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Gerd Stern

FROM BEAT SCENE POET TO PSYCHEDELIC MULTIMEDIA ARTIST  
IN SAN FRANCISCO AND BEYOND, 1948-1978

With an Introduction by  
Ivan Majdrakoff

Interviews Conducted by  
Victoria Morris Byerly  
in 1996

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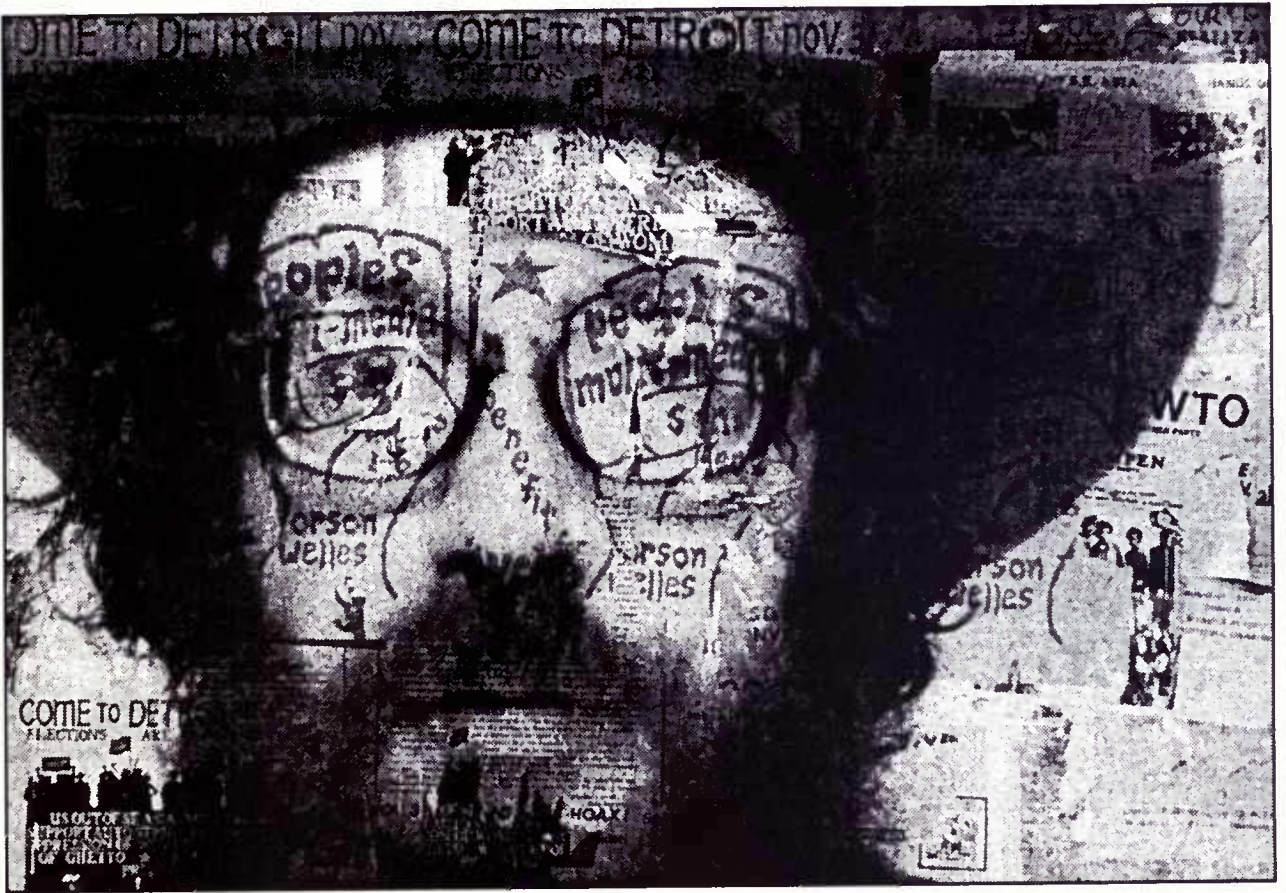
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*Gerd Stern etcetera* by Bobbi Carey, Cambridge, Massachusetts, circa 1940.







## Cataloging Information

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Artist/poet

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Childhood and education in New York City; discovering poetry; moving to California, 1940s; writing poetry; meeting Allen Ginsberg, Maya Angelou; marriage to Jane Hill; marriage to Ann London; writing for *Playboy* magazine, 1960s; living on houseboat in Sausalito; USCO (multimedia art); marriage to Sally Shaw; Michael Callahan and Intermedia Systems Corp.; entering family cheese import business; reflections on art, poetry, counterculture, drugs, and the cheese industry. Includes sixty poems, with some commentary.

Introduction by Ivan Majdrakoff, longtime friend and collaborator.

Interviewed 1996 by Victoria Morris Byerly, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.



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## INTRODUCTION by Ivan Majdrakoff

To introduce Gerd Stern, my path is to recall my dehydrated memories. It was in New York's P.S. 187 concrete school yard that I was first aware of Gerd. Thick glasses and short pants signaled "different." His name then was Jack.

Later in my drama class at the High School of Music and Art, he emerged for me as a personality but an outsider. He was going to the prestigious Bronx High School of Science. I was aware that he had been successfully involved in a science competition with his own biology project. He then also became involved with our amateur theater group, called "The Rolling Players," named after our director, Hubert Rolling. We did many ambitious, passionate, "serious" plays together. About that time, and very startling to me, he, Jack, decided to change his name back to the original German, Gerd.

Our friendship grew and I discovered myself as the only one at his early graduation from William Howard Taft High School, to which he had switched. He now had his own room away from home. I recall drawing there from a nude person. It was almost an illicit feeling. Most adult!

While I worked for a year in my father's portrait photography studio, we slightly drifted apart. He, having left home, had another life and now was somehow living in Greenwich Village which in those days meant beret-Bohemia. The next summer, I worked at a kosher summer camp in upstate New York. Out walking on a day off, amazingly, I encountered, coming from the other direction, a sandalled Gerd, also hiking. We now became closer linked, even though for the next three years I was attending the Cranbrook Academy of Art outside of Detroit. After Cranbrook, I returned to New York. We connected, did similar things, knew some of the same people, and moved in criss-crossed paths. I was aware of some hospitalization weirdness of Gerd's but I linked this to the vagaries of living in the Village. About then, I illustrated, or rather abstractly interpreted, Gerd's first book of poems. This really made me confront his chanted, very solo-word voice. It was a lean, demanding territory.

An art gallery job was offered to me at the University of Minnesota and I was soon to leave. Gerd now had a west-side apartment and was involved with an older woman--Jane! She had left her husband and children for Gerd. Phew! Going away, they lent me their apartment where I held a farewell party. I decorated the walls with dozens of head drawings. The next morning, I cleaned up, and left for Minnesota in a \$25, 1936 black Buick.

That winter, I returned to New York to marry the painter and ex-musician and artist, Julia Pearl. We spent our first married night in New Paltz, New York, with Gerd and Jane. Memorable was the meal of a very large white rabbit--a pet that Gerd and I had reluctantly shot and butchered.

After three years at Minnesota where I had become Acting Director of the University Gallery, Julia and I decided to move to California. Mutual correspondence and criss-cross meetings with him continued over these years. Contact was maintained.

Arriving in California, we stayed on Jane and Gerd's Sausalito barge and visited them also on Partington Ridge in Big Sur. Jane helped us look for a place to live. One barge night, I remember a group conversation about verbal visualization. Say the word "rose" and what image comes to mind? The variety of responses was fascinating. To hear Gerd claim that he thought of it only as an idea and abstraction, unlike my pink Whitman Chocolate sampler box image that flashed in my mind, was jolting.

In later years, another conversation boiled down to his insistent phrase, "think of the world as object." Often as a painting and drawing teacher, this was to be a useful and important pointer. It focussed on the relationship between meaning and its physical coat, or the psychological intertwined with the pictorial. The focus was on all the grappling that visual form demands. It encouraged me to expand my use of words, numbers, and phrases in painting and assemblage. I spend several years working over this territory that Gerd had gestured towards. It has never left me.

To go back, his connection to Jane, an earth and woods mother, was profound. There was a first birth, Adam, and a second birth, Radha, whom I still remember holding in my arms on that barge. Now that I think of it, it was the first just-born that I had ever held.

Upon arrival in the Bay Area, I immediately got involved in one of Gerd's group productions. It was a puppet show, and I recall my recording the voice of the newly arrived hip, heavily accented New Yorker. Gerd's voice languorously intoned a laid-back Kenneth Rexroth. It was originally done in San Francisco's Fugazi Hall, and later to a crowd on the Sausalito barge.

Gerd's life seemed to dramatically change after Jane's departure. Ann London arrived on the scene. Ann was good-looking, literate, and a poet. Julia and I shared their wedding day. Quickly it seemed, Gerd became a public relations person, and actually had some good accounts. I recall Alexis' Tangier, for one. Herb Caen also seemed part of Gerd's expanding territory. Certainly to me, this was a new and surprising place--another world of words. There was Bill Ryan's Contact magazine.

I contributed a black-and-white drawing and did a composite collage head for the Criminal Man issue. It was the literary world. For instance, I got to meet Theodore Roethke, and spent time with Evan Connell.

Ann and Gerd conceived of a very ambitious subscription project, called "Poems in Folio," for which I did their logo--a lyre. Also in another issue, I did a color drawing for a Louise Bogan poem. Their collaboration gave monthly subscribers a beautifully printed broadside poem. It was a combination of a fine Bay Area press printing of a new poem by a nationally-acclaimed poet.

Later, after separation from Ann, Gerd returned to the East Coast. He eventually took up with Judi. After a while he showed up in California with Judi. He was very excited by all the new ramifications of Pop Art and the electronic world. I was only too willing to listen, as I had gone through a backwash decade of what has since been called Abstract Expressionism. He saw that I had been painting words and said that it was unlike anyone in New York. When he lectured at San Jose State College, I went along and chimed in with my new pop enthusiasm. We also did a performance with multiple projectors flashing word slides. These I photographed. At the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, we took over their vast rotunda space. There were screens and constructed booths within which personal interviews were held. There were many voice-overs and projected words and phrases culled from what Gerd called "The Verbal American Landscape." This complex, raucous performance was greeted with bewilderment and confusion. The second night, it came very close to creating an audience riot.

Sometime later, at a party, he asked me if I wanted to do a film with him. And I said "sure." But I did insist we spend discussion time to be sure we understood each other's point of view as much as possible before we started. We made the film, and it was an adventure. George Walker, the attorney, backed us and eventually we needed his help with censorship problems. In a Victorian house next to the Stockton Tunnel, I filmed at a six-inch distance a close-up trip upon Judi's body. This, combined with road-striping and several hundred road signs, was eventually edited into a 12-minute, 16 mm black-and-white film called "Y." There were several hundred cuts and Gerd and I collaged/edited it together. The soundtrack, done by Michael Callahan, was orgasmic breathing and the roaring of trucks. Earlier film of pubic hair (and armpit hair) was seized in the lab. George had to threaten legal action to get it back. Out of context we were dead, but we prevailed. It was a moving, nervous film. Amazingly, it won awards and we also eventually showed it commercially in North Beach.

Gerd also stimulated my attitude towards the presentation of events that I put together independently and called performances. These were in Fresno, San Jose, and for the San Francisco Art Institute's

"Farewell to the Back Yard." They used multiple projectors, film, slides, tapes, and other diversions--a general audience media assault.

Later, at the San Francisco Arleigh Gallery of Lee Carlson, I was given two backroom galleries. There I made an environment and included my painting, assemblages, and collages. Additionally, all the senses were engaged--smell, uneven flooring, flashing lights, Vietnam machine-gun fire and the collaged music of that time. Interspersed in all of this, Gerd's influence was strong. His earlier participation in an LSD conference in San Francisco, for instance, had found me aggressively handling a spot-light that continually disturbed the audience. I then moved naturally into the assemblage area with a successfully reviewed show called "Things." That exhibit announced for me the firm arrival of my assemblage attitude.

Gerd left San Francisco and took "Y" and what seemed like a group of people on the road, ending up on the East Coast. I've just come across a lost accumulated correspondence from 1964-1965. There are over seventy closely typed pages from his side and I'm amazed by his drive, rushed energy, and clarity as he described ongoing projects and future possibilities. Alas, all my other correspondence with him was destroyed in the Oakland firestorm of 1991. We saw each other on my trips to New York and vice versa. So I was aware of his multi-media development in Woodstock, N.Y., and eventually his move to Cambridge, Mass. My ex-wife Julia Pearl was then Intermedia Systems' art director.

When he came to the West Coast, we would often meet together. I was now married to Ruth. Our exchanges and interests were personal and creatively ongoing. While we were together we seldom saw our original high school friends. In fact, a hostility on the part of a number of my old friends towards him startled me. They refused to respond or to believe in him as a poet. As the years have passed, I have wondered about this and recognized on my part a constant conviction and loyalty. As an artist, I've been strongly influenced by him and respond to Gerd's myriad world of words. For four decades, I've been exploring words and feel confident in using them in my art. It's a natural part of me.

His attitude towards classical poetry and that of his contemporaries' seems to me to be guarded. Broadly, I think, his seeming avoidance of nouns and lyric or narrative sweep makes audiences work hard. He demands people respond, and the beat-beat simplicity is off-putting to many. That, and not publishing traditionally, have delayed the evaluation of his poetry. But for me, there was always a flow of work coming out. His letter-writing voice is poetry. The writing is so multi-level--the pun, joke, duality, over and over. This alertness is his poetry.

My own feeling toward "poetry" has always been cautious, even confused. I knew it existed, read a bit, and as a heavy book reader



myself could not avoid considering it. But I've seen that I'm not a natural abstractionist, perhaps more an expressionist with formalist tendencies and most of this in the fantasy world of the mind. At times I do give myself to visual, graphic pictorialization. My ability in this world still shocks me and I tend to avoid it. Perhaps for me the poetic is represented by the lyric.

Now comes a newfound power. Gerd began making things--assembling and collaging occurred. His arrival in San Francisco with new pieces was a great joy. I liked and approved of the direction. One remembers his carpentry skills and his ongoing interest in the contemporary painting world. I thought he was trying to fuse the word and object. It brings a smile to think that we now hang together in Renee di Rosa's collection in Napa.

As I watch the arch of his life from afar, particularly during the USCO days, it seems apparent that a huge part of his medium is people. Gerd's involvement with people is part of his palette. He easily moves from the "I" to the "We"--a natural collaborationist.

He has always seemed to intuit where the action is. His multiple contacts who were often on the leading edge continually surprised. He operated naturally in that area and only occasionally did I get a peek, a taste. These introduced contacts and brief events were always interesting but I never overly pursued them. Gerd's vision is to look out, contact, and then gather people and mold them to make events. Projects were always ongoing. It reveals his great creative gathering strength.

Years ago I asked him if he planned to write a book about his life and I lamented having lost most of his letters in the fire. He said "no." But he is almost doing it in this vast monologue. He once said of my father, the photographer M. I. Boris, that he was the first example of a father that creatively seemed to know what he wanted to do and was doing it. This finding of one's own way seems one of Gerd's quests. He swings through different media. Just to list a few of his project involvements would start to reveal his scope. "Poems in Folio," "Teleportraits," poetry, conferences, tapes, films, electronic systems, object-making, multi-media efforts and recording. They all add up. I used "Billie Master," Gerd's half-hour collage tape of voices made from KPFA's archives, in my experimental classes at the San Francisco Art Institute. All these are bindings of an intricately wrapped collaged figure. And the message is sometimes delivered verbally with ecstatic, messianic, almost rabbinical verve. Gerd's taped history is not only an attempt to document, but also to unwind and clarify what I am convinced is a unique fading historical time span. Perhaps he has verbally written a book!

Let me end here with some personal speculation. He has been a hard worker, a builder, and a wordsmith. His life has been one of elasticity. The word chain is there, binding it all. There is his sense of humor, at times wry, cynical, but most often he sees the comedy. There is a collage pounding sexuality to his life. He has been criticized as an operator, an entrepreneur. Of course money has been a nagging source of concern in his life. It even might be a nemesis to him. The role of women in his life seems a drama world in itself. I appreciate Gerd's putting on tape his analysis of his relationship with his father. There also is a pleasure in hearing Gerd's thumbnail descriptions of well-known public figures. Most often there he is generous, fair and apparently quite accurate. He is also a thoughtful connoisseur of the good life. The section of this oral history on the topic of cheese is a passionate gem!

These remarks--kaleidoscopic in nature--are concerned mainly with our relationship and are mostly without precise dates. I believe that as you listen or read, you will be led through a map of a particular fading time. You will also follow an evolving life that develops slowly into an amazing photo. Here is the portrait of a person involved in recreating and redefining himself as a complex artist. This groundbreaking time in America's cultural history should be recognized for its unique seminal contributions. And Gerd's journey, which is complex, rich, and ambiguous, is certainly not yet over. Sail on Gerd!

Ivan Majdrakoff

October 1998

## INTERVIEW HISTORY--Gerd Stern

Gerd Stern arrived in San Francisco in the late forties just as the Beat scene was emerging here. Shortly after moving to the California Bay Area, he found himself with his new wife, Jane Hamner, living on a barge in Sausalito in the middle of an alternative bohemian culture of poetry and art. There he experienced the spirit of the times set against the backdrop of jazz musicians, weed, all-night parties around bottles of cheap wine, free love, and the birthing of a radical and iconoclastic alternative aesthetic.

By 1953, Stern was publishing his own poetry and was one of the founders of the Boobam Bamboo Drum Company, which produced a musical instrument that resembled the bongo drum. Later, he went on to write for Playboy magazine and, after Jane, was lover and manager of Maya Angelou. By the late sixties, Stern was a counterculture artist producing innovative kinetic art that involved light shows and surround sound, and as a founder of the artistic company USCO, produced the Timothy Leary Psychedelic Theatre. His avant-garde style, which was representative of the late sixties and early seventies psychedelic art, was taken seriously by both Harvard University and the University of California at Santa Cruz where he held lectureships. His artwork drew national attention in both Newsweek and Life magazines.

Stern and colleague Michael Callahan formed Intermedia Systems Corporation, in cooperation with a group from Harvard Business School during the seventies, which produced multimedia art internationally. Stern and Intermedia consulted and produced projects for the Venezuelan government under Presidents Raphael Caldera and Carlos Andres Perez, for the United States Government, as well as for the National Endowment for the Arts and others. As the seventies gave way to a more reserved eighties, Stern gravitated back to New York City where, with his step-brother, he carried on his family's international cheese import business, always maintaining his creation of poetry.

I met Gerd Stern as an interviewee for another ROHO oral history project on the San Franciscan bohemian anarchist artist Shirley Triest. I learned from that initial interview that Stern had his own historically valuable account of the California counterculture movements of the fifties, sixties, and seventies, and after finding the funding to do so, we set out to document his story. What the reader will find impressive here is Stern's excellent memory of the names of the many people who were involved at the center and along the periphery of late 20th century California social and political history, a cultural history that reverberated throughout the nation.

This work represents a compilation of twenty-one tape recordings of interviews which I recorded in April and July 1996; it was supported by the children of Jane Hamner Buck. The interviewer in this particular interview exerted little influence on the direction of the interview as Stern's intense recollections proceeded without interruption for as long as eight hours at a time. These first interviews occurred in the spring of 1996. Stern returned to the Bay Area that summer and invited his long-time friend and former associate of Intermedia Systems Corp., Michael Callahan, to collaborate on this project. The conversation between the two of them, included here, deals specifically with the early history of multimedia art technology. Also, Stern read some of his published and unpublished poems here, an inclusion which represents a different style of oral history than is standard for the Regional Oral History Office.

The appendix of this volume includes various memorabilia of art shows and other artistic productions.

I was pleased to work with Gerd Stern on this project and have personally benefitted from his intimate connection to and participation in the beat and counterculture waves of bohemianism in the California Bay Area.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through tape-recorded memoirs the Library's materials on the history of California and the West. Copies of all interviews are available for research use in The Bancroft Library and in the UCLA Department of Special Collections. The office is under the direction of Willa K. Baum, Division Head, and the administrative direction of Charles B. Faulhaber, James D. Hart Director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Victoria Morris Byerly  
Interviewer/Editor

June 2000  
Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library  
University of California, Berkeley

the no you said yes to  
brought yesterday, now  
the way you made contact, love  
made now, so wow!  
so now  
love will show and  
the curtain will rise, and  
the lights will dim low

jak



## I 1930s: A NEW YORK CITY CHILDHOOD

[Interview 1: April 14, 1996] ##<sup>1</sup>

Stern: I was born on Columbus Day on October 12, 1928, in a place called Saargebiet, which means Saar basin. And it's actually the basin of the river Saar. It's right on the border of Germany and France. In fact, my mother's grave is in a Jewish cemetery in Saarbrücken, which is the name of the town. The gate of the cemetery is now in Germany, and the actual grave is in France, so you can see how borderline a little place it was.

The Saargebiet was the subject of a major controversy between Germany and France for a long time after the first world war, in which my father fought in the German army. It was a protectorate of the League of Nations, and it was the first place that [Adolf] Hitler took over, and he took it by plebiscite, which is a form of election. But it was a totally phony election because he sent in hordes of native Germans who were not citizens of the Saar to vote in the election, and they forced their way in, and he won. So we left.

By that time, my mother had died. She died very suddenly of causes that now would have been treated with penicillin or antibiotics. My grandmother, who was my closest friend, had left for the United States to join her son. My father and my mother's sister and brother were married to each other, which kind of complicated the familial situation. And my uncle--my mother's brother--had emigrated to the United States. He was a doctor, and he lived in the Bronx in New York. He brought to America his mother--my grandmother--whom I missed a lot. About the same time, my father decided to remarry, and I was deposited in Luxembourg with his new mother-in-law. We left the Saar because of all the political upheaval, and we were waiting for visas and permission

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<sup>1</sup>## This symbol indicates that a tape or tape segment has begun or ended. A guide to the tapes follows the transcript.

to come to the United States. We needed a sponsorship, and that sponsorship came through an aunt of mine who had lived in the United States for many years. Anyway, I had a period in Luxembourg which was rather difficult, and we went to Belgium to get our visas, and eventually we boarded the *S.S. Washington*, which some years later was sunk when it became a troop ship.

### Immigration to the U.S.

Stern: We arrived in New York on April Fools' Day in 1936, and I was hurried off the ship to the home of my uncle, the doctor, because I was in extreme pain. I didn't even get to see the Statue of Liberty. I wound up having an appendicitis operation my first week in America. My first literary experience in English occurred when one of my nurses read *Little Black Sambo* to me. She gave me the book when I left the hospital. I remember the tiger [turning to butter] running around the tree. I had been used to German children's stories, which are rather horrible: the kid who won't have his hair cut, the kid who grows his nails and won't cut them, the Suppen Caspar; I mean, they were all punitive, exemplary, disciplinary tales. Grimm is grim, right?

Byerly: Very Grimm. [laughter]

Stern: So we arrived, and first we settled in the Bronx, and then eventually we moved to Washington Heights, which was later referred to as Frankfurt-on-the-Hudson. It was a neighborhood for refugee German Jews.

### Family Cheese Business

Byerly: This is in New York City?

Stern: Yes, upper Manhattan. And my father continued the family tradition in the cheese importing business. He had taken over my mother's father's--my grandfather's--business in the Saar after my grandfather had died some years before. My father had been in a different business but he took over the business and rescued it, and then transported some of the representations to the United States. Those connections became dormant because of the war, but he became one of the first importers of cheese from Denmark, Holland, and Switzerland into the United States. Switzerland was his major importation at that time.



I went to New York City public schools, then on to high school. During all those years I had an extremely difficult time with my stepmother--understandable later, but not at the time by a small boy. I was probably not a very nice child. I wore thick glasses, and I was dressed in a European fashion, which was always a problem to me because the other kids wore knickers while I was wearing shorts. I was an object of derision. And when they wore long pants, I had graduated to knickers. [chuckles]

### Father and Stepmother's Parenting

Stern: My father was a strong disciplinarian. I was shuttled back and forth between my grandmother and her son the doctor and my aunt--my father's youngest sister--they were the two youngest of ten. My stepmother and I didn't get along at all. My father took a strong hand, and I was always encouraged by my aunt and my uncle to spill all the beans of my horror stories, and of course that didn't help anything. In fact, they were a negative influence. Although it was in the guise of being my confidants and friends, my "rebellions" emanated from those circumstances.

I was an avid reader; I started going to the local library very early when people didn't even think I could read the books that I borrowed. I struck up a friendship with the librarian, and she allowed me to take out books which were beyond a child's permission: *The Three Musketeers*, Victor Hugo, [Leo] Tolstoy, [Fyodor] Dostoevsky, I read quite early.

I was somewhat an enforced loner. Eventually, before I left public school, I found a couple of other outcast members of the class, and we spent a lot of time together. My weekends were always in the Bronx with my uncle and aunt, and with my cousin who was a little younger than me. He and I were very close, but then he was somewhat manipulative, and I was somewhat naïve. Anyway, about the time I was at the Bronx High School of Science I became involved--through my English teacher, Dr. Gordon--at the Museum of Natural History in New York where her brother, Dr. Myron Gordon, was a research ichthyologist. In the meantime, I had become very enamored of tropical fish, and although my father wouldn't allow much of an involvement at home, I had friends who bred them and who collected them and whose parents were much more supportive. So I joined the Aquarium Club at school and at the Museum of Natural History.

Somehow through that connection I met people in the Astronomy Club at the Hayden Planetarium which was in the museum,

and we used to go out into Central Park with telescopes and watch the stars. I became friendly with a girl who was going to the High School of Music and Art, and I started hanging out there. I then re-met Ivan Majdrakoff, a neighbor who had gone to the same public school as I--P.S. 187, Manhattan. We became close friends. Also, there was a circle of friends who had already decided to become artists or actors or writers, and I fell in with them.

We spent gobs and gobs of time together, and I started ignoring my studies at Bronx Science. Eventually, in order to get finished with high school in a hurry, I transferred to a much easier school where my Bronx Science credits helped me, and I was able to get out early. Now, that wasn't really early because I had started late in public school due to my arrival in the U.S. at the age of seven. I was a year behind. Of course, I didn't know English the first couple of years too well, although I wound up being one of the more literate students by the time I left that school.

I wasn't quite sure what my connection was to all this creative ferment among my new friends, and I was having more and more trouble at home because I would stay out what now would not be considered late, but at the time, I would stay out late, which meant after six o'clock. When my nineteen-year-old gets home at three in the morning, I think that's normal. [laughter] Anyway, six o'clock; that was difficult.

### College and Leaving Home

Stern: I was also working. My father took me down to the local grocer when I was about nine, and I started lugging packages for a nickel a shtikel, five cents per delivery. Later, I worked as a temporary at the post office. I did that for some time; it paid much better than anything else in those days. It was hard work, but it was fairly easy to do, and the people were nice to work with--most of them.

Anyway, I left home when my stepbrother was born. There was a lot of excitement around that, and I just kind of slipped out. With my earnings from the post office, I rented a furnished room just a few blocks away but in a poorer neighborhood than where my parents lived. My leaving was accepted because the apartment was too small for all of us anyway, and I had been sleeping out in the hall, which was not something I enjoyed as a teenager. I had a half-sister and now a baby half-brother.

Byerly: How old were you?

Stern: Probably sixteen, seventeen. That was much younger those days than it is now. I don't have a good idea of timeline and I don't remember the years. I couldn't tell you what year I graduated high school or exactly when all this went on.

But my next step was I needed to get a better job. I started my freshman year at the City College of New York, although I wanted to go to Cornell and study zoology, particularly ichthyology.

Anyway, I didn't like CCNY; I couldn't stand it. On the day that my English instructor asked us to write a composition on "Our Summer Vacation," I decided to leave. I mean, I had already been through all that, and that wasn't what I thought the university was going to be like. And the other thing was the buildings at CCNY were connected by underground passages; I felt like I was in a totally Kafkaesque environment, having recently read [Franz] Kafka--it had quite a powerful influence on me.

Anyhow, CCNY was not a long period; it was a few weeks. I then somehow gravitated downtown toward Greenwich Village, and I got a job through the newspaper classifieds at a place called Almay Cosmetics, which, I believe, still exists. At that time, it was owned by a liquor company, Schiefflin. They called me an assistant chemist, and I was in charge of this little ball mill by which I ground up various things to make custom anti-allergic cosmetics.

### The East Village and New Friends

Stern: The important part of that story is that it brought me downtown to what's now the East Village (although it was at that time not considered the Village, but very close--just a few blocks away). And I wandered around with some of my friends from Music and Art whom I had met through Elsie Peterson, the young woman I had met at the museum and who kind of got me into the whole music and art crowd. She was working for a jeweler, Henry Lobell, in the Village by that time. I visited her there, and I went to this pottery shop next door and met a guy who was working there, Stanley Gould, and he introduced me to some people. Before I knew it, I was sharing an apartment with somebody who turned out to be a junkie, but I didn't know a junkie from a hole in the ground, I was so naïve back then.

It was really a very intense period; the energy of my youth and the dive into a world so different from the world I had grown up in. My first apartment in the Village was with a guy named Dick Winard, whose real name was Winanski, and he was a junkie. We were basically sleeping in the same bed. And I didn't understand what he was up to. He was taking injections, but I thought maybe he had an illness. [laughter] That just gives you an idea of where my head was at.

And the second night I was there, all of a sudden there was a woman in bed with us. She said her name was Rose Gorgeous. This was really before I had had any sexual experience. I didn't get involved with them, but that was unexpected. I wasn't horrified or terrified then; but I was later when I finally understood what was going on with the drug-taking. There were policemen, and when there were not enough drugs there were physical symptoms of trying to kick the habit. This was a few weeks now, this wasn't months. Around that time, I had my first smoke of marijuana from a guy named Jimmy the Greek. I remember I also went to the party of a guy who was a translator at the United Nations, and he was gay, and I didn't understand what that was all about.

In the meantime, I had moved to the east side, near the Bowery, to a little apartment on Stanton Street. And I was still involved with people from Music and Art, and one of the painters had fallen in love with me. She insisted that we had to go to bed together; that was my first experience, in my apartment, this little bedroom which I had painted dark brown. Not exactly an illuminating color. [chuckles] I later added one wall in orange. It's not a palette that I have any love for. Anyway, here I was living near the Bowery among bums, and my father came down, and you can imagine the explosion.

Right next to me, on Stanton Street, right off the Bowery, was a family named the Sauers. Augie and Hattie Sauer took an interest in me. He was in the window display business and the building of exhibits and floats, and, eventually, hired me as an assistant. He was in charge of the May Day parade for the radical unions. [begins singing] "The Furmakers Union is a very fine union." And we built these floats of Bilbo and Rankin; they were two federal legislators who were the bane of the liberal and radical establishments at the time. They were horrible, gross, huge, three-dimensional caricatures which opened their mouths and tipped their hats. Those were a lot of fun to work on; I had never done anything with my hands. I remember one time when I changed the electric plug on a lamp in the house, my father took it down to the local hardware store to have them redo it because he didn't think that any son of his could handle anything like

that. [laughter] Of course, at Bronx Science, people were a lot more into doing things with their own hands. My father desperately wanted me to go into his business. I mean, he thought that was the only solution, but I had no intention of following in his footsteps. I had been listening to him scream at his business associates and haggle with customers for years. I didn't want any part of that. It was not a way of life that I was interested in. I wanted to be an ichthyologist because I loved the whole involvement with the lives of fishes and turtles. I had been a nature counselor and I had earned all of my nature badges up at Bear Mountain Park. I was really into animals of all sorts, mostly reptiles, amphibians, and fish.

I couldn't get the support from my father to go to Cornell Agriculture, I didn't get a scholarship, and I was somewhat depressed about that until I discovered that poetry was my call. In a sense, throughout my life, I had a strange feeling about not having gone to a university, which was balanced out later on when I became an associate in education at Harvard, and I taught at [UC] Santa Cruz. People are always wondering how, without a college education, I got into that, but we'll go into it later.

Ellis Kramer, the gentleman whom I referred to as a translator at the United Nations, lived in the Village. I met him at a cafeteria where everyone hung out and where Jimmy the Greek sold toothpicks of pot, which had precious little dope in them, [laughter] but we managed to enjoy them. And he--the translator--invited me to a party at his house. I stayed overnight. I remember I was in his bed with him, and he tried to make an approach to me, and I just didn't understand, so I rejected him.

The next night at the party, I met Elaine Goldman who basically dragged me back to her apartment and raped me. [chuckles] And I lived with her for months. Elaine came from Boston. She was working in a publishing company. She wasn't quite sure what she wanted to do. She later married another poet, and I lost track of them.

Now somewhere during that time in the Village, I met a group of people who were around a man named Michael Fraenkel, the author of a book called *Bastard Death*. He also had a series of correspondences which were in several published volumes with Henry Miller. Through that group I met Michael and Henry. That became the connection to Israel.

### Jewish Background and Education

Stern: My Jewish background is rather odd because my father, like so many German Jews, was not a religious Jew. Although he had grown up in a religious setting, not in this family necessarily, but in the community, and gone to a Jewish school, which--characteristic of Germany at that time--had a Catholic priest who was a Hebrew scholar as principal. My family only went to synagogue on high holidays. But I went to Hebrew school, and I was Bar Mitzvahed. And that was about it. And I was taught rote Hebrew; I was not taught the meanings of anything, and when I did my Bar Mitzvah, my teacher was very happy because I had learned the cantillations perfectly and gave a great performance--but without meaning.

### Bookstores and Village Authors

Stern: Then when the whole political situation in Israel surfaced, one of Michael's followers, Harry Hershkowitz, who was the editor of *Death* magazine--they had poison rings to keep them conscious of death at all times--well, Harry was the one who introduced me to this whole circle of people who were raising money to buy the boat, which was an ancient freighter. I met, through Harry, the leader of this group, Nick Kisburg. He and his family lived in the Village. All these people became very critical to my life; we spent a lot of time together, we ate together, we drank cheap wine together, we got high together, we listened to music and went to art exhibits. They took my poetry seriously, and I took their work seriously. When I decided to go to California, it was kind of a break in sequence. I had become somewhat isolated in any case because of the relationship with Elaine; before that I had been really circulating all the time in a fairly nervous manner. I was heavily into jazz, also.

Friends in the literary scene, through another involvement with the Four Seasons Bookshop which was owned by a lady named Toshka Goldman, was the *Partisan Review* crowd that hung around there. This crowd included Delmore Schwartz and Lionel Trilling and a lot of highly intellectual literary types. I worked next door to the Four Seasons in a place called the Jabberwocky Shop where we made lamps out of vases and bottles and anything that anybody brought in. There was pottery and jewelry and really crafts stuff. It was run by a sculptor named David Raucher. He was crippled, and he was bearded, and he always wore a beret. A real Village character. Having the Four Seasons next door, I

could borrow any books of poetry. I spent many hours sitting, waiting for customers in the Jabberwocky Shop, reading poetry.

### Black Mountain College and Poetry

Stern: We had interesting customers. I remember delivering a set of lamps to Eleanor Roosevelt and her giving me cookies and tea. She lived in the Village on Washington Square. But among the people I met through the bookstore and Ginny Miller, Paul Goodman's first wife, was Isaac Rosenfeld. Isaac was a literary guru of that time, and he was very kind to me. He had an academic bent, and he really felt that my lack of formal education would be a problem to me in the future. Yet he understood my radical kind of leanings. He had taught during the summer at Black Mountain College, and he persuaded them to give me an interview for a scholarship. I hitchhiked down there at his behest, and I loved it. It was really the perfect place. There was this idyllic oasis in the mountains with a lake and modern studio building--something paradisiacal.

M.C. Richards, who was teaching poetry there at the time, was exactly who I wanted to study with. And they gave me a scholarship! Wow! I hitchhiked back down and I arrived there in the middle of absolute chaos. The management or the administration and the teachers were all fighting with each other on philosophical and financial grounds. M.C.'s husband at the time was Bill Levy, the dean, and he left, taking M.C. with him. I was desolate because the guy who then took charge of the school was Hans Albers, a painter. Albers was out of the same mold as my father: the Germanic disciplinarian. I couldn't take it, so I split. Probably a major piece of msthinking on my part, but I was young and carefree.

I met a lot of interesting people in the two weeks that I was down there who later on became influential in my life: M.C., John Cage, the Williams--Paul and Vera--on and on.





## II LATE 1940s: CALIFORNIA AND THE WEST COAST ALTERNATIVE

### Elaine Goldman and San Francisco

Stern: Eventually, I met Elaine Goldman, and I moved in with her. She had gone to UC [University of California] Berkeley, and some time later her roommate--a woman whom she had an affair with during her time at UC--came to visit, and Elaine was the one who persuaded me that I was a poet. "Bard" [Barbara] Norville, who was the friend who came to stay, and Elaine decided that I really should be going to UC, and Bard invited me to stay with her and her husband when I got to San Francisco. I persuaded my father to give me air fare, which at that time was very low, and I got on this plane that landed four or five times before it got to California because that was how things were in those days.

My father had agreed to send me twenty dollars a week, which he reneged on because of another tale. I was followed out to the west coast by a young lady whom I had gotten involved with at summer camp where I was a garden and nature counselor. My father and her father got together, because she had told her father we were going to get married. We never had even talked about marriage, but my father was very upset so he didn't send me any more money. So I was kind of at a loss in San Francisco.

### Poetry and California Life

Stern: In the meantime, mostly because of Elaine's encouragement, I had accepted my role as a poet, and I was writing poetry. At first blush, I was totally innocent, and I was starting to read poets through people I met and who had libraries. Soon after I arrived in California I went to a poetry reading at the San Francisco Museum of Art which is now in a different building than it was then. I met Bill Everson, who later became Brother Antoninus. I

met Philip Lamantia. I met Paul Goodman, whose first wife I had had an affair with in New York.

Big Sur and Jaime D'Angulo

Stern: I arrived in California, and I stayed with Bard and Mac [George McCarthy, Jr.]. They [Bard and Mac] were breaking up at the time. Mac left to get a divorce, and he went up to Virginia City, Nevada, in his 1928 Model A Ford with a rumble seat.

I'm skipping a lot of stuff because--there was the poetry reading--actually, that wasn't the first day. The first day they picked me up in the Model A, and they took me down to Big Sur, to Partington Ridge, where we stayed with one of their good, close friends, Jaime D'Angulo. And Jaime and I, through later years, became very close, and actually I was the one who got his *Indian Tales* published through Carl Solomon, who was working for his uncle A.A. Wynn at Ace Books and I was their west coast rep. It was very informal.

Quite an experience for a New York boy. They pick me up at the airport and it was the weekend, so we're heading for Big Sur. I'm sitting in the rumble seat coming down the California coast, and we're going to the ranch. You can imagine what a New York refugee thought a ranch was going to be like after having seen "Abbott and Costello in the West" or Bob Hope or Shirley Temple movies. Anyway, first we stopped at an auto wrecking yard just before Monterey in Seaside. And there's this character right out of John Steinbeck who runs the yard and then there's this big guy who's a fishing boat engineer called Sandy Justice. There's mucho alcohol. I ride with Sandy to the ranch in a dump truck, and then we go up this winding, dirt road, and it's late at night, and we go up the mountain and go over the edge. We have to shovel, and it's madness, and I think it was about six o'clock in the morning, and at dawn we wind up on the top of the ridge and here's Jaime de Angulo dressed in basically nothing and with hair coming down to his whatever, and his beard, and he's burnt by the sun, and he's obviously drunk. And he looks at me and he says, "Shalom!" [laughter] I'm with Bard and her husband, whom I've just met, and a drunken Sandy--I had never been driven anywhere by somebody who was drunk. Then Jaime recognizes my accent and says, "You must have come from somewhere in Germany near the French border, but you've grown up probably in New York City; not in Brooklyn, for sure--." [laughter] Then we go into his house, and he has a fireplace in the middle of the room, and he's made a big hole in his roof for the smoke to go out of. I'm sleeping on basically a

concrete slab with kind of an Indian blanket thrown over it. All of a sudden I feel at home. I don't feel alienated or strange. I feel okay; this is it; life.

### Jane and Wally Hill

Stern: Jane lived right across the alley on Telegraph Hill from Bard, so that's where I met Jane and her husband Wally [Hill], and I believe at the time--I can't remember whether their third daughter had been born by then or not. But there were definitely two little girls and maybe three little girls. They very soon thereafter moved over to the Berkeley Flats. But at that time they were on Telegraph Hill.

Anyway, they invited me for dinner, and I regaled them with tales, none of which were true, about my supposed political experiences. I had been involved with the Sternist movement to send a boat to Israel, which was principally financed by Ben Hecht and Harpo Marx. My involvement with that had been peripheral, but I blew it out of proportion into some romantic tale worthy of a third-rate movie, [laughter] and they believed me.

Jane was fascinated. But Jane was a person who at that time was ready to change her life already and had been involved with a lot of other people--

### Developing a Poetic Style ##

Stern: In the meantime, I had been writing poems. I think I started out in a very abstract manner language-wise, and I've never departed from it. It's a style which has never somehow been conjunctive to any of the other movements or schisms or literary coteries. It's isolated me, which is still true. And I don't understand in the least how I developed this particular verbal style; I imagine it must have its roots maybe in the fact that I started out being a German speaker and translated then to English. The relationships that I've had in the literary and artistic world have all been kind of social and intellectual rather than connections between my work and the work of other people.

Virginia City Mines

Stern: I started looking for a job. At that time, if you were resident in California for six months you could go to UC free of charge. That was my plan but I got waylaid. I was living with Bard after Mac left. I didn't have any money, and I didn't know what was going to happen. I was kind of looking for a job, and I couldn't find one, and Mac called up from Virginia City, Nevada and said, "Hey, Gerd, why don't you come up here? This is great up here. I'm working in a gold and silver mine; you can work here too."

So I hitchhiked up to Virginia City, Nevada, and I worked in the gold and silver mines for Consolidated Chollar, Gould, and Savage [Conchollar]. And that was [laughter] quite an experience.

In Virginia City, it was incredible how much snow there was. It was the blizzard of '48. The blizzard was so bad that you couldn't drive. I had just learned how to drive, although I didn't have a license yet. I had learned to drive in Mac's 1928 Model A Ford. We went down the grade to Reno and had a good time. Mac liked to gamble. He was from Charlotte, North Carolina. Anyway, we were renting a house for ten bucks a month, a former whorehouse in Virginia City. It had a lot of bedrooms. [chuckle] It was a great old house.

There was practically nobody in Virginia City in those days. It was like a ghost town. There were about ten saloons. It was before it became gentrified and before Lucius Beebe and those people who I later knew in San Francisco moved up there. We worked on the other side from Reno in a little place called Gold Hill at the Consolidated Chollar, Gould, and Savage Mining Company. Actually, first Mac worked at another little mine--at Conchollar. I didn't work in the mine, I worked in the refinery.

There was no water: we had to get water from a truck that came up once a week. Finally, Mac had had it; he was working in a smaller mine which shut down. It was bizarre. We went to dinner one night at his boss' house, and he and his wife had rigged up a chair for their German shepherd--a huge, huge dog called Sonny--and he ate at the table. And they treated him just like their son. At the mine, the dog could carry a four-foot piece of two-by-four in its mouth. It was a big, big dog.

This was a small old mine, and it was quite an experience--you went down in a bucket. I don't mean an elevator, I mean a bucket. It was the same bucket that came back up later with the ore. You went down and then along these little sideways shafts, and you had a little carbide lamp on your head, and you spent the

first part of the day mucking out, shoveling the ore that you've blown the night before. What we had to do was fill this bucket which is on wheels and take it to the place where it goes up the shaft to the surface. In the afternoon, with this pneumatic drill--it's not exactly a dance, but you shake--you drill out holes into the spot where you're going to get the next ore, and you plant charges with a long fuse which goes practically all the way to where the up and down shaft is. Then you get the hell up out of there in the bucket. [laughter]

##

Stern: My job in the refinery was the crusher man's assistant. I was called "Whiskers." This was somewhere between a Charlie Chaplin movie where he gets caught on the little cogwheels, and a nightmare. It was an enormous refinery, and you couldn't see for more than a few feet because the air was full of dust; clouds of dust. All the people who worked there had silicosis. They used to compare the size of the spots on their lungs on their x-rays, and when there was a certain amount of square inches then they had to stop working.

The trucks would bring this ore with a lot of big rocks, and they would dump them on what's called the grizzle. The grizzle was a bunch of metal railroad rails laid a certain width apart. If the rocks were too big they would take a charge of dynamite called "salami" because it was shaped like a big roll of salami, and they would place it on the rocks and blow them up until they would fall through the grizzle. When they fell through the grizzle, they fell into our crusher, which was these two huge jaws that went [makes crushing noises], and they crushed the rock into slightly smaller sizes. Once in a while, at least four or five times a day, a rock would get caught in the jaws just right so that the jaws couldn't close. There was a metal bar over this crusher, and the way you handle the situation, as Ike demonstrated to me--Ike was the crusher man and my boss--the first day I worked with him it was you would grab on to this bar, jump into the crusher and try to move the rock with your boots. [chuckle] You push on these big rocks until they adjusted themselves. The crusher would go boom, boom, and as soon as you adjusted it you had better get your damn feet out of the way because otherwise it would crush you too.

They had tales of losing people. Actually, we lost one guy while I was working there. You had to clean out these many story-high tanks, and they were full of fine ore, and if you slip when you were in there, you could really get hurt even though you had a safety belt on. When we had to change parts on the fine crushers,

we used a twenty to thirty foot wrench with twelve men on the end to put enough pressure.

Then one day it was really cold; we were working in a completely unheated environment in the dead of winter. Each little work station had a fifty-five gallon drum which served as a stove. We would throw scraps of wood into it and sit around it for lunch. One day, we were sitting around--three or four guys-- and we were talking about religion and going to church. They looked at me and said, "What religion are you, Whiskers?" I said, "I'm Jewish." They laughed like hell. I was offended and I said, "Hey, what's so funny about that?" They said, "Oh. You weren't kidding?" [laughter] They had never met a Jew. It was okay. I just didn't understand. It was quite an experience. Turned out they had also never met a black person.

### North Carolina

Stern: Anyway, it got so cold, we had no water, and Mac had lost his job, so he decided he didn't want to come work for Con Chollar. Mac wanted to drive to his home in Charlotte, North Carolina. The problem was getting out of Virginia City; all the roads were blocked. We decided not to drive to Reno or through Carson City, but to go down the middle of the canyon. The Model A was so light that it could run on top of the snow. The problem was if you ever got stopped, it was hard to start again because the wheels would sink into the snow. So we had shovels and everything. Within half an hour of leaving, we got stuck behind a bunch of cows that were running down the canyon. There was nothing for them to eat. Around there there was a lot of cattle left in the fields to graze. Fortunately, the cattle had tromped down the snow so we were able to get started. We had lots of experiences. We had two cocker spaniel puppies in the rumble seat that we had acquired somehow in Virginia City. At one point--I mean, it was the big blizzard, and the Joshua trees were covered with snow. Later, when we were on Highway 66, we were out of the snow, but everything was wet where the snow had melted. There were these signs that read "Dip". I was driving, and I had never seen a "Dip" sign, so I didn't know what it was. Well, we got into this dip, and there was like about two feet of water in it. So here is the Model A Ford stuck in the middle of this dip.

Mac gets out to take the distributor apart and dry out the points and the spark plugs. He was mechanically oriented. He taught me a lot. However, he put the distributor cap on one part of the engine, and when this truck came running through the dip

next to us. The distributor cap goes high up in the air and lands in this two feet of water. We can't find it, so now Mac has to hitch to the next town to buy a distributor cap for a '28 Model A. [chuckle] In the meantime--this was incredible--another truck comes through the water, and I see this distributor cap leaping up into the air, and I catch it, dry it, put it on, and off I go and meet Mac about six miles down the road. [laughter] Anyway, it was that kind of trip.

We finally got to Charlotte, and we stayed at his parents' house. His father owned a chemical plant of some kind. His parents were really southern types. I had been to Black Mountain, but Black Mountain was really not the South. Charlotte, North Carolina, *is* the south. It's different. His father had just been to Cuba and had brought back a case of banana liquor which Mac proceeded to drink. We were on the way to have dinner with two gay friends of his; one of them was a veterinarian. I hadn't met them, but on the way there Mac ran into the back of a Greyhound bus, and he smashed our Model A Ford, never to be seen again. I got cut right here on my chin; there's still kind of a scar there. The veterinarian lived in a trailer, and they had prepared this really wonderful meal for us. But first, the veterinarian sewed up my little cut.

### Back to New York

Stern: Anyway, now we were without a car. We were on the way to New York, and Mac's father was really upset with his son's drunkenness and his weird Jewish friend from New York with a beard, etcetera. Still, he bought us a burnt-out Willys. A Willys was practically like a Volkswagen bug but a little bigger. It had had an interior fire, and it was all black, but it drove fine.

We went up to New York, and Mac only stayed a couple of days. He couldn't take the city. So I wound up with this car, and I was living in it on the streets of New York.

There was a bar at that time that we all went to--the San Remo on Bleeker and MacDougal streets--and who should show up at the San Remo a few days later but John Hoffman, a poet from San Francisco whom I had met there with Philip Lamantia at a bar right across the street--12 Adler Place--from the City Lights. Anyway, the bouncer, Trent, was a guy I had known in New York through Fran Deitch.

So I'm in New York, and the two of us are living in the car. For about two weeks, this folk singer lent us his apartment. We didn't have anything to eat, and there were about twenty-five pounds of oatmeal, and there were a bunch of spices. So we had a lot of oatmeal with curry powder and with oregano and with everything else--even soy sauce. When he came back he was very angry that we had eaten up his oatmeal so he threw us out. And there we were back in the car again.

We decided to go to P'town [Provincetown, Massachusetts]. In New York, they used to deliver bagels about five o'clock in the morning. They would leave them in front of the storefronts, and they would also leave milk. We would kind of cruise around and pick one bagel and one quart of milk from one store and another bagel and a quart from another--it worked pretty good; we never got caught, and that's how we had bagels and milk. We got up to Provincetown, and we barely had enough money for gas. We were sleeping in the dunes, and we didn't have anything to eat there either. We decided to go into Provincetown and try the same trick. Well, we picked up a few things outside of a store, and all of a sudden we see this truck driver coming after us. He was parked down the street, and he obviously saw us take the stuff which he had just delivered. We got in the car, and we sped down the highway away from Provincetown. We could see behind us this big truck chasing us, and we were scared, really scared. Finally, we turned into a sand road--the side roads are all sand--and we get stuck in the sand. The truck just keeps on going. [chuckle] We were relieved, but it took us a couple of hours to dig out.

We finally drove to Providence, Rhode Island, and on the way back to New York we didn't have enough money for gas. So I called the local rabbi. That was a stupid idea. He just told me to get lost. I finally had to call my father, and he Western Unioned us some money. But he was angry. He was very angry, and he said, "You better come and see me as soon as you get back in New York."



## III 1950s: POETRY AND THE BEAT AESTHETIC

In the Psychiatric Institute: Carl Solomon and Allen Ginsberg

Stern: So I came and saw him, and he dragged me to my uncle the doctor. My uncle supposedly discovered I had some kind of a problem with my kidneys. They put me into the hospital. After the hospital, they made me go see a psychiatrist who was a friend of my uncle. The psychiatrist says to me, "Look, I can't help you because your father can't afford to pay me, and besides, I think what's wrong with you is that you're malnourished, you don't have a place to live, you're wearing dirty clothes, etcetera. I've got an idea; listen to me carefully, and I never told you this. There's a place called the Psychiatric Institute at the Presbyterian Hospital. You call them up; here's the number. You tell them that you are a young poet and that you just tried to commit suicide and that you need help. They're looking for interesting people."

So I do it. I get an appointment, and they ask me, "What happened?" So I said I'm driving my burnt-out Willys down the Henry Hudson Parkway, and I have this terrible impulse to drive over the railing and into the Hudson River--which was totally untrue. They accept me; now I'm in this ward with a bunch of really funny people. Nobody violent, but interesting. And I'm getting fed three times a day, and I have a doctor who sees me twice a week--a Doctor Hambidge, one smart guy, and, over time, he listened to me, and finally told me, "Look. This is not difficult at all; this is very simple. You've gotta decide whether you're going to live your life or you're going to live the life that your father wants you to live. You can't manage both of them; they are not compatible. You're not going to make your father happy if you decide to do what you want to do, and I don't know if you can be happy doing what your father wants you to do. I can't help you any further than that." It was amazing. At the time I think it would not have been seen as a psychiatric solution; I mean, that was still a very Freudian period.

Anyway, at the same time, one day there walks into the ward a guy dressed in a dark blue shirt and dark blue trousers and blue suede shoes with huge stacks of books under both arms. He looks around kind of dazed, he's got this wild hair, and he's got a big face and big glasses. So I walk up to him, being a new patient, you know, and I say, "Hello, my name is Gerd Stern." And he drops all his books on the floor, and he sticks out his hand, and he says, "Define your terms!" That was Carl Solomon.

Carl had gotten into the Psychiatric Institute because, at a lecture by a proto-anarchist named Wallace Markfield at NYU [New York University], he had gotten up and thrown potato salad into Markfield's face. [chuckle] Carl was bizarre. He and I had a great time for a while. He had just come back as a merchant seaman from Paris. There he had acquired a lot of really fascinating books. He had Jean Genêt, whom I had never heard of. I had read [Marcel] Proust, [André] Gide, and I was fascinated by Gide's journals particularly, because, in a sense, they persuaded me that it was possible to be self-conscious, and that was like a positive practice, and somehow I think I had grown up thinking that was a negative practice being self-conscious. But Genêt and Celine were something else entirely.

Carl and I were there together for some time, then one day Allen Ginsberg showed up. Now there we were, three weirdos out of the literary world. Carl had Christopher Smart--that was a great little library that he had brought with him--and [Louis-Ferdinand] Céline. The problem was that at P.I. they thought Carl was really, totally crazy, insane; they gave him first insulin shock and then electric shock, which took him pretty far out of it.

Allen came because he had been acting weird at Columbia [University]. Mark Van Doren and Trilling and all those people decided--there was some kind of problem--I can't remember what happened. I think there was a trial of some sort involved, too. Anyway, we wound up at P.I. together and we had a number of adventures. We drove one of the aides crazy. One of the aides had to be taken away in a straightjacket!

Carl was very mischievous. We used to play ping-pong with this aide, and if he was losing, we always changed the score to where he was winning. When he was winning, we changed it so that he was losing. He wasn't very balanced; I mean, we were patients, you know? He should have understood, but he never did. [chuckle] What finally drove him over the brink--it was Easter, and they had put these papier-mâché bunnies up on the tables where we ate. Carl went into the bathroom and masturbated into the inside of this rabbit, and then put it back on the table and it drooled out this little pool of cum. The aide came and said, "What is that?"

Carl said, "I jerked off into it." The guy went mad, and they took him away.

Later on, I was at the San Remo with Carl, and a blind man came in and asked the way to the men's room. Carl took him, and when he came back to the bar, I said, "Carl, that was really unlike you." He said, "No, it wasn't; I took him to the ladies' room." [laughter]

So there we were. We misbehaved badly and consciously. We were in an asylum, and we acted out, and of course they think we were crazy. Anyway, eventually, I got out for the weekends because nobody thought that I was dangerous. But Carl and Allen couldn't get out for the weekends because they were under observation. Carl was having shock and Allen supposedly had violent episodes. So they asked me if I would bring some grass in when I came back. I did, and then they turned me in to the authorities. They were acting out--Genêt did that with his confederates--and they felt that was something they wanted to experience. Of course, both Allen and Carl were gay, and I was not. Anyway, I was ready to leave by that time.

#### John Hoffman and the Norwegian M.S. Bowhill

Stern: John Hoffman was still in New York, and he and I wanted a change of scene. So we decided we were going to go to sea. Actually, I think I got inspired for that by what Carl had told me about his time as a merchant seaman. We couldn't get American seaman's papers; it was really a catch-22 at that time. We would go to the union, we would ask for union papers, and they would say, "Well, you have to get a job first." You'd go to a shipping company, and they would say, "We can't hire anybody who's not union." They would send you back and forth, and it was hopeless.

We heard that there was a hiring hall for Scandinavian seamen in Brooklyn. We finally found the address, and we went there, and they hired us on the spot. We left later that day on the *M.S. Bowhill* from Bergen [Norway]--a Norwegian ship--for South America.

We had two jobs that were offered to us: one was galley boy, and the other was the officers' mess boy. John was a space cadet, I mean, before the term was invented. He was blond, tall, and very skinny, and he came from the peninsula south of San Francisco. He was really good-looking, but he had this vacant kind of look in his eyes. And he was a really good poet. So he

said to me, "Which job do you want?" And I said, "I think I would take the officers' mess boy, and you take the galley, John." And John says, "Well, I think I'll take the officers' mess boy." I said, "All right," but the reason I was going to take it is because I think it was the more difficult job--dealing with the officers. He said, "I can deal with the officers." Well, he should have taken the galley boy job because he got into nothing but trouble, he was so spaced out even without any drugs. We tried to score some grass before we got on board, but we got burned by Bob Kaufman.

Finally, we got to Rio [de Janeiro, Brazil], and John had to clean the cabins. Part of his job was cleaning the cabins. He had devised this method of cleaning the cabins by taking a pail of soapy water and throwing it on the floor, and he would lay on the officer's bunk and read with the door locked until the motion of the sea had drained all the water, then run the mop a little over the deck and leave a couple of soapy streaks. The officers expected him to scrub the cabin deck on his hands and knees every day.

So we get into port and we get leave off the ship, and John thinks he's a smart guy, and he goes through each of the cabins and throws a bucket of water on the floor and then closes up the cabins. Of course, the ship was laying at the dock, and it wasn't moving [laughter] so the officers all found water on the floors in their cabins. Then they understood what had been happening. It didn't go over too well.

I had a good time in the galley. I got to peel potatoes and wash pots, and I got to drink a lot of beer because the cook was a twenty-one-year-old Dane. He was fantastic. Seamen are very particular because food is about the only thing that they really get. They don't get paid very much, and it's hard work. He was fabulous; he was one of those people who could cut a turkey, slice the whole thing and then put it back together, and you wouldn't see that it had been cut up. So I had a good life; I ate well, I drank well, and the work wasn't that bad. John had it worse.

We had taken all kinds of books of poetry, and one of the books we took was a surrealist work--*Les Chants de Maldoror* by the Comte de Lautréamont who happened to be born in Montevideo [Uruguay], which was one of the ports that we were going to. It was a coincidence that John happened to have the book. We felt that it was very poignant. So we read the poems to each other. We would lie out on the hatch under the moonlight. It was a good trip.

Poetry and Trouble in Brazil ##

Stern: In Rio, we were looking for suspicious-looking characters, and we would go up to them and say, "Marijuana?" One of them started screaming and yelling, "Calaboso, Calaboso" which means "jail". We ran down the street fast, because he was calling for the police to grab us. We never did manage to score.

I nearly got killed in Santos [Brazil], which is a heavy-duty Brazilian port--we got into the nightclub and bar scene. I wound up spending a few nights with a little seventeen-year-old girl, Huda, who was quite precious. We went to Argentina, to Uruguay, and when we came back, we went to the bar again, and she wasn't there. There were some other young girls that were having some drinks with us. I was very friendly with an Australian who was an engineer on board--and John had done something wrong, I remember, and they didn't give him leave that time--but the original girl came, and she and the new one that was sitting at the table got into a big fight clawing each other up, and before you knew it the whole bar was fighting. Somebody hit me on the head with a bottle, and the Australian dragged me out and got me back to the ship. Two days later I came down with gonorrhoea, and the first mate had heard about this whole ruckus and he was very stern and so Scandinavian that he could barely speak English. "See what that kind of behavior does to you?" And he takes this syringe like it was a knife, and he sticks it into my rump. [chuckle] I got cured very fast anyway, so that wasn't too bad.

John and I were writing poetry like mad on that trip. I don't know whatever happened to a lot of it. I have a lot of his poems; in fact, the famous reading--you remember at the Beat Conference they were saying who had read, and they said Philip read that night but he didn't read his poems.

Byerly: Yes.

Stern: That was John's poems that he read that night. John, by that time, died very, very young. He was found on the beach at Zihuatanejo in Mexico dead. What probably happened is he had an overdose and lay down to sleep in the sun, and the drug and the sun killed him.

He was an abuser, you know? The abusive personalities are so different--I've always enjoyed and appreciated getting high. I've been smoking grass ever since I was seventeen years old. I can still get high on two or three tokes. I don't need to smoke any more than that. I've never been into hard drugs; I've done a lot of acid and peyote, but not for many years, and I don't need

it anymore because those were very ecstatic experiences. One of my own sons is a chronic abuser. His mother's family were all abusers of one sort or another. He's living on the piers in San Francisco at this very moment.

John and I got back from South America, and, ever since I had my appendicitis operation, I had a hernia which kind of popped out. The Europeans had very different ways of treating things; all through my childhood I wore this belt which had a thing on it to keep the hernia in place. Ridiculous. It was terrible--I mean, when you're in gym and had to wear a thing like that. So I decided since now I had the protection of the Veterans Administration because--even as a foreign seaman, if you have an American passport you qualified--so I went to the V.A. Hospital to have my hernia fixed. But it was another Kafkaesque institution, and I couldn't hack it so I managed to get my clothes and spirit myself out of there after two days. There were all these old men with really serious diseases. I was on this big ward--whew--it was not conducive. So it was years before I finally got that condition operated on.

#### Hitchhiking to California

Stern: I was living with my friends the Kisburgs, and I got this letter from California, from Jane. It was very enticing. As you have noted, she wrote well. It was like a clear invitation of some sort. I didn't know what it was, but I responded. I got on the road, and hitchhiked out to California. By that time, they were living in Berkeley, on the flats. Wally, her husband, was a sheet metal worker. I wouldn't say he was conservative, but he was a working man; he worked every day, and he had a working-class life, and he was satisfied with it. But she wanted more, more, more, more, more, and more. So she was always extending herself out of that family life in many directions.

#### Hitchhiking with Jane to New York

Stern: When I came to stay with them--she was a big potsmoker, too--after a day or so, we immediately fell into bed. She wanted to know what I wanted to do, and I didn't have any idea what I wanted to do. I mean, I was just hanging out and scuffling my way through life. I had come out there basically because I received a letter, and because I had liked California the first time. Within days

she had, with my total assent, decided that we were going to go back to the East Coast--she had never been to New York, and she had this friend, Violet, who was on the East Coast. But first she wanted to go visit various friends of hers to say goodbye. Here we were, her husband and herself and her three girls--little kids --staying in her house in Berkeley, and we're making plans to run away together. It was beyond my ken, really. She was much older than I was, but she was very attractive and very passionate.

Off we go, and first we went to stay with some of her friends near Los Gatos on a mountain near a town (Alma) which is now at the bottom of a reservoir--Jack and Shirley Shore. He was a jazz musician, and Shirley was a singer. I think they only had one child at the time.

Jack was a pacifist. We had mutual friends like Paul Goodman and Bill Everson and so forth. But Jack was violent; pacifism is often one face of people who have very intense emotions. It was true of Frank Triest; he was a pacifist, but he also had these violent tendencies, right? I saw Jack Shore the pacifist, who had been a conscientious objector both in jail and camps, tear a telephone out of the wall and throw it at his wife. It kind of upset me. It kept on happening in my life--I mean, Lew Hill, who was not only a conscientious objector but who started KPFA and with whom I worked closely, committed suicide. Self-violence. A very odd kind of matching emotions.

So we visited Jack and his wife for a few days, and this was all really bohemian, a lot of pot, poetry, music and having a great time.

Then we hitchhiked up to Eureka [California], where Jane came from. I met her mother. I met her father, which was not a very nice experience. Later in life, he used to refer to me as his refugee kike son-in-law. He was really some piece of work. A dentist, an American Legionnaire, and a Mason. We stayed with a good friend of hers that she had grown up with--a man named Wallace Look, who was a librarian at Arcata, at the CSU [California State University] campus there. A gay guy, very civilized. We were very friendly in later years. Later, he spent some years in a monastery.

#### Arrival in New York and Odd Jobs

Stern: And then we hitchhiked back to New York, which was quite an experience. We went to a cowboy barbecue in New Mexico; we were

picked up by a cowboy and his wife who had just won a race with the horse which was in the back of the pickup truck. Grand old time. All the experiences weren't positive, but anyway, we got back to New York, and we got a cheap place to live. I didn't have any prospects for what I would do for work. At that time, in San Francisco, wherever there was a public place they had metal containers with advertisements from hotels and restaurants for tourists, but we didn't have those in New York. I thought maybe I could get something together like that. So I tried it, but I didn't have the right connections; so finally I gave it up.

Violet, Jane's friend, was working as a taxi dancer at a ten-cents-a-dance place down on Fourteenth Street, and over my strenuous objections, Jane went to work there. She enjoyed it; she really enjoyed it. She met a lot of strange people there, among them Ross Russell--he was a record producer. He produced a lot of Charlie Parker's music, a lot of interesting jazz.

In the meantime, we had found a nice railroad flat up on 101st Street on the West Side. And I was painting it and decorating it. I got a bunch of odd jobs, I remember. I got a job in a factory where I was supposedly putting plastic insulation onto copper wire, you know, electrical wire. The machines were very old, but I still couldn't keep up with them. I was the only non-Puerto Rican working in the factory, and at the time I didn't know any Spanish. It was another disaster in my employment record.

Oh, I forgot that when I was out here I did have a little job--that was a bizarre job, too. It was loading tin cans into railroad cars. John, I think, had the job, and he got it for me. You had this kind of a fork with a lot of pegs on it, and the cans came down a belt, and you stuck this fork into them--I can't remember if it was ten or twelve cans--and you ran from this belt, up a little ramp and into the railroad car, and you would stack these cans. Now if you weren't in total sync with the other person who was doing this same thing, and you didn't get back to the belt on time, the cans all erupted into madness and chaos and rolled all over the place. I didn't last on that one either.

So here was Jane working as a taxi dancer and having several affairs on the side with people that she had met there, which also didn't please her employers. She was supposed to be making money for the house. And Violet had--I don't know--a protector who was some kind of a criminally involved person. She had a little daughter also--who had she been married to? She was a friend of Shirley Triest also. I think she was married to--Radha [Stern, Gerd's daughter] will remember--to the diver?



Byerly: Al Podesta?

Stern: There was some kind of a mixed relationship there. Anyway, I think she had been long gone from that marriage.

### New Paltz, New York

Stern: We decided to go back to California to visit. Jane was getting letters from her grandmother who was ailing. Her grandmother always finished her letters by saying, "And I don't know how anybody could leave God's country." Eureka being God's country. Have you been to Eureka? Eureka's quite a place. There's a graveyard on the seashore between Eureka and Arcata, and there's a redwood tombstone there. I guess it's still there. It says--I can't remember the guy's name--it says, "Murdered by capitalism." He was a Wobbly.

So we got an ancient car--I think it was an old Pontiac--for very little money. We started out in the rain from New York, and we got onto the Pulaski Skyway; it still exists. In the rain a car hit us from behind, and we hit the car in front; our car was demolished. So we had to regroup. So we hitchhiked back out.

We spent some time here--we kept actually going back and forth quite a lot. When we got back to New York, I had been doing babysitting and some odd jobs for a family, the Habermans. He had a mother who lived on an old farm in New Paltz, New York. The name was Thorborg Ellison. She was a bohemian from the early part of the century, and she knew all of the figures of that era. They were all her friends, and she had signed paintings and books, and she was married at the time to a really mad Yugoslavian. She had her farm with a lot of buildings that she wanted to have renovated so she could get some rental income. The idea was that she would give Jane and I a place to live, and I would work, and she would feed us. That was like heaven sent. So we moved into an old granary; it was a little larger than this room, and it had a loft. It was attached to the barn, and that's the first thing we did, we made it into a livable space; it was lovely. We ate with them in the big house, and I worked, and I wrote. Jane did little artsy-craftsy things, and she helped Thorborg with the kitchen. Jane was a very good cook.

We weren't married yet. There were other places to stay--we had visitors. Carl Solomon--at this time, Carl was out of the Psychiatric Institute, and he had married a very nice lady, Olive, and--I forgot to mention a girl at the time named Fran Deitsch,

who had been going to Temple Arts School with my friend Mona whom I mentioned before. And we had gotten involved in the Village. In the meantime, she had married Jay Landesman, who was the publisher of a little magazine, *Erotica*, which featured Carl and Allen and a lot of people in those days. We were all quite friendly. Carl and Olive and Jane and I were very close; they would come up for the weekend quite often, and others of our friends from New York would come up and stay, and it was very sociable.

Thorborg--we got along. She was a really odd bird. She gave me a piece of land which I later had to give back. We got kind of involved in the community. At that time, New Paltz was only a teachers' college; now it's a rather substantial campus. Other artists lived around. Right above the farm, huge properties belonged to the Smileys--a Quaker family that owned Mohonk resort --they were kind of despotic patrons. A lot of the locals there were their tenant farmers.

There was an incident where a farmer down the road who was an old radical had painted his barn orange because he had gotten some cheap paint. The Smileys didn't like it because when they looked down from the mountain there was this orange spot. His wife was a teacher, and the Smileys came down and they said, "Look. We want you to repaint your barn, and we'll give you the paint because it's just an eyesore." And he said, "No way." A few weeks later his wife was called into the principal's office and was told, "Your husband is making problems in the community, and it is going to reflect on your position in the schools. Now the Smileys have offered the paint for him to repaint his barn, and I think it would be a good idea if you persuaded him to repaint the barn if you're really interested in keeping your job." I'm just telling you this story because it's indicative of that period. And the guy repainted his barn--these people, you know, the Smileys--Quakers, pacifists, people who you would have thought were of liberal bent, but that was the way they behaved in the community. And they kept the local farmers in a position of servitude. I mean, you wouldn't have thought it existed in the twentieth century, but it did. They got some food, they got free firewood which they could cut on the land. They were basically kept in bondage. And those properties still exist, but now of course there are no more tenant farmers. It's now a very fabulous resort. You can't drive there; you park, and then they have carriages with horses.

New Paltz was an experience. I renovated a large chicken coop, and a Juilliard composer named Marga Richter, who I wrote an oratorio with, moved in with her Steinway piano, and unfortunately she left her kerosene stove on--the whole thing burned down. This

caused some tragic circumstances, and of course Thorborg was very angry at us, and it wasn't insured. Marga was insured for the piano, but anyway--it kind of disintegrated the relationship.

### Marriage to Jane Hill

Stern: In the meantime, Jane had gotten pregnant, and we were married by a justice of the peace who was watching television over our heads. And this was by a justice of the peace. We decided on getting married in Austerlitz because it was the town where Edna St. Vincent Millay had lived.

We decided when all of these bad vibes happened at the farm that we would go back to California. Coincidentally, this musician whom we had known in California--Keith, his strange wife, Barbara--we all drove out together here. It was some trip. I think we went through the national park--saw Old Faithful--we had a high time driving out. And Jane was quite pregnant.

Jane had an old friend, a doctor, Marion Wagner, who lived at that time in San Jose [California], and we spent some time with her. We had actually stayed with her on a previous trip. She was gay, and she came from a fairly well-known California family. She was a very generous and intelligent woman.

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Stern: We're about at the point where our son Adam was born, which was in San Jose, and he was delivered by Dr. Wagner whom I was just talking about.

I did leave out the publication--or the printing--of my first book of poems, *First Poems and Others*. One of the jobs I had in New York--one of the times when I was doing odd jobs--I worked for Clarence, a friend who had a photo offset shop where they did mailing and folding and all that stuff. I was kind of good at organizing that stuff. I got him to agree to help me put out my first book of poems. It was in the [Greenwich] Village so we called it the Village Press. It's a handmade book, really, called *First Poems and Others*, and my friend Ivan Majdrakoff did the illustrations, and Julia Pearl, his first wife, did the calligraphy, the hand lettering of the poems, which I think are quite good. And I've loved Ivan's work ever since we've known each other. And I still do. There's a painting of his right here in the next room; in fact, several of his works are, including the one hanging right there [points] which is an early piece, about

the same period that he did the illustrations for my book. It was a fairly limited edition, and it was put together by hand and hand stapled, and the cover was made by hand. It was a small edition, and it was quickly sold out--mostly by friends and acquaintances and various people. I think it took another fifteen or twenty years before the second book, and it's taken over thirty years since the second book for anything else left. I'm writing now, actually, for another book, but who knows?

I would really rather do a CD--a spoken version CD, maybe with some music, because I agree with what was brought up at the Beat Conference at the UC, at The Bancroft Library by Lawrence Ferlinghetti--that we managed to re-oralize the poetic tradition, which had gotten to the point where it had become just words on a printed page. During much of my life, I've written poetry in print, but also written in visual print; in artwork rather than just in books. A lot of my audiovisual experiments have been done with poetry.

When we came back out here [California], Adam was born, and we stayed here. We lived for a time in Berkeley, also down on the flats near the bay. We had a very active literary and social life. I'm just trying to think, and it isn't coming back too quickly, about the following sequence of events.

Byerly: What was that literary life like?

Stern: Well, Kenneth Rexroth was kind of the major glue of the literary life in the San Francisco world. And he had a weekly salon--I can't remember offhand whether it was Friday nights or Saturday nights--but everyone was welcome. Whether we were totally friends with Kenneth was beside the point; practically everyone went to his soirées. Sometimes there were periods during which, for instance, Robert Duncan wouldn't be there or other people would stay away. But in general, everyone kind of circulated through--anybody who came to town in that world would wind up there. And it was an opportunity to meet and to exchange information and to listen to people's work. Later, I actually took a workshop from Kenneth; the only poetry workshop I was ever involved with except for a couple I've given myself.

Byerly: Is this at the Scott Street apartment?

Stern: Yes, I believe so.

Byerly: So you and Jane--

Stern: No, not necessarily; sometimes. Jane and I, I, alone, and later on Ann and I would go.

Byerly: Was Jane into the literary scene?

Stern: No, not so much. I think Jane didn't like the company of well-known people, actually.

Byerly: Why?

Stern: Well, you may not take this well. Jane liked to be the center of attention. She was not comfortable in situations where she was not the center of attention. In a salon like Kenneth's, she would have been outnumbered, outranked, and outspoken--not in that sense of the word, but you know, there was no opportunity for anyone. Kenneth would rap ad infinitum, and you could not get a word in edgewise. Some people would scream and yell to get a word in edgewise. There was a lot of disagreement with Kenneth because Kenneth had opinions about just everything, and they were not ordinary opinions or the common opinions either. A lot of them weren't even his opinions; they were just provocations. He was a very provocative guy. He would do anything to get a rise out of people, especially out of somebody whom he found on the other side of radical politics, and I don't necessarily mean conservatives, but I mean in those days the schisms were--Kenneth was a prototypical Chicago product, and there's a certain--Nelson Algren, Kenneth Rexroth, Paul Goodman--there's a certain sensibility that comes out of that midwestern capital which is very different than what you get from New York or from the West Coast, or even from other midwestern cities like where Michael McClure and some of that whole gang comes from.

I guess, one of the principal connections for Kenneth was labor. The labor movement was very important to him. He was about as far from labor's proletariat as you could get. [chuckle] But, he identified with workers, he wore the clothes, he had the street talk. I don't know how much taped archive there is of Kenneth; I imagine there would be some, but if you ever listen to it, he had great rhythm. And you know, he was unafraid of any endeavor. I mean, the man translated from languages which he didn't know, which he only knew through the dictionary, and fearlessly, and a lot of them are really great translations. He was an exceptional being. What I learned from him was one thing: I had written a poem with the word "bird" in it. He got very upset. "Aw, come on, Gerd, what the fuck kind of a bird is that? It's gotta be a *bird*, not just *bird*." Precise images are what we were looking for. Well, I disagreed with him about the bird, but he's right; you need the precise image. Sometimes it can be the generic bird; it doesn't have to be a particular bird. I got into

a lot of trouble later on with that very thing with Hayakawa. He published a number of my poems in his magazine. He rejected one in which I used the image "washed idol." So he decided that that was not a precise image. It happened to be a very precise image; I had picked up a little figure of a Buddha outside my barge in the dirt, and I washed it off. I was standing there on my barge, and I said, "washed idol," and that's what it was to me. We had a terrible argument, he didn't print the poem, never printed another poem of mine, and we stopped fishing together. [laughter]

We used to go out in Leon Adams' little boat. And Hayakawa, who was not really Oriental in the sense of having been born there--he was from Canada, but he was a sashimi addict, and he had these sharp knives, and we would catch a striped bass, and without further ado we would be eating it within five minutes. Now that's really an experience to eat fish right out of the water. Very different. Anyway, that's much later than what I'm talking about now.

I don't know whether we should just jump or not. Should we jump? Don't jump. Jump, brother! Jump with care, jump in the presence--*punch* it is--Mark Twain. Punch, brother! Punch with care, punch in the presence of the passenger. It's a rhyme that he wrote when he was riding on a train, and he couldn't get it out of his mind--it was part of a short story of Mark Twain's. It's the conductor's punching of the ticket.

Where were we? We were with Jane. All right, so we're in Berkeley and we're--I don't know--

Byerly: How old was Jane at this time?

Stern: I don't know. The age thing and the years thing we're going to have to think about.

Byerly: How much older was she than you?

Stern: Oh, more than a decade. Nearly two.

Byerly: Almost twenty years older.

Stern: Fifteen, maybe. She wound up being over twenty years younger than her next husband, but they were never married. They might just as well have been.

Byerly: She was never married to Bill Buck?

Stern: No.

Byerly: She has his name.

Stern: That's what I said: they might as well have been. You can check with Radha, but I'm 99 percent sure they never married.

We got involved in the jazz scene also. I used to spend a lot of time listening to jazz.

Byerly: In San Francisco?

Stern: Yes, in San Francisco?

Byerly: What was that like?

Stern: What was it like? It was super duper. I first got into jazz on the East Coast. The time, for instance, when I was talking about that girl who followed me to San Francisco, Lorraine Oyl--I met her when I was the garden counselor at this camp from the Arbeiterskreis, a part of the Jewish Workers' Circle, a radical Jewish organization. A lot of the people you are working with, bohemians and radicals from California, came out of that movement, actually.

Byerly: I know they used the Workmen's Center; is that it? Was it a Jewish Workmen's Center?

Stern: The Workmen's Circle, it was called. David and Belle. All those people came out of that movement. A lot of people who were in that movement came from New York.

They had a summer camp called Unser Camp, which means Our Camp [in German]. The children's camp was called Camp Kinderwelt. You know, Children's World. And I was a counselor there. That was the year that Dizzy Gillespie's Manteca came out. I remember hitchhiking down to New York to buy it. We had a band at the camp that played at night at what was called the casino. Lorraine's father was the concessionaire.

I had originally gotten the job because I went to public school with a kid named Sheldon Secunda, and his father was Sholom Secunda, who wrote [sings], "Bei Mir Bist du Schoen." You know that song? That's a famous Jewish popular song. It was a big hit, and he sold it for thirty-five bucks, and other people made fortunes on that song. He was the musical director at Unser Camp. I got this job as the garden counselor, and that was also the year that that tune [sings], "There was a boy, da da da da da," which was called Nature Boy. That's what they called me. I had my beard already. I was called Nature Boy, and they would hum that tune every time they saw me. Drove me nuts. [laughter]

That summer I really got heavily into the new jazz. I had been listening to Dixieland and Chicago music, but the first sound of Bop really grabbed my ears. It was like what I felt my poetry was about. And that's in a sense what I had in common with a lot of the people that we were talking about yesterday at the conference. I mean, I didn't like Jack Kerouac for various reasons. But he had a great ear for jazz. He understood the rhythms. So did a lot of other people like David Meltzer, who read yesterday. He's got a fantastic connection to jazz rhythms. Mine are more of the broken rhythms like Bird. I knew Bird, I knew most of those people in that music world. In later years, I spent practically every night of the week at the Black Hawk [Club].

Byerly: Here in San Francisco?

Stern: Yes, it was run by a family named Noga.

We wound up moving to Mill Valley, to Throckmorton Street, with some friends that we had met through the jazz world: a couple named Pam and Bill Loughborough and a single guy named David Wheat. But nobody called him by that name; everybody knew him as Buckwheat. He was a jazz bass player and guitar player. Bill was an electronic engineer working for the government, and they were both big heads. That was a time at which pot smoking was a big deal.

Actually we didn't move directly to Mill Valley. We moved to San Francisco first. We moved to San Francisco and then to Mill Valley. We got involved in a kind of a crafts business. It kind of developed slowly. Buckwheat was working on a--there's so many threads to this, I don't know which one to tell first.

Meanwhile, KPFA had been organized by poets, basically--by Lew Hill. Lew was--I mentioned him in terms of the conscientious objector--Lew was from a very wealthy family down in Oklahoma. His theory was that what America was lacking was a practice of real communication--of cultural communication. And he was determined to give that to the nation, and he was determined to be president of the United States. I've never met anyone else in my life who was determined that he was going to be president of these United States. And he was serious about it. In a sense, I think it killed him. He managed to persuade the Ford Foundation, which was under the leadership of--you know, as I get older my name memory bank somehow disappears--but you know, the famous youthful president of the University of Chicago--Robert Hutchins--who then became the head of the Ford Foundation. We'll recover it; it's an easy recovery. He believed Lew's concept; he believed in it, and he funded the beginnings of KPFA which was not an easy thing to



do. It was the first listener-sponsored station; it was a brand-new idea. It was a station which was FM--frequency modulated--in a day when very few people had FM receivers, and the content was not something that was available over the airwaves.

The other poet who was seminal at KPFA--Pacifica Foundation was the parent organization--was Dick Moore, Richard Moore, who then later went to KQED. I don't know whatever happened to Richard in poetry; I admired his work very much. But he kind of got sidetracked into broadcasting. I'm not sure whether he kept on writing.

Lew lived up in Duncans Mills, very close to Shirley and Frank, and they knew each other. And I became the public relations director of KPFA. My basic job was to persuade people to subscribe to the station, but there wasn't much point in subscribing to the station unless they could listen to it.

I was lucky enough to somehow get involved with a company called Granco, which I believe was Japanese. The Japanese made these little FM receivers which you could plug into your amplifier and your speakers. They were cute little things, and they were not very expensive. What we did was we devised a system by which you could buy one of these as part of your subscription, and then we would send in a crew to install an antenna--you had to buy the antenna. And we went all the way down into the valley--into Stockton and Bakersfield and down through the Monterey Peninsula and up north. We got hundreds of new subscribers. It wasn't that that could support the whole budget of the station, but it brought credibility to the funders--like the Ford Foundation--that we actually had a viable, intellectual, cultural audience in California. It was a very satisfying practice.

The problem was that Lew's ambition was so much greater and his weakness was that he was so into diversity of opinion that he hired people who could not work together. It was a continuous battle on intellectual and conceptual grounds at KPFA, and it obstructed the working. We did some incredible programs that I was involved with. We did a series on poetry--it was his idea--and he got it funded by Ford. Wallace Stevens, you know, various voices reading the poems and then explicating them. We produced Alan Watts and Grace Clements, whom I talked to you about the other day.

It was the first time that I had really gotten seriously near tape recorders. I had a wire recorder, which was a very difficult technology, but it preceded tape. I was always interested in sound and the preserving of sound. At KPFA, at this point, I was also working with Harry Partch--Harry, you know, was

an American composer, now dead, who developed the system of music which depended on a non-tempered scale and which required the building of instruments, which could play non-tempered scales of various and exotic designs. Some of them are based on Greek models, and some of them on more primitive models like marimbas.

I was really impressed by Harry as a person. Jaime de Angulo was the first person whom I felt was a creative genius and totally out of the ordinary. I had met Henry Miller, but Henry was kind of--I mean, you could sit around with Henry, and he was like people. There are some figures that transcend that; Jaime was like that, and Harry Partch was even more so. There was only one of him.

I met Philip Lamantia, and I remained close to him for years, until the last couple of decades. Philip was a very young protégé of some of the French surrealists. He was in San Francisco, and he came from an Italian family here. His father was a produce merchant.

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Stern: One day Philip and I went to visit the Onslow-Fords, who lived up here on the mountain in Mill Valley, in a large Victorian mansion. Jacqueline was a San Francisco heiress who married an English baronet who was a painter and also part of the surrealist group in Paris in the early days. He then became kind of an Orientalist who was a patron of Suzuki Roshi's and Alan Watts'--that whole group of people. Gordon owned the ferryboat--the *Vallejo*--which lay outside of Gate Five in the shipyards and belonged to a Portuguese Sausalitan man, Donlon Arques. The *Vallejo* was on one side of Gordon's studio, and, on the other side, it was the studio of Jean Varda. Do you know who he was?

Byerly: I've heard the name.

Stern: Yes. Well, Jean also came out of that Parisian world. He was Greek, though. He was a fabulous painter and a social animal of the first degree. I mean, he had parties, and he had a marvelous boat with a lateen rig that we sailed around the bay on. You could fill it up with everyone in the art world in the San Francisco Bay Area.

We met Harry at this soirée of the Onslow-Fords, and he was carrying on about his musical theories, and I was enthralled. Then I heard his music, and I was further enthralled. He needed someone to manage his ensemble; he didn't have a penny to squeeze together, and I volunteered. And I was with Harry with some years. We never had any money, but we had absolutely incredible

experiences of putting together very complex works and building instruments.

Harry was the child of American missionaries in China. He was born in China, but he was 199 percent American-grade person. He had been a hobo, he was in the Southwest and California, he traveled all over the country on the rails, and one of his works was called *U.S. Highball*, which was the story of his hobo days and the whole hobo life. I still think it's one of the greatest works in American music.

At the time, he had his studio in one of the old shipyard buildings down there. We were by this time living on Throckmorton in Mill Valley. One day after I spent so many months working with Harry, Gordon invited me to lunch on the *Vallejo*. Gordon stuttered--I don't imagine he's still alive. He was a wonderful, kind of comical figure. He was so British, and his paintings were unique. They were kind of hard to take seriously because they were so--what should I say?--they were formula paintings. He had ideas--he had this, like, spirals, for instance, which he used as an element in many of his paintings in this period that I'm talking about. I'm not speaking badly about his paintings; I really enjoyed his paintings but they were more of an idea than actual--. He was so wrapped up in calligraphy and Zen and that world. And that's a world of ideas.

### The Barge

Stern: At this lunch he said to me, "G-G-G-Gerd, Jacqueline and I," she wasn't there--she was a beautiful, beautiful woman, and she had one of those high voices, and she always wore flowing robes and scarves that were transparent. Jacqueline was too much. Anyhow, Gordon says, "Jacqueline and I are so appreciative of what you've done for Harry. I want to give you something, Gerd." I was ready to be given something, you know? [laughter] I think maybe dollar signs were dancing in my head, because they were rich. He had a lot of trouble bringing it out. He says, "Y-Y-You know I own this land here on the waterfront." He had a little piece there which was right in the middle of the Arques shipyards. "What I would like to offer you is a berth for a barge." There was a lot of stuttering which I'm not going to try to imitate. I was dumbfounded. It was like, you know, what kind of an offer is that? A berth for a barge? I didn't have a barge. I didn't have much money to eat, much less buy a barge, you know? But I was nice, I said, "Thank you very much. It is a great gesture," and

so forth and so on. To be a neighbor of his and Yanko--Jean Varda was called Yanko--would have been great.

About two weeks later, I was having a drink at the Tin Angel, which was owned by Peggy Tolk-Watkins. Peggy was a Black Mountain product, and although we hadn't been at Black Mountain at the same time, it was--anybody who had ever been at Black Mountain had a bond with anybody else. Peggy was a fantastic character. Do you know something about her?

Byerly: Peggy. What's her last name?

Stern: Tolk-Watkins.

Byerly: And it was a barge? The Tin Angel?

Stern: The Tin Angel was not a barge, it was built on stilts. It was right on the water in Sausalito, right on the middle of the causeway. Peggy was a raging dyke. I mean, she was something else--not a violent person, but an intense, strong, raging personality. One of her good friends was a sculptress named Blanche Sherwood. We were talking at the bar and drinking, and she was muttering on about, "Blanche has a fucking problem, blah blah blah." I said, "What's the big problem?" She says, "Well, there's this barge, and it's stuck on the mud in Don's shipyard, and it's costing a fucking fortune, and what are we going to do? We should burn the bloody thing." I said, "Barge?" She says, "Yeah, it's this big old navy laundry barge, 135 feet long, 30 feet wide, and Blanche had no business buying it. She should just get rid of it." I said, "I'll take it."

So within a week I owned a barge. A huge barge. And it was stuck on the mud. And I went to Arques, whom I didn't know--great guy, a really great guy. Big heavy belly, and he drove tugboats around Sausalito. A very ethnic Portuguese, although I think he was born here. His father had started the shipyard, and I guess it had been a big deal during the war. You know, those were all Kaiser yards down there. What were they called? Liberty Ships--Kaiser's specials, which were not great boats but they served the purpose during the war. I went to Don--everybody called him Don; it was Donlon [spells], which I guess is a Portuguese first name.

So he said, "You can do it; I'll help you get that barge off the damn mud." He didn't like the two ladies--in quotes, "ladies". I said, "Hey, tell me what to do." He says, "Well, you've got to get some guys to help you, and it's--" No, no, I'm sorry; I got this mixed up. I got this completely mixed up. This happens much later.

Okay, now we're back at the Tin Angel; we're going to cut this whole little part out. I get the barge. The barge is sitting in his shipyard, and we get it up--that's right; she didn't have anyplace to put it. That was it, she didn't have any place to put it. She couldn't live on the barge because you're not allowed to live in the shipyard. And the barge was about to sink because it had a lot of holes in it. So I went to Don, and he knew exactly where Gordon's place was because it was in the middle of his shipyard, and he says, "I'm sure we can get it out there." So we get it out next to the Vallejo, and Buckwheat and Bill and Pam and I and Jane and Adam move on it. And we're living on the barge.

Byerly: Pam? Did you say Pam?

Stern: Yeah, Pamela Loughborough.

Byerly: Who's she?

Stern: She was married to Old Bill. Bill Loughborough, the electronic engineer I told you about.

Byerly: Right.

#### Boobam Bamboo Company

Stern: Now there was another guy involved with us named Jak Simpson. We had founded a little business, and the business was called the BooBam Bamboo Drum Company. What we did was we made drums out of bamboo. Buckwheat was working on the President Lines as a bass player, going to the Orient.

Byerly: On what lines?

Stern: President Lines. The ship line that used to take passengers and freight. In the Philippines, which was one of their stops, he would buy this large diameter giant bamboo and bring back a number of sticks of it on the ship. This really came out of the Harry Partch world. I had enlisted Bill and Buckwheat into helping build instruments for Harry. We had built a marimba which delivered tones down to about sixteen cycles, which is barely audible. And in order to build something like that and to get the coupling of the bar which you hit with a big soft mallet over the chamber which resonates--when you can't hear so well, you've got to figure out a way to measure vibration. Now Bill had instruments that he borrowed from the Navy Yard which could do

that. So we were able to work on a new technical level that hadn't been possible before, and we were able to tune these instruments using an oscilloscope and an audio oscillator and a device that read out what the cycles per second were. It used to be cps [cycles per second], now it's called hertz, after a man named Hertz, who was kind of the progenitor of audio engineering. Heinrich Hertz--I think his name was Heinrich.

We had two kinds of drums. We had the drums that had two nodes on the end, and we carved an H out of them and tuned them to the size of the resonating chamber. You could play them either with your fingers or with mallets. And then we took the ones in between which were open at both ends, and we put skin caps on them like bongos, except we tuned them in half-steps so that if you had, like, one-two-three, or you had one-two-three-four-five-six, you could play an actual scale on them. A lot of the jazz groups and a lot of people generally were fascinated and added them to their percussion sections.

We went to the big music conventions; Jak Simpson and I drove there in a Volkswagen Bus filled with drums, and we played them and showed them, and we got more orders than we could imagine, but we could never fill them. There wasn't enough bamboo, and we weren't into making money. The prototype of this to me was when I really understood what business was about and what--. Many years later I was in Venezuela, and I was into cigars, and I found an incredible cigar through--I'll tell that story some other time. But I went to the guy and said, "I would like to import them to the United States." He said, "You're a friend of friends. I'm going to explain to you that I make enough cigars for my country. If I wanted to, I could sell cigars all over the world. But I just have a few people working with me; they've worked with me for years. I have small fields. I have enough money to live here the way I like to live. I don't want to be bigger; I just want to be what I am. Do you understand?" And I understood. I thought back to the BooBam Bamboo Drum days, and I said, "Hey, we didn't have a ghost." If we had just continued making them for friends and for jazz musicians, and making them by hand--but, you know, right away we went to the music convention and we were drowned in a world which was beyond us.

Here we were, and Jane gets pregnant again. We're living on the barge.

Byerly: Did you build a house on the barge?

Stern: No, it had a house on it. It was a laundry barge, and it had a house on it. Blanche had done some work on it. There was a beautiful fireplace with a copper hood.

Byerly: Is that the picture of it? [points]

Stern: Yeah, that's the picture, but many years later. This was long afterward.

A fabulous place to live. At that time, it was in fairly good repair. Anyway, we were attached to the electricity. We had electricity, and we had water. What we didn't have was sewage; the sewage just went into the bay. Later on--well, that's a later story.

Pam had lost a baby. She was pregnant again, and she had to spend all of her time in bed. We were heavily into the jazz scene, and all of the famous jazz musicians came to the barge. I was still working at KPFA for a very meager salary.

We were all big potheads, right? And we believed we should be able to smoke them legally instead of illegally, so we did this secret program at KPFA. There were like five people talking about pot, and it was broadcast, and the authorities were, I mean, it was headlined in the papers. People were really upset, and they were looking for us. They didn't know who produced the program in the station; most people in the station didn't know. Several people who did, refused to talk--acted like they didn't know. So they never found out who produced it. I think it was like the first act of actual media aggression against the authorities on that level. Even to this day, I don't think anybody knows who produced that program [laughter]: yours truly. It didn't improve my position at the station, by the way, among the several people who knew it.

### Lewis Hill

Stern: Lew Hill--we were extremely, extremely close. We would spend weekends up at his place up in Duncans Mills, and he had a little printing press there on which I printed one of my poems, and he printed his poems. And he accused me of being a typical Jewish anarchist, and I wasn't an anarchist by any means. But he felt that I was chaotic, and that I wasn't organized, and that I didn't understand the agenda which was necessary. His next step was to have a--first of all, he was trying to replicate KPFA in other cities, and then he wanted a chain of newspapers, and once he had a chain of newspapers he could get elected president, you see, and he needed me and a few other people to be his henchmen. And we didn't share his ambitions. [laughter] We enjoyed the concept but we didn't want to do the work; I wanted to write poetry, and

other people wanted to do their thing, and nobody wanted to be in politics for sure. Except Lew.

Now Lew was a terrible womanizer. I mean terrible in the sense that it was destructive to him. He had a marriage to a childhood sweetheart, he had two children, but he had a long-term affair with Richard's wife, Eleanor, which was destructive to his marriage. It was kind of a triangle which everybody thought was all right, but nobody really prospered under it. And then I had a lady who was working as my assistant in public relations. They started having an affair, Lew and she, and it got terrifying--she had a husband too, and blah blah blah.

One day Lew was discovered in his garage. He had connected the gas pipe to a tube and committed suicide. I was so angry. I don't get angry much, but I felt, like, betrayed and disillusioned, you know? Here was this exceptionally intelligent, wealthy, talented, organized person, and he had let what I considered just a stupid emotional bind that he had gotten into to lead him to the point of killing himself? I found it inconceivable. Just totally inconceivable. I have never really gotten over it. I don't--after all these decades later--understand how that was prompted in him. I understand that he and his wife--but a man of his capabilities--. Anyway, that was devastating.

#### More of Life on the Barge

Stern: In the meantime, we were on the barge, and Harry Partch--we had thirty to forty people involved in an orchestra and a dramatic performance with singers. We had finished doing Plectra and Percussion dances, and we were on to his Oedipus. A very complex piece of work. Harry's main righteous remark on how one led one's life was, "If you want it done right, do it yourself." That was completely counter to writing a work which involved thirty to forty people. And the conflict was enormous; he was an irascible, strange dude, you know? He was basically gay but he was in the closet for most of his life because of the times. He was a--what do you call people who really are not in tune with women? I can't think of the name.

Byerly: Men? [laughter]

Stern: Yeah, men. You know what I mean; there's a word.

Byerly: Misogynist?



Stern: Yes, he was a misogynist. He had women friends, but he was always critical of them. Jacqueline was so good to him. There were many women in his life who supported him and were his patrons, who really understood what he wanted to do. I don't think he had an idea of why he had this strange relationship, but he really liked young boys. Eventually, [chuckle] he got into it, which was good. He was also an alcoholic, and he didn't use drugs at all. He was kind of terrified and against them.

I was lucky; I managed to interest a lot of people in his work. Carl Haverlin, who was the head of BMI [Broadcast Rights Incorporated], and who gave him money from then on for the rest of his life. BMI is a rights association like ASCAP [American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers]. You know, every time something is played on the radio or television, the composer has the right to collect money and do it through these two organizations. Carl really appreciated him. He's been dead for many years.

We did Oedipus on the waterfront in Sausalito for a number of days with great critical acclaim. A lot of our band I had recruited from the Presidio military band. There were a lot of jazz musicians who were part of that band because they got into the army and, what do you do? You're a musician? Oh, we need--. Well, these guys were great musicians, and they loved being in Harry's band. They learned the instruments, they learned the non-tempered scale, they were super duper musicians.

Then one day one of them brought this gangly--in Yiddish you call him nebbish--I mean, a guy who just doesn't somehow fit in, you know? And I felt sorry for him. Bill Buck. He was in the army, and he was hanging around the band. He wanted somehow to be involved with Partch, and Harry didn't want any part of him. I finally talked to Harry and said, "Let him turn the pages on the harmonium," which was this reed organ that Harry had converted to a non-tempered scale. Bill started hanging around the barge, and we turned him on and kind of changed his life. He was wearing like old clothes when he wasn't in uniform, and he drove a ratty old Ford.

### Bill Buck ##

Stern: He did not appear to be from any wealth, or any fine family; he looked like something that the cat had dragged in. He would sleep on the couch, and you have some idea of what Jane was like. He was introduced into Oriental philosophy and art and all kinds of

literature--things he never had really known about, and he took to them like a proverbial--. Then one day Jane is gone, and the kids are gone. By this time, Radha was born. Radha was a baby, less than a year old, I think. I'm not quite sure about the time and everything. But Jane's gone; she's disappeared with the kids. It's like ten days or two weeks before I find out what happened. But Bill Buck is also gone. It turns out that--remember I told you about Wallace Look, the librarian? In the meantime, he had come back out of the monastery which was on the Hudson in New York State, and he had a little apartment in Sausalito. He had sheltered Bill and Jane and the children. They went to Nevada, and they lived in Nevada while Jane was getting a divorce from me.

But in the meantime, we found out that Bill Buck was a millionaire. He had just turned twenty-one, and he inherited the first part of his fortune. He bought her a Mercedes, which at that time was not something that you saw every day. And they had my children! They were not friendly; they were unfriendly. I wasn't the nicest person in the world; I'm not saying that I was a virtuous husband or anything like that, but on the other hand I wasn't expecting this at all. I was not pleased. I was hurt. I was particularly hurt because I was the guy who had brought Bill into our group--the other guys, Buckwheat and Old Bill, had thought that Bill Buck was the FBI. I said, "You've got to be kidding. This nebbish kid couldn't be the FBI." I was right about that, [laughter] but he turned out to be even worse in a sense. Now it's all turned around kind of strangely.

There was this sequence of bizarre events. I know I've used that word a number of times. One day, I came back to the barge and Old Bill and Pam and Buckwheat are gone. They've moved everything out while I was somewhere, you know. And now it turns out that they--Bill--has formed a company and financed them to build drums out of redwood in the same pattern that we were building them out of bamboo, but square instead of round. They now have capital and a company, and they've left me.

The next thing that happens is all of sudden there's this book of poetry. The poetry is Jane's and Bill's and Look's. I'm beginning to think that I'm being co-opted, and I'm right.

The next thing I get is an anonymous offer to buy the barge. I was a little slow, but it didn't take me very many days to think about who was making the anonymous offer to buy, and it turned out it was Bill Buck.

Maya Angelou

Stern: In the meantime, Jak Simpson and I had remained fast buddies. He had been a good friend of Old Bill's and Buckwheat's the same as me, but when they left, he was quite offended. He stuck with me. Jack was from Kansas City, he was a friend of Bird's, of Charlie Parker's, and a lot of people. He knew a lot of people, and among them was a Greek guy named Tosh Angelous. Tosh had been married to Maya. They had a breakup, and Jack remained a friend of Maya's, and he introduced me to Maya. Maya at the time was between jobs. She was trying to get into the Purple Onion [Club], and she had been on the road. She just came back from the road; she was the primary dancer in the Porgy and Bess company that toured Europe.

One of my neighbors was John Drew. He lived on the waterfront, and he was a real queen. Wonderful guy--from the Barrymore family. He was the manager and impresario of the Purple Onion. I became Maya's manager, and we got her into the Onion. She was an instant star there.

Byerly: What was the Purple Onion?

Stern: Well, there were two hip clubs in North Beach. One was the Hungry I, and the other was the Purple Onion. Enrico Banducci was at the I. That was before your time, huh? You know, Mort Sahl, the Kingston Trio, Phyllis Diller. Phyllis and Maya and the Kingston Trio was the bill. Great bill.

Byerly: And Maya danced?

Stern: She sang and moved. [Sings] "Don't let the sun catch you crying."

Anyway, we lived together, and we had a great time.

Byerly: She moved into the barge?

Stern: Yes. With her son, Clyde. Clyde was, I don't know, eleven or twelve at the time.

She came from a very difficult family. I never knew her father, but I knew her mother. Her mother was basically lesbian. And Maya was very bisexual herself. Her mother ran a kind of a coffeeshop in the Fillmore with her lover. They were really tough dykes, man, oh boy. One day a guy came in and held her up, she pulled a gun from under the counter and shot him dead. Boom. No problem, right?

So Maya and I, you know, we--. She got in the Purple Onion because she was a great talent. She still is a great talent. She was a performer. She could magnetize an audience; wonderful, wonderful onstage personality, and a good repertoire of songs. She moved, and she wore these very simple strap gowns with nothing under them. She was over six foot tall and skinny, and when she moved people just gasped. She had studied originally with Pearl Primus, New York, who was the black modern dancer.

We were together for some time. Maya is not an easy temperament; she's a difficult woman. She used to introduce me to men as, "This is Gerd Stern, my manager, and my man." But if it was a woman, it would be, "This is Gerd Stern, my man, and my manager." It was very clear, right? [laughter]

It was a difficult life. We lived at night. In those days we had to live in the black world. Not in Sausalito, but like in Los Angeles. We couldn't stay at a hotel; we had to stay at a hotel in the ghetto. Well, not ghetto, but in the black section; it was a nice hotel. I'm not saying it was a dump or anything. It was difficult for me being accepted in that world--even though, for instance, in New York, I had had black friends.

Just about that time, problems started developing. Percy Heath of the Modern Jazz Quartet was--you know, he and I had even slept in the same bed together, not sex--and then it got to the point where John Lewis, who also was a friend of mine, was saying to Percy, "Look, Percy." Pussy, they called him. "You've got to think of the race. I mean, all these white friends and all this pot smoking, you know? You're not thinking of the race." There was a lot of ambivalence toward white people. It was very painful. Like in Chicago. In New York there's no problem, no line at the hotels. I mean, there were hotels where you couldn't stay at, but one knew which ones. But in Chicago and in the South and in other places, in Los Angeles, hey, if you're a mixed couple you had to stay in a black hotel, and you got a lot of bad vibes even there.

We were very friendly with people. She had a lot of fans. You know, the famous black singer, Lena Horne. Lena loved Maya's work. Lena played the Fairmont, and we were very friendly. Her husband was still alive then. He was a fabulous arranger and pianist. He was white.

So one time we came home--we had had some difficulties. Her son was not easy to deal with, and school, and so forth, and so on, and living that life and not having anybody to take care of him. Her brother was in jail for murder, etcetera. One morning about six or seven o'clock in the morning she woke me up and said,

"Oh, your baby's so dry; go get your baby some water." And I said, "Bitch! Let me sleep!" [laughter] And she took this bottle of Dixie Peach--you know what Dixie Peach is? It's a hair gel, and she smashed it onto the floor. "No white motherfucker is gonna call me 'bitch'!" [laughter] And she went after me with this bottle, and she cut herself. Then she started crying. "Waah, you made me cut myself!" That was it for me. I just couldn't take that, and within a week we had come apart. It was all right. We both understood it, and she went on, and I went on.



## IV 1960s: PLAYBOY MAGAZINE AND SAN FRANCISCO HIGH SOCIETY

Marriage to Ann London

Stern: Anyway, that was right after Jane. In the meantime, I had left KPFA. I mean, after Lew, and after--. The guy who had succeeded me was a guy named Henry--Sandy Jacobs. He had become public relations director. And he then became a partner of my partners who were--you know, Old Bill and Buckwheat. Henry, whom I had known because of KPFA, was going out with a lady--well, there were other friends that came out of this group. They were from Chicago. One was a sociologist, Howie Becker, and his wife, Nan, and his sister-in-law who was part of the Second City troupe, you know, the comedian. Anyway, Henry--or Sandy--was going out with Ann London, and that's how I met Ann. Sometime after Maya left, I ran into Ann somewhere, and--you know, she was a poet also--we got to talking, we went out together. Before we knew it, she was living on the barge with me.

We were very much in love, and we had many similar interests, although she was a lot more classical and academic than I was. And we knew a lot of the same people in the literary circles.

Carl and I had kept in touch all this time, and he was working for his uncle, the publisher of Ace Books. I had some bad trips in New York after the hospital--with Allen and Jack and the gang and people around him. At one point I had been in an apartment, and we had all gotten high--I think I was the first guy to actually turn him on. They held me down and tried to get this guy to fuck me in the ass because they decided that what was really wrong with me was that I didn't understand homosexuality. But the guy couldn't get it up. So I was saved that experience. [laughter] It didn't endear them to me. I never did like Jack; Jack was a fucking voyeur. He was a dirty alcoholic; he just really liked to get drunk, and he wasn't nice to women. He treated women badly. I'm not attached to any feminist causes, but

I've always somehow felt differently about women than I think that a lot of men do.

Byerly: In what way?

Stern: Well, women have been very important in my life as confidants and as romantic and intellectual peers. Elaine, whom I talked to you about, was the foundation of my self-confidence as a writer. Jane, I learned an incredible amount of cultural knowledge from Jane--like I told you, she was a dilettante; she knew a little bit about everything, whether it was archaeology or anthropology, Buddhism, etcetera. It wasn't deep but it was enough to get you started in practically any direction. Maya was a fantastic experience for me; I must say I don't regret any piece of any relationship that I've had. I think Maya's the only person, the only relationship that I would have voluntarily broken up.

I guess I have a very deep-seated fear of violence. I will not--strange thing about my grandson's murder--I can't stand to have guns around, and I never have been able to since I was very young. I don't know where it came from. I won't tolerate physical violence. And it isn't like I haven't been bad about it once or twice in my life. I used to be very hysterical. I had absolute fits during my relationship with Jane, all the way up until much later in this tale when I took acid. I haven't had a hysterical episode since my first acid trip, which is somewhat different from other people's experience.

Ann and I were a very successful couple for some time. We lived together for quite a while. Ann was the West Coast editor for McGraw-Hill at the time, a job which her father had gotten her. When I met Ann, and even when we started living together, I didn't have a ghost about who her father was. I mean, I knew what his name was. His name was Dan London. I wasn't into San Francisco society; I didn't know, you know? Ann had all these fabulous connections; she knew everyone. She never believed until the moment that she died that I didn't know who her father was, that I didn't understand what I was getting myself into. But I had no knowledge of it. And the fact that she didn't believe me, which didn't come out for a long time, was somewhat devastating to me because why would I? A refugee boy from New York. [laughter] Sure, I was involved in the San Francisco kind of poetic scene, but I never read the *Chronicle*. Once I was with Ann we had the *Chronicle* every day so I started reading it. I had no idea who Herb Caen was, who later became a very close friend of mine. I'm really pleased as punch that he got the Pulitzer.

Byerly: Herb Caen was her father?



Stern: No. Herb Caen was just somebody she knew. Dan London was her father. Dan London was the manager of the St. Francis Hotel, he was the Commodore of the Golden Fleet, he was a director of the Golden Gate Bridge, he was a personal friend of the Shah and of President [Dwight] Eisenhower, and etcetera. He was a bigshot, a big deal. It wasn't my world, and I didn't understand the world. Later on, when I got to know him, we got along fine. He was unfortunately another alcoholic, and the whole family was alcoholic, and it was very sad. But he was all right. He was only happy when he was piloting or driving his seventy-some-odd-foot cruiser, the *Adventuress*, which was the leading boat of San Francisco's Chamber of Commerce Golden Fleet. You could invite fifteen people to sit at the table on this boat and have dinner while you were cruising around Alcatraz [Island]. Wow. We used to do that; we used to have literary dinners on this boat. [laughter]

It was a whole new world for me. But Ann was convinced that part of my original motivation was that she was a rich girl and a society girl, and it couldn't have been further from the truth. I didn't have any idea. The family had come from Seattle [Washington]; she had gone to the University of Washington. And Ted Roethke, who was her teacher, was a friend of mine; he was a poet. Remember I told you about Ruth Witt-Diamant at the San Francisco Poetry Center? When Ted was here reading, I was the guy who drove him around and took him to the right bars and etcetera. And he was one of the few poets who appreciated my work. She was his student, so that was the major connection.

The London family lived in the St. Francis Hotel. They had a floor basically--or half a floor there. Of course, it wasn't until somewhat later on that I met her mother and father, and I had met the sister, Mimi, who was a fashion model, younger than Ann.

But Ann was rebelling from her family at the time, so she wasn't very attached to them. Well, all of a sudden, some reporter at the *Chronicle* realized that here Dan London's daughter was living on a barge in Sausalito, and I can't remember, but they came and took pictures, and they published this big story with a picture of Ann. I can't remember--I think I was in it also. And it was very embarrassing to the Londons because here was their daughter living with somebody. So Ann was called in and read the Riot Act. She had been married before to a composer in Seattle. The marriage had broken up--without children. Ann pleaded with me that we had to get married immediately and that actually it should be thought of that it was retroactive, et cetera. Hey, big deal.

So we went out to Inverness [California] with my friend Ivan, who at the time was married to his first wife Julia Pearl, another painter. Ivan and Julia were the witnesses, and a justice of the peace married us, and that was the time he was watching television over our heads, and we just thought it was the funniest thing in the world. We got back to the barge, and I cooked--I was a very good cook--I remember I cooked oxtail soup. That was our wedding feast. So we were married.

Now all of a sudden I understood. They didn't come to the wedding. But now I got to meet Dan and Claire and have dinner at their apartment. Now I got some idea of the world that she had come out of. I mean it was a world which was like Madeline's--that book about the little girl who lives in a hotel.

That's how Ann grew up. She grew up with room service and had practically never seen her parents. And she had this awful ambivalent relationship with her father. He had abandoned her, and he hadn't spent any time with her, and he demanded that she be this kind of person, and she wasn't, and he was basically an anti-intellectual, and she was a highbrow. He was a dead-conservative Republican, and she was a liberal Democrat; he was for the death penalty, she wasn't, and so on.

[Interview 2: April 15, 1996] ##

Stern: Ann and I were each deeply involved with poetry. We decided early in the relationship to publish something in the nature of single broadsheets of poems. It was called Poems in Folio. It was a monthly subscription where people who subscribed got one poem per month. Each one was printed by an artisan printer, most of them here in California--the Grabhorn Press was the first one--they did William Carlos Williams' *Sappho* version or translation. A very beautiful poem. We did it for a year; there were twelve poems.

As usual, Ann and I were on kind of opposite sides of the coin. She was a fairly strong-willed woman, and she won the day. What that involved was that I felt that we should publish young, unknown poets such as myself at the time, and Ann felt that the only way that this would be successful is if we had important poets who would get people to subscribe and who would give the whole thing a cachet. I understood that that was a reasonable point of view. It didn't match my feelings about what I wanted to do in terms of my poetry or others of my peers and contemporaries. But that's how the thing went.

Ann had had an affair with a very well-known older poet who also--I think she had attended one or two of his workshops when she was still up at Seattle--Stanley Kunitz. Stanley was one of

our editorial board, and we had--I can't remember at this time, but it's a matter of record the poets that were on our editorial boards. It was a very uptown kind of a presentation. We also had a binder which was very handsome, and Ivan, my friend, designed the logo for *Poems in Folio*. It was a lyre, which is a long-term symbol of poetry, of barding. I wouldn't say it was a great business success, but they were beautiful, beautiful poems. There was a limited edition, and then there were some other poems. We certainly didn't make any money, but it created a little bit of a stir, and the press people were very happy with it. Most of the well-known hand presses did one of the poems. It did point out to me the vast distance between the respectable world of academic and prestigious poets and my own world, which was kind of a poetry underworld.

At more or less the same time, Ann and I were involved in a small group of poets. We gave readings and published a little--I can't remember whether it was mimeographed or photo offset--it was called *Seven Stray Cats*. There were seven of us. It was our own poetry. It brought us together, and we discussed a lot of the issues involved in our poems. One of the people--probably the one who has gotten most well-known--was Jack Gilbert.

Jack and I wrote a satirical puppet play which was done at the San Francisco--I can't remember exactly what it was called--Art Fair. It was kind of an open-air thing. There was a group--I can't remember the name--but Helga Williamson was the puppeteer. And it was called "Don't Flee the Scene Salty," after a tune by Lionel Hampton.

We did this in the studio; we recorded it with music in the studio of Richard Wirtz Emerson. Dick recorded a vast array of Bay Area poets. He was one of the first people to have the technology; he worked for a big company (Shell) during the day, and this was his passion in the evenings and on the weekends. He lived in Sausalito, and he was really a big help to a lot of poets in terms of not only appreciating their work--. There were a lot of interesting people around that time: Bern Porter, who had been involved in the Manhattan Project and was somehow assuaging his guilt by publishing in the arts. The "Don't Flee the Scene Salty" music, the tune, is by Lionel Hampton, and the play was a satire on friends like Allen Ginsberg and Kenneth Rexroth, and the music was Charlie Parker and Hampton, etcetera, etcetera. It was very well accepted at the time. The strange thing is that it's a lost piece of work. I don't know what happened to Richard; I lost touch with him. I'm sure that it exists on tape, but I've never been able to recover a copy of it. It's definitely a very interesting typical kind of take on that time. It would be a good addition to this archive if we can figure out how to find--I don't

know if Richard is alive. I wouldn't be surprised if he were. I think he was a little older than I am. But I'm sure that somewhere his treasure trove exists.

Byerly: Who were the other "seven stray cats"?

Stern: Oh, you would ask me that.

Byerly: You and Ann--

Stern: And Jack. I'll get it for you. In fact, I will send you a copy of the Seven Stray Cats; I think I have three or four of them left. I'll make a note of that. Laura--well, let's just go on.

### Playboy Magazine

Stern: At that time I hadn't been working. We needed money, and as I think I said on an earlier tape, Ann was extremely well-connected in the Bay Area, and one of her friends was Herb Caen. Herb at that time was married to Sally Caen, several wives ago at this point. It turned out that Sally and I had quite a lot of mutual acquaintances in the past, in the Village: Mason Hoffenberg and Stanley Gould and other people that we knew in common. She came from a much wilder side of the world than Herb did, certainly, but Herb and I wound up with a very close friendship. The four of us saw a lot of each other. He helped me to get work. I had never written really any prose, and he hooked me up with August C. Spectorisky at *Playboy*.

Augie Spectorisky was another incredible human being. He was a fantastic writer, and he had been enticed out of New York by [Hugh] Hefner's money very early on to become the associate publisher of *Playboy*, and he was the one who injected the intellect and the appreciation for both fiction and articles of socially positive content into that magazine. He took it from a kind of medium success to its peak. Unfortunately, he passed on very early. He was ultra-sophisticated. His book, *The Exurbanites*, was a best-seller. It was about people who lived outside of New York City and commuted in. When Hef found him, he was the major writer on the Arlene Francis Home Show. He kept saying no, and finally the money got to be so much, and the perks got so much that he and his wife moved to Chicago and took over the leadership of *Playboy*. She was the personnel director and he was the associate publisher.

Spec had conceived of a series called "Playboy On the Town" done on certain cities, and he had asked Herb to write the San Francisco "On the Town." And Herb's policy was that he only wrote things with a byline. I mean, he was already very well-known, and there was no reason for him to write something which would be house-written. He said to me, "Gerd, you write it. I'll introduce you to Sectorsky, and you write it." I said, "I've never done anything like that." You know, write about restaurants and nightclubs. He said, "Look, it's easy. Believe me. I'll introduce you to three or four PR people here; they'll take you around, and you write about it. And I'll look at it."

Sure enough, it was a ball; I had a marvelous time writing it. Sectorsky and I hit it off immediately. They sent me a ticket to come back to Chicago to meet with them. And here all of a sudden I was writing for a major national magazine, totally courtesy of Herb's rep. Then I met all these flacks: one of the principal ones was a guy named Frank di Marco. He was Ernie's PR guy and a number of other places. We became friendly while he was taking me around to all these restaurants and introducing me to the owners and getting my story down for me. It was a little coterie of people in that world, like any other coterie. All of a sudden I was in this little world. Then Frank said to me, "What are you going to do when you finish this story?" I said, "I don't know; I've never done this before." He said, "I've got an idea for you. I have a friend who owns a restaurant, and I can't represent him because he is in competition with Ernie's--or at least Ernie's thinks he is. I don't think he is, and Ernie's doesn't want me to represent him. So I'll take you there, and you write about them in *Playboy*, and you take the public relations post. You'll get a good fee every month. And from there on, Herb will help you."

Now all of a sudden I was in the public relations business. I represented the guy who was Alexis Merabishvilli of Alexis' Tangier, which was, basically, as far as I was concerned, by the time I got to know it, the premier restaurant in San Francisco at the time. And Alexis was some character. He was born in Tbilisi, in Georgia. He had been a movie actor. He worked with Pudovkin and [Sergei] Eisenstein--I mean, these people were to me heroes of the avant-garde; I found it rather unbelievable when he first told me the story. I don't think I really believed him but it turned out to be true. He also taught me most of what I know about wines.

At the same time, I had become friendly with Leon Adams, who was the head of the California Wine Institute. They represented all the small wineries. I knew his son, Jerry, who was a reporter. Leon would invite me--we were still living on the barge

in Sausalito, and we would go fishing in his fishing boat for striped bass. He wrote one of the first books about California wines, but he also wrote the first computerized survey of where striped bass were caught in San Francisco Bay. Very early use of computers for something that you wouldn't even think you could compute. And it worked; people could understand where and when and how the fish bit.

Spec was also an old friend of Hayakawa's--now this was long before Hayakawa was either at the university or in politics. Hayakawa's wife's brother was Frank Lloyd Wright's principal associate. They lived in Mill Valley, in a Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired house. When Spector and his wife Theo came out here we had dinner together, and I got to know Hayakawa, and that's how, as I mentioned--I don't remember; was that on the tape?--he published some of my poems, and we got into this stupid argument about the washed idol.

Byerly: [inaudible]?

Stern: Yes. Anyway, Hayakawa used to come out with us too on the boat--with Leon Adams. It was a very "ferment" time in Sausalito. We got into a lot of political fights because there were people trying to kick out the barges because of sewage problems and because of land values. We managed to win most of those battles at that time, and eventually we did connect to the sewers. Most of the boats--at least the ones that were close to the land like ours--.

#### The Sausalito Houseboat

Stern: I've now skipped--before Ann. Somewhere in there, you know, after Gordon Onslow Ford's ultra-generous offer to me of a berth for my barge, he went ahead and sold the land [chuckles] that my barge was on, and I had to move. By this time, the barge had a lot of holes in it because there's a marine worm here in the bay called the torridos. They're really ferocious little critters. The torridos had eaten a lot of the timbers. I had to go back to Arques and say, "What am I going to do? Can I save the barge?" He says, "Ah, don't worry about it. I'll give you a place up on my land. We'll move it." I said, "How are we going to do that?" He says, "What you gotta do is you gotta get a bunch of old mattresses, and you go down below, and you stuff all the holes up with mattresses, and you cement them in," and he went through that. "Then, at high tide, we put the pumps on board, and we pump the rest of the water out, and we move the barge up."

I spent a month with a few friends who volunteered to help me. It was a filthy, dirty job in the mud. It was dark down below and not quite headroom, you know, so you bent over, and we did all this work and stuffed mattresses and hammered boards behind them and with cement and all kinds of stuff. The time came, and we put the pumps on board, we pumped out, the tide rose, the barge stayed where it was. No way was it going to move.

I was ready to give up. At the No Name Bar in Sausalito this became a *cause célèbre*. People were betting on whether the barge could be moved or not. Don Arques kept telling me, "You can do it, you can do it!" With one more month, right? Okay. So now I got about twelve people from the No Name Bar who are all betting on me, so they're helping me stuff mattresses. Of course, you can only do it at low tide. So another month goes by, and the pumps get going on board, and I'm below fixing last-minute leaks, and the tide rises, and all of a sudden there is this thunderous crack. I mean, it was like the world had ended, from where I was down below. Everybody thought I had had it, you know? The barge popped up, and the tugboat towed it to the new site. Nobody could figure out what this noise had been. I mean, it was really earth-shaking.

The next morning at low tide we went to the site where the barge had been and what had happened is the bottom planking of the barge was left in the mud with the nails sticking out of it. It had been so stuck to the mud that the barge, with its main timbers, lifted up. But the bottom planking just stayed in the mud. The guys who bet on me won. That was quite something.

Anyway, the barge was there for many years--long after I left it. That's another story.

### Public Relations Work

Stern: I represented quite a few clients, and I worked very hard at it, at this public relations business. It was a lot of fun. One of the accounts I worked for was a guy named Angelo Sabella. The family was one of the original Sicilian fisherman families on Fisherman's Wharf. Angelo was one of the side sons--not the main family that's on the wharf. He had just opened, right by Richardson Bridge, Sabella's of Marin. He was dying for lack of business. It was this big round restaurant, and it was *empty*. He asked Herb--Herb was kind of the guru of all restaurateurs and night club operators--"What can I do?" Herb sent me over, and I worked for Angelo for a number of years. He was a wonderful,

wonderful human being. Tough. He looked like something out of the sea himself: he was short and squat and not by any means handsome, but he was generous, warm-hearted--and the whole family, wife, daughter, and son, worked with him--a wonderful family.

I devised a lot of really silly, stupid stuff to promote that restaurant. First, we had a grand opening, and I brought in waters from the seven seas of the world. And we got the volunteer fire department with hoses to baptize the building with all these waters from different places. We got pictures in the papers. Then we entered a frog in the--they served frog legs in the restaurant--Calaveras County jumping frog contest. We got tremendous space--the *Independent Journal* here was a great help, and the *Chronicle*. In those days you could do things, and people just responded. There wasn't a whole bunch of problems to relate. These days, you try and get a reporter to take a free meal, and it's iffy. I'm not in that world anymore, but I know it for a fact--in those days, you would invite people, and they would come. You could get twenty or thirty journalists to Sabella's of Marin, and it wasn't exactly a gourmet's hangout--but it was before the whole culinary movement took over in the United States and the food was fresh, well prepared.

One of my very good friends--he and his wife, Ann--was Fred Lyon, who was a nationally prominent magazine photographer. Leon Adams introduced me to a wonderful couple, Mary and Jack Taylor of Mayacamas Vineyards, which was on the slopes of an extinct volcano, Mount Veeder. And Jack had spent his life being a refinery designer for Shell Oil. He was an Englishman. And Mary had been a student of Gurdjieff, whose work I was familiar with--"All and Everything". There were such wonderful people around. I mean, there still are wonderful people, but all of a sudden in this little period I was meeting all these great characters. Mary was a superb cook, and she had a line of spices which [actually?] still exists in the marketplace. She sold the company.

But Jack had bought this vineyard. His lifelong ambition was to be a winemaker. He had personally, with very little help, terraced the side of the volcano in very Italian fashion, and planted vines there. And Mayacamas was--according to him--an Indian word, meaning "the cry of the mountain lion." He used to--when he would tell you that, he would howl it out; I won't try to imitate it. It was a beautiful old stone winery up there. They made remarkable wine very early on. I devised a concept--because they were having trouble selling this little bit of wine--that people would buy shares--

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Stern: --shares. And the privilege for shareholders was to buy a certain amount of this limited-edition wine. It worked well. The reason it worked well is because I brought Fred Lyon up, and he made some incredible photographs of the terrace and the Taylors. It was published in the *Chronicle's Sunday* magazine. Well, [snaps fingers] the shares were sold out very quickly. I went from an unknown poet to a successful public relations man practically overnight. It was very amusing to me. I, however, didn't let it go to head. For instance, when Vic Bergeron from Trader Vic's offered me a job, I refused it. I refused it really because I thought he was an awful man.

Byerly: Who was this?

Stern: Vic Bergeron was Trader Vic. Trader Vic's was the place where San Francisco society went. First the original one in Oakland, and then the one in the alley downtown in San Francisco. I don't know what it was that drew them to him. I don't think it was the excellence of the food because it wasn't really--it was kind of tricky dicky Polynesian food. Of course, society here in San Francisco was to a great extent based on alcohol. That may have been it because alcohol consumption at Trader Vic's was prodigious. But you see, now you've got kind of a line between the St. Francis Hotel and Trader Vic's and maybe the Fairmont, and you have this little world. Here I am kind of bouncing back between the Beat poets and San Francisco society. My wife was usually driving around not in our old beat-up car, but in her father's black Cadillac with the Golden Gate Bridge Director's badge on the back so that no matter how fast she goes, she doesn't get stopped by the police. Kind of a bizarre little world that we were living in. You know, famous poets coming in from the east-- Robert Lowell--. And we're giving a dinner party on the *Adventuress*, and Robert Lowell is groping my wife, and I go after him, and nearly threw him overboard. [laughter]

It was kind of heady. And I was writing a lot of poetry. It was at that time that Allen Ginsberg showed up in San Francisco. Of course, I was still in touch with Carl Solomon, and we were in the publishing world because Ann was the West Coast editor for McGraw-Hill. It was a job her father had gotten her because he was a friend of the chairman of the board's. Allen worked for a short time for an ad agency here, and then he got a job on a ship--I think he was an assistant purser or something. Then came the *Howl* period and the reading at the gallery--I wasn't one of the people who read that night. Philip read John Hoffman's poems. That was in '55. By the way, we had a date there--you asked yesterday about when Adam was born. And Radha says he was born in '51; we were thinking more like late forties but it was later than that.

Jane and Bill Buck had come back from Nevada. You remember I mentioned that one of my friends who stuck by me was Jak Simpson. He was married by this time and living somewhere in the East Bay. Unbeknownst to me at the time, Jane and Bill went off to Thailand, an Asia trip, and they left Adam and Radha under the care of Jak Simpson and his wife at their house. And while they were gone, Adam and Radha contracted polio, which in Adam's case later on developed into muscular dystrophy. He died when he was about, I don't know, fourteen or so, I think. As you've discovered by now, I'm not very good with dates. We'll have to check that. Radha was--first she had to wear, I think, a brace, but her polio disappeared after a couple of years, completely. She did have some after effects which are no longer evident. Adam was crippled badly; he had to be in a wheelchair with braces. They eventually came back; it was hard to contact them at the time in Thailand. There was some bad feelings involved, whether the Simpsons understood what was going on, et cetera. But Jak and I remained friends. I used to take the kids on the barge on the weekend. There are a lot of pictures of them with Ann and I. We established that much of a re-relationship with Jane although Bill would never be seen--I mean, he would not physically be in the same space with me, and I kind of understood it although I realized that there was a guilt trip going on which had some legitimate rationale to it because from one day of being basically my friend--boom! He absconded and tried to take over much of my life.

The reason I'm concentrating on this is because as you know already, this whole thing has turned around with his son who appeared on the scene slightly after the time we're talking about, and who at this point is an important and positive part in all our lives.

By this time, I was going off every few months to write another *Playboy* story in some town. Acapulco I think was next. Hotel people throughout the world are, you know, kind of related, and they all comp each other. I was in Acapulco with a photographer and models and the whole big deal, and we were hosted by a lot of the important people--Miguelito Aleman, the president of Mexico's son on his yacht, et cetera. We were staying in this hotel which had Chagalls in the elevator. My wife, Ann, wanted to join us so she got, through her father, a suite in the hotel that was made available to us free of charge. She arrived in about two days and I got a telegram from Hef at *Playboy* saying, "Playboy writers are not married." [laughter] I called up Chicago, and I said, "What do you mean they're not married? I'm married; you knew I'm married." "Not when you're on assignment!" I didn't pay any attention.

I had a couple of run-ins with Hef. He's a funny guy. He was at that time young and very unsophisticated, and he came to San Francisco for the first time. I introduced him to Herb, and we had dinner and so forth and so on. He had this friend who owned a big nightclub in Chicago. I remember running around the streets with them and them pulling out hundred-dollar bills and waving them at people--I mean, and that was not San Francisco style.

I took them to Ann's 440, a night club where Lenny Bruce was working. I already told you I was quite involved with the jazz scene, and I didn't really cover that so much when I was talking about Buckwheat and Old Bill and on the barge, but we knew all those people, and they would all come to the barge, and they would go to Harry's studio to see the Partch instruments. I told you we were all big pot smokers; in fact, on the barge--this is before; this is still when I was living there with Jane and Bill and Pam--we had a bathtub, and we had rigged up the whole bathtub as a water pipe. It was absolutely too much for most people.

Byerly: How would that work?

Stern: Well, we had a bowl which probably held about a half ounce to an ounce of grass, and we bubbled it through the bathtub full of water in kind of a glass distillation tube, so it was cooled, you know? When it came out, you could barely get any throat burn on it, so it didn't taste like it was very much that you were doing, but actually one was overpowered. I remember one time we took-- Old Bill had an ancient Cadillac limousine, I mean really ancient. Kind of square. We took Count Basie back to his gig on Grant Avenue--I can't remember the name of the big club there. As he got out of the limousine he shook his head at us, and said, "I don't know whether to love you or to hate you." [laughter] Actually, I used that line in a poem somewhere along the way.

Two of the jazz musicians I'd gotten to know were a couple named Lorraine and Herb Geller. They lived down in L.A.. One time when I went to L.A., they were playing out in the Valley in a strip club. Jazz musicians really had a very hard time making enough money to get by, and they were excellent musicians; they had, as I remember, classical backgrounds, and here they were playing a strip club in the Valley. Not just a strip club but a freak's strip club--a midget, a lady who probably weighed about three hundred and some-odd pounds, a bearded lady. And Lenny Bruce was the M.C., and his mother was the cocktail waitress, and Herb and Lorraine were the band, the orchestra. They played the strip music, not their usual jazz, but with a touch of their music. But they thought it was kind of a kick to take me out

there, and we got high when we went there, and it was really strange. Anyway, that's how I first met Lenny.

At the time, Lenny wasn't really interested in being a stand-up comedian. His ambition was to write movie scripts, and he had written quite a lot of them, and none of them were bought. He was married at the time. Later, I was able to help him get a job up here in San Francisco.

### Sausalito Houseboat Revisited and Maya Angelou

Stern: During the time I was with Maya--and now we're going back again; you don't mind going back and forth--this semi-mobster came to see us, and he owned one of those stripclubs on the Barbary Coast. You know, that one-block thing which was like an unbelievable little microcosm of--the closest thing that San Francisco still had to a red-light district. The D.A. [district attorney] was closing up the stripclubs because of the bar girls and the whole tourist thing. He came to see us when we were working at the Purple Onion. Maya was on the bill with Phyllis Diller and the Kingston Trio, and it was a great time. They were all friends. He said to us, "I got this problem. I gotta shut down--I don't want to shut down; you guys know what you're doing. Look, you got the 'I' over here and the Onion here; I want to do the same thing. It'll be three or four months and then everything will die down, and we can go back to the girls." He had his wife and his sister-in-law--a ménage-à-trois. The two of them were really "B girls", but they were his family. It was a bizarre scene. I keep using that word; it's embarrassing. I named it the Hollow Egg. We sent out these invitations in hollow eggs--you know, those Chinese eggs--to everybody for the opening.

Helen Noga from the Black Hawk at that time had said to me, "Gerd, you gotta help the boy--I found this fantastic boy. He's still in high school but he's such an incredible voice, you wouldn't believe it. Johnny Mathis." [laughter] So the bill was Johnny Mathis, Maya--there was a female lesbian comic who was a protégé of Edgar Bergen's. And Edgar Bergen was supposed to come up for the opening, which is how I met his daughter who--later on we became fairly good friends--Candice. We had a little orchestra, and sure enough--the I and the Onion were really kind of comfortable little clubs, but the Hollow Egg was a stripclub, and it had these tables which were just very narrow tables with seats behind them that the Johns watched the girls from. Well, he didn't want to change the seating or anything, so here we were in this reconverted stripclub, which had been slightly decorated to

be the Hollow Egg. And everybody came; all the society people, and Herb, and it was a big laugh. But it worked. And sure enough, a few months later, things died down, and it went back to being a stripclub.

There were fabulous entertainers. The guy who made Ann's 440, a female impersonator named T.C. Jones--he later was on Broadway; he and his wife owned Persian cats. This man did a fabulous show. Oh, I remember how I had gotten into it: because of Hef. So I took Hef to Ann's 440 club, and his nightclub friend, and Lenny totally bowled them over; they couldn't believe Lenny. Lenny was unbelievable. When he did his--drive the car he drives or--the genie comes out the bottle, and he was going to grant any wish, and the guy doesn't believe him, and he says, "Make me a malted." He says, "You're a malted." [laughter] The obscenity and the humor. So they hired him immediately for Chicago, and that was the beginning of Lenny's big fame and downfall. It was a very disillusioning experience for me as the guy who had made the intros. I had a few of those. Another one was when I introduced McLuhan to Gossage.

Ann got more and more involved in political consciousness and organizations. At the time I met her, she--like most everybody we knew--was smoking grass. At one time, we went to a party, and they had pot brownies, and I think Ann didn't realize how strong they were, and she ate too much, and she got into a really paranoid scene, and after that she turned into a real prude, and she didn't want anything. It was difficult for me. Also at the same time, she got pregnant. By this time--I told you the story about how we got married because of the Chronicle. It got to the point where I couldn't have any grass in the house, I couldn't smoke in front of her.

It really bothered me because I've always kind of used pot to change my head. In other words, like--now I'm in the food business. In order to get my head out of the food business and into my poet self--if I would take two or three tokes--boom! It's like a transformation, you know? I've always used it that way--not as some people to "get out of it." I don't want to get out of it; I want to get high, and I want to get on it. And I do, and as I said before, I'm still at the point where I can take two or three or four tokes, and I get very, very high, very stimulated and inspired. Now I don't know whether that's actually the drug or my kind of acquired behavior. But whatever it is, it works. If it works, it doesn't need fixing, right?

It was a complicated situation. Ann was getting less and less into me and more and more into other things and other people. It got kind of very mixed up. There was a group around the No

Name Bar who published a little magazine called *Contact*--Bill Ryan and Herb Beckman, and some of the writers were Evan Connell and Calvin Kentfield. I wrote some things for them which I don't think they ever published. I've had that kind of history--as I say, my poetry is not of a very acceptable style; it's too abstract and obscure for most people, which is okay. To tell you the truth, I've kept a consistent voice ever since I've started writing, and I really like my poetry; I know it's good. It isn't that I don't give a damn what other people think; I do give a damn, but nobody can convince me otherwise about my work. Also, I've steered away, really, from putting myself out into the public. A number of times--and it'll come up later--when I surfaced, I didn't enjoy being out there; I really enjoyed more being just in the--it's funny because the other day at the conference I talked about margin and mainstream. I think I'm on the margin of the mainstream, or maybe I've submerged in the mainstream. I don't know. But I was thinking that the image is not an accurate image; you're not either/or.

So now I went off to New Orleans to do another "Playboy on the Town." There was a strange little story, and maybe I shouldn't tell it, but I think I will. I had an apartment over Brennan's restaurant that was given to me as the *Playboy* writer--and I had twenty-four hour room service from the restaurant, and I met a young painter there, and she stayed with me through the four or five days. When I got back to Sausalito, I discovered again that I had gonorrhoea. I went to our wonderful doctor, Doctor Mackenzie. "What are you going to do about Ann?" I said, "I'm going to tell her. What do you mean what am I going to do about Ann?" He said, "You're serious?" I said, "Sure, I'm serious." I said, "Now I'm going to have to tell Georgia too." [laughter] He says, "Oh, I see. Well, I'll tell you something, Gerd. This isn't the first time that I've heard this situation; this is the first time I've ever met somebody who I didn't have to talk into telling people that they're sleeping with." I said, "What are you going to do? Are you going to try to hide it and take really big risks?" So I come back for a second shot, and here in the office is Calvin Kentfield. I say, "Hey, Calvin, what's up?" He says, [mutters inaudibly]. He said, "What are you here for?" I said, "I'm here to get a second shot for the clap." He says, "Yeah?" So I look at him, and I say, "Who are you sleeping with? With my wife or with Georgia?" [laughter] Anyway, kind of a funny story. But that was typical of that time. I don't think it's very typical of this time that we're living in.

Next thing that happens--we have this friend, Les, who was kind of an architect. He was living in Muir Beach. He was my connection. I can't smoke at my house anymore, and who wants to go all the way to Muir Beach. In the meantime, I'm having a

little thing with a reporter on the Sausalito News, and she turns out to be also his friend except they had a big argument, as it turns out, and I go to Tiburon Tommy's to score with Les. We're having lunch, and everything works out fine. I give him money, and he gives me, you know. I get back to the barge, and a couple hours later I get a phone call from Sheriff Louis Mountanos, whose campaign I had worked on. He says, "Gerd, I need you to come down here." "No problem, Louis." So--

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Stern: --I get down there, and he says, "Let me play a tape for you, Gerd." They had a tape under the table at the restaurant, and they had taped me buying from Les. Sheriff Mountanos said, "Gerd, how could you do that? This is terrible; I don't want to book you, but I don't have any choice." So he takes me up to San Rafael, to the jail, I get a cause célèbre--headlines in the *Chronicle* about being Dan London's son-in-law. What can you do? We had another friend, because Ann had worked on the publication of his book *Never Plead Guilty*--Jake Ehrlich. We go to see Jake. Jake says, "Son of a bitch. Don't you believe what you read?" I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "What the hell is the name of my book?!" I said, "*Never Plead Guilty*." He says, "So what did you do?" I said, [sheepishly] "I pled guilty." He says, "That was the stupidest thing you ever did in your life; I could have gotten you off no problem. That was an illegal tape."

So it cost us some money, and I got probation, and I had to go to a psychiatrist. The judge was the head of the law office, and a former partner represented me. My father-in-law forgave me eventually, although he couldn't believe that people use drugs--after all, he was an alcoholic.

It kind of worked out. Now I'm going to this psychiatrist who also happened to be in Tiburon [California]. His name is Doctor Richard Prest. I called him D. Prest. [laughter] He was a very interesting guy. He grew little miniature trees. He didn't like them to be called bonsais because they were American trees. Every week he had a different little tree in his office, and they were beautiful. Sometimes he had a row of aspens. But he was a lot better at doing that than he was at psychiatry, as far as I was concerned. So I tell him the story, and I said, "Look. I think it's time for me to break up this marriage because it just isn't working anymore for me. We're both playing around, and we have a son, but she doesn't like the way I relate to kids, she doesn't like me anymore. I mean, I know what happened: she was rebelling, and she met me, and she had been married before, and then we had to get married because she felt embarrassed to be living with me, and it just isn't working." He says to me, "No

way. You're just like a cock on a leash." Not a rooster, but a penis. "If you divorce Ann now, you're just going to redo it one more time. That's the worst thing for you; you've got to try to make it work, and see what happens, all right?"

It gets worse and worse, and we're barely talking to each other now. All this time that I've been with her she's been taking Dexedrine to keep her skinny. She thinks she's heavy; I think she's great. This woman was a beauty. She was a beautiful, beautiful woman, and she had a great figure. She danced well. Marvelous and intelligent, but fucked up from family and from wanting to be a super duper intellectual. She [wound up being? wanted to be?] a professor of Anglo-Saxon. And she screwed up her next marriage too. Then, you know, cancer. She smoked like a chimney also. She could drink me under the table easily.

Finally he says to me, "I think what would be wise would be for me to have a session with Ann and see what's going on there." So he has a session with Ann, and he advises her that she should see a psychiatrist--after all, marketing. Not only does he advise that, but he says, "I have a colleague right across the hall." Same office, very convenient, right?

Okay, so we decide she's going to go see this guy. The second session he tells her, "The only solution for you is to divorce." So the next time I go in and see Doctor Prest I say to him, "You know, I think your conduct is miserably unethical." "What do you mean?" I say, "When I tell you that I want to get divorced you tell me that I'm supposed to stay with this marriage. You then see my wife, then you send her to your damn colleague across the hall, he tells her to get a divorce when you tell me I gotta stay married. What kind of shit is this?" He says to me, "You surely don't think, Mr. Stern, that I have any influence over my colleague's policy?" It was just too much for me. I said, "D. Prest, this is it. Goodbye." And I walked out. I explained the situation to my probation officer, and my probation officer understood. Very nice. I was nearly through with probation by that time.

We were in this kind of unsteady relationship now. Now from years and years and years ago when I was living with Jane in New Paltz--I was redoing the house from the fire; you remember the whole story there?

Byerly: Yes.

Stern: All of a sudden we get a call from this guy, Joe Kerrigan. Joe was married to the farmer's daughter next door--Mort DePew's daughter. He was the dairy farmer where we used to get our milk.



He called me, and he's driving out, and can he find a place to stay? Sure, I invite him to stay on the barge. Three days later, he and Ann run off together. It lasted about two weeks [laughter] but then she was gone. Finito. Finito.

### Single Life after Ann on the Barge

Stern: Now I'm living on the barge alone. I'm tired of public relations, and the Playboy thing is kind of wound down. I started working odd jobs. I had kind of learned to be a carpenter when number one, I was fixing up New Paltz and Jane's mother's house, and also originally when I did that work on the floats with Augie Sauer on the display for the Labor Day parades. I worked in a display shop too at that time, which I haven't mentioned. Actually, I was doing spot welding. Then I get a job at the Bay Model in Sausalito. The U.S. Engineers--as a carpenter; it lasted about four days because they asked me to hang doors. I was a failure at hanging doors. They were ancient doors which had been ripped off, and the frames--this was not the kind of thing that you give a new employee to do but they were putting me on. So I've been put on.

But I wound up doing odd jobs, and I did a lot from an old lady who lived right near here, actually. Right down the road from here. She got to the point where she was so sick and so alcoholic that she couldn't drive anymore; she gave me her car. I drove her around, and it was in my name. An old Austin.

I was living on the barge. I went to a party. A composer-- Steve Reich--I didn't know him at the time, but it was his wife who I took to the party, and I met there a lady named Barbara McCallum. She was out from the East Coast, and we had a good time, and we got pretty high, and she came back to the barge with me. We had a nice fire in the fireplace, and we made love, and at breakfast the next morning she looked at me, she said, "Boy, that was the best fuck I've had in weeks," which I didn't expect [inaudible--laughter]. But you know, she was a California girl, raised in southern California, and it was very--her remark really got to me; I thought it was so genuine.

She was there for a few more days, and I kind of told her what had happened to me through the years. She says to me, "Hey, why don't you come back east? You're from the east; what are you doing out here?" Then she started telling me about where she lived, and she lived right across the road from a community of people who had left Black Mountain.

Black Mountain fell apart. There was a guy named Paul Williams, and Paul's father had made a lot of money, and Paul was a student at Black Mountain. He was an architect, a designer. He bought Black Mountain; they were in a lot of financial difficulties. Despite the fact that he solved a lot of the difficulties, there were always tensions in the faculty, and they just couldn't make the thing work anymore. They decided to close down, so Paul sold the property to a seminary, and he bought this fairly large property up in Rockland County in New York. The people who were living there were M.C. Richards--the woman whom I had wanted to study with, and who I kind of kept in contact with--John Cage, David Tudor, and Karen Carns, La Noue Davenport--who was an ancient music instrumentalist, formerly a jazz musician--there were a lot of interesting people. She kind of whetted my appetite, and I was beginning to get a bad taste in my mouth from having lived on this barge with three different women, and nothing ever working out. And I kind of blamed myself, but on the other hand, you know--.

### Move Back East

Stern: So I decided okay, I'll move back east. I rented the barge to a transvestite, it turned out. I didn't know he/she was a transvestite until later on. He was very convincing. He didn't speak English too well; he was Scandinavian. But it turned out later he was a she. So I rented the barge, and I took off in my car with my little tape recorder, and a good stash, and I drove across the country making poetry on the tape recorder as I went along, singing.

I arrived, and I had called Barbara to tell her I was coming, and I moved in with Barbara. Actually, I didn't go directly to Barbara's; I went to some friends of hers, and it turned out that the woman, Ethel Hultberg, was somebody I had known in the Village, on the East Side, years before when John Hoffman and I were banging around before we went on the boat. There was an interesting group around at that time of anarchist poets, like Bob Stock, who also had been here in California. Jackson McLow. A lot of people who made an impression on that world over time.

Before John Cage became so famous, he had a lot of influence because of his work with random ideas and his knowledge of technological theories. Now I arrive here, and I meet people that I met at Black Mountain years ago--also Paul and Vera Williams--and M.C. welcomes me with open arms. It was like coming back to a

richer intellectual environment. Let's face it: the East Coast and the West Coast both have extraordinary virtues but they're very different. In those days, I think what happened--and this happened again the next time I came to California--the people on the West Coast were very receptive and laid back and welcoming, but the people who came here from the east and the midwest had a lot more energy and a lot more drive and a lot more motivation to succeed. It was easier to succeed on the West Coast in the arts--in any of the arts--than it was on the East Coast. The East Coast had establishment, you know, and there were a lot of barriers especially to young people and especially to anybody who had ideas that didn't fit in to the academic and the commercial ends of the arts. It's different now; that was a different time. Anyway, all of a sudden I felt reinvigorated and reintegrated into an East Coast environment.

### Visual Poems

Stern: I got into kind of two modes. I started doing visual poem collages. There were a lot of painters and sculptors around, and I saw that they had a world of exhibitions and performances and all kinds of ferment was going on. A lot of them were successful. John Chamberlain--

So I was surrounded by a lot of people who were more into the visual aspect of things than I had been. I had always been very involved in going to museums and galleries ever since I first got my friendships with the whole Music and Art crowd. They really turned me on to painting and sculpture, and I had a lot of connections to painters and sculptors in those days, and now here I was kind of coming back to that scene.

M.C. Richards had been given by John Cage--they lived just across the road from us--a report to the National Association of Educational Broadcasters, the NAEB--I knew what the NAEB was all about because of KPFA and KQED--by Marshall McLuhan, which later became the verbatim manuscript for the book *Understanding Media*. Now when M.C. got that manuscript, she immediately thought of me. She gave it to me to read. She said, "John, I need it for a few more weeks."

I read it, and it was a revelation; I understood immediately that his perceptions were seminal for my development. Particularly things like his statement that what you need to do is pay attention to the effect rather than the content. But there were a whole slew of insights which just kind of got me turned on

and working. I was particularly taken with what I then considered--I don't agree with myself anymore now--the limitations of the written word in poetry. I started making these word collages, and I wrote a proposal for a work titled *The Transformer*. It was a total audio-visual experience of words and images, and it never went anywhere. Nobody really was that receptive to funding it or to building it at the time, but it was an important step forward for me.

I then started developing a concept called the Verbal American Landscape. I was cutting up words out of magazines and posters and anywhere I could find them, and then I kind of expanded that into road signs and advertising messages, and I was really beginning to collage my mind and physically, and a landscape of words which were not necessarily linear. I mean, the whole McLuhan perception from Gutenberg type to electronic media was [snaps fingers] hitting on me, and it was also very somehow compatible to the "high" state of mind in which you tend to associate more than to just build from grammatical sentence structure. My poetry, even though a page had become less and less linear--before this, it just was like a fantastic mish-mash of these ideas with where I was heading.

#### "The Land" Artistic Community

Stern: Among the people I didn't know and met at that time, was a painter named Steve Durkee and his wife Barbara. They were living downtown on the lower East Side, and his gallery owner helped him to buy an old church which was very close to Gatehill Co-op, which was where we were in Rockland County. the co-op was known as "The Land," this little artistic community of Black Mountain people. And people had been added. We became friendly immediately. Steve was a skinny, red-headed giant--I loved his paintings and I still do. He was a great painter, and he's given up painting now but I had a lot of work, which was left behind to me. He was, and I assume still is, a very difficult personality, but brilliant--both visual and conceptual ideas. We got on famously, and we wanted to work together. He was very taken with my ideas. Steve's wife was a San Franciscan. The patron of this whole group was Paul Williams because he had inherited money, and he designed people's houses, and he helped people buy land and things. He funded The Living Theater, and he was a primary funder at that time of radical causes and artwork. And he was a very modest and hardworking guy.

Barbara's house was old and needed a lot of work. I did a lot of work on it for her while we were living together. And then Steve and I decided he would help me to rebuild the bathroom. We built a really wild little bathroom with trees growing through it and a mandala stone floor. Barbara and I had a very good relationship but she was one of those people who always wanted more. And after we got through with the bathroom she wanted me to redo the kitchen.

In the meantime, I was very busy working on what I considered my new three-dimensional poems. I had designed some ideas for sculptural poems which I was so enthusiastic about, and I talked to Steve, and I talked to a lot of people. I talked to Paul Williams, and it got to be, conceptually, an *idée fixe*. Paul offered to build them for me; he said, "We could do that." And Steve's gallery was a very prestigious gallery, the Alan Stone Gallery in New York. The gallery owner said that if we built them, he would show them. Here I was in seventh heaven.

In the meantime, I was near my parents again. We had a rocky relationship which had been somewhat repaired during my marriage to Ann, because--wow--she represented real middle-class splendor beyond any--. We went back for my brother's bar mitzvah, and I was called up to the Torah for an aliyah. I had a nice bass voice.

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Stern: After years of basically not talking to my father and my stepmother--there's really kind of a disconnected scene going down. But now I was divorced from my nice society wife, and I was living up in a bohemian scene in Rockland County, and it started coming apart again. Barbara and I had had a big fight because I refused to get involved in this kitchen remodeling, and I stopped talking. I would not talk, and various people around there would come around and tell me, "I know you're not talking, but I won't tell anybody; you can talk to me." Things like that. I just wouldn't open my mouth. I was on strike. I would go to Paul's shop, and we would work on the pieces. There were some really exciting things we were making.

Then it was the high holidays, and Ethel [Hultberg] offered to take me to the synagogue. I went, but I still wouldn't open my mouth even to say the Shmah or anything. I was in total withdrawal but I was working full time. People would feed me, etcetera.

This went on for weeks. They wanted me to go see a psychiatrist, and I wouldn't do that. Once in a while I would

write notes to people. I had another friend, Arthur, who was living with M.C. Richards. He was an artist, a wonderful guy, and he said I was bewitched. One day, in the evening, I went over to one of the houses on the land where Betsy and Ep Epstein lived and they weren't home. There was a woman there, Judi Wilson, and I may have seen her once before, I don't know. Anyway, I got this fixation that she was the Angel of Death. I was writing notes back and forth. She was very attractive. And when the Epsteins came home she put me in her Volkswagen Bug and took me up to Woodstock. And I started talking.

Byerly: Woodstock was--?

Stern: New York. Woodstock was where she lived.

Byerly: She took you to her house?

Stern: Yes.

Byerly: Oh, okay.

Stern: So now I had left Barbara. But I had to keep going back and forth from Woodstock to Rockland County because we were building all these pieces. Some of which were fascinating: there was a garbage lid on a restaurant table pedestal with a little mechanism there where the word "enough"--except it was spelled "enuf" [spells]--you know those letters they used to use on postboxes on the road that had little things that caught the light, little reflectors on them? The garbage can lid was filled with crankcase oil. About every minute or so, the word "enuf" would rise out of the oil, dripping oil, and after about fifteen seconds or so it would fall back into the oil. [laughter] It was a great piece, it really was. And Paul--the idea was simple, but to build these things was complex. I helped him, but basically he designed the things. He didn't want his name used when they were shown. That piece unfortunately--I wasn't there when it happened, but it was standing in the foyer of the gallery on a plush red rug, and a delivery man came in with a delivery book, and he needed to put it down. He threw it in the oil. He thought it was a table because it looked like--it reflected light; it was when the "enuf" was submerged. He threw the book; the book got wet but it splattered oil all over the red carpet, and Alan was furious. I mean, this was a very expensive red carpet.

I was so devastated by the--the other thing that happened was the day the show opened there was a newspaper strike in New York. So there was no possibility of reviews. And this was a big day in my life, my first show. It was a group show; there

were three people in it. So Judi and I got into the Volkswagen, and we went to California--leaving the show up.

In the meantime, Steve had moved into the church, and I had helped him with building walls and things. We had gotten very, very close. I mean, Steve was the guy who arranged the show for me. Our mutual appreciation of each other's work was a very, very powerful bond.

As a fascinating side story to this, Judi and Steve had lived together, and Barbara had come to visit them with two Mexican friends of hers. She was on her way, I think, from Europe back home to California, and she had decided that Steve was going to be hers. And she invited him to California--she comes from a wealthy family, related to the Mellons. And Steve bit; he left Judi, whereupon Judi allied herself with David Weinrib, who was a sculptor and who had been married to Karen Carns. He was one of the founders of the community at The Land. That had been just kind of breaking up when I met Judi that night.

All three of us are Libras--Steve, David, and I. Now there was obviously some not-so-great feelings both between Steve and Judi and between Barbara and Judi. David and Steve were also friends, but the bond between Steve and I, and, ergo, Barbara, was so strong that it overcame that. In the meantime, during the time I was living with the other Barbara, a lot of people had come through--I mean, this little community was a central focus--Michael McClure and Allen Ginsberg and all kinds of people from my past and from other people's pasts. A lot of black activists and anarchists, Igal Rudenko and Bayard Rustin and David Koren, for instance.

Byerly: Say that again.

Stern: Rudenko was a printer who was an anarchist and a very close friend of David and Belle's, for instance. And Vera Williams did all the covers for Resistance, which was the anarchist publication. And what was his name now--a big figure in the black movement, a gay guy-- Anyway, Ethel and Paul, in the meantime, had lived at The Land, but they had had a lot of philosophical differences, and they had been kind of pushed out, but they were around. There were a lot of strong inputs and outputs.

### Back to California

Stern: And Judi and I went to California carrying all my collage materials and things with me. I was designing new works on the

road. We stopped to see friends along the way, including her parents who, of course, I hadn't met. Her father was a dirt farmer in Tennessee. He called me "Santi Claus," which was better than Jane's father's "refugee kike son-in-law."

I was really turned on to audio-visual, electronic use of words in media. I had made a lot of kind of excerpts out of the McLuhan thing which I took along. We didn't have copy machines in those days, at least available to us. But I had written it out by hand. Eventually, *Understanding Media* came out. I don't remember when that was in this context.

I got to California, and by that time we were able to move back onto the barge. The transvestite had absconded. I had evolved on the way a concept for a piece called "Contact is the Only Love." I built a paper mock-up of it; it was a seven-foot octagon with flashing lights and audio components. It was a sculpture, kind of a pop kinetic sculpture. Some of it was somewhat derivative, to tell you the truth. I had met Bob Indiana through Steve, and I was extremely taken with his work which--I love words--was another kind of very strong pop image. It was different from what I wound up doing but it had given me a very strong hint that it was possible to do things in a completely different manner that I had conceived of before.

I started building pieces, and I related to Ivan Majdrakoff --again, after years of not seeing him, we got very close--he was living here in Mill Valley. We started working on a film together, the first film that he had ever made.

I'm getting confused again about the timeline. There was a certain problem about this piece; it was a very ambitious piece, this big one. In the meantime, I was doing collage works. I got back together with Herb Caen, and he was still married at the time to Sally. Herb helped get Judi--I referred to Judi as my nurse; by this time she was no longer the Angel of Death although that was in the background of my mind, but people here thought of her as my nurse, that's what I told them she was, and Herb got her a job working in David's delicatessen as a waitress.

I needed several thousand dollars to start buying the equipment to put into this piece. One of the people I had known well through Sally Caen was René di Rosa. René is the major collector of California art. He has a place called Winery Lake. He was another element of San Francisco society whom I knew when I was married to Ann. I was just writing poetry then. In fact, there was another guy who lived in that same section, Frank Granat from Granat Brothers Jewelry. He wanted to be a songwriter, and Ann and I wrote some lyrics together with him. Now René, when he



saw my collages--at that time I was working not only with a lot of words, but I was superimposing other words on top of them, and I had a Superman figure that swung back and forth on a little motor. René was the first one who bought my work. It's in his museum up in Napa [California]; there are three pieces there. That was a big help even though he got them for very little money. It was a big help. They are very nice early pieces.

The connections started developing. I went to see, at the time, George Culler, who was the director of the San Francisco Museum of Art, and I went to him cold. I showed him this thing--and this was this roll of paper, which was a seven-foot octagon, red and blue and yellow; it was a little like a highway sign. I have a film of it, and I have photographs of it, etcetera. He really got turned on by the idea, but he didn't have any money to fund it.

So he told me that the museum would accept contributed funds; that would be a tax incentive. We started meeting every few weeks, and he was wonderful. I mean, he didn't know me from Adam. Then I was having difficulty raising the money, so he suggested, "Well, you're a poet; why don't you do a poetry reading at the opening of your show. We'll charge money for it. It'll help you defray the cost."

In the meantime, I got to know some other people. There was a gallery owner who was the heir to the Piggly-Wiggly grocery fortune--I can't remember his name now, but it'll come back. Hal Babitt, who was one of Henry Kaiser's assistants and had been with Kaiser forever, got interested in the project and gave it some personal money and some Kaiser money. And a number of other people contributed hundreds of dollars, and we got enough money together, and we built the piece right here on Mount Tamalpais. An old friend of mine who's a wild constructor/designer/architect/carpenter/guru named Roger Somers--he's still there. He was a fantastic craftsperson; he could make wood do anything. He's particularly good with routers and making curved edges and things. A little too much for me; I needed some hard edges, and we made some compromises.

I needed audio help. I got an introduction to Morton Subotnik who at the time was with Ramón Sender, the co-director of the San Francisco Tape Music Center, which later moved to Mills College, but at that time it was on Divisadero Street. There was a young guy there about sixteen years old named Michael Callahan. By this time, I decided, Poetry reading? Who wants to do a poetry reading? I mean, that was old stuff, right? I started working on plans for a multimedia experience--multimedia, mind you, wasn't a word that was known in those days--called "Who are You and What's

Happening?" I got all my old friends involved--Ivan Majdrakoff and Allen and Michael McClure, and what we finally wound up with--and I needed audio help to set up this elaborate thing--and Michael Callahan was their technical director at sixteen. Morton and Ramón said, "Okay, Michael, this is for you." It was much too big a job for him at the time, but he was incredible. He borrowed a lot of equipment.

It was in the auditorium of the museum. We had transparent isolation booths onstage in which each of them--there were four people all together--you know, Herb Caen, Allen Ginsberg, et cetera, et cetera--we were able to broadcast and switch the signals from the various booths onto a series of speakers. In the meantime, we were projecting a series of slides which came from the Verbal American Landscape. Those had been chosen by me--I didn't do the photography; Ivan and Stewart Brand did the photography. We borrowed some closed-circuit television equipment, so there were television images. We were able to switch the whole thing. There were people in costume--it was a very elaborate affair.

### Psychedelic Multimedia

Stern: The technology was not by any means perfect. We had telephones and microphones, and there was a lot of feedback. There was absolute chaos. In the meantime--a little antecedent to this--we had started getting into the psychedelic period, and I had had my first acid trip at Roger Somers' in kind of an orgiastic setting.

Roger was close to Alan Watts and Elsa Gidlow. Alan and Elsa both lived on the same property down here on the flank of Mt. Tamalpais. There was a picture of Elsa in this week's *Chronicle*, and the books that they were reviewing.

The acid had kind of given me an even more precise idea of the kind of mixture that I wanted to create. Mixed media. Between that and McLuhan and et cetera.

We did this for two nights. Alfred Frankenstein was at that time the San Francisco *Chronicle* arts and music critic, a nationally or even internationally known critic. I found out later on he had wanted to go to some [Béla] Bartók quartets that were playing that night, but his city editor had gotten the release of this thing at the museum, and it had really sparked his interest so he insisted that Alfred go to this affair. Well, the next day on the second page of the *Chronicle* there was the

headline: "Landmark of a Flop." Some enormous eggs have been laid in the history of San Francisco art, but--[laughter] he went on and on, and he slammed the hell out of this performance, which absolutely delighted me. In fact, a couple of years later I was on a plane and sitting next to me was Alfred Frankenstein. I started talking to him, and he said, "I didn't think you would talk to me after that review I wrote of your work." I said, "That was the best review that I could have ever have expected. It was a success; it was incredible. The second night, we were turning away people because of this review."

Well, the second night was even more chaotic than the first night, and I was on acid during the performance. At one point, some guy--there was a piano on stage which had just been left there from something else--some guy jumped up on the stage and started playing terrible chords. It was very disruptive. Michael McClure and I jumped up on stage--it was the period when he was doing his "Beast" poems, and we started roaring, "Ahrgh, Grahrr!" at each other. It was really a very exciting piece of work.

Judi and I were living on Hayes Street at the time; we had a big apartment, and I had huge collage tables. The show was about fifteen different pieces by this time. With part of the money I gathered, I had the pieces from the show in New York sent out, and I had made a few more things. I'd had a little show at the Art Institute which had been arranged by friends of mine before that. Anyway, things were really rocking and rolling. The soundtracks we had made were with FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt], Billie Holiday, Alice B. Toklas, etcetera and Michael and I had spent night after night collaging sound in a way that hadn't been done until that time--although now it's old hat. He and I just became co-workers; it has been an amazing collaboration.

One of the people who had been there--it was part of the material that came out of McLuhan--was Alvin Balkind, the director of the University of Vancouver's art museum. He just happened to be in town. He called me up about a week later; he had gotten my number from the museum--

Taking the USCO Show on the Road: Vancouver, Seattle, The Psychedelic Theater and the Timothy Leary Lecture, MIT, New York, Riverside Museum, The LSD Conference, Harvard

[Interview 3: April 16, 1996] ##

Stern: I was telling you about the director of the gallery up at the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver, who had called me and who had been at the performance at the San Francisco Museum.

He had also read McLuhan, and he noted the inclusion of the McLuhan ideas in the performance. Actually, there was a quote from McLuhan in the handout that we gave at the performance. He asked if we could repeat the performance at the university, and I said I thought that would be possible. He said he was going to invite McLuhan to speak. He wanted to know if I could bring up some of the smaller pieces that were in the show and show them in the gallery. So that was all arranged.

I persuaded Ramón and Morton to let Michael come up with us, and Michael, Judi, and I got in a little Volkswagen bug--I don't quite understand how we managed that. I think we had a roof rack, and we tied all these collages and pieces, they promised to give us whatever equipment we needed up there, and we took all of the software--you know, the slides and the films and the tapes--and off we went.

It was really quite a great experience because originally the idea of doing this multimedia performance was simply to raise money to support the making of "Contact is the Only Love" because I still owed quite a bit of money for the parts and the electronics and so forth. Most of it was not exactly electronic; it was like electromechanical because we were using the kind of equipment that's made for display signs and neon and so forth and cam-operated switches. It was before the days of fully electronic switching capability.

Of course, we couldn't take "Contact is the Only Love"; that weighed--I can't remember how much it weighed, but it took four people to lift it, so you can imagine. The base of it was a tire filled with concrete, and the little pedestal that the octagon rested on itself weighed hundreds of pounds. Anyway, the notion of "Who Are You and What's Happening?"--as it was titled--or "The Verbal American Landscape" as being portable was not something that I had anticipated. I was communicating back and forth with the East Coast; they were fascinated by what was happening--Steve Durkee and the rest of people I had been working with there.

Now we met Marshall, and we recorded him. He was somewhat taken aback by the performance because he was kind of a Victorian gentleman, despite his very forward ideas about media transforming twentieth-century consciousness. We got along well. I remember he said he was the kind of person who didn't even like pop-up toasters; he liked the kind of toaster where you have the two sides, and you open them up, and you turn them around, and you would close it again. That was his kind of technology, even though he was writing about the most forward kind of media experiences. His expertise came out of studying the Middle Ages and medieval manuscripts originally and then on to Gutenberg and forward.

He had an extraordinary way of expressing himself. He would field an idea, and he would talk a few phrases about it, and all of a sudden he would be switching, and he would be on some other track immediately. And that just kept happening. To me, it was a very dynamic and engaging experience listening to him; I had never heard anybody express themselves that way. To some people it was ultimately confusing. Since I've never been into totally linear-type expression, it suited me to a T. He followed the presentation, the multimedia piece, and he spoke about it--not entirely appreciative, because it was a very noisy little piece. He did have some remarkable insights into it, and we continued relating from that time on for many years both up in Toronto where he was headquartered and in New York when he came down to take a year-long position at Fordham University--a controversial appointment at the time because it used government money, and the question was if it was right to bring someone in from Canada, and also he was not exactly accepted as an establishment figure.

From Vancouver, we packed up the little show--they paid us what to us was an interesting amount of money to come up there. It was really just expenses, but it certainly kept us going. Then we went on to Seattle, and we stayed there with a friendly collector and his wife--the Bagley Wrights. It turned out that--I knew that Ted Roethke had died, but I hadn't realized that he had died in Bagley's swimming pool. It was kind of a--here we were.

Bagley owned the restaurant on top of the Space Needle in Seattle, which was one of the first restaurants that turned around, and you could view the whole city. I stayed in touch with him for a few years. He was very generous to us. He bought one of my pieces. Then we went back to San Francisco.

Sometime not too long thereafter, Steve and Barbara came out. Steve and I created several pieces together which were shown in a San Francisco gallery. Things were going on at quite a hectic pace. After Steve and Barbara went back to the East Coast, Judi and I decided it was time for us to reassemble there with them. We did a number of other performances at various campuses around the Bay Area, and Steve had attended one of them, and he wanted to get involved in making more materials for the performances. They were developing: we were getting more images and more sound material, and Michael had become very strongly a part of what we were doing. Our initial technical difficulties were being solved, so there was a lot less feedback and a lot more supposed clarity.

My intentions in these works were to extend concepts of poetry into more elaborate modes of expression. I felt that it worked. For instance, the slides in "The Verbal American

Landscape"--each were slides of one word. Now if you had three screens of one-word slides, the three words together would create some kind of an associative pattern, and you wouldn't necessarily change all three of them at once. Some of them related to others, but all of the words were either cut out of print or they were shot on the street, out of signs--it would not necessarily be the whole sign; it could be just one word out of the sign. Sometimes it would be two or three if it was the correct kind of meaning. It got a lot of impressionistic feelings going from the audience. I think that was not on tape what I said about the Aha Syndrome: if you throw enough information up simultaneously not just a narrow focus of people but a lot of people can draw something out of it because there's so much. They tend to identify with something that for some reason does that association for them, which may not do it for the person next to them.

Somewhere along the line I wrote a sentence, an explication of some of it which went "in a world of simultaneous operations, you don't have to be first to be on top." As I said, Ivan, my old friend--I call him Ivan [stress on long i, not e], but the really preferred pronunciation is Ivan [long e, not i]-he and I had made our first film together. It was used as part of some performances, and it also won an award at the Los Angeles Experimental Film Festival. It was titled "Y", just the letter Y out of a highway sign. It was a physically cut montage of highway signs and the center line on the highway and a nude female figure, very close up and panned over as if it were a highway. It had orgasmic breathing sounds and traffic noises also mixed. It's quite a powerful film.

There was kind of a complex thing going on here with the *Northwest Review* which was up in Eugene, Oregon. I had somehow gotten them--I think it was through M.C. Richards, a translation that she had done of Antonin Artaud, a poet *maudit* from France--in fact, I had become acquainted with his work through Carl Solomon; you remember how I had told you about how he had brought all the books to the Psychiatric Institute. Artaud also had written about a Mexican journey he had made trying shamanic, psychedelic mushrooms; it was a very interesting piece. I can't remember what magazine it was published in--maybe *Transformation*. It really grabbed a lot of us; it was extremely intense poetic imagery, as was all his work. They published that, and then they found out about what I was doing.

We had a friend who lived on Lake Siltkoos in Oregon, in a log cabin. He was a former professor of Latin and a friend of Martha Graham's, and he had been dismissed because he had had an affair with one of his male students many years before. He

retired to this lake. Jane and I had actually stayed with him, and I kept in touch.

We didn't do a whole performance in Eugene, but I showed this film. A couple of days later I went back to a presentation at the university, from Lake Siltkoos. Another filmmaker and critic whom I knew from San Francisco was lecturing and showing some avant-garde films of the time--I think, Bruce Conner and Stan Brakhage. After the films, he got up to talk, and he was saying, "Well, I hope what had happened to one of my friend filmmakers a few days ago here doesn't happen to me. I understand the police are still looking for him." I kind of listened to this; at first I didn't quite understand what was happening. Then I realized he was talking about me. [Laughter] So I quietly snuck out of the auditorium and fled back to Lake Siltkoos. And I then called the people at the *Northwest Review* who had sponsored me there. It had really hit the fan the day after my showing. A twenty-year-old student had complained to her mother that she had terrible aftereffects from seeing this movie because of the orgasmic breathing, it was obscene--and I can't remember all the details, but the Regents of the university got involved, and the editors of the *Northwest Review* lost their positions, and the Regents even threatened to dismiss the head of the university. It was like a ridiculous *cause célèbre*. And I disappeared quickly. For sure the police would have arrested me.

After that we decided to go back to the East Coast, and several people arranged--Ivan and other people--arranged stops along the way with performances. One of them was in Salt Lake City, Utah, and when the first nude images--this was in the art school, mind you, at the university--hit the screen, they stopped the projector, they gave me my film back, and they ushered me quickly out the door. At that time, you were not even allowed in that art school to draw from the nude. Mormon edicts.

We went on, and we did four or five little performances on the way. Michael was not with us; it was just Judi and myself in the Volkswagen bug. We then arrived back in Woodstock at Judi's little house in what was called "The Maverick"; we thought it was a very appropriate place to live. There was no running water, there was an outhouse, but it was a lovely little place. Very quiet and very conducive to doing creative work.

We started spending quite a bit of time at the church in Garnerville [New York], which was a little over an hour away, and which belonged at that time to Steve. I think I mentioned that his gallery owner, who also was showing my work--Alan Stone--had helped him buy this church. It was \$5,000 for an old church. Not too bad, huh? Even in those days when money was worth more.

I forgot--after the show in San Francisco, there were a number of galleries that became very interested in my work, including the David Stewart Gallery in Los Angeles. We also had a show down there, and a lot of the movie and art people were fascinated. David also showed Dennis Hopper, who at the time was doing visual arts--it was before he was really in the movies, although he was married to the daughter of a well-known movie star--and I met him, and we became quite friendly. And by that time, John Chamberlain, whom I had known on the East Coast, had moved out to Southern California--there was a lot of great associations with people who were working hard and who were either not known or well-known in the arts. A lot of the people who were at the Beat show at the Whitney, which is coming out here--Wally Hedrick, etcetera, were living in the canyons there. We had some friends who were involved in the popular music business. You know, those crowds at that time were very kind of mixed up and hung out together. We stayed with Barry Maguire for several weeks--the guy who did "Eve of Destruction".

My first psychedelic experience--my first LSD [lysergic acid diethylamide] experience, rather, because I had taken peyote both with the Indians and with Philip Lamantia. Philip and I had gone down to the de Angulo ranch. It was my first peyote experience. There was a little cabin on that property called Gloria. We had an amazing night together eating peyote with very anthropomorphic and mandalic imagery. At the time I was working with Grace Clements--this goes back to the time when I was around KPFA--we had an idea for a rather elaborate work called "The Symbology," of taking international and interreligious symbols and doing kind of a comparative analysis and exposition and imagery both from a philosophic/psychological standpoint from her side, and from my poetic standpoint. We, through her connections, applied for a number of grants to realize that project but none of them ever came through, so it just remained a proposal. I might actually have a copy of it somewhere. It never occurred to me until this moment that that Symbology project--and later the "Transformer" project, which had some conceptual relationship, not on a subject [form?] but the idea of synthesis, bringing together elements in that kind of a locus--anyway, where am I? That's always a good question, huh?

Now we're already on our way to the East Coast after that, doing performances along the way. When we got back--as I said, we were spending more and more time at the church, and both Michael



Callahan and I were really missing working together. Michael had decided to leave school, and we arranged for him to come east. He joined us; he had a little extra room in Woodstock in the cabin, and there was room at the church. Michael and Steve got along very well.

I had turned on Steve to grass, and it kind of changed his life. It somehow made him a lot less neurotic. He also then had LSD experiences--he and I, it seems to me, are the only people I know who instead of getting more out of it, got less out of it. Timothy Leary and his group always resented the fact that I felt that I had gotten more rational on--

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Stern: --the LSD experiences rather than further out of it as had happened to them. Most of the people involved in the psychedelic movement were very straight people before acid, and they were looking to get out of their straitjackets. I was kind of a hysterical--I wasn't straitjacketed because I didn't allow myself to be, but when I got hysterical the only way to calm me down was either to put me in a hot tub or to fuck me or do something that would break the pattern. It was only after Michael and I had worked a long time together that I understood the nature of feedback loops. Actually, he started explaining them to me after the experience at the San Francisco Museum.

A feedback loop is the relation between a transmitter and a receiver, and once they start interacting--unless you somehow break the loop--they just keep accelerating, and they don't stop. It's called positive feedback. There's no way to stop it except when the mechanism or organism breaks down or if you are able--yourself or somebody else--to separate the elements. It's a nice metaphor for hysterical behavior. I think once I understood it from the theoretical and electrical or acoustic point of view, and also the chemical point of view from psychedelics, I was able to handle it myself instead of needing somebody outside of myself to handle it.

We kept on developing these multimedia performances, and Steve got incredibly involved in making super-eight millimeter movies and developing image banks with us. We did electronic music, mostly meditational in nature, and before long we stopped doing the performances as individuals. Without our names, we decided to call ourselves "USCO", the company of Us, because we were anonymous artists.

Now this actually came out of something I had learned from my time with Grace Clements. Grace had introduced me to the work of Ananda Coomaraswami, who was curator of fine arts at the Boston Museum, and who had written a lot of work on the artist in traditional society. The artist in traditional society was incorporated in the society; it wasn't a ego trip: he didn't sign his work. He made objects and images that were used by the community, and he was no different, supposedly, than the other craftsmen or the other people who produced food and clothing and shelter and whatever. It seemed to me at the time that that was a much saner and compatible role, at least for me personally. Steve, who has always had trouble in terms of his ego, was entranced by this idea, and now we became USCO, the company of Us.

We were always looking for more material and more people. By this time we had gathered another five or six people who were working together with us, some of them living at the church and some of them not. I had met in Woodstock--because we were neighbors--an artist named Bob Dacey. He did tie-dye work, and he did work in which he collaged a lot of things and then burned them using glue that he set on fire.

We all got involved in everything, and Dace had a friend named Jud Yalkut, who was working as a stockboy at a big record store in New York, Sam Goody's, but his ambition was to be a filmmaker. At the time, I had gotten very involved in the Woodstock Artists' Association; I was the vice-chairman, and Dace was on the board, and a lot of our other friends--and there was quite a conflict developing between the old traditional artists who felt that they were the artists and that we were not. But we had the backing of the most powerful conservative person who had been one of the founders and one of the chairmen, Arnold Blanche, and he taught at the Art Students' League, and he was a fairly well-known painter. He backed us 100 percent against a lot of his colleagues.

In any case, there was a woman there whose son had died in an automobile accident, and she happened to have a movie camera that he had used, and she gave it to us. And I gave it to Jud. We had another friend, Jonathan Ayers, who had a remarkable motorcycle; it was called "The Ghost." I was fascinated by the concept of real time and time as it was represented by the number of frames per second in film and how you can really manipulate time on film by simply--somehow, either mechanically or electrically or electronically slowing it down and speeding it up. We conceived this piece of film work, which we used in our performances--it was filmed simply by Judd sitting behind Jonathan on the motorcycle running down roads around Woodstock--fairly woody roads. What we did was we printed three of these films--

identical films--and we projected them on three screens right next to each other, and we would adjust the speeds so that they would go in different directions through each other. We also superimposed slides of words on the three images. Single words in black and white. The accompaniment through four channels of sound was the sound of this incredible motorcycle which was like-- somehow it reminded us also of Tibetan chants [simulates]. In a big auditorium with big speakers, it was definitely an overload experience. We kind of got into overload for a while.

Byerly: That was the trend.

Stern: It was the trend, and there weren't many people at that time doing multimedia work; we were pioneers according to *Life* magazine. We performed this in various places: the University of Rochester, where we had some friends who were professors; MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]--.

I haven't talked about Santa Cruz. Paul Lee, see, we were starting to get very involved with Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert and Ralph Metzner. We were at the church which is in Garnerville. Garnerville is in Rockland County on the west side of the Hudson--you know, New Jersey starts opposite New York and then goes back into New York. Millbrook--at that time it was called the Castalia Foundation, after something in one of [Hermann] Hesse's novels. I had met the people up in Boston sometime before, but I didn't really know them. My psychedelic experiences and their psychedelic experiences had not been connected to this time, but we were invited to come up to Millbrook.

Millbrook was an incredible estate which was owned by the two Hitchcock brothers and their sister. They were very wealthy socialites who became patrons of Timothy's, and of the psychedelic movement. There was a house which probably had forty or fifty bedrooms which they turned over. They lived also on the property but in other houses; it was quite an estate. There was even a bowling alley.

Byerly: This was the Hitchcocks?

Stern: Hitchcocks. Billy, Tommy, and Peggy. Billy, I think, at the time was working as an investment banker with Lehman Brothers. I mean, there were private planes; on the other hand, there were indigents, hangers-on, living there. Sometimes you'd come up there, and there would be a hundred people. Can't remember that famous movie--was it *Marienbad*? The estate reminded one of this kind of setting.

We somehow became involved. They thought that our multimedia performances were kind of simulations of psychedelic experiences. One of the people who had been one of Timothy Leary's early subjects with LSD was a guy named Paul Lee, a professor of philosophy and religion at MIT and Paul Tillich's assistant. We became very friendly with Paul, and Paul invited us to do a performance first--well, I'm getting ahead of myself here. He was first [the protestant chaplain?] at Brandeis [University], and then he moved back to MIT. We did performances at both universities. By the time we got to MIT--there's an incredible auditorium there; it's kind of like a diaper shape, designed by Saarinen. We had started building strobes. Strobe lights. Among the audience when we did this-- We had done a series of performances in New York City for-- Jonas Mekas and his brother Adolphus were the leading figures in the avant-garde film movement on the East Coast. Jonas had decided that he was going to do a festival, "Expanded Cinema." I've got all the materials for this; my problem is I've got an attic full of stuff in dreadful chaos which needs to be organized, and a lot of the stuff you should have access to.

At the same time, Jonas had arranged to go to Europe. I believe he was Latvian, and he was going back home. So he turned over the Expanded Cinema festival to a guy named John Brockman. John contacted me, and we arranged to do performances--and we also put him in touch with a lot of the other people who were working in the media by that time--both using theatre media and performance pieces. We added at that time to our performance in New York an artist named Carolee Schneemann. Carolee is a dancer, a performance artist, and a filmmaker. She and her dancers would get up during one portion of the performance on stage where we had this white photographic background paper, very large, and as the slides and images were projected, they would take paintbrushes and paint portions of the images with dance motions. They were dressed up as painters in white overalls, which also of course caught the images, and each of them had a white ladder. Then when they finished painting those, they would rip down the pieces of paper, and there would be more paper behind it.

After a while, we were kind of getting out of overload, and we felt that we had freaked out too many people. We were changing the name of the performance, and we finally changed it to "We Are All One." Now what we did is we would build up to overload, then from overload we would come down to a meditational transformation and just [hums] "oooooooooooooooooooo." There would be these hundreds of images just multiplying and overloading and sounds. Eventually the only image there would be on a big display--a CRT [cathode-ray tube] monitor--an oscilloscope sine wave which looks like the infinity sign or a Moebius loop just dancing for fifteen minutes

just very low "ommmmmmmmmmm." It would cool everybody out; it was our intention to excite people and to give them the multiplicity sensation and then to bring them back to unity. It worked beautifully; it was amazing.

By the time we got to MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology], you know, here was the motorcycle film--Kresge Auditorium, I think it is. I think it's Saarinen who was the architect. Woodstock is near Poughkeepsie, which is where IBM's research and development and some of its manufacturing facilities were centralized. There was a place there called P&D Surplus, where you could go and buy incredible electronic devices and parts and things which weren't ordinarily available. This was Michael's world; he knew what everything was. We would go--whatever we had; a few dollars in our pocket--and Michael would save thousands of dollars. His technique was "Wow! We could buy this for forty dollars! This cost somebody \$6,450!" [Laughter] We weren't saving anything; we were spending everything we had, you know? But we got some incredible things--like this big CRT. Now this [points] is considered a large screen, this television, right? Well, this thing was twice as big. It couldn't show television programs, but Michael was able to build the circuitry so we could show very elaborate wave forms that were taken off one or two oscilloscope inputs into this display tube, and it was the central piece on stage. After a while, we had somebody sitting in the Zen meditation position on top of this piece of equipment. We flashed images on him, and that guy had to stay totally still during the whole performance [laughter]. It was a kind of obsessional madness intended to get across our "We Are All One" message.

With the strobes and the overload with the three motorcycles going, after our performance at MIT, we got a phone call from this professor who first developed the strobe and who worked with [Jacques] Cousteau and who was head of the department at MIT. His name was Harold Edgerton. He's an extremely famous and brilliant guy. You probably have seen some of his strobe photographs of the milk drop which looks like a corona. He wanted to talk to Michael and me. He said, "This strobe you have is puny. Next time you have a performance, I'll lend you a real strobe," and he took us into his laboratory, and he showed us these enormous strobes, and he gave Michael some circuitry. It was a very, very generous gesture. He said, "I didn't really enjoy the performance, but I understand what you're trying to do. If you want to use a strobe, at least get a powerful strobe."

He explained to us that his reputation and his career had been made on the strobe light. He had arrived at it simply because his original field was motors, and to measure the rpm, revolutions per minute, of a motor was very difficult. It used to

be done mechanically by holding some kind of a counter as the motor was revolving. He developed the strobe to count the revolutions on a motor, and everything came after that. There was a big manufacturing firm of grandiose proportions that he formed with two associates--EEG, it's called, and it's a big military supplier. We were a little put off by all this, but he was so forthcoming. It's a relationship which we kept going for many years.

Now we had met John Brockman because of the Expanded Cinema festival. John, who came from Boston where his father was the Carnation King of New England, had gone to business school at Columbia and had become a china buyer at Bloomingdale's but he wanted to be in the arts.

Here we were: this group of poets, engineers, and painters living in an old church in Rockland County. You saw one of the pictures of the church, I think, in that thing I sent you, the USCO retrospective brochure?

Byerly: Yes.

Stern: Right, okay. That was all of us at the church.

John decided that we were something that he wanted to represent, and he got involved with a guy named Michael Meyerberg. Michael Meyerberg was a theatrical producer; he had brought "Fantasia" to Walt Disney, and he was the first one to produce "Waiting for Godot," and he was by this time very old and very frail. He had leased the airplane hangar from which [Charles] Lindbergh had taken off at Roosevelt Field, and he wanted to put in a major kind of a nightclub, youth center, entertainment complex. His original concept had been to put a movie studio there, but he couldn't get somehow the use permissions, and there were things that stood in his way. He was looking for people to put this thing together. Somehow John met him--and John organized a bus, and all of us and Andy Warhol's group and Ken Dewey's group and a lot of arts people got on this bus and went out to the airplane hangar, and we were supposed to make proposals on how to turn it into this kind of avant-garde rock music palace.

Steve and I and Michael got our heads together, and we wrote this proposal. I don't know if it was because we were cheap or whether it was because we were more adventurous and mind-blowing, but we got the contract to do it.

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Stern: We tried to negotiate a cooperation of collaboration with Andy because we really felt badly that he had been passed by for this fairly ambitious project, but he was involved in the Electric Circus, and he decided he didn't want to work together, which was also typical of Andy.

We went on with the project. We had, I think, around the whole hangar about thirty slide screens, and we also had one of the first video projectors. It was black and white, and it was an Idofor, a Swiss machine; it could deliver an image which was, I think, about twenty-five feet across, and we had three cameras that could take--for instance, the jigging behind of a young girl on the dance floor, blow it up across that whole screen, or back off and take practically the whole dance floor.

The place was at first called "Murray the K's World." Murray the K was a well-known macho disc jockey out of New York, and he was a very powerful personality, and he didn't get along too well with Mr. Meyerberg so "Murray the K's World" became "The World."

It was a great scene for us because, number one, it allowed us to work with some technologies and programming that we hadn't worked with before. Michael was able to build a very large-scale programmer for all of these thirty slide machines. They were in pairs because they dissolved, and we had to make them match with the music, so there were all kinds of little effects that we could do with them. We actually programmed the slides to go with certain tunes. I remember one of the popular tunes of that time was Nancy Sinatra's "Boots are Made for Walking"; we had these great boot shots all over the screens, and when they dissolved into each other it looked like they were walkin'.

There were fairly well-known groups that played there: The Rascals, the Isley Brothers, and so forth and so on. I mean, not the top level--not The Beatles, you know--but the levels just below that. The groups alternated with the recorded music, and the recorded music is what we had programmed the slides to, because we had decided ahead of time what music would be played.

Michael actually had the job as an employee to run the shows. I think it was three a nights a week--Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. It made the cover of *Life* and the inside of *Life*. We had two *Life* stories within that year. The reason we were so excited about making the money from "The World", which was not something we were particularly into--making money--was because we had been offered a very large space at the Riverside Museum in New York to do a show of our work, an installation of environmentally installed pieces.

It was somewhat ambitious for us; they didn't have any money. It was a very interesting museum. They had two sides: one was probably the best collection of Tibetan tonkas and other Tibetan objects in the country that had been collected by the founder, Nicholas Roerich--and the other side was devoted to contemporary work. At the time, we were living up in Woodstock, and there was this sculptor: a lady named Lily Ente who was very friendly to our work, and she was the one who recommended us to the museum, and Steve was in seventh heaven because Tibetan philosophy and Tibetan art was one of his passions. Somehow drugs and Eastern mysticism seem to go very well together.

This was a huge space. We had, I think, six rooms. By that time, we had a lot of associates of various kinds--members of USCO, including just about anybody who wanted to get involved, practically, as long as they were marginally compatible. We had a lot of conflicts because Steve was an irascible and difficult person. I mean, one time he went so far as to chop a hole in the wall to prove to us that he wasn't going to compromise. On the other hand, he was one of the most intensely creative and generous and hardworking artists I've ever met in my life. Brilliant insights into visual and conceptual possibilities. I think he still inhabits that kind of persona. Later on, he became a Sufi, a mosque designer, and a Muslim. He has just recently moved from Alexandria, Egypt, back to Virginia with his present wife who was his ex-wife's sister-in-law--a development which started while we worked together.

The Riverside Museum was probably the peak experience of our USCO time. Paul Williams, whom I talked about when he constructed my ideas into visual poetry and didn't want his name mentioned, by this time was making works of his own and was using his own name and had left "The Land" and had moved to a studio in the city. He had severed his marital relationship and had gone off with Betsy Epstein, who was David Weinrib's sister and who had been married to Arnold Epstein. We were all living on or near "The Land." Paul contributed one whole room of a light garden--fabulous work. Dacey had a tie-dye meditation environment, and we had everything from the old "Contact is the Only Love", which had been shipped from San Francisco, to a what we called "The Tabernacle," which was later installed at the church. "The Tabernacle" was a series of paintings hung inside a hexagon, and in the middle of the hexagon was kind of a lingam made of metal with light internal to it and turning, and a fountain, and speakers on each side with multichannel capability. It was a big draw. We had oscilloscopes set up where people could do their own sine wave adjustments. Rooms full of exciting, kinetic, audiovisual artistic experiences.



Dion Wright had done a painting of the evolution of life --a huge, huge painting. He had come to Woodstock sometime previously; it was an incredible piece of work later printed as a poster. We filled all the rooms, and it was the far-out art event of that year. They had to extend the weeks of time that it was supposed to be shown, and there were crowds, I mean, there were lines standing in the streets. *Life* magazine came out, and we were interviewed on television. It was a big deal. Too big a deal, really, for us. It put us in the limelight, and it exposed us to a lot of publicity and scrutiny, and we attracted hundreds of young students and hippie wannabes, and wannabeats who then congregated around the church and made life a little difficult for us.

At that time we also incorporated the church as a free church under the laws of the state of New York--the Church of the Living God, believe it or not. After the Riverside we had set up "The Tabernacle," and we opened it to the public every weekend. The town of Garnerville was overrun--this was after the show closed--by people who--the local blue-collar citizens really didn't think we're what the town was all about. We had a lot of police action. We cooled it all out, but it was difficult. It caused a lot of strain inside the community, inside USCO, and it was a great idea to put "The Tabernacle" there but it destroyed a large part of our workspace. We were all living there; by this time, there were quite a lot of people living in this church.

Barbara was working as a teacher, and Barbara and Judi were doing silk-screened psychedelic posters which we were selling to head shops in various parts of the country and selling at our performances. We had quite a busy scene going.

We were also getting a lot of critics from all over the world. You know, art critics who had heard about it and who came and wrote or needed material. We were trying to sell copies of the paintings in "The Tabernacle." The paintings in "The Tabernacle" also had lights embedded in them; they were meditation images, some of them of Shiva Shakti, others simply of geometric images that seemed to move with the strobes and the pulsing lights and the various audio inputs that were in there. We had a little isolation room behind "The Tabernacle" where if you were on a bad trip or you needed some help, you could stay for a week at a time, and we would take care of you. It was an odd period.

Across the river, our friends--I mean, an hour or so away by car--at the [Castalia?] Foundation who were having a hard time keeping their scene together asked us for help. We really didn't know how to help them, but finally everybody got together. There was a theater that we were able to--I can't remember if it was entirely contributed, but it was fairly little money, and it was

called the New Theater, and it was in a very good location in New York. We presented, as a benefit, six or eight weeks, I think, one time a week, what we called "The Psychedelic Theater." All the proceeds except for the bare expenses went to the [Castalia?] Foundation which was Timothy and Richard Alpert and Ralph Metzner and their cohorts.

### The Timothy Leary Lecture

Stern: We did a multimedia show which we had programmed particularly for this theater event, and Timothy lectured about psychedelics. Timothy, you know, had been a brilliant psychologist at Kaiser. He developed various instruments for analyzing personalities. Nobody doubted his professional ability. His wife committed suicide--first wife, I guess. He came to Harvard to teach at more or less the same time as Richard Alpert, a young psychologist.

Richard was the son of the head of a big railroad. He had grown up with fairly immense wealth, flew his own airplane. He became totally involved at Harvard, and they were all protégés of a motivation psychologist named David McClelland, who was the head of the Social Relations department at Harvard. He didn't really quite know what he was getting into. David was a Quaker who had followed Murray's work in motivation being divided into three areas: achievement motivation, affiliation motivation, and power motivation. This is what people's behavior was divided into. This was a way of looking at the behavioral world. Richard was probably the most magnetic and the most successful lecturer in psychology ever to teach at Harvard. Psychology 1, or whatever it was that he taught, always needed the largest auditorium, and there was never even standing room available. The guy is a snake-oil salesman of the first order. I mean, he can go on any subject and persuade you that this is absolutely it. Wonderful ability, but also a frightening and destructive--because you can lead people very easily down the garden path and he did.

Here we were at the "Psychedelic Theater," and Timothy was really and always has been an alcoholic. I don't mean this as an ethnic slur, but what's called a "black Irish" personality. Just subject to a lot of drink. He allowed the drug world to become an additional layer on this alcoholism; he never gave up the alcohol, by the way. Alcohol and drugs are not the greatest mix in the world; they're destructive physiologically. Especially together, and when they're taken in large quantities. He's one of the several people that I've known that have really burned themselves to a crisp. Anyway, at that time he was an extremely popular but also under attack--he had been thrown out of Harvard as had Richard under very painful circumstances. They had turned on students, and that was absolutely a no-no, and they had kind of destroyed their relationship with the powers that be. On the

other hand, they had drawn with them a group of people who were totally convinced that this was the way to go--among them a lot of people who became close friends of ours.

The "Psychedelic Theater" showed up a lot of schisms between our group and their group. Timothy started lecturing, and he wasn't Richard Alpert; Timothy was kind of a dry, boring lecturer in those days. He got more lively as time went on. But we were appalled; it was the middle of this really turned-on show, and here was this professor standing up in the front going on and on. We happened to have a tape of Artaud screaming on a radio program while--he was incarcerated in an asylum, but he had been allowed to do this radio program. Michael McClure had given me a copy of the tape, which I don't know how he got. In the middle of Timothy's lecture, we played Artaud screaming. It stopped everything; people didn't know what was going on. Then we stopped, and Timothy went on as if nothing had happened, you know? Then about eight minutes later he was still going, and we played another little gob of Artaud screaming. Ralph Metzner came running up to where our media control booth was and said to us, "You've broken your contract!" [Laughter] We just thought that was so terribly amusing.

It was a great success. The auditorium was always full; everybody paid except Harry Smith. Harry Smith was someone who was a spectacular creative being who died recently. I first met Harry--I think the first time I came to San Francisco he was working as a photographer for the *Examiner*, and he was living in a black hotel--he was pale white--in the Fillmore. He had done these way-ahead-of-their-time murals at Jimbo's Bop City--which was just like it sounded--in the Fillmore in return for food. I think it was Philip Lamantia who introduced me to Harry, and we sat there eating Harry's favorite food which was casaba melons--on the house; they kept them there just for him. Then he took us to see some of his visuals at his hotel. But when we reached the lobby we had to take our shoes off, and we had to not say a word between the time we got in and the time we left. We then crept up the stairs, and he whispered that there was a whore living in the next room, and she was in the pay of the FBI or some government agency to keep an eye on him. It was a paranoid, delusional complex that he had going. He took us into his room, and it was totally dark. He turned on a flashlight which had a cardboard tube attached to it. He put these works on the floor, and he illuminated them slowly so that we could see them, and in total silence we crept out holding our shoes and went down the steps and put our shoes on. That was Harry Smith.

Harry came to one of the "Psychedelic Theater" pieces, and he started screaming about how he was whatever he was, that he

wasn't about to pay, these were all old friends of his. Timothy and Richard had said there were nothing but spongers and people who didn't have any money in this world of ours, and they all wanted to get in free, and they all were friends of ours. We had set a definite policy: No one was going to get in free. Well, Harry got in free because I told Timothy that if Harry didn't get in free, there wasn't going to be a show and there'd be a riot.

I keep talking about alcoholics, but there happened to have been a lot of them, and there are still a lot of them. Harry was one. Most of these people in this world mixed the alcohol with drugs, so there were episodes of total insanity.

Anyway, the "Psychedelic Theater" went on very well, and Timothy came to me at the end and says, "Gerd, this was incredible. It's a little chaotic, though. The next thing I want to do with you is the life of the Buddha. And we're gonna start at the time he was born, and we're going to wind up at the end. We're going to have logical progression." I used that famous Lone Ranger line of "What do you do mean 'we', Kemosabe?" [Laughter] I wasn't about to do the life of the Buddha starting from the beginning. But he found some other media artists to do it.

The other thing at the "Psychedelic Theater" is we had left openings, and we had invited any other media artists or any kind of artists who wanted to participate, and they came out of the woodwork. There were some incredible people who had projection things and various instruments and very much in the psychedelic main--Richard Aldcroft, Jackie Cassen, Rudy Stern, Isaac Abrams. It opened up a lot of new relationships. Part of our interest was not to just do it ourselves but to include others.

It kind of got us off on a track which turned out to put a lot of conflict into the system. About that time in Woodstock, there were a group of people who were adherents or followers of an Indian guru named Meher Baba. I was very impressed by Baba, and, as a matter of fact, at our shows we sold posters that we made of Baba's face. The idea that somebody in a world where he lived in in India, which was a world of poverty and illness and really desperate distress, could say "Don't worry, be happy" as kind of his major contribution really got to me. His other thing of "I am God, and you're God; the only difference is I know I am" was also something which appealed to my religious sensibilities. Then the fact that he hadn't spoken for all those years and only communicated with an alphabet board, was somehow an attractive behavior.

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Stern: Baba had this group of Woodstock people who were very strong-- maybe believers isn't the right word. A number of them were very talented artists. A lot of beautiful paintings about the circumstances of Baba's life came out of the group. They related to a group that was in New York City, and they related to a colony of Baba followers who were in Myrtle Beach in the Carolinas, and we knew them all. When we had done our performance at Brandeis University--we were already having these images of Baba on the screen; they were part of "We Are All One." Baba fit into "We Are All One" like hand to glove.

There was a guy named Bob Dreyfus who was into the drug scene heavily and who got totally turned on by the Baba thing. We sold Baba posters and used to carry around little brochures about Baba and little pictures--Baba loved to give out pictures of himself. And Bob bought a poster at the first Brandeis show and got heavily into Baba. He decided to go to India to meet him. He did; he hitchhiked through Turkey, and it was a very difficult journey, but he arrived there. He told Baba about all of us and all of him and what we were all doing. And Baba sent this very strong message that drugs were destructive and that we all had to stop using them. Dreyfus came back to the church and said, "You guys were the people who got me into this, now I want to tell you that--" of course, Baba didn't speak; he wrote this out, and he communicated through his brother-in-law. His sister's husband, maybe. Anyway, it was his principal assistant. Bob got the message loud and clear, and he went all over the country to all of the groups that were involved in drugs, and he told them that they had to stop using.

Now some of us, like Steve, really got the message, and it was very hard for him to stop. And he didn't stop for very long, by the way. Other people were totally offended: "How can somebody [Baba] who never tried it tell you to stop doing it? He doesn't understand what he's talking about." This was Richard Alpert.

At the time, we had--you remember I told you about Robert Indiana and how I had been somewhat influenced by his paintings and the way he used words in the paintings. Among that group that used to hang around there was Richard Baker. In the meantime, Richard had settled in San Francisco, was working as an event coordinator for the University of California, and was also the principal disciple of Suzuki Roshi, the first Zen master to settle in San Francisco. Richard and his wife, Virginia, and the whole family were good friends, and we used to stay with them.

One of the events that Richard put together was called--I can't remember now--the LSD Conference. It was a conference with speakers, and we were the featured show. This was at the campus

of UC Extension in San Francisco--a big gymnasium. By this time, we had started projecting on weather balloons. Huge eighteen-foot balloons. We would float them above the audience, and the audience would push them, and we would follow them by hand-manipulated projectors. That was just one part of the performance; we were always adding new things. We put on an enormous, enormous performance. Richard, for his lecture, talked about Baba, and he made this whole thing very clear that nobody was going to tell him, no guru from India--this was a very ironic piece of business, by the way, which we'll get to later, because later he went to India and found his own guru who told him to stop, and he stopped. But that guy ingested the LSD, and it didn't do nothing to him according to Richard. Then Richard turned into Baba Ramdas, selling a very different line of enlightenment.

Anyway, that's way ahead of the story. Now we had enormous conflict not only in our group but in this little world of people who were into drugs and Eastern religious philosophy and painters and everybody took sides. Steve and I were on opposite sides of the issue. I said I'm not going to advise anybody how to behave in this way. I was getting to the point where I had had enough LSD trips, and I didn't want any more acid. But I was and still am a confirmed pot smoker. I wasn't going to stop for anybody whether I got a divorce as with Ann--of course, I don't have a habit, you understand [laughter]; it's just something I like to do, and I've been doing it for fifty years. What I mean realistically, aside from joking, is that I don't have a habit--a habit means you've got to increase your dose. That's one of the things which hasn't seemed necessary. And it also means that when you don't have it that you're physiologically deprived, which I'm not. Sometimes I don't get a high for weeks or months or even longer, maybe because I'm too busy or maybe because I don't have a source of supply, or whatever. I've never experienced any discomfort from either stopping or starting.

The schism became very strong. On top of it, we were still experiencing huge crowds at the church, and it was becoming a hassle. Everybody needed this and needed that and wanted to be fed, and it just wasn't what we were into. We were an artist and engineer group trying to do creative work; we weren't a charity service organization.

We decided that--and Steve was kind of at the helm of this--what we needed was the high-energy charge of the church in Rockland County, but we needed was a low-energy center somewhere else where we could go and cool out and meditate somewhere in nature. Steve and Barbara went off to look for the place in their

Volkswagen bus, painted holy orange with the Shiva Shakti figure mounted on top of it, which I also had one of on my Corvair.

They went off, and they basically started out in California where Richard Alpert was living at the time. Richard had a huge house down on the peninsula. He was always wealthy. They lived with him, and there was another lady, Jane, who was also living with them. Dick was basically homosexual, but he has always had a feeling--he may not now--but he was always trying to pass as at least a bisexual if not a heterosexual. He doesn't have the--he's neither an auntie nor a real faggot in terms of being flagrant, but he does prefer young men.

Jane and I met for the first time, and we were attracted to each other. No big passion or anything. She had a little girl who was the daughter of the later fairly well-known novelist Bob Stone.

Richard and Steve were lecturing throughout the country and doing very well at it. They were being paid fairly well, and the subject of the lecture was "LSD: Illusion or Reality?" What Steve didn't know at the time was that Richard, after the lectures, was selling acid in large quantities to big dealers--not just a few hits at a time, you know? This was after periods where Timothy and Richard and the whole group--before Millbrook [they had been?] down in Zihuatanejo, Mexico, where they were tossed out because they were running an acid experience center. The Mexican authorities had been pointed out by the U.S. authorities that they were doing bad things. One of the funny stories was that Richard had at the last minute packed a suitcase with a liter of vodka which was full of acid, and he had wrapped it in his white linen suit, and he put it on the plane, and it broke. For months they were eating little pieces of his white linen suit because it was all embedded with LSD [laughter]. It was a wild period.

Later on, Steve was quite disillusioned because Richard hadn't explained to him what was going on. Richard and I did not get on, and the reason that Richard and I did not get on was because Steve and I were very close, and Richard was in love with Steve. Richard and I both had organizational ability. He was the organizing principle for the whole movement with Timothy, and I was the organizing principle of USCO. He felt there was only room for one. I was not about to take USCO into their orbit because I didn't feel that their orbit was our orbit, you know? As simple as that.

Now we've got all of that background, and we're here on the peninsula, and I'm ready to go back to the church but I came out to see my kids, really. And I stayed with Dick and Jane and Steve

and Barbara down there. Before I leave, I wanted to see my old friend Ken Kesey, but Ken is hiding because the authorities are looking for him. Jane says, "I'm sure we can find him." So we get in her car, and we drive around all night long. Finally, somewhere in the middle of the night in a car somewhere in the woods we make love together, then we go back to the house, and we wind up sleeping together. In the morning Richard finds us entangled, and he throws us out of the house. And I'm saying to Richard, "We are all one." [laughter] And Richard says, "No, we're not!" And Barbara and Steve are like wiggling out because they don't know--they're not sympathetic with Richard but they're dependent on him. So I understand the situation; I say, "Okay, cool."

Now I got me and Jane and her baby, and we're flying back to the church where Judi and Michael and my scene are. Now this is a very difficult entrance, right? Very difficult entrance. And I take a lot of shit for a few days. But it turns out that Michael and Jane get along very well [laughter], so the whole thing turns around, and now we just have a few more people living at the church.

We always had lots of people coming in and out of the church. People would stay for days and weeks and months and years. We had little bedrooms all over the place and lofts and mattresses, and it was free and easy. The only thing that wasn't free and easy was the kitchen.

"The World" went on for a long time. It finally collapsed and died, and Meyerberg wanted to move it down to Florida, and they kind of did, but it never worked out. Michael went down there. We did lots of other shows in the meantime. Some of them were just installations--projection environments, like in Boston.

About this time, along comes--Zalman, my son, is born. Barbara and Steve had a daughter at the church, and when Barbara was working, Steve not only was painting but he was also taking care of Dakota, his little girl. Steve tended to stay up all night painting, and then he wouldn't wake up in the morning, and Dakota was always awake and trying to get her father to feed her or something. One time she went to the extreme length of laying a turd right on his face [laughter]. After that things were a little more timely.

Byerly: Who was Zalman's mother?

Stern: Judi. Also about that time, Radha came to live with us for a little over a year. Actually, a little before this time. "The Land" had at--some distance away near the church, there was a



school called the Collaberg School, which was patterned after the English--what was his name, Neil?

Byerly: Summerhill.

Stern: Right. Patterned after Summerhill. And Radha went there with all the kids from "The Land," and other hip kids from around. That was when Paul Williams had a place on the Cape, at Wallfleet, an A-frame that he had built. It was, and is, a really nice little house. Lots of us used to go up there for kind of a refuge.

Radha knew that everybody was taking acid and smoking pot and things. She was thirteen years old, and a lot of the kids at the school had decided to do it, and had done it. She wanted to try it, and I didn't want her to try it with the kids because you never knew--. So I took her up to the Cape, and I took her on a trip, and it was a beautiful trip she had. Of course, I didn't take any acid; I was there to guide her through. A lot of people were bummed out that I would do that. I thought it was absolutely the correct move for a parent, and fortunately Jane agreed with me.

By that time, Bill had committed suicide. We don't know if he committed suicide. Radha? [Radha enters room.] How old were you when Bill committed suicide or O.D'd or whatever he did?

Radha: I was young. I was probably like twelve.

Stern: It was just before you came to the church.

Radha: No.

Stern: No? I thought you were thirteen when you were at the church.

Radha: I'll have to think about this.

Stern: All right, we'll think about it.

Radha: It's in that--I think my sisters took it, but it's in that--I want to say it was '67.

Stern: I don't know. Anyway, it's just one more artifact date that we're going to have to figure out, and as I said, I'm hopeless about dates. But at some time, Radha and Jane were out camping; it was long after--Bill had gone from being a recluse to being pretty out of it, let's put it. Jane and his mother had put him into an institution. When he came out, he didn't go back to Jane; in fact, he had another relationship. I don't remember whether he actually got married or not. Then one day they were out camping,

and they came back to their house in Fairfax, and they found Bill dead on the floor. Nobody ever quite established--I think partially because of his family's influence and partially because of the circumstances, whether he had O.D'd from a drug dose, whether he had committed suicide, or whether something else had happened. He hadn't been living there; he had not visited them for ages and ages. His son Paul was living in the house also, but was not there at the time, so it was rather mysterious. But Jane always kept her doors open.

Byerly: I see. Jane and Radha discovered him.

Stern: Yes. When they came back from their camping trip. At least that's how I was told the story. You never knew with Jane. Jane could make hay out of sunshine.

Byerly: [Laughter] Jane was a trip.

Stern: Yes, she was a trip. It wasn't always a positive trip for people. It was not a positive trip for Bill Buck.

Byerly: Obviously.

Stern: I mean, he thought he was the beneficiary, and he was taken on a big ride for part of his life. It's nice for a young man to have an older woman to guide him through a certain amount of passage or vice versa, but then the young man wants to be his own person, and that didn't suit Jane's needs.

I don't know if you know that when Bill was living in Bolinas, California with Jane, he translated two esoteric works. We are conscious of the fact that the University of California library was financed by family money to publish those books. How Bill, who had no formal education in Sanskrit or any other Asian language, was able to translate those books is another question. It's one thing for Rexroth, who was an extremely well-educated person with a high poetic sensibility to translate haiku and other poetry from foreign languages by the use of a dictionary and by the use of this experience and understanding. It's another thing for a kid who had basically no background but a kind of a desire--or in German we call it *Sehnsucht*, which is a much broader word; a strong emotion that you want to do something--that he was able to carry those off. I have the books; they're very well done. I don't know the originals obviously, but they seem beautifully done. Whether he had help, I don't know. Who knows? It's an amazing story.

Now Radha lived with us, then she went back to California. In the meantime, we had been visited--actually, it was through

Paul Lee. At one of the performances that we did--I can't remember whether it was Brandeis or MIT--Paul Lee had to go to a formal party in Cambridge with the director of the media center at Harvard, Bob Gardner. He didn't know what to do with me because I was staying with him and his wife. He called up a friend of his, Andre Ruedi, and said, "Andre, you gotta take care of Gerd."

So I went to Andre's. Andre was at the time at the business school. He was about to graduate, and he was writing his thesis, and he was also doing case studies for the school, and he was very psychedelically oriented and also a pot smoker of the highest persuasion; we had a great time together. He was a great cook, and he spoke German. He had a lot of girlfriends, and we grooved together. Andre started coming down to the church and working with us and helping us schlep our--I mean, part of the real problem that we had at USCO was that everything we did was very heavy. We would travel with a Volkswagen bus and trailers and thousands of pounds of equipment. Schleppling. In fact, I once wrote a piece for one of the art magazines called "The Artist as Schlepper." The cheese business is just as bad, by the way. Cheese is also heavy.

Andre was very interested in the media possibilities that we pioneered, and he talked to his professor, George Litwin, and the powers that be at the business school that they should be exploring the use of these forms of media to do case studies and to do various presentations as part of the business school's activities. George Litwin happened to be another one of the group that had originally been around Tim Leary. We didn't know him. He was a short guy, kind of a Napoleon type, and he immediately went to David McClelland, who had been Richard and Timothy's sponsor. He talked David into the fact that in the school of education and in Social Relations where David was operative--he was still department head at the time, I think--that this was a wonderful idea to apply these techniques. David agreed, and he got me an appointment on the faculty--you know, a legitimate appointment from the fellows of Harvard University as an Associate in Education.

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Stern: So I'm flattered because here I am, not a college product, a few weeks in the underground halls of CCNY and a few weeks at Black Mountain College, and an aborted attempt to go to UC Berkeley, and all of a sudden I'm an associate in education with a faculty appointment at Harvard University. And I'm flattered, which is a big mistake. Don't get flattered in this world.

I'm coming up there, and I'm meeting David McClelland, and I'm not even telling him that I'm a friend of Timothy and Richard's because [laughter] I know there would have been some bad vibes in there for him. The university wasn't very happy with him. But he managed; he's a very well-known person. His book, *The Achieving Society*, was a bestseller in sociology, although for years he has been under great attack because he worked a lot in the Third World developing countries, and the accusation was that all this achievement training was simply making capitalists out of people who had no business being capitalists. But he was a Quaker, and he believed in social good, and he believed he was on the right side of whatever. An incredible man.

### Intermedia Systems Corporation

Stern: George Litwin, who is the guy who has gotten me the appointment, and Andre Ruedi said, "We didn't just bring you up here to do this thing at Harvard. What we want to do is we want to form a company, and we're going to do multimedia productions, and we're going to make multimedia equipment." Michael Callahan and I and these two guys and later on other people formed a corporation, Intermedia Systems Corporation, and we rent a space with an office, a media production facility, and an electronics shop.

Michael's moved up from the church, and I've moved up from the church. But Judy doesn't like Boston. She's not going to move. She and Zalman, the baby, are back in the church, and she's going to stay there. Now we're commuting. And I'm pissed. I really am. "What do you mean you don't like Boston? What's the matter with Cambridge? It's a nice place to be." No, she's adamant. And I'm getting kind of tired of her trip anyway. And she's getting tired of mine.

In the meantime, we're doing various things. One of the things we're doing--Michael McClure is an old friend, and he's written this play which was produced in San Francisco, *The Beard*, and he wants to produce it in New York. Rip Torn agrees to direct it, and we agree to do the media background, and it's at a new theater called the Evergreen Theater put up by Grove Press. Our media ideas get very elaborate: we project the whole theater, the side walls, and the stage with projections and sound. It's pretty super duper. The play is wonderful; I love this play. I'm not trying to upstage the play; I'm trying to enhance it, you know? I think it's a brilliant *mise en scène*.

My accountant, who was the artists' accountant in New York--he's Rauschenberg's and Martha Graham's is Rubin Gorewitz. He happens to have as one of his other clients and as a friend of his the theater and sometimes arts critic of the *New York Times*. The guy comes to see the opening, and he writes a long review, and

among other things he basically says that the media tops the play and the acting and the directing, and all of a sudden we're not so popular with Rip and Michael, which was a drag because it was not our intention, and it wasn't true, by the way. I think he thought he was doing us a favor but it wasn't really a favor. Just the course of life; it's only a little hitch, but it was kind of a funny hitch which we didn't need. The play ran for a while off Broadway but not as long as it should have.

We also did an elaborate piece of kinetic sculpture for a play of Norman Mailer's. Norman and I had known each other through various other connections. *The Deer Park*--a play about Las Vegas, which Rip--in fact, that came before. Rip was the principal actor in that. That's really how I got to know Rip.

We were very busy doing all kinds of things. We were doing another very elaborate projection environment for a stage presentation about Lenny Bruce which was done by Alan Douglas, a record producer. He had an office in New York, and we did record covers for him. Kelly was a psychedelic artist who worked for us at that time at Intermedia although he was really a Californian. Kelly Mouse studios. They did a lot of the Grateful Dead covers and Big Brother and the Holding Company--you know, that whole period.

Light shows were a big thing; we were into light shows. But we never did wet shows, liquid shows, which was a kind of a different form.

This guy comes to visit us in Boston. He grew up in Boston, and he takes us to a Russian schvitz, a steam bath. We knew him as Douglas, and we get into this schvitz, and there was a bunch of old guys sitting around there, and they look at him and say, "Hey! Rubenstein!" I look at him and say, "Rubenstein?" He says, "Yeah. Did you think I was born Douglas?" [laughter].

The same with Bob Dylan. There was another scene, a really bad scene I had with Bob. Bob admired our work, and when we were in Woodstock he came to our performances at the Maverick Gallery which was a communal gallery we had, and at the Woodstock Artists' Association. He was always asking us questions how it was done. One day we were at a party at somebody's house, and there's this big picture window, and my wife and a bunch of other people are standing inside, and a lot of people are standing outside on the wall smoking dope and outside on the grass and various things. Al Grossman, who was Bob's manager, and Bob and a bunch of other people--somebody had a rifle, they had just bought a rifle. He showed it to Bob, and Bob picks it up--now he didn't know anything more about guns than me. I've always had a phobia against guns.

He picks it up, and he points it at the window just about where my wife, Judi, was standing. I knock it down, and he says, "What the hell's wrong with you, Gerd?" I said, "I don't like guns. And I don't like people pointing guns. Do you know whether it's loaded or not?" He says, "I'm very careful." I said, "Have you ever held a gun in your life before?" He says, "No." Well, from that day on Bob and I were not friends, and it's ridiculous. It's okay; I didn't need Bob Dylan. He was good friends with Allen Ginsberg. But we lived right near each other in Woodstock.

How did I get on that? I got on that through Boston, through Rubenstein. What was his name? Douglas--he changed his name from Rubenstein to Douglas. And Dylan from Zimmerman.

Intermedia Systems Corporation was now making hardware of a fairly advanced sort, which hadn't been put forth by others yet, to control audiovisual programming, and we were doing multimedia. We were working for David McClelland. We had a little room about 20' by 20' where we could project all over the walls, and the projectors were in boxes and movies and four channels of sound. We had a little sound studio behind this wall. He would bring his classes in, and there were categories of mood which involved colors and certain images, and we would see if we could change people's moods. Then we did simulations of climates of organizations for Harvard using the students to do the filming and photography and recording. We would do the climate in an insurance office which had a twenty- or thirty-year-old office with everybody sitting at desks one after the other in rows, and then we would do a modern insurance office where everybody had a little cubicle with rugged walls. The difference in the mood and the climate of those organizations--we recorded the employees and the kind of tensions that happened. We did classroom climates, where we would go into different classrooms with different teachers, and then we would project all the way around. You would hear the students' voices and the teachers' voices. It was an opportunity for teachers who were in training to analyze the climates of those classrooms and to judge how they felt and what worked and what didn't. It was an instrument.

I didn't enjoy Harvard. There was a lot of politics. I didn't have a degree, and I was attached to the school of education which is very degree-oriented, and everybody realized that I was just kind of an adjunct of McClelland's who was a big deal, but they weren't going to bring me into the fold. Even Ted Sizer, who was the head of the school of education and a brilliant and interesting man--you know how academics are.

Then a little later I was taken up by another professor, a philosopher named Nelson Goodman who wrote *Languages of Art*. He got me on the board of the summer arts institute--they had a program where they trained arts administrators. For many years now, I had been on three or four proposal evaluation panels of the New York State Council on the Arts: the literary panel, the television panel, the media panel. And even after I moved up to Boston, they paid me to come down. I mean, those were the days when federal money for the arts was really flowing. It was fascinating; we considered all the grants in our areas, and of course I knew most of the people who applied, and it's an important kind of function. People like Erica Jong and Toni Morrison--you know, before they were well-known--were on those panels--Ed Emshwiller [sp?], the avant garde filmmaker. It was a great experience.

I was also involved very strongly with the National Endowment [for the Arts], and I was on the board of Planning Corporation for the Arts. Kenneth Dewey, who was a descendant of the admiral's, was a performance artist and an arts philosopher, and he worked for the New York State Council. I mean, he was employed by them, and he started this national Planning Corporation for the Arts to advocate the long-term agendas on what the meaning of arts were to minorities and what the meaning of big cultural institutions were. Being associated with the other people on that board was a very inspiring and important role that I occupied. Eventually, we also worked with Ken on four of five commercial and artistic projects.

One day Ken--he did come also from wealthy people, which is true of a lot of people in that world because you can't support yourself, you know? So either you have money or you have some other kind of occupation to supplement what you can do in your profession. One day he got in his little plane and he flew, and he crashed and died. It was another of those experiences which I told you about like with Lew Hill. I mean, for me Ken was at the height of his powers; he was a great influence in the international and national art world and at the New York State Council. His work was admired by a lot of people, and all of a sudden, bang--he's gone. Why? And I think again, like Lew Hill, it has to do with his romantic and emotional life rather than his work life. Both those cases. But I'm not sure. How can you be sure? We did a huge memorial for him at his parents' estate in New Jersey. We floated hundreds of balloons in large masses which floated away. A few artists and I spent hours blowing up these balloons and tethering them and then letting them go all at once, and a lot of people--I'm not even sure if Yvonne didn't do a piece that day. I think he did. I know Yvonne knew Ken.

We had a gallery at that time for our kinetic works, a fairly uptown gallery, Howard Wise, on Fifty-seventh Street. There was a show--I can't remember the name of it--of kinetic pieces. They were all pictured, the principal pieces including ours, in color on several pages of *Newsweek*. One day I got a call from Howard, and he said, "Your piece has been bought." I said, "Oh, yeah? Who bought it?" He said, "Well, Malcolm Forbes bought everything that was pictured in *Newsweek* without ever seeing the pieces except in photos." I said, "Oh?" He said, "Well, you're gonna have to put it in really top shape, and you're gonna have to deliver to his place in New Jersey." All right. It was a few thousand bucks--I mean, wow.

We fixed it up, and we took it down--it was seven diffraction grating hexes rotating with strobes. A fairly complicated piece. We had a wonderful relationship with Rem Wood, the man who developed diffraction gratings. Do you know what they are? Those little rainbow jewels? He gave us lots of the material, and he also commissioned a piece from us. Actually, this piece that Forbes bought was a development out of that first piece that we made for The Diffraction Company of Riderwood, Maryland. We came to the grounds of the Forbes estate, and the butler let us in, and he took us down to this other building, and this was a heavy piece, and Michael and I were schlepping it. We had to go down some stairs; it was like a bunker. Turned out it was Malcolm Forbes' air-raid shelter, which he had turned into an art gallery. They were dismantling a show of op-art which he had donated to Princeton [University] in toto; it had hung up for about a year. Now he had this show of kinetic art which he bought--in another year he donated that to Princeton. I wasn't particularly struck by this, and we were introduced to Malcolm Forbes, and he gave us a drink. He showed us what he said was his favorite piece of art, which was a bronze casting of his Marine boots from the war. We were not thrilled by this experience. But it's not untypical of the experiences that artists have with collectors. It was not a relationship that I enjoyed.

Not long thereafter we got out of making pieces for museums and galleries because I found that the social demands of being a fiscally successful artist were worse than being in business, and that museums--I mean, we had museums not only in the U.S, all over the country, but in Europe asking for pieces. But everybody wanted something new; hardly anybody wanted to show something you already had. To make the kind of pieces that we or I were conceiving was extremely expensive, and nobody had any money. They would always say to you, "Well, you know, we'll extend to you our not-for-profit; I'm sure that you have a patron that would be happy." Most of the collectors--the pieces that we wanted to do were much too ambitious to put in anybody's house.



The next piece we made, which was one of the last big pieces which Michael and I and others were involved with--including Jonathan Ayers--was called the "Fanflashtic." It was a transparent gazebo which was raised up from the floor with a metal subway grating under which there were rather powerful fans. There were four strobes mounted in the gazebo. It had a roof. It was filled with balloons, and the fans blew the balloons up, and the strobes picked out the balloons, and people got inside it, and there was sound. We toured it throughout New York State for the New York State Council on the Arts. At one point in Rochester, it was filled with nuns in habits. Incredible. There was a photograph in *Horizon*, a kind of a book magazine, and they sent up a very well-known photographer. He took a picture of it; it's in one of those *Horizons* [points]. It's in other books, too. It's really the last big piece we made. It was also before Ken's death, because Ken was part of that tour also with a piece of his. And so was Carolee Schneemann.

The tour was very successful and very satisfying. That was at the time when Ann London, my ex-wife, was a professor of Anglo-Saxon studies at SUNY [State University of New York] Buffalo, and I wanted to see my son, Jared. She didn't want me to see him. She and her father had used detectives--it was a bad trip. The funny thing is later on after he died, and she died, her mother and I grew very close trying to take care of Jared who very early on turned into a terrible abuser stealing his mother's diet pills. But anyway, I wanted to see my son, and she was a professor at the university, and I was touring for the New York State Council, and she said no, so I called up the head of the New York State Council on the Arts, and he called the governor, and the governor called the chancellor of the university. The chancellor called Ann and said, "We have a visiting artist here, and he happens to be your ex-husband. I understand he wants to see his son. I think it would be a good idea, Professor London, to make that possible." So I got to see Jared. [laughter]

Years later Ann and I got back into a reasonable relationship, when she realized that Jared had become an addict, and she didn't know what to do nor did her present husband, so she wanted my help. It was too late. There were years when she wasn't even conscious of the fact that her supply of Dexedrine was being raided day by day. How could you not be conscious of that?

Here we were still working somewhat with John Brockman, who was our agent on commercial things. Another job we did at Christmas time was Bendel's department store, a collection of fashion boutiques on Fifty-seventh Street in New York. Geri was the manager, and she wanted something psychedelic, so we created a black light environment made out of stretch fabric that we

stretched as a ceiling all over the store. She had approved the design, and her display manager, who was very, very fey--when we got it all finished, they didn't like it. So they made us take it down, and they didn't want to pay for it. We didn't know what to do. Bendel's was owned by a large corporation, so I called up the corporate office, and I asked for the CEO, and of course I couldn't speak to him, so I sent him a telegram telling him that if we didn't get paid, that the next day they would have two dozen Greenwich Village artists picketing Bendel's. About half an hour later, I got a telephone call from his assistant saying, "Mr. Stern, you will have a check brought out by our driver within the next several hours as soon as he finds your place. One proviso: you cannot tell Geri that we paid you." [Laughter] "She's a real *enfant terrible*, and Mr. so-and-so doesn't want to have to deal with that. But the money's not a problem." So we got all our money.

#### Intermedia Continued

[Interview 4: April 10, 1996] ##

Stern: We've been kind of playing with details and dates which are not necessarily in sequence. Some of the things that I just talked about were before Harvard, and some of them were during Harvard. As we were progressing with the days at Harvard, Intermedia was growing very rapidly. Early on, we were up in Porter Square--remember where that is?

Byerly: Sure.

Stern: Then we ran out of the capital from the people from the business school who had started this company with me. It was a very interesting conjunction. It was a conjunction of my naïveté and their hubris. George Litwin, who was a professor at the business school, thought he was a businessman because he taught at the business school. The truth was he was a psychologist. They had done a lot of training work and various kinds of work for business organizations, but they were no more business people than I was. They were involved in the subject of business on an academic level--no idea about numbers or how to run a business, profit and loss statements, balance sheets. Theoretically yes, but practically no.

We needed money, and we needed investment. The original policy and the original way that this business was set up was they said to me, "We'll take care of the business end and the marketing and the sales. You, all you have to do is be creative." Oh, was that a lot of bull. Now we're dead broke, and we have these hardware lines that we're developing--Michael needs money for the parts and for the subcontractors and for the techies that have to do the work. And for the software we need equipment, and we've got a little sound studio going; we need more equipment for that.

They don't know where to come up with the money so I call my accountant and friend Rubin Gorewitz, and he comes up [to Boston]. No problem. He introduces us to an investment banker in New York, Larry Teicher, and the investment banker introduces us to a little guy on Wall Street named Jesse Krieger who's a one-man share flogger. And we go public. What do I know from going public? I've never even heard of it. What stock market? I mean, I knew about the stock market from the *New York Times*.

Now, all of a sudden, I have 100,000 shares, and we're selling shares to the public, and we get \$600,000. My good friends from the business school--the president of Intermedia Systems Corporation, Dr. Litwin, goes crazy. I told you he come out of the whole Timothy Leary group, and he drives a Corvette, and he's a high liver in ways I never experienced, really--even in the days of the Londons. That was civilized compared to this shit that's going down. All of a sudden George buys--he's also into scuba--50 percent of the Underwater Explorers' Club in the Bahamas. We had no business--we were going to do a surround media experience there, and we're all involved. That's not the only thing he invested our money in--his money, he's the president, so he spends it, you know?

At the end of the day, we've moved to Central Square--two floors in a big old building. I don't know if you remember it with the arched windows; beautiful old building. Later on there was an Indian store that we rented the bottom floor of, but at first we installed big environmental projection installations, and now we're in bigger business.

Then some dreamer has built a sound studio on Newbury Street, and he copied the Deutsche Grammophon studios in Germany, and it was going to be for classical music for groups out of the Boston Symphony. Two or three weeks or a month after he's got it together, he goes broke. We take over the sound studio, and now we have the first sixteen-track studio in the country, with the first Ampex sixteen-track machine, and we're Intermedia Sound. Another of the psychologist/dopester/psychedelic group, Dr. Gunther Weil, who we've known for a long time and who was a buddy,

takes over Intermedia Sound. He was at the time a psychology professor at Brandeis.

We're going great guns, but basically we're heading into deep debt. We have a board of directors including David McClellan. We're prestigious, and we do a lot of interesting work. We're bouncing around, we're working for corporations, we're working for the U.S. Information Agency, we're working for the Commerce Department. By the time we get up to speed, we've got maybe somewhere between thirty and forty employees. I'm the creative director, and I've got a big office overlooking Central Square.

Walter Gundy is at this point no longer roadie for The Lovin' Spoonful but he's now with The Incredible String Band, and when they come through Boston there's a lovely high party and I wind up talking to one of their friends, Peter Beren. A couple of days later he calls and tells me he wants to interview me for a piece in the *Boston Phoenix* and he winds up titling it "Intermedia Systems: Cinderella Sweeping Up on Desolation Row," and writes things about me and USCO and ends with, "Intermedia Systems, then, is a new type of corporation, a living contradiction in our present vocabulary. A corporation born in art, aiming at expanding horizons in business and education."

Anyway, throughout the years, Peter winds up being a close friend, and he's one of the few people who keeps touching base to find out what's happening with me and us and I do the same with him. Now he's publications director for Sierra Club and also acts as literary agent for on or close to the edge writers about spiritual, musical, health, and literary topics. We have an uncanny way of sensing when one another is down and giving in person or by phone support for each other in words and feelings. That mutuality helps. And I've always had a problem with one-way type relationships--you know what I mean, people with whom you need to do all the initiating, the "Contact Is the Only Love" transmissions and if you don't do that, they're out of touch. Now, when that happens, after a while I give up on them. But Peter and many other friends through the years are a two-way street. And, now, with email, the flow increases.

### Marriage to Sally Shaw

Stern: In the meantime, Judi has kept on her path of "I'm not moving up to Boston." So I'm commuting back and forth. Then Judi, with another friend of hers--they want to go away somewhere. So I

borrow Rip Torn's house in Mexico, and off Judi goes with little Zalman and with her friend Patti with her daughter Ever. I'm beginning to feel like I'm not involved in a relationship anymore, that I've just got dependents.

I'm still spending a lot of time with Andre Ruedi. Andre's now a partner in Intermedia Systems. We're really buddy-buddy, and he had a girlfriend, Sunny, who's going to Simmons College. A really well-endowed and hip young lady. One day he takes me over to her apartment, and her college roommate Sally from New Hampshire is sitting there. It's in the middle of the summer, nobody's wearing very many clothes, and we're sitting around the floor getting high, and we're practically naked. We're listening to music loud, and we're having a great time. After a couple of hours or so there's a big noise from above, and some guy comes practically falling down out of the skylight. Apparently this is Sally's boyfriend, and he's been calling, and he's been ringing the doorbell, and nobody had answered, and nobody has remembered that he's supposed to be arriving. We leave, but in the meantime I've gotten a fixation on this young lady whose name is Sally Shaw. In the next four or five hours, which is probably between two a.m. and seven a.m. in the morning, I call her four or five times. In the meantime, she's with her boyfriend. But I don't give a damn.

The next weekend we drive up to New Hampshire--Andre and Sunny and me, and we go to her house, and from then on Sally and I are a thing. This is a young lady going to Simmons, and she's from a real Yankee New Hampshire family, with both sides of Scottish ancestry--been here since the 1600s on king's grant land. Peterboro, right? You being from New England will get the picture. I'm not exactly welcome. In fact, I'm not that much younger than her father. He's a doctor, and he was at that time the doctor at St. Paul's School. They're living at the school, in a house on campus. I eventually get invited to dinner--by Sally, not exactly by her parents. I get there, and I'm there all evening, and this man doesn't talk to me. We sit at dinner together, and really nobody talks to me except Sally, so I'm feeling like--.

Doesn't matter. We get together, and I'm really enamored. I'm so enamored that I'm not very long thereafter asking her to marry me, and she says no. But by this time we're living together.

In the meantime, of course, Judi is getting vibes that something else is going on. Eventually I go down to Mexico, and I have a very bad experience there. I get sick with "Montezuma's Revenge", and I'm also not being very happy about the

relationship, and I'm feeling bad about my young son one more time. By this time, this is the fourth child I've kind of lost. But Judi and I were still trying to keep it together. Everything is in limbo now. Judi comes back to the church, and we get a job doing environmental coverage, an in the round media room at Hilton Head Island. Judi is also no slouch; she's a good photographer, she does silkscreens, and she paints. Unfortunately, she never really does anything with any of it. She's also completely dependent on me. So we send Judi as the photographer on this job down to [South] Carolina to Hilton Head Island. She meets a young rock musician there, and she finishes the job, and she takes little Zalman and her new friend, Todd, and they go to Colorado. Now I'm definitely out of this relationship. Willy-nilly.

I'm determined to make something better out of the relationship with Sally who is now in 1996 still my wife. It takes many years for us to get married. In the meantime, she graduates from Simmons, and she goes to work for an architect. Eventually, she comes to work for us at Intermedia. I teach her the elements of sound editing, which I'm very good at and she gets even better. These days sound editing has developed into a completely different technology, but Michael and I come from the days where you actually cut the tape and spliced it. We teach this to Sally, and Sally gets very good at it. She edited Huey, and she edited Rabbi Zalman Schachter, and she did a lot of great work on our audiovisual pieces.



Lilly and Otto Stern, circa 1927.

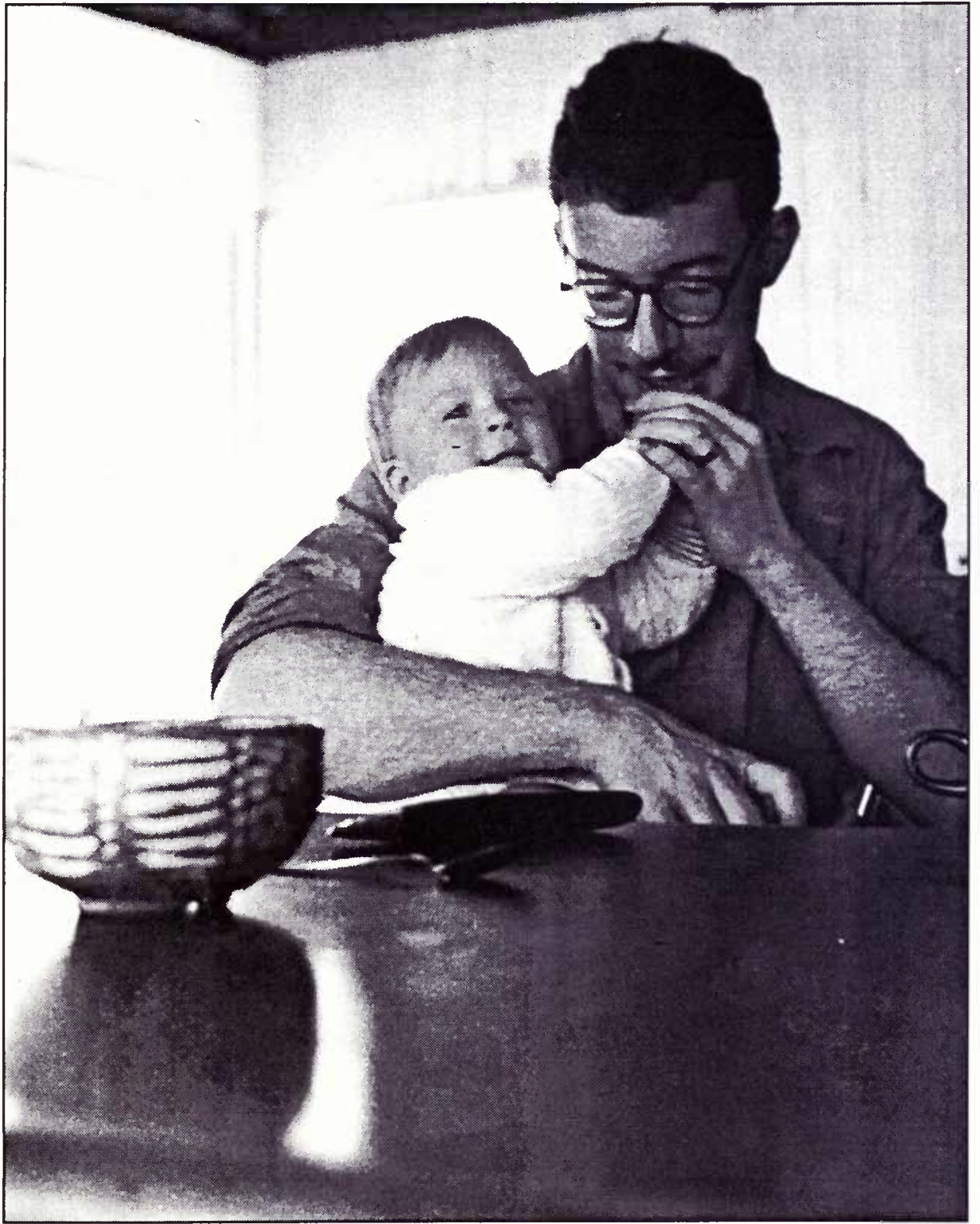






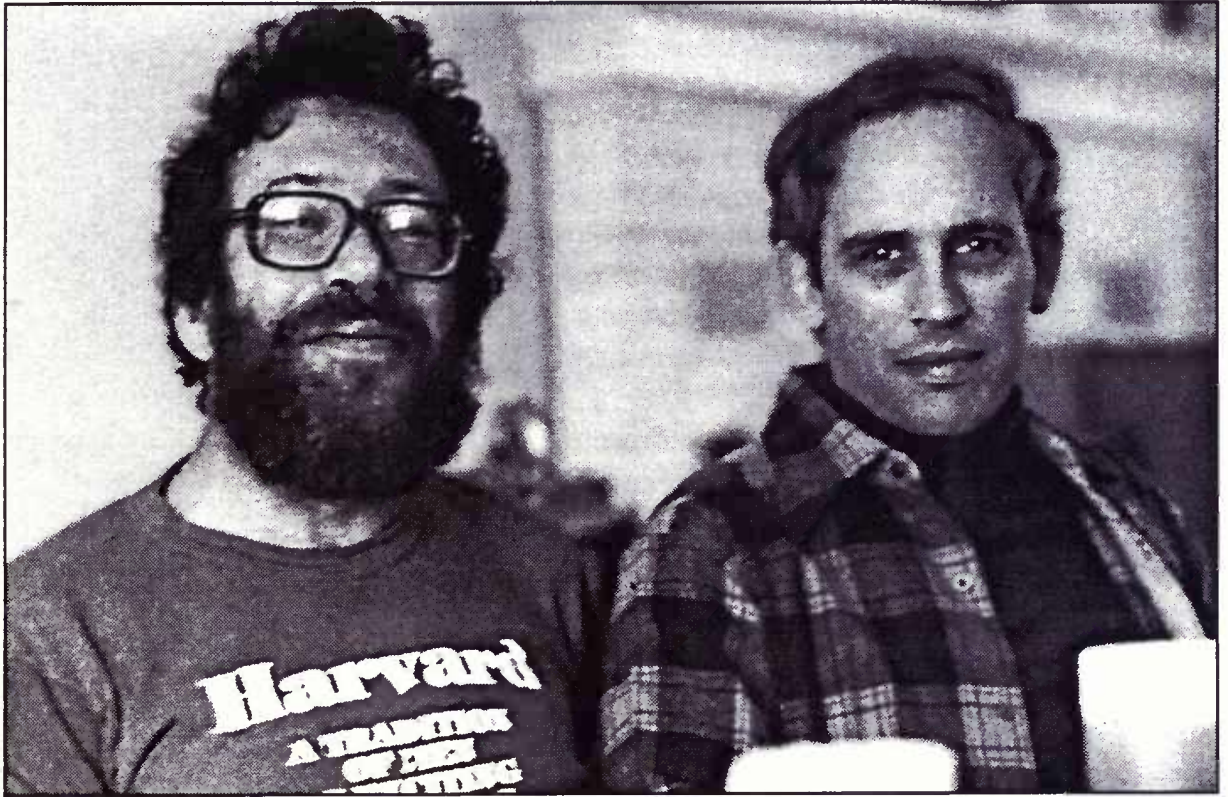
Unser "our" Camp with Ivan Majdrakoff (in the striped shirt) et al, circa 1946. Gerd Stern bottom right and Lorraine Oyl top right.





Gerd and Jared on barge, circa 1959.





Gerd Stern and John Brockman, circa 1963.





A.C. "Augie" Spector and his wife, Theo Fredericks (Spector), with Ann London Stern and Gerd Stern on the back deck of the barge at Waldo Point, Sausalito, circa 1964.

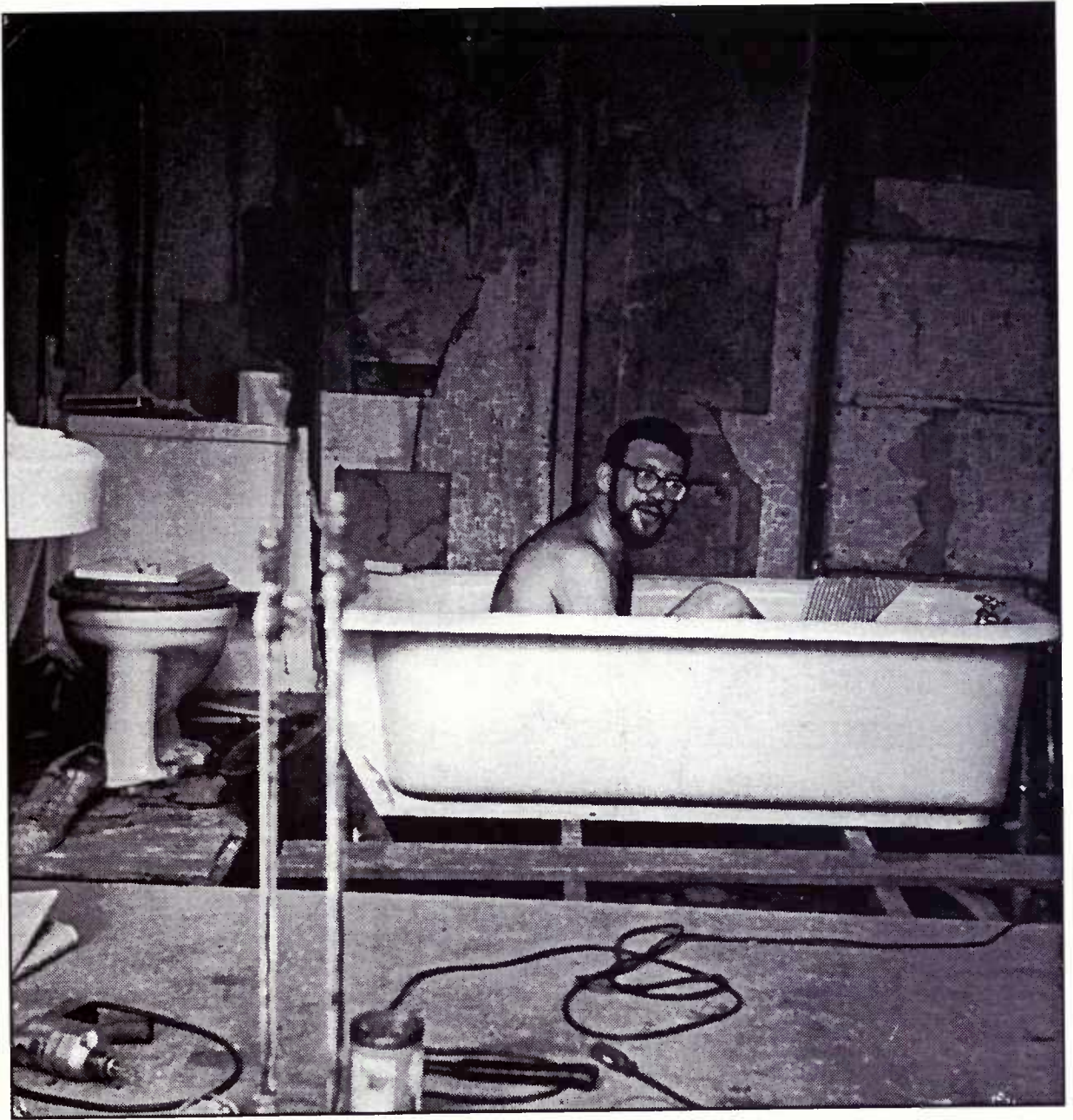






Michael Callahan, circa 1964.





Willow Grove Road, Rockland City, New York.





Back row: Jane, Sheridan, Radha, and Michelle.  
Front row: Adam, Kristin, and Paul.

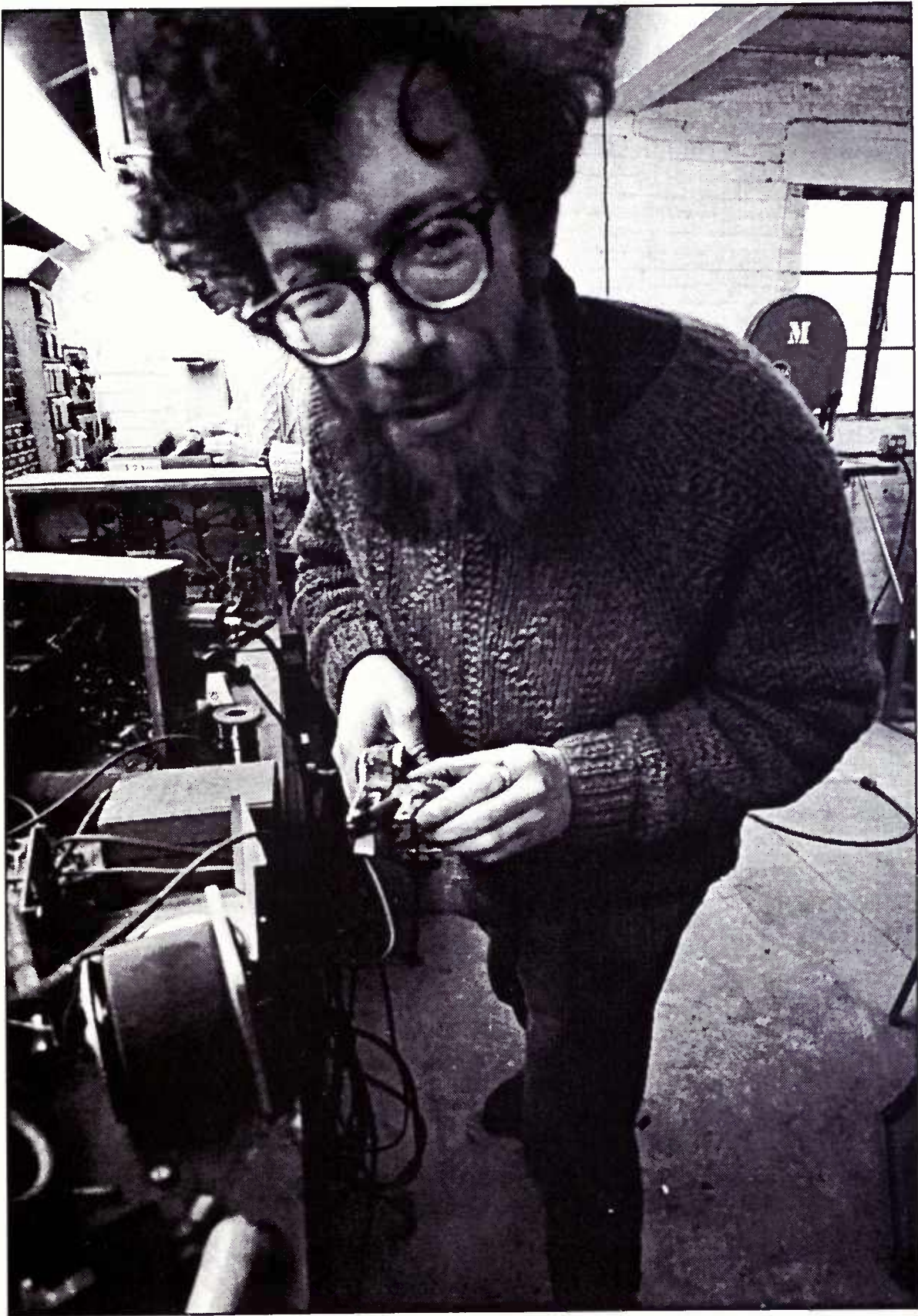




Gerd Stern, Michael Callahan, and Steve Durkee--otherwise known as Beardo, Electro, and Weirdo--of UCO, Woodstock, New York, circa 1965.







At the Garnerville workshop, USCO, getting ready for *Intermedia '68*, NYCA.





Ivan Majdrakoff and Gerd Stern, circa 1970.



## V 1970s: ART AND PSYCHEDELICS

Michael Callahan and Intermedia Systems Corp.

Stern: Now Michael Callahan--he and I are the closest of friends, and we work together. We were partners in Intermedia--he was not quite a shareholder on my level, but he's a director and an integral part. The problem with Michael is that he's drinking, and he's drinking more and more. His father, who left his mother when he was just a baby, was an alcoholic. This was surfacing, and it was surfacing in a fairly destructive manner. I mean, Michael is not above taking a few tokes but he's basically into alcohol.

Jonathan Altman

Stern: It's a very, very hectic kind of atmosphere because we've got things all over the place. In the meantime, Steve and Barbara have continued to explore for a place to buy for a low-energy center. There's a guy who came into our little world when we were still at the church named Jonathan Altman. Jonathan is the son of a wealthy Jewish family, the family that bought the Dead Sea Scrolls for Israel. His stepfather is the architect for the shrine of the Scroll, and Jonathan is really into what we're doing. He has promised to put up the money to buy the land for our low-energy center.

One day--and this is probably before what I'm talking about, again. I keep remembering that I'm not catching up certain parts of it to the other parts. You know how that is: it's like you're swimming in a school, and you don't stay in place; you swim a little faster than the last guy or a little slower, and you get caught up in some kind of a time lapse. One day they call up, and they say, "Gerd, you've got to get your butt out here because

we've found the place." Believe it or not, the man's name is Israel.

Now I've got to go back further, on a completely different strand. I'm brought up obviously Jewish. I told you I learned Hebrew by rote. When I was still in New York, in the days when I was living in New York with Jane, I spent a good portion of time studying the mystic Jewish tradition, which is Qabbalah-- particularly a little book called *Sefer Yetzira--The Book of Light*. It's been very influential on my poetry and on my way of thinking. Another mystical strand, one of my favorite poets in the world, was Yeats. Through Yeats, I get into McGregor Mathers and into that whole mystical world. Then later, when I come to California, this gets kind of *vermischt* with Grace's syncretic impressions that she's got me reading all of Jung. I had read a little bit before. And I'm also into Robert Graves.

So the whole thing makes sense, right? In terms of Judaism, I'm not observing but I'm connected to the tradition--more so than my family. One day, when we're still at the church, Ralph Metzner calls me up. Ralph was one of the original psychedelic trio of Tim, Richard, and Ralph. They did the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* together--I mean, there was also Tibetan tradition that comes into it. He called me up and says, "Gerd, I know you're into this Jewish thing," he's a Jewish refugee too, but he's not into it at all. He says, "You've got to meet this guy. I took this wild rabbi from Canada on his first acid trip last week here at Millbrook. He's something else, and you've got to meet him."

#### Rabbi Zalman Schachter and Other Eastern Spiritual Influences

Stern: So next time Zalman Schachter comes down from Winnipeg, where he's the head of the department of Judaic studies at the University of Manitoba, Ralph calls me, and we meet on Second Avenue at Rappaport's. And we fall in love. I mean, this man is a wondrous human being and an incredibly learned Judaic scholar. I take him up to the church, and he stays overnight, and I stick him in the "Tabernacle." He doesn't believe that this exists in the world. We had really locked right in to each other.

It's now '96, and so it's thirty or forty years later, and Zalman and I are still very, very close. He's gone through a lot of different stages. We see each other whenever he comes down, and the next time Judy and I travel across the country, we don't go straight across; we drive up through Canada, and we go to Winnipeg. We stop and see and stay with Zalman and his then-wife.

That was his first wife. He had married an Orthodox wife, and slowly he got more and more interested in studying other religions. There was a Catholic monastery nearby; he was very friendly with all of the people there, and he studied a lot of the eastern religions, and he knew most of the other gurus that were floating around that world at the time.

And so did we--Swami Satchinanda used to come up to the church, and the head of the Hare Krishna movement came up to the church. Suzuki Roshi, when he came east, came up to the church; that was great. Barbara and Judi didn't know what to cook for Suzuki Roshi, so they went out and got just the finest vegetables that they could, and they made a clear soup with little things floating around in it. He liked the soup, and he says [imitates Japanese accent], "Ah, what you call this soup?" I'm not good at imitating the accent, but it was a very strong accent. They said, you know, a little bit of this kind of vegetable and a little kind of that vegetable and some broth. And he said [again with accent], "Oh, we used to make that in the monastery. We call it garbage soup." [Laughter] I very much liked Suzuki Roshi.

We knew him through Richard Baker, who later on became Suzuki Roshi's dharma heir and became the head of the Zen Center here and was later scandalously dismissed. Richard and I were very close; he and his wife Ginny and their daughter and the rest of their extended family. I've lost touch with him regrettably in the last few years, but we hear about each other.

When we were living in Cambridge, Sally and I were living on Broadway in Cambridge. Richard came and stayed with us for some months because one of the major contributors to the Zen Center was a Boston banker whose wife was one of the leading exponents of the tea ceremony. The banker suggested to Richard that he come and spend some time in the investment bank learning about finances because he was running a fairly major enterprise by this time: the Zen Center in San Francisco, with Tassajara down in the Carmel Valley, and they had just managed to acquire the Green Gulch Ranch here on Mount Tamalpais.

When we visited Reb Zalman in Winnipeg, he had established in his basement--in his little study--an array of psychedelic lights and toys. He had a little strobe light and lava lamps and black light and tie-dyes, and he had surrounded himself. This whole interest level of his eventually estranged his conservatively Orthodox wife and his children because this wasn't the Orthodox way. He was developing ideas in writing and extensions of Judaism, and he understood that the gender approach in Orthodox Judaism was intolerable in terms of the twentieth century. If a woman couldn't, for instance, read from the Torah--

it didn't make any sense anymore. He extended the potential of Judaism into the twentieth century like nobody else was able to do. Now there are other groups that have followed, but his is the seminal energy of New Age Judaism.

##

Stern: Zalman came from a similar background, Germanic Jews. He was born in Vienna, which is a little different--Austrian rather than the German/French border. But we both spoke German. He was a little older than I am by just a couple of years. We forged quite a close relationship which has lasted over the years. When I talked about the apartment on Broadway, that was an apartment that we took over from Reb Zalman because he had been at Brandeis for his sabbatical year, which wasn't his first experience in New England. He had had a congregation in Fall River earlier.

Zalman came out of Lubavitch, the main Hasidic sect--he was a shliach, a "messenger", which is what the word means in English for the rabbi of the sect. He traveled through the Caribbean gathering funds. He slowly rose out of that Orthodox mindset into a very twentieth-century renewal tradition. If a religion doesn't renew itself in every century, it doesn't work that well. He has been the principal renewal agent in contemporary Judaism. And he was friendly with all of the elements that we've been talking about, like Ginsberg, and he now has a chair at the Naropa Institute in Boulder [Colorado].

I'm getting ahead of myself again, but when his marriage to his Orthodox wife broke up because he was expanding his consciousness in ways which were intolerable to the Orthodox set of mind, he had converted his secretary at the university, who was a very Protestant young lady. He had then married her. It was his second marriage. When he was in Cambridge, they were there together, and they had a child. He had children who were in their late teens by that time from his first marriage--three of them.

We saw a lot of each other when he was in Cambridge. There was an old Orthodox synagogue which had gotten kind of conservative. He did the high holidays there, and we went there every year, Sally and myself. Of course, Judy had known Zalman also, so there was a back and forth. In fact, when Judy's and my son was born, I called up Zalman, and I told him we're going to name him Zalman. Zalman said to me, "You know that's not in our tradition. We don't name people after people that are still alive." I said, "Zalman, you break rules every day, and now you're telling me that this is something that shouldn't be done; besides, I'm naming our son after somebody else whose name was Zalman." He laughed, and it was fine.



Zalie Yanovsky from the Loving Spoonful calls me up. We had done their very psychedelic program book, which their manager-- after paying us some thousands of dollars to do and having to print it for many more thousands of dollars--had destroyed because he didn't like the psychedelic image for the group. A real macho Italian mafia type. I suppose that's an unfair characterization.

So Zalie Yanovsky calls me up, and he says, "Gerd, wow, you named your son after me?" [Laughter] I said, "Well, not exactly, Zalie; I named him after Rabbi Zalman Schachter." And he didn't like it because, you know, he was still alive. But it's everybody's name who's named Zalman. So about a year later, Zalie calls me up, and he says, "Hey, we just had a baby! Guess what we're going to name him?" I said, "What are you going to name him?" He says, "Gerd. After a friend of ours who runs a kosher deli in Nashville." [Laughter] It wasn't true at all.

One of the people who lived at the church, Walter Gundy, was the road manager for the Loving Spoonful, which is how we had gotten this whole thing going with the Spoonful. There were a lot of involvements of various kinds with music, with architects, with collectors, with scientists.

Anyway, now we're back in Boston. Where were we?

Byerly: You were living on Broadway, on Central Square, with Intermedia.

Stern: I was talking about Richard Baker. Roshi Baker. And now, Sally and I, after years of living together, I finally persuade her that we should get married. You might well ask me why, but I'm pro-marriage. Like I said, I don't think--except for the circumstances--that I would have gotten unmarried, even from the relationship where we hadn't had a formal marriage with Judy. But I wanted to be married. For a long time, Sally thought that something different, maybe something better was going to come along. I was a lot older than she was, and she wasn't quite sure what she wanted to do with her life. I kept hitting on her, and finally she decided okay, we're going to do it, because we wanted a baby.

Neither of us wanted our parents involved for reasons which I think are fairly obvious the way I've talked about mine. Her parents were very staid. It just seemed like we wouldn't do that. So I asked Roshi Baker, who by this time had gotten Green Gulch going, and we had been there and visited, whether he would do the marriage, and he agreed. Then I called up Reb Zalman because I knew he was going to be in California more or less at the same time because his daughter from his first marriage was getting married in Los Angeles. I said, "Zalman, would you come up and be

with us during our marriage? Roshi Baker is going to marry us." And I gave him the date, and he was very cold on the telephone. I said, "Hey, what's going on?" He said, "I can't understand it, Gerd. Why didn't you ask me to marry you?" I said, "Zalman, you don't do mixed marriages." He said, "Who's not Jewish?" [Laughter] Now he had known Sally for some years by this time; she had cooked for him--funny thing is, she has some kind of an impression that she's the reborn of a Holocaust survivor. Eventually she converted, but at this time she was pure, both sides, Protestant stock and had no real connection to Judaism except through Zalman and myself. I was amazed because it would never have occurred to me that Zalman, who knew Sally that well, would think that she was Jewish. But that was his impression.

It was a great wedding. It was at Green Gulch, and it was in the Zendo. When we first went into the Zendo, Richard said we were going to do the marriage here, and we're going to have these big candles. I had brought these--oh, I haven't even talked about Venezuela--I had brought these enormous candles from the Venezuelan Andes, and everything was set, and I said to Richard, "Couldn't we do it outside under the redwoods?" He said, "We do all our marriages here in the Zendo." I said, "I know, but--." He asked, "What's wrong?" Well, there was this enormous Buddha, like fifteen or twenty feet high standing there, and I said, "Richard, one of the Ten Commandments--graven images." He looked at me and said, "Oh. I'll tell you what. You walk over to the Buddha and invite him to be a guest at your wedding, and everything will be okay." [Laughter]

Now, by this time, Reb Zalman had agreed to come up because he understood that he couldn't perform the marriage. So when he came I told him I'd invited the Buddha to be our guest, and it was fine with him. And during the ceremony he gave us a great blessing, which he is able to do. On top of this--Paul Lee--I was teaching at Santa Cruz at the time--who is a Protestant minister and a philosophy professor--I told you about him; he was the guy who sponsored us at Brandeis and MIT and then got me the job at Santa Cruz--is in the wedding. He's not supposed to do anything except maybe say a few words. But he gets up, and he goes through the whole damn marriage service. And Sally is stunned; she doesn't want any of this "to honor and to obey" and all the crap that we had managed to do without. We were somewhat upset, but he was an old friend, and there was nothing we could do. He just started it, and then he went through it. [laughter]

We had Bagavandas play the Indian instruments and chanted, and it was a great wedding. We had my favorite cheese--I come from a cheese family, and I'm now in the cheese business, but I've always loved cheese. One of my favorite cheeses in the world was

and is Peluso's Teleme Jack, which is a Californian cheese and which Jane had introduced me to at the Crystal Palace. Anchor Steam beer and Teleme Jack: a great combination. The Teleme has to be dead ripe so that it's completely liquid in the center. We had a lovely wedding meal at Green Gulch, and went off on our little honeymoon to the Santa Cruz mountains.

### John Brockman and USCO

Stern: When I had been working with John Brockman in New York, we got a lot of publicity--The *New York Times* magazine--and there was national and international interest in our work. People would call up and ask us things. One time we got a call from Hollywood, from Bert Schneider and Bob Rafelson, asking us if we would be interested in consulting with them about a project that they were doing at the time. Bert is the son of the former head of Columbia pictures, Abe Schneider. A very substantial force in the industry. They met us in New York, and they explained to us that they were doing this film with the Monkees, and it was a very far-out film. They were both big heads. Mucho smoke, in quantities that were impossible for me to even conceive of. The Monkees were not exactly what we thought of as our kind of culture, but they brought us out and paid us royally. John got the lion's share: he wound up with a yellow Jaguar sports car out of this gig. This is still during the days of USCO at the church, what we're talking about, more or less. It was winding down; I think it was after Barbara and Steve had left for the coast.

We weren't quite sure of how to handle this scene, but it was interesting; it was a very odd movie, the way it was shaping up. It had a lot of surrealistic aspects to it. The problem that they had was how to promote and how to name it and just kind of--we were communications experts, right? We were friends with and worked with McLuhan, and all these things and they were hip. I decided a great name for the picture would be "Head." Don't ask me why. It seemed like a name that people would really grab on to--and they loved it. Then I said, "The poster has to be somebody's head. It's gotta be a really wild poster." I decided that it should be Rafelson's head; Rafelson was the director. We set up in Hollywood a photography appointment, and we were all sitting there--John doesn't touch drugs at all; he's a real straight guy. And Rafe and Bert and I were kind of out of our minds, and Rafe says, "It's gonna be John's head!" I said, "Come on, that's ridiculous; it's not going to be John's head. You're the director, you're the head. That's the idea. The head." He says, "No way--it's going to be John. We're paying you; you're

not paying us." [Laughter] This totally typical kind of Hollywood trip.

It winds up being John's head. John's head gets transformed by Judi. We do this color poster on mirrored mylar--which is now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art--and it's an incredible poster. But to me it's totally meaningless because it's the wrong head. John doesn't want to have his photograph; he's really reluctant. But what can you do? I mean, there's the yellow Jaguar to pay for, right? [Laughter]

We compromise. Besides, Judi's really anxious to do this poster. It's a great poster; it's just a head in psychedelic colors and underneath it says, "Head." The problem was how to conceptually connect it with the picture. The picture didn't do well, and it's a very funny, very great picture, I think. But, it became an underground fad success in the years that followed, and it's done quite well. It's played on college campuses all the time and so forth. It worked out after a while.

In the meantime, while we were in L.A. for a few times running, we met a lot of people. One of the people who was associated at BBS, which was Burt's and Rafelson's and their partners' company, was Jack Nicholson. My old friend from the gallery, Dennis Hopper, was at the time making a movie with Peter Fonda and Jack Nicholson. Bert was putting up the bread, and I was asked to do the sound for that picture. But I was too busy. You know, the motorcycle picture.

Byerly: "Easy Rider."

Stern: "Easy Rider." Right. From then on, Jack and Bert and Rafe and I and John stayed pretty friendly. Bert was married to his childhood sweetheart from Mt. Vernon, New York, and had two children. And he had never sown his wild oats. All of a sudden he ran off and bought another magnificent house in the hills and lived with Candice Bergen for a number of years. And it was through Bert, who was the major financial supporter of the [Black] Panthers and a lot of other radical groups, that I met Huey [Newton].

### Huey Newton

Stern: I was drawn to Huey Newton because he was an intellectual of great depth who had read practically everything that there is to read and who liked to talk about it. He needed people to throw his

ideas against who would listen and be able to respond--hopefully respond very shortly so he could have 95 percent of the time to speak. My father had always told me that I should listen. In business, in anything, it's a lot better to listen than to speak. I'm not following his injunction. But I usually do; in business, he was absolutely right. In a lot of human affairs, you can manage and negotiate better if you listen more than if you talk more.

So Huey and I became very friendly. When I was at Santa Cruz, I introduced Huey to Paul Lee, and we managed to get Huey accepted as a student there, and he actually got a degree there. That was quite an accomplishment.

### University of California, Santa Cruz

Stern: It was kind of a strange scene at Santa Cruz because Paul was very interested in our multimedia work, and he had decided that Plato's Myth of Er was an incredible thing to do in multimedia. And he was right. And he's still right. I'm sure he's around; we've lost touch with each other. Paul and I had first met in Boston--I had told you about how he introduced me to Andre Ruedi when he sponsored us at Brandeis and then MIT, and we had visited him in his summer home in Wisconsin several times with a woodburning sauna which you then ran into the cold lake. Oooh, oooh. I can still feel the cold. We were great friends. He got me the job in Santa Cruz, first at College Five. He wanted me to produce the myth with my students, but it was a very difficult piece of work, and there were no funds. He didn't have the time to get involved, and I just couldn't bring it off. I was teaching a course in the History of Consciousness program which I had conceived of as a communications course about the history of technology, which is what they wanted, and which I wanted to call, "Turning Tools into Toys." I was thinking about McLuhan's ideas of tools as extensions. I was really into trying to get these doctoral students to understand the successive impacts that various technologies have had on human activity. I mean, the plow, the stirrup, electricity, capacitors, resistors--these are all concepts that are mechanical, they're electric, they're electronic, they're philosophical, and trying to bridge all of these different levels that are contained in the technological universe.

The course appeared in the catalogue as something like, "The Role of Technology in the History of Consciousness." They wanted a much more doctrinaire kind of an approach than I was taking.

Norman O. Brown, the author of *Love's Body*, was in charge of the History of Consciousness program, and he and I definitely did not see eye to eye. He felt that humanism and the humanities depended on ideas, not on things, and he resented the fact that I brought the engineer from the communications center to talk to my students about electricity. He didn't like the blue-collar approach. The guy was by no means blue-collar; this engineer was a Brit who had been one of the first video television engineers at the BBC. He was a sophisticated guy. Brown was up the wrong alley completely. Later on I had the pleasure when Brown came to consult me--he wanted to do a series of videotapes of his ideas and his work, and he wanted to know from me how he could protect the videotapes so that people couldn't copy them. Instead I explained to him my ideas about freedom of information and the technological unfeasibility of being able to protect a videocassette from piracy. And those were the early days; they weren't the videocassettes we have now. And they didn't have any warnings on them the way videocassettes have now.

Talking about video--I'm going way back--

#### The Venezuela Project##

Stern: The potential of using video for other than broadcast television started out when Sony first put its first half-inch portable on the market with a small camera, and we got the set practically immediately. We were involved--as I mentioned, I had been on the video panel and was still on the video panel at NYSCA--and we were friends with Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik and the Video Freaks, Global Village, the Vasulkas, and all of the groups that were involved in producing--video, documentation, and in the arts. In fact, I wrote a chapter in a book which was eventually published by the MIT Press regarding the funding of experimental television, which is an interesting history. I did some experimental videotapes at WGBH in Boston at their workshop. I also did a little work in New York: public television workshop.

One day when I was sitting in my office at Intermedia in Cambridge, I got a call--it was obviously a long distance away--and this guy in a very accented voice said to me, "Are you the Stern whose work is in this magazine that I'm reading?" It was an audiovisual magazine. "Is this Intermedia?" I said, "Yes, this is me." He said, "Well, this is José Ignacio Cadavieco from Caracas. Are you going to be in your office tomorrow morning?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Please save some time tomorrow morning

because we're going to come up and see you." And he hung up. I figured some friend of mine was joking around.

The next morning, these two characters are waiting for me when I come in to the office early in the morning. They're from Venezuela. One of them is José Ignacio, and he is the director of public relations for the Ministry of Public Works in Venezuela, and he brought along this painter and sculptor, Fernando Irrazabal, who is a kind of a jolly, chunky guy, and José Ignacio is a skinny--it's real Latino Mutt and Jeff country. They tell me this story about how they have to do this multimedia audiovisual for the World Bank about a project called "Col de Sur," which is the opening of part of the Amazonian jungle at the intersection of Venezuela and two other countries--Brazil and--. They've never done multimedia like this before, and they want to buy equipment from us like they saw in the magazine, and they want us to teach them how to use it. And they want to buy the equipment that day and leave back for Venezuela. They have about three weeks to do this show, and I tell them, "Forget it." I couldn't do it. "Don't worry, don't worry, we have a lot of people, and--" blah blah blah. I said, "But I can't sell you equipment. We make this equipment to people on order; we don't have it standing." "Well, tell me what you have and--" blah blah. They talked me into it. Three or four hours later they bring out this huge package of hundred-dollar bills and off they go, and the last thing they tell me is, "As soon as we get this finished we're going to invite you down so you can see it, and we want a seminar so that from now on we understand how to make multimedia. The minister will be in touch with you."

I figure, you know, we got thousands of dollars in cash, and we have no equipment. All right, Michael will make more equipment, right? We all can't believe this. A few weeks later, sure enough, I get a telex--this was before fax--and phone calls from the Minister of Public Works, and he invites us down to do a seminar on audiovisual in Caracas, and we get tickets for three of us--me and Sally and one of our photographer technicians, Nick McClelland, David's son--we fly down there, and we give a seminar, and we meet artists and photographers, and people from all the government ministries, and we have a wonderful time. At the end of the seminar we get fed well and put up at a great hotel--I don't know any Spanish at this point, but we have translators--and we get taken to the museums. They have incredible modern art. We meet poets, and a lot of them speak English.

At the end of the seminar, José Ignacio comes to me, and he says, "The minister says we can either pay you or if you would like a week to see our country, we will instead give you a tour of the entire country with a guide--" Fernando the sculptor, who did

speaking some English, "will take you around." So I think of my poor treasurer, Stuart Vidockler up in Cambridge, but I managed to forget about him, and I said, "We'll take the tour."

I didn't even know what the tour would entail, you know? The next morning we get a limousine not to the international airport but to a little airport in the middle of Caracas, and we have a military jet with two military pilots, and the three of us plus Fernando get in the plane, and we take off. We fly up to the Andes, and we land, and we see the whole scene there, and then we go to the hotel, and the next morning we take off for Maracaibo. I keep saying at each place, "Wait a minute; I'm not ready to leave," because you don't have enough time to--. All of these places are really super wonderful in various ways. We go to Maracaibo, which is where the oil fields are, and we go to the Amazonas, and we see Angel Falls, and we go to the gold and the iron Mines. It was just too much. And then we get on the plane and go home to Boston.

But it's not over. Now we're into the Venezuelan scene, and the next thing they ask us is--there's this famous Czechoslovakian group which did multimedia, and they had done an installation at the battlefield of Carabobo, which was the last battlefield on which Bolívar won independence for a lot of South America, including Venezuela. They asked me if I would consider producing a second production for the battlefield because the Czechs didn't really do much of a job on the software. The monument is incredible; a contemporary architect did it. We met the architect, but the production is kind of lame. This is a major production. "No problem; money's not a problem." All right, so money's not a problem.

We get an apartment that the government gives us at the Anaco Hilton right in the center of Caracas. Now I'm introduced to historians, and I start researching Simón Bolívar. Now Simón Bolívar was an incredible figure; a Venezuelan but studied in France at the time of all of the revolutionary thought. He wore a medal of Washington and Jefferson. He spent some time more or less exiled in Jamaica. He came from the upper class and by no means had any financial problems, but he was a philosophical democrat, and he wanted independence from tyranny. Without any resources to speak of, with military expertise learned along the way, and with help from Irishmen and all kinds of odd people from around the world, he managed to assemble a peasant army and drive the Spanish out. Unbelievable story! And then, because of political infighting, this hero dies penniless under a bridge in Colombia. And it's all true.



We managed to put together quite an audiovisual, and we installed it, and this took well over a year, and we had a few other projects going in Venezuela. So now I was commuting between Intermedia and Harvard and Venezuela, and we had some staff members down there, and we got very involved with the art world in Venezuela. I became very friendly with the director, Sofia Imber Rangel, of the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo. I was able to bring down for an additional seminar video artists Woody and Steina Vasulka. We did a show of video art at the museum with Charlotte Moorman and a lot of the American and South American artists who were working in video. It was creative ferment. We made a lot of good friends down there in the art world, and project after project developed.

Our major source of influence--this was in the days of President Caldera, who was a sociology professor and is now the president again except he has gotten really old, and he's more of a puppet than the president that he was the first time around. I became friends with the former president who really took Venezuela out of tyranny and then to democracy, Don Rómulo Betancourt. He was a sophisticated, generous, and wise politician. Our principal source of influence, who was originally the Minister of Tourism, was a man named Diego Arria. Diego had been with the World Bank. He was an internationally known figure, and he persuaded me that I could really be of great help in bringing liberal ideas and communications and American expertise to Venezuela. I brought people, consultants, from all walks of communication and political consultants, like Pat Cadell, to Venezuela. We were involved in a lot of work there.

There was the art level which was no problem because it was art. I was beginning to understand what we were doing not only for companies like Armco Steel in the United States--we did their seventy-fifth anniversary media spectacular in a geodesic dome which traveled all over the country to Armco plants. And they persuaded me that they were a people-oriented company. A beautiful show, but there were conceptual cracks in the propaganda. Now we're doing things in Venezuela, and now we're putting a huge geodesic dome in the Plaza Bolívar, and we have this program called "Caracas Para Todos"--Caracas for Everyone. By this time, Diego was the governor of the Caracas Distrito Federal, and I'm beginning to realize this is also all propaganda. I'm playing idealist and doing good by going into the barrios and photographing people who are helping to rebuild their own houses, and Diego being stopped by a woman whose heart--what do you call those things?

Byerly: Pacer?

Stern: Her pacer has run out of batteries, and he snaps his fingers--"Go get this woman a battery immediately," and all these great things are happening, but it turns out to be all kind of surface stuff.

Eventually--and I'm skipping a lot, a lot of high cultural points--Diego decides he wants to run for president, and we're all telling him he can't do it, he shouldn't do it. But he's determined to do it, and he announces, and the next day we are persona non grata because we're on Diego's trip. And as I say, I'm leaving out a tremendous amount of relationships and things. In the meantime, Diego has got to leave the country. He's married to, by this time, not to the lady he was married to when we first met him, but Tikki D'Asencio, whose family is one of the heavy-duty oil families in the country. Diego and Tikki have mucho money, a huge house in the country club section of Caracas, and an important art collection.

I go to dinner with the president; not Caldera by this time, but Carlos Andres. Carlos Andres is at dinner with his ministers, but he's not with his wife; he's with his mistress. He's a policeman, really; he started out as a policeman. He's stupid. I could tell you some very funny jokes that--the Venezuelans are very jokey people. We're having a marvelous dinner, and all of a sudden we have this wine which has been sent by Hans Neumann, who is an industrialist who was a refugee from Europe and now owns a chateau in Spain as well as an enormous industrial empire in Venezuela and is a director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, married to a ballerina. I take a sip of the wine, and the wine has turned to vinegar. I say to the Tiki, the hostess, "Psst--[mumbles]" and the butler with the white gloves comes and takes all the glasses away. Carlos Andres says, "Hey! Give me back my glass!" I mean, this is all in Spanish. He says, "That's one of the best wines I've had for years." Believe me, it's pure vinegar.

Now not only are we out of it, and we go home, but we are owed a lot of money by Venezuela which is uncollectible. When you're through, you're through. Politics is very strong. And it basically puts Intermedia into Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

#### Intermedia Goes Kaput

Stern: We had another couple of disasters at Intermedia, and Intermedia is kaput. So we fold our tents, and we move into a little office, and we go Chapter 11--we probably should have gone totally bankrupt, but I'm trying to save; we owe a lot of money, and I

don't like this idea of leaving people stuck. So I decide I'm going to spend a year or so closing it down in a civilized manner. We owe people projects that aren't finished. We were doing one at the time for Sangamon University, funded through the NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities], a transformation of the Lincoln Shrines, mostly in Illinois, into Lincoln sites. We did multimedia environmental settings in the courtroom where Lincoln practiced, the railroad station where he came back to on his campaign trail, one of the cabins where he grew up; it was a beautiful project. We had film and slides and sound. It was a solid research job, writing and production, and I did it myself because I really enjoyed it.

In the meantime, Sally and I were married, and we decided we were going to have a child. But we were going to live part of the time in Venezuela until that whole thing broke up, and we named our son Abram [spells] because, number one, I was working on Abraham Lincoln--I liked it. And in Spanish, Abram sounds kind of Spanish, too. In fact, one of Diego's bodyguards was named Abram. And then when we had the baby we told this big guy with the muscles, "We heard your name, and we named our baby that: Abram." He said, "That's just my nickname; my name is Abraham." Of course, Abram was the name of Abraham before he became the father, you know, in the Bible.

Now we have a baby, and we've moved back to Porter Square. Not to the same place, but to the same area. We've given up our great offices and we've sold our sound studio, and we're really three people instead of thirty to forty people.

We more or less satisfied all the Intermedia needs, and in the meantime my brother, Raymond, gets in touch with me. This is my half-brother who's about eighteen years younger than I am. And my father's getting much older. I think my father's by this time eighty--it was his eightieth birthday. Raymond says to me, "I know you have difficulties in Boston. I really need to have somebody whom I can trust to work with me; Father can't do it much longer." Ray's been in the business for a few years by this time. He says, "Why don't you come down and talk to me and see if you're interested?"

Well, I was offered a job at WGBH in experimental television, and there were a couple of other possibilities, but I was a bit burnt out. I was also strapped. I talked to my father, and my father said, "It has nothing to do with me; this is you and your brother. I wanted you to come into the business years ago. If you want to do it--I don't want to influence you." I don't think he really thought it was a good idea at the time. Raymond

and I made a deal, and I started commuting down to New Jersey three days a week.



## VI 1980s: FOOD AND POLITICS

Entering the Family's Cheese Import Business

Stern: So I was closing up Intermedia on one hand and starting to learn the cheese import business on the other hand. And through all this I'm writing poetry. Actually, Intermedia was a fairly low-production period for me because I was so busy creating, writing, producing. Sometimes we had three crews going. What I mean by crews is people doing photography, film, sound, and then having to put it all together--and design, visual, and actual presentation architecture.

While I was commuting, I was staying in the Soho loft of a good friend of mine, an experimental filmmaker and professor named Phill Niblock. He had done some work for us on the Lincoln piece, and he had done some work for us in Venezuela. I had first met him when I was on the New York State Council panels because he was one of the artists who had made a grant application, and we went to his studio to see his work, to evaluate whether we were going to give him a grant or not. I was one of the first people who really pushed for public support for his work. He's a first-class creative--not only filmmaker but also composer--and he's now quite well-known throughout the world of international avant-garde.

It was kind of odd because on the one hand there was all these arts endeavors, and on the other hand I was getting into the cheese business. Of course, I grew up hearing about cheese, and my father would take me down to the office, and I would go to the warehouses. It wasn't like I had never understood what the business was all about. And I have always loved cheese, which is different because for most of the people in the cheese business--it's just something that they sell.

One of the first pieces of advice my father gave me--which was, by the way, a very good piece of advice--was he watched me starting to get involved with cheese, and he said, "Gerd, we're

not in business to sell cheese; we're in business to make money." I have never, in anything I've done, been able to concentrate on that aspect of things--on making money. It has never seemed to me to be a positive motivation. Why? I grew up in a family in which materialism was everything. I guess I rejected it because I didn't like the vibes, I didn't like the principles, I didn't like anything that concentrated on money as an objective or goal.

My father was a very interesting, a very special person, but he wasn't nice. Ninety-five years old the man was when he died. Not once in my life of like over sixty years with my father did he tell me he loved me. When I said this to my stepmother sometime after he died, she said, "How many years do you think it was since he told me he loved me?" He was incapable of that kind of expression. You couldn't please the man. I had spent so many years estranged from him that the last years of his life I felt like, "Hey, he's my father, and I'm going to do anything that he needs me to do, and I'm not going to tell him he's full of shit, and I'm not going to argue with him. If he needs me to drive him someplace, sure." You drive him someplace, and you either go too fast or too slow. If he knew where we were going, which he usually did, you never took the right road. You couldn't do anything right for the man. And he was a cheapskate; he had plenty of money but he was a fucking cheapskate. He fought in the German army during the First World War on the Russian front as a cavalryman and he got frostbitten feet. They gave him up for dead. He was about eighteen, and at ninety-five he is still going and he's driving a Mercedes Benz in New Jersey.

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Stern: I was commuting. And these commute experiences--I've had a number of them: I commuted between Cambridge and Santa Cruz when I was teaching there; I commuted between Cambridge and Venezuela; and now I'm commuting between Cambridge and New York. What this does is--you're in two different places, and you have different things going on in the different places, and somehow you manage to both separate and integrate those two lives. Coming back to my family--re-relating to my father, to my stepmother, to my half-brother and my half-sister-- was an experience, and I felt very positive about it because I was trying to understand and to empathize and to use the wisdom or emotional stability that I had gained over the years to try and deal with a situation which had always been on my mind as negative relationships and now make them functional and positive for everyone involved.

However, there were attendant difficulties. Number one, I was the dependent. When I started out working with my family, they paid me in a sparse manner, and they put me on short shrift.

I very quickly understood what the business was about. From the time when I expressed myself that I knew nothing about business, I had some disastrous experiences with my associates in business, with attorneys, with accountants, with clients and customers. I wasn't educated or trained in business, but one does learn from experience, and by this time I could read fiscal reports, and I knew how to deal with business problems.

I came into a situation where the dynamics of the company, to me, were difficult and disorganized: the potential profit of the company was not being realized, and there was a personality conflict between my father and my brother which was not in the open. My brother was very busy. He was very occupied, but he wasn't working very hard, and he didn't put his mind or his energies--as far as I was concerned--to the benefit of the business. We had a secretary or a clerical person working in the office who spent most of the time on the phone talking to her friends and who was involved with a guy next door who was also in the same business and who was pumping her for information and giving her money on the side and using our company to make money for himself. That suited my brother because the guy was doing the work and my brother wasn't, so he had a lot of extra time on his hands to play.

My father was by this time in his eighties but he was totally *compos mentis* and had business principles which went back to the beginning of the century. He disliked the things that were going on, but in a sense he was afraid of my younger brother because he was my stepmother's darling, and my brother had attained some kind of ascendancy over my father which was very odd to me. When my brother first went into the business, they had their office in downtown New York where the cheesemongers were all congregated. They had a very small office with one telephone, and during the first week my brother said to my father that they should get another telephone. My father's answer to that was, "Can't you wait to call until I'm finished?" My brother waited a while, and he finally just ordered a second telephone. He found that that was the only way to cope with my father--to do instead of ask. By the time I was there it had gotten out of hand.

My brother, quite a few years back, had eloped with a Mormon while my parents were traveling--my father and my stepmother. And when they came back, this was a *fait accompli*. They were dumbstruck; they couldn't believe that, number one, he would elope, and number two, that he had married a Mormon--outside of the religion--had converted to Mormonism. So there was a hiatus when they didn't even speak. His first wife became pregnant very soon, and the family got themselves back together. The history goes further back. The only way really to cope with my parents



was to deceive them because they were so strict and so doctrinaire and so unwilling to bend in any way that you either had to do what they said or you had to deceive them. My brother always chose to deceive them. He was a good liar. For instance, they sent him to college--my brother got things which neither I--of course, I wasn't even from the same marriage--nor my sister--who was--ever got from them. My brother, when he was supposedly going to college, wasn't going to college at all; he deceived my parents, and they didn't find out about it for about a year. He was just going to the movies and having a good time.

Anyway, to start with, he was not working for my father, and he didn't want to go into the family business. He was working for another company in the office products business. My father wanted him in the worst way, and when Ray and his wife Dixie Lee were about to have a baby and were living in a small apartment, my father said, "Look, if you come to work for me, I'll buy you a house." Quid pro quo. Sure enough, Raymond decided "Hey, yeah, I'm going to have a house."

He started running the business on his principles rather than on my father's principles. He got my father to move out of downtown New York into New Jersey with the business. He incorporated, which my father had never done--some of these moves were very positive moves and smart moves. Some of them were totally against my father's style of life. He adjusted because, like I said, he was kind of afraid of my brother. Here I came into this equation, and I saw the problems, and I saw that I had to establish a role for myself which had nothing to do with that dynamic. Instead of just following instructions, I started branching out. I built new pieces of business and new customers--some of them things that both my father and brother thought were not possible to do or not wise to do or wouldn't work. And most of them did work in the end, and I also developed new cheese types which I thought would have some reason to fit into the market, which was not the kind of thing that they did. I used the kind of dynamic and kind of metabolism that I had used in the arts and then the media business, and transferred them to the cheese business. Basically, it worked.

In the meantime, the government regulations and other elements in the business were changing. My father was coming in every day, but he was tired--a lot of his buddies had retired or had died, and he was kind of out of the daily grind of things, but he was very critical of everything that was going on.

My brother had divorced his wife after starting an affair with the daughter of one of our suppliers. My father was very disturbed by this because this was a man he had known for many

years, and he thought it was going to wreck the relationship. There wasn't much he could do about it, and finally they decided to get married. My brother's new wife was very young and very beautiful, and they quickly had children. She changed rapidly, and although she was European, became more U.S.-style materialistic than anybody else. My brother had to buy a bigger house and bigger cars, and he became strapped for money, and then started playing games which skirted import regulations.

Things started getting out of hand, and we had an employee who managed all these matters and who was privy to all the tricks that developed. Eventually one day--I am getting ahead of myself and leaving a lot out--five guys stormed into our office with flak jackets with "Police" on them. They were U.S. Customs agents, and they took 150 boxes of papers and arrested us and took my father's private papers, and there was hell to pay. Actually, I'm still suffering from what happened. My brother was absolutely stupid because he had not kept the papers from all those tricky transactions separate from anything else, and the proof was all there of what had taken place. Since we were both officers of the company, we had to plead guilty, and we were heavily fined, and I was put on probation which just ended last month. I still have six years more to pay the government. On top of it, I decided to leave the company at that point. I had wanted to leave the company a couple of years earlier. Things had gotten out of hand, and the employee I was talking about left because she couldn't take it anymore. My brother was becoming more and more outrageous because as he saw that nothing happened to him, he felt that everything was going swimmingly. What he didn't realize was that some of his escapades in Europe involved him with people who didn't give a damn about him and who had no problem turning him in. He felt he was out of harm's way.

I was figuring that my father, who was by this time ninety, wouldn't be around for much longer. I didn't really want to leave the company while he was still around, but finally after the police and everything, and after my brother lied his way through the next series of events--I had a very good friend who is a criminal attorney here in San Francisco. We knew him through the Caens and through Beth. He came and defended us and made a deal with the government. The other attorney that my brother had originally gotten for us had told us simply to plead guilty and go to jail and serve time. My friend George Walker really broke that pattern and got us out with money penalties and probation.

I left. I tried to tell my father the truth, and among other things, to tell my father how my brother and his wife talked about him, my father. My father didn't believe me. He told me that I was abandoning my brother, and he didn't approve of it, but

I did it anyway. Now I had a difficult choice. By this time, I had learned the cheese business; there were people whose respect I had, and who wanted me to continue doing business with them. I was very tempted to leave the food business. On the other hand, I knew I was up against paying the government. I also needed to support my wife and my young son.

I wanted in the worst way to go back to the art world and the more civilized pursuits. I considered the options; I looked around to see whether I would be offered anything. There were no real opportunities in that world. I decided--when both our English supplier and our Israeli supplier wanted me, not the family company, to represent them--to open our own business.

I persuaded my wife, who had not been working but had been involved in some not-for-profit education in the child abuse arena and had been thinking about going back to school to get a degree--that she should help me in the business, at least to get it started. We worked out of our house, and it was heartening because here there had been all this bad publicity. I had the mindset that my brother had led us into this dark passage. On the other hand, I wasn't entirely ignorant and innocent. I could have left at any time, but as I explained, I didn't want to leave because my father was elderly, and I felt that I was so connected to him and that it would be painful to him. On the other hand, I knew that there was a lot that was wrong and that I was abetting it and sometimes even helping my brother. This is not really our central issue about my life but it's part of it.

At one point, my brother had made a deal with a guy, and he then made the same deal with somebody else. The first guy was an Italian, a Sicilian, an older man--practically seventy. He came into the office one day, and he said to my brother in very Italianate speech, "Hey, you made a deal with me, then you went back on it." Then he grabbed him by the crotch, and he said, "Your wife likes you that way?" Raymond says, "Yeah, uh-huh." He says, "Your wife likes you that way. You want to stay that way, you had better fix this deal." And he left. Our employee and I were there, and Raymond kind of laughed, "Ha, ha--he didn't really mean that, did he?" I said, "Damn straight he meant it." He said, "The old man is going to what?" I said, "The old man isn't going to do anything. He's going to pay somebody a couple of hundred bucks. What's the matter with you? Don't you go to the movies or read the papers? You know where he comes from?"  
[Laughter]

He managed somehow, with my help, to reconstitute the deal, but that was how he behaved. Our employee just shook her head,

and she said to him, "Get real. You're really asking for it every day."

We were fortunate, myself and my wife slowly started getting involved in the business together. She had never had anything to do with this type of work, particularly in the sales area. She's developed a lot of expertise, and we now have two little companies which manage to support us not in very luxurious style, but it's never easy, in my experience, to earn a living. Despite the fact that there was maybe a blot on my reputation, I became president of the American Cheese Society. My brother has kind of dropped by the wayside in terms of the industry; he's still around, but very few people want to do business with him.

The next step was--one of the things when I left the business my brother had promised to take care of the bank situation where he and I had both signed personal guarantees. He reneged on that situation, and hung up the bank for a couple of hundred thousand dollars, and of course eventually the bank went against both of us. I have a garnishee on my wages, and as a result of this and the total situation, my brother and I are not talking to each other.

My father died at the age of ninety-five, and the business problems weighed heavily on his psyche: First of all, the business had his name, Otto Stern and Sons, and it had gone down--he had a really high-level reputation all over the world in that trade. He took it very hard. He blamed me: "You're the older brother." My brother owned 100 percent of the company most of the time, because my father gave it to him, but that didn't make any nevermind to my father. I had come in late after everything had been organized, but to him the fact that I was older, I should have had influence over my brother which my father never had or never exercised. So that's what I mean--the man couldn't talk to him. Reb Zalman, whom I had always talked to about all kinds of situations whenever I had a problem, had advised me that somehow I should manage to make peace with my father. But I was never able to do it; I tried, but my father, number one, wouldn't listen. Number two, he didn't believe me. Although I helped him in all kinds of ways, it just didn't work. It didn't work.

Our practice when somebody dies--a parent, a close relative --is you say *kaddish*, which is a prayer. It's a blessing to Ha-Shem. We don't really mourn, because we celebrate life; we don't celebrate death. I said *kaddish* for my father for eleven months. Nobody else did. [chuckles] What gets into these strange relationships between parents and children. What really pleases me incredibly is that my children and I have a loving relationship--all of them. Even Jared the abuser. I can see that

the significant difference between my father's generation and me as a child, and my generation and my children. My children love me, I love them, we express it to each other. They know who I am, they're not afraid to tell me anything or for me to tell them. We're close, even though we may not be close geographically. We see each other a few times a year at least. It's a relationship without--there are no stop signs.

I think that that's not just something about me; our generation was able to achieve that with its children--those of us who had children. Tragically, a lot of the people who we've been talking about in terms of the world of the arts and the worlds of the bohemians and radicals--a lot of them had broken marriages, a lot of them did not have children. It's a really wonderful experience to be able to have that relationship between the generations which works. I guess a significant demonstration of it is why we're here. It is such a touching experience to me that Paul, the progeny of my ex-wife's running away with his father, should have had the idea and suggested that we do this oral history which he has supported. It's the kind of turnaround which one could never conceive of. It's a generosity and an openness of spirit which I think is typical of the next generation--I don't mean mine, but I mean his. And it's not just that he has the money, it's the kind of mindset that is capable of it. I think what it tells me is that history, as badly as we see that progress is not maybe--

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Stern: ...Sometimes we think that civilization is not necessarily progressive, that sometimes it's retrograde. Particularly in the Jewish context, a lot of people think for instance that the Holocaust is an indication that barbarism down through the ages--there has been no improvement, there is no progress in civilization. I don't think that's true. I think both from a viewpoint of ethics and a viewpoint of technology that our communication as human beings has been progressive and that people are in general--not in specifics, but in general--kinder and more conscious of each other than they have ever been before in history. It's maybe not a popular point of view, but I hope it's true.

In any case, during the time that I was involved in the business and when the business was really doing well, we were making more money than I had ever made before. I was actually able to take vacations, which I don't think I had ever done before in my life. I mean, I had gone places but there had always been some kind of a reason.

When I talked about Reb Zalman, I neglected to mention that when we had the sound studio we had produced a double album, "Tales of Reb Nachmann." Reb Nachmann was a major figure in Hasidic Jewry, and he wrote--or he actually said, and they were written down by a scribe--stories. They were tales that could be seen as moralistic. Not in the narrow sense of the word--spiritually moralistic. A lot of the Hasidic tales have the same kind of quality that Zen Koan's do. Reb Zalman translated these, and he told them, chanted them, and they were accompanied by music and by sound. There were two brothers, the Siegel Brothers, who were young rabbis--twins--and they did some accompanying music in the studio to it, and I got to know them, and I then produced an album of their songs titled, "Hallel." Hallel means "praise" in Hebrew. One of them is actually a niggun, a kind of a chant without words that the Hasids sing. One of them is called "Reb Gerd's Niggun" because I kind of improvised it.

### Jamaica

Stern: The Siegels did yearly trips to Negril on the island of Jamaica, and they talked so much about Jamaica to me and to Sally that we got intrigued. For years, we had not had a chance to go down there, and--we had actually had reservations to go somewhere else, St. Martens, but there was a hurricane and the beaches were wiped out. We just decided on the spur of the moment to get on a plane to Jamaica.

It was a wonderful experience. I had missed the black world a lot. I grew up and went to school in New York, and I had a few black friends, and they were just friends. The distinctions had not arisen. In the jazz world, I had a lot of friends. I won't say that Bird, Charlie Parker, was my friend, but I knew him. Percy Heath was a close friend. Other musicians and artists and poets that I knew--what had happened is that there had been a lot of noise in the system between blacks and whites. Then I was with Maya, and there were tensions and conflicts. Originally not between us but with the rest of the world. I can't remember whether I had talked about--we had to stay in black hotels, and it was difficult for me; I was the odd man out, right? Very odd man out.

Here now we were in Jamaica, a totally black world except for the tourists and the remnants of British colonialism. I made some very close friends there, and I understood that we represented for them a source of information, of food, of money--on the other hand, it wasn't like in Mexico where everybody's poor

and trying to take advantage of you. We had relationships, and we kept going back. Eventually, I felt like I wanted not to have to schlep everything back every time and that I wanted to acquire a place in Jamaica. One day a lady who used to give aloe massages on the beach in Negril said to me, "Gary,"--they have a hard time pronouncing Gerd, so they called me Gary--"I live up the way, and I bought this house, and I thought I bought the land but my cousin only sold me the house. I think somebody is going to buy the land and throw me off. I know you are looking for some place. Come up and take a look."

We had been looking in Negril, and it was actually my wife's birthday, and she didn't want to go, so I went up. It was a piece of land right on the Caribbean in a cove and right on a coral reef--not on a beach. She had told me to bring snorkeling gear. I went snorkeling--I love snorkeling. I love to be in a world where somehow nothing is conscious of you but everybody allows you to be there with them. It was like paradise. I thought to myself, Is it really possible that a piece of this could be mine?

She had told me that the land belonged to a Mr. Farmer and that she thought he lived in Toronto. She gave me a couple of phone numbers. It took me about six months. I thought I was looking for a Jamaican named Farmer, but what I really found was a Hindu named Varma whose family had been in Jamaica and moved back to Canada during the days when Jamaica had, in Manley's first administration, gone toward the Cuban Communists. And a lot of the people who had built some kind of wealth had left.

Indeed, I flew up to Toronto, he picked me up, we went to his house, he excused himself to meditate and pray in his little shrine room. I thought, "Hey, this is an okay kind of guy." And indeed, we made a deal for the land. It turned out that it wasn't just a little piece of a few acres, but it was eleven acres right on the seafront. It was really cheap, and I thought to myself, "How can one possibly own this?" In most places in the world, you can't even own seafront land. It's a narrow piece, but a very beautiful little cove. We built a house there, and the property is called Poetreef. It's been my place to write and to lie in a hammock on the veranda and look out at the sea and to understand how one can be in more than one place in more than one time in one's life. Slowly and slowly I've gotten to the point where I go there four or five or six times a year for a week at a time, and I'm able to separate from my business self. Until last month we didn't have a phone and a fax there because there weren't any lines. Now we've just gotten that, which will change things considerably. A lot of our friends have gone there to stay.

### Jamaican Marijuana

Stern: It would be wrong of me not to mention that the grass, the marijuana, in Jamaica is maybe not the best in the world but I would say the equal of anything anyone can get anywhere. It's fresh, which means that you get the feeling that you have something organic and unaged and unpreserved--and it's a somewhat different feeling than when you get something that's been lying around for a few months or even a year. Although it's illegal, it's fairly open as long as you don't try to commercialize, and I have no interest at all in being a dope dealer, and I never have had--and it's not expensive. So that makes for a very pleasant kind of environment.

### Rastafarians

Stern: Our associate and caretaker is a Rastafarian, which is a very odd religion or sect with mostly no organizational or institutional structure. Most Rastas are just single Rastas; they don't attend any kind of a community, but the principles and the practices are the same. They don't eat any flesh, they don't use salt, they don't use alcohol, they don't drink coffee--now various of them have different levels of orthodoxy, and they speak a slightly different language. The food is called Ital. "I" is very important, but it's not an ego "I"; it's always "I and I", not just "I." It's a very poetic involvement; the music and the lyrics are extremely socially conscious. The people all the way from Bob Marley down to the latest DJs are--most of them very un- or even anti-commercial. The sense of justice and ethics and moral practice are very high.

### Jamaican Food Imports

Stern: We've also gotten into business with a line of Jamaican food imports, mostly condiments, with some people who are exceptionally civilized and artistic people. That's been a wonderful kind of extra added attraction in the last ten years. A lot of the poetry that I've written has either been written there or finished, transformed, there. I have a series of eight poems that are poems with silkscreens by an artist friend of ours, David Weinrib, whom I mentioned, and who long ago had been Judi's lover between Steve and myself.



Global Village

Stern: The big mistake I made is--there are always these temptations in life, and Negril is a beach town which has been in the last decade urbanized and touristicized. Where there were little places, now there are large resorts, and I didn't want this to happen to the community where our house is, Cousins' Cove. Across the road from us, more or less, there was a parcel of thirty-eight acres which also belonged to my--by this time--friend, Ashoka Varma and his family. I was negotiating with him somehow to buy it all, although by this time I no longer had the kind of money that was needed. Some years ago, Ashoka fell down; no one knows whether he fell down because he had a stroke or he had a stroke which caused him to fall down, but his speech disappeared and his liberty of motion, and he has been in very bad shape.

I visited him a number of times, and then I spoke to his sons, and I said to them, "Look, there's this piece of land that I was negotiating for. Why don't you give it to me, and I will raise money, and we'll have a foundation in your father's name, and we will do things that are for the good of the local people. They need a medical clinic. I'd like to bring artists and scientists to live there and to learn and to teach at the same time, and I think it could work out." They thought about it, and they said to me, "We have a problem because we don't really own just thirty-eight acres but within a few miles of there we own about 400 acres. We're not interested in keeping it. We would like to sell it. What we'll do is we'll sell it to you at a price where you think you're getting the thirty-eight acres for free, but figure out how to buy the whole thing."

And I went to some people I know in Woodstock, the Wapners, and we got involved with old friends, an attorney whose wife is a sculptress, and they were very interested. We made a deal, and we paid a down payment, and then my friend the attorney had a heart problem and a triple bypass. On top of it, there were about a hundred squatters living on the land. What I did was I wound up with an enormous headache. [laughter] I was still involved in trying to get this not-for-profit foundation, the Global Village, together and to try to deal with the fact that I am now the white colonialist owner of land to the inhabitants who think that I'm trying to take advantage of them when I'm not. And I feel very compromised and ambivalent about being involved with it. I feel that what I should have done is kept my Poetreef acreage and not had been tempted by this ambitious project. That's life. One does these things, and then one has to deal with them.

**VII 1990s: REFLECTIONS****Writing Poetry and Memories of the Reality Club**

Stern: My poetry has been--I've been writing more and more every year, which has surprised me. There were periods in my life when I wrote precious little. I sometimes have a hard time breaking out of the business set of mind. However, when I'm driving or basically when I'm alone or when I'm with somebody who really sets me off, I've gotten to the point where there are very few situations where I'm unwilling to take out a piece of paper and pencil and write. I don't care whether it's business or love or what it is, but it's a necessity for me because I know that a phrase is there only for a moment. Memory is unreliable. Even if you remember the sense, you often change a word here and a word there, and it's not to the good. If you have it down and you want to change it later, that's one thing, but that feeling of it not being the way you thought it or spoke it is a strange experience.

**John Brockman**

Stern: This takes me back to John Brockman. At some point along the way, John Brockman, with a few other people, including myself--I wasn't one of the conceivers of this; it was really John's concept--formed "The Reality Club." We met mostly in New York, and we met to hear one another or some remarkable person in any field of endeavor talk about his present work and get the response of supposedly his peers. Multidisciplinary, not necessarily in his or her field. It was a tremendously inspiring thing to go to these meetings which were held sometimes in John's house and sometimes at the Rockefeller Institute and various other venues. Anything from six to twenty-five people would attend. Soon, the only way that you could become a member would be to ask to address or be asked to address the group and do a presentation. I was one

of the original members. It took a while before I had my turn, and actually it was the only time we came to San Francisco for a meeting, and we had programs, and I was on the program right after the psychologist Rollo May. I addressed the group with a poem which is titled "Poemthink." The idea of "Poemthink" came to me one day while I was lying in bed, maybe not ready to go to sleep, and I thought of the idea of thinking of lines of poetry and not writing them down--you know, as kind of a practice of what one could do with words in one's mind when one had maybe nothing else to do, when one was waiting for something. So instead of not writing that idea down, I started writing, and it got longer and longer and longer, and it turns out to be a very long poem which I gave to The Reality Club at this session in San Francisco. Heinz von Foerster, who was a cybernetician of some note, was in the audience; he was one of our members. He came up to me afterwards and congratulated me, and said that he felt--in fact, he got up and said out loud during the question-and-answer period, that scientists, who had logical minds and who were trained to think in ways which sometimes were not totally creative and constructive, could use this technique to enhance their process. Heinz was a cybernetician who was involved with Norbert Wiener and the initial group in cybernetics, and he invited me to publish the poem in a journal called *Cybernetics*, which unfortunately was short-lived. But it lived long enough to publish the poem, and I was very grabbed by that because to be in that kind of a context rather than in a context of a little poetry magazine was much more communicative with the world. I'll give you a copy of it.

It was even more of a gas--the piece just before my poem in the journal was a piece by Heinz titled "To Know and to Let Know," and I think it's an incredibly perspicacious and on-the-dot examination of knowledge and the psychology of how to think about what you know and what you want to know. It was an address that he originally gave to a librarian congress. Certainly the Bancroft probably has it, but I will give you another copy of it because it's kind of a manifesto for librarianship.

The Reality Club, unfortunately--John and I had been contracted to write a book together for a publishing company about media. We went up to the Cape--this was years and years ago--to start writing it. At the time, I was just starting to see Sally, and I invited her to come up to the Cape and stay in the motel in P.Town [Provincetown, Cape Cod, Massachusetts] on the sea where we were staying. We got involved in long hours of lovemaking, and John was a bit perturbed by that. We weren't doing the work he was expecting that we would do together. We never wrote the book, but during the many hours where he was next door in his room by himself, he started writing, and he published a book called "*By the Late John Brockman*." It was a series of aphorisms and

interesting ideas. He followed that with another two books, and they were very abstract and abstruse; they didn't have a very wide audience, but among the cognoscenti John became kind of a celebrity.

John was looking for a way to use his talents, and he became a literary agent. Later he allied himself with a very talented and beautiful woman named Katinka Matson, who was the daughter of one of the grandmasters of literary agents. They have developed their agency, John Brockman and Associates, into probably the leading literary agency in the country, and have become wealthy, very wealthy. Unfortunately, we've kind of lost touch with each other, which is a pity. The Reality Club, at first not only fed his intellectual curiosity but also fed his client base, kind of moldered and is no longer active. Its president, who was a physicist--

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Stern: Heinz Pagels--I said physicist; he was really a cosmologist--was the director of the Rockefeller Institute, and he was an odd, somewhat perverse person. He was married to Elaine Pagels, a MacArthur Fellow who wrote the book on the Dead Sea Scrolls. A very impressive lady and thinker and representative of the kind of persona that were involved in the Reality Club. Heinz fell off a mountain near Aspen, Colorado, some years ago to his death. I don't think he really had any business being there; I don't think he was in physical condition for such a climb. It was a somewhat strange way to go.

We had various odd scenes at the Reality Club. It started out with some very interesting people who were unrecognized. I think that would include myself. It wound up with fairly prestigious and established figures, which was kind of a progression not necessarily to my personal preference but certainly fascinating. For instance, one of the later people was Hugh Downs. Now Hugh Downs happens to be an extremely articulate and intelligent person but he wasn't representative of the people like Paul Ryan, the video philosopher that I've referred to early on, or even in the middle, people like Dennis Hopper. Dennis was a disaster; I had to take him out of the room. He was cursing and screaming and being the bad boy, which is an image that he cultivated in a certain period of his life. I've lost track of him, although I was very fond of him during the first years we knew each other when he was doing visual arts rather than acting or engaging in the Hollywood world.

Stewart Brand

Stern: One thing I've kind of skipped over which was brought back to mind by my talking about the session of the Reality Club in San Francisco was Stewart Brand. Stewart came into our life at the time I first met Steve Durkee. He was in the army--he had become an army photographer and, although starting out as an enlisted man, they had switched him over to a lieutenant because he was taking pictures of generals and command people, and they couldn't have enlisted men associating there closely with officers. So they made him an officer. He was very fond of heights and parachutes. When we started renovating the church and when we did USCO and even before that when I was in San Francisco, he became involved with our multimedia efforts. He had been in New York, but he wanted to move out to the Bay Area. I rented him the barge.

And as I say, he liked heights. There was one time we were all on a psychedelic trip at the church, and we went outside, and there was Stewart climbing a high-voltage tower which was outside. I mean, this was a really tall tower. A number of people kind of freaked, and we couldn't figure out quite what to do; it wasn't like we wanted to let anybody know what we were up to--or up on [laughter]. I finally said that we had better go inside and if we're lucky he'll just go up and come down, which turned out to be true--he just came down, and nobody noticed.

In fact, the first time I came back to the barge in Sausalito when we arrived from the east, we went in, and I couldn't find Stewart. I finally saw him sitting up in the rafters.

Stewart was an excellent photographer, and he had a companion--wife, eventually: Lois Brand--who came from an Indian tribe, and Stewart branched out from our multimedia shows and put together one of his own which we also used parts of for a poster in our work. It was called "America Needs Indians." Again, we had a mylar poster which was done at the church by Barbara and Judi. A really spectacular poster.

Barbara had studied silkscreening, and as I said before, she was teaching art at the time we were at the church, but she had studied silkscreening at a nearby convent with an artist named Sister Adele Meyers. Adele became very involved with us later on, and in fact she left the sisterhood with a number of her fellow sisters, but they stayed living in the convent as lay people for many years. She ran the Intermedia Gallery which was part of our foundation that came out of the church and which still exists. It's a 501(c)(3) and it's not as active as it was at one time,

partially because public funding has become so difficult and partially because some of us have scattered about. David Weinrib is the executive director; I'm still the president of the foundation. There are some activities going on at the church; the church is the property of the not-for-profit Church of the Tabernacle.

Stewart, of course, went on to do the Whole Earth catalog. It started out with him wondering why we don't have a picture of the whole earth. He made little buttons, and eventually this became a kind of a cause célèbre with him, and he did the whole catalog, which was an incredible success, progressively, to the point where I think it commanded one of the highest advance figures in the history of publishing. And guess who was the agent, and guess who introduced who to who? Stewart Brand and John Brockman introduced by me.

At the Reality Club here in San Francisco, Stewart attended --he was very interested in a lot of these ideas, and he was there for Rollo May, and he came up to me afterwards. I was to go on right after Rollo, and he came to me and said, "Gerd, I know poetry is important, but I think I'll get a better deal going out and lying in the sun on the beach, so see you." Kind of typical of Stewart. Passive-aggressive type behavior, right? It was interesting because I had talked before about the kind of attitudes that Richard Alpert had had about Steve. It was mirrored by Stewart's attitude. I mean, Steve was--and I assume still is--that kind of charismatic character that people want to glom on to. I've never been competitive about people's affections and relationships--I certainly value them, but who is who's best friend is hardly the way I go into relationships. [chuckles]

Stewart then put together a foundation with some of the money that he had earned. The relations--although I felt that we had been extremely supportive and got Stewart going, he had other fields to plow. Although Lois had been very influential in all his enterprises and had worked fingers to the bone, so to speak, with the beginnings of the catalog and so forth, when Stewart began to be rich and famous and a friend of Governor Jerry's then Lois was left by the wayside for younger and sweeter fillies, if you don't mind the expression. [laughter] I felt slightly amused by that kind of behavior from someone who supposedly is in the front ranks of the ethical environmental movement, right?

Israel: Karl Katz and "The House of the Diaspora"

Stern: I've left out a few things. One project which came through Karl Katz--Karl Katz had been the director of the Jewish Museum in New York during the time of our heyday at USCO. One of the rather elaborate multimedia shows we did had to do with the Lower East Side, an exhibition which showed the past and present of the Jewish neighborhood which had turned into a black and Latino community in New York. We did this with our usual techniques of multi-screens and multichannel sound, and I think it was one of our best efforts.

We got to know Karl. I worked well with him during that show, and he then asked me to become involved in a project in Israel: Beth Hateputsoth, "The House of the Diaspora." It's a museum in the middle of Tel Aviv University which deals with the 2,000 years of Jewish wanderings. The process at that time was just beginning, and they wanted me to come to Israel. There's some kind of a custom that you're supposed to, when you come to Israel as a Jew for the first time, you're supposed to do it on your own volition and your own support. I was in no position to finance a journey to Israel, and I also felt that since they were seeking my professional consultation and design and concepts in this project, it was inappropriate for me to do it on my few pennies. The gentleman, Nahum Goldman, whose project this basically was happened to be a very important personality who had actually negotiated the exit of the Jewish population from where I was born--in the Saar--at the time of the plebiscite when Hitler took over. In a sense, he probably saved me and my family, so it was a very interesting meeting in New York when Karl took me to meet him. He asked me what was going on, and I explained to him that I was very interested in working on this project, and he said, "No problem. I will personally pay for your stay." So I felt a little justified in my attitude, and Karl was pleased.

When we arrived in Israel--this was my first trip there--I met the two people who were the Israelis in charge from their side. One of them was a well-known poet named Abba Kovner, now deceased. He had been the leader of the resistance movement in his own country, and he had been effective in the wars for independence in Israel. He was a real hero figure. The other fellow, Shakje Weinberg, was the managing director of the principal theater in Tel Aviv.

The odd thing about this project was that the building had already been built--I mean, before the design and the concept of what would be in it; that's unusual in a museum that's built for a specific purpose. The Israeli government, during the period just

preceding this, was very hard up to find money to finance their military expansion which was necessary to protect the country. But the money had been raised for this project, and the fear was that by some compulsion, the government would take it over. So instead they decided to commission the architect and build the building before the design and plans for what would fill it would be ready. It was a quite magnificent building; it wasn't completely finished when we were there, but the spaces were already established.

Abba and I, at the first instance with a number of other people both from America and from Israel, were responsible for developing the concept. The basic ideas that we forwarded were to divide the museum into a series of Sharim gates. The concept of a gate or an opening to experience is very central to Judaism. That is how eventually the concept was developed.

I also decided that--my area of expertise was audiovisual design--we should collapse the 2,000 years of the Diaspora into a six-minute presentation which would be in a planetarium-type dome as a projection environment. The historians who were involved in the project were supposed to deliver to me a précis of the events and the structure what this six-minute experience would contain.

Well, the research just kept going on forever. In the meantime, there was also a need for a fairly sophisticated computer component in the museum for genealogy and for storage of information. This was some decades ago, and it was not as sophisticated technology as it is now, but Eric Teichholz, who was at the school of design at Harvard--remember, I was connected to Harvard at the time--I involved him in the project, and he designed the original computer infrastructure technology hardware and software.

The name in Hebrew is Beth Hatefutsoth, which translates to "House of the Diaspora." Historians just never came up with the research, and time was passing, and I got very frustrated, so I had the chutzpah--this is a Yiddish word which means "nerve"--to construct and submit a script. It isn't like I'm a historian, but I did know Jewish history, and I did have books to do the research, and we had done for another museum in New York a series of presentations on Jewish history which went along with models of synagogues throughout the ages that were constructed by craftsmen. And Beth Hatefutsoth had commissioned another set of these same models.

I apparently offended the professional acumen of these historians who were bigshots in Israel, and I got a telex back telling me that this was very embarrassing; how could I, someone



without professional historian experience, come up with this timeline? I was so pissed by the whole confluence of events that I resigned the project. Not until many years later when I was in Israel for cheese purposes did I visit Beth Hatefutsoth and discovered that a lot of the ideas that Abba and I had fielded were incorporated. They had taken the audiovisual experience-- they didn't understand audiovisual, so instead of a planetarium dome, they had a kind of a frontal diaper screen. What you need in order to really get people involved in such an experience is to have full surround. There's no way you can get it with a frontal screen; you can get various effects, and there are other things that help like three-dimension, but then you have to wear those ridiculous glasses, or surround sound, but it just doesn't work.

To me, this was the kind of compromise which people who don't understand what you concentrate on in McLuhan's terms is the effect, not the content of what you're doing. They don't understand it. That's got to be a basic design principle when you're designing communications. Why are you doing it? Not to achieve an aesthetic sense of, you know, "Wow," look what this person was able to do with space or with time. What you're looking for is the impression that you're able to make on people with the information that you want to communicate. The concept of 2,000 years of wandering of the Jewish people is not easy information to deliver--where, why, when, who, how--but it can be done. It didn't work, so I was again somewhat disillusioned by that realization.

An interesting Israel reverberation: I spent some time with Abba on his kibbutz. As you may remember, I had been involved with that kind of fundraising where I never got to go--by the way, that boat that we bought at the time to bring refugees from after the war from Europe to Israel, the *Ben Hecht*--I told you it was funded by Ben Hecht and Harpo Marx. Harpo didn't want his name on the boat because his brother Groucho didn't approve of the whole enterprise. [laughter] So it was named the *Ben Hecht*. He was a screenwriter and a famous Jewish persona. He was gung-ho. But that boat was seized by the British, and all of my friends including Harry Herchkowitz, the editor of *Death* magazine, were imprisoned in Acre prison. So I was really lucky that when we drew lots, I wasn't one of the crew. I guess I was lucky; I don't think it's an experience that I needed, to tell you the truth, although I'm sure it would have changed my life.

Here in the cheese business, we were approached through other associates to buy cheese from Israel. My father, in his particular class of wisdom, told me to forget it: "You can't make any money, and they're impossible people to deal with. They came to see me before; they think they're always right, they don't

listen, the prices are no good," you know, total rejection. I was the kind of person--and I think I still am--who, number one, knew that the industry was changing, and number two, nobody else wanted this opportunity. Well, there weren't that many opportunities left which were open. So I grabbed it despite my father's and brother's protestations. And when our business fell apart, and I moved on to my own, it was something that I had started, and the Israelis wanted me to continue it. It was a little more complicated than that, but over the last ten or twelve years, we've managed to grow--

[Interview 5: April 18, 1996] ##

Stern: --managed to grow it from a business of importing from Israel maybe forty tons of cheese a year to a business of about a thousand and more tons of cheese a year. Now that it's there, there are other people who would like to have had a piece of it, but since so far we've been able to maintain our privilege of representation without too much competition. Business is a whole different world than art, but it has its own principles and satisfactions. I must say, I've gotten a lot of satisfaction out of doing business in Israel and making it work. And also I've gotten to go to Israel several times a year, and that has been influential in my poetry and my thought processes.

I tend, as I said before, to be interested more in the mystical and spiritual parts of Judaism than in the ritual and observances. Although I deal on a daily basis with kosher products, I don't keep kosher myself. Through Rabbi Zalman Schachter, I was in touch with the most liberal elements of Jewish observance. His congregations--women read from the Torah. But for instance, I can't take reformed Judaism because what happens there is that they do all the work for you; the spirit of Judaism as far as I'm concerned is that the prayer comes from the people and not from the stage. In the reform movement--at least the kind of traditional American reform movement--the rabbi and the cantor perform, and the congregation sits and listens. It's not conducive, I feel, to partaking of a spiritual experience. The saying out loud and the chanting of the words are what carries you into the significance and the meaning of the relationship with whatever binds the community, and the community to the Godhead or however you prefer to refer to it. The sound of Hebrew, the sonorities, are something which I think come out of the same place that my poetry comes out of.

So at home I attend a small Orthodox Labavitch congregation which happily appeared very close to home within the last year and a half or so, and it's made my life much easier in terms of being able to participate in some kind of formal practice. Before that,

I was kind of isolated and only when I could get to where Reb Zalman was did I really get into that conduit and that experience.

### Returning to Poetry

Stern: So I'm not quite sure where we are in terms of timeline. I think we're fairly close to the present. During the past years, from a time when I really only engaged in my visual and kinetic and audiovisual poetry, I've come back slowly to the point where I mostly only write poems on paper and say them as breath. The return has been quite satisfying.

It's not satisfying in the public mode, but I've never really experienced a measure of success in the public mode as a poet who writes poems. When we were doing our audiovisual and multimedia and artworld thing, there was a lot of success but it had fairly negative side effects. It tended to emphasize ego gratification which for some reason doesn't settle well with me. It also has to do with pushing your work out into the world in a fairly aggressive and competitive manner which also doesn't suit my personality. I will admit that I have certain resentments and feelings of not being appreciated as a poet, both from my family and friends and from the world at large. But in the balance those don't come very often, and they're not very important compared to the fact that I know that my poetry is me, and that it satisfies my standards of excellence and my standards of communication. It happens that I'm quite aware that my poetry is particularly obscure, and it's significantly experimental. The major reaction is that people don't understand it, and I keep telling them it's not necessary to understand; it's just necessary to listen and to take whatever there is, and there are things to take.

What I mean by, for instance, "resentment": at one period of my life, I really felt that the homosexual clique in poetry was rejecting me and not allowing me to have the kind of exposure that would otherwise have been possible. I certainly was aware that the academic portion of the poetry world had no use for what I was doing. During the time I was married to Ann, she at first couldn't even understand how people like Ted Roethke and Stanley Kunitz, and I had known Dylan Thomas, and how these people could actually take me seriously as a poet; after all, I didn't have a degree, I hadn't studied poetry, I didn't know the difference between a villanelle and a sonnet. It happens that I do know the difference between a villanelle and a sonnet, but you know, that kind of attitude; she was not only a graduate but a post-graduate, and there's a kind of elitism. Of course, the fact that she had

been so powerfully attracted to this kind of a rebellion at first --that kind of reversal that happens so often, and which has happened often in my life in my relationships with women--is something that I would like to get into.

### Sexual Identity

Stern: What I feel is that throughout my life, my drive toward sexual gratification and satisfaction has been both a compulsion and a direction, and it has been a very positive influence in terms of imagery and motivation and intention, and also a rather negative effect on limiting my ability to understand the limitations of relationships and to achieve some kind of rapport devoid of desire and need and emotions which aren't necessarily--in the end--positive. They seem positive, and I have a feeling that it must-- I grew up in an era where Freudian ideas floated around, and I haven't even talked about the period when I was leaving home and being exposed to a lot of ideas which I had never heard of whether they were political--Marxism--or Freudianism in both the sociological, psychological, and even political terms in which they were seen in those days.

My mother's death at a very early age--I really can't tell you how that affected me. I was protected from it by my maternal grandmother. I had a rather strange experience of my father withdrawing his presence and being taken care of first by my grandmother and then--when she left for America--by my stepmother's mother and sister when I really didn't even know my stepmother much less understand who her mother was--and I didn't understand the relationship. And then the journey to get the visa, which was a kind of a terrifying experience--away from home and not like going to Switzerland for vacation and swimming in the Vierwaldstätter See on top of a St. Bernard dog with a bridle with my grandmother, but being, as I remember it, in a single bedroom with my stepmother who was a very attractive woman but who was neurotic in the extreme and a lot of tension with my father going to get papers. I had no understanding, and then getting on the boat and winding up here and getting off as an invalid and getting into the hospital.

My stepmother was a very attractive woman, and I was a young boy, and she would expose herself when I was around. I didn't have my own bedroom because my sister had been born and took my bedroom. My father, as always, was this very strict disciplinarian, and I often had to eat in the kitchen because I ate too slowly and I didn't eat correctly. I was wearing shorts

when everybody was wearing knickers or long pants. Not too long thereafter I was able to integrate and facilitate, especially after my experience at the Psychiatric Institute, I took Dr. Hambidge's advice and I understood that I had to go out and live my own life. I wasn't going to live my father's life, so it was rather ironic eventually that I came back to the business and helped take care of my father in his later years.

But it worked because by that time I didn't have a lot of negative energy going on the relationship anymore or resentment. I resented the fact very much for many years that he was not willing to cough up the money to send me to college. He hadn't gone to college, but I understood afterwards; I mean, here's a man who was born in the 1800s, who grew up before telephones and electricity, really. What can you expect? Sometimes what our children expect of us is a whole different level of what I would consider a real luxury. Our children take it for granted. I didn't take it for granted; I didn't get a watch until I could buy one of my own, and I got one for a Bar Mitzvah but I was only allowed to wear it on special occasions, not on a daily basis--it was an object of value, so weekends maybe.

When I was in high school, my male cousin and I were obsessed with masturbation and with young girls. But I had heavy glasses, I was a sissy, I didn't know how to make friends and influence people, and I just couldn't get it together. Finally, when I met all the people from the High School of Music and Art, and I started making friends and spending time with them listening to classical music and jazz and folk music, joining a square dance group--here was this refugee boy dancing American square dances with the Margo Mayo group on the ice rink in Rockefeller Center for the United Nations. Looking back on it, it's pretty out of it, but it didn't seem strange at the time. What seemed strange to me is that when I was doing that, and I came home late at night, that my father acted like I was some kind of criminal and all I had been doing was square dancing or looking at the stars in Central Park with the Junior Astronomy Club from the museum.

I remember my first experience on the roof of Julia Pearl's apartment when Naomi Sternberg stuck her tongue into my mouth. I mean, it like was a revelation, right?

Ginny. Ginny was much older than I was, and she was a tiny little lady, very pixie Irish--her hair floated around her, and it was like being with the Faerie Queene. I met her through this homosexual United Nations guy, Ellis, and she was Paul Goodman's first wife; they had been apart for a long time. She took me home, and as a favor, really, she took me to bed. It was a

totally transformational experience for me; it changed my life from A to Z. Why? I don't know; I can't tell you.

But from then on, I was confirmed--I wanted it, I really wanted it very badly. I looked for relationships, and I found them. They were always, I felt, in the first few years, more serious to me than they were for the women. I was wrong about that. I was scuffling through life: I was working at something where there was never enough to pay the rent and to do everything. Most of the young ladies, girls, artists that I knew and went to bed with, came from well-to-do families, and here I was living in the Village, basically on a level which I equated with the romanticism of things like *Dead Souls*--I was into Russian novels.

I had been involved with an acting group when I was in high school and all my friends from Music and Art were involved in it; we did Ibsen, and we did Chekhov and Pirandello at little library theaters in New York public libraries and also down at the Cherry Lane Theater in the Village, which was a historic little old falling-apart theater where Eugene O'Neill had produced some of his plays. And we re-did one of his plays there.

I was envious of other people's sexual relationships. When I finally kind of fell into Jane's arms, I didn't think of it as being a maternal relationship. But the whole idea of consummating relationships and oral and coital sex were much more than physical experiences; they seemed to me--and of course I was familiar with literature, but at that time the whole idea of sex and literature was very different than it is today. I was also familiar with the mystical literature which alluded to sex as a spiritual experience. I've never been faithful in my life. I've lied about it. And I've never had a serious relationship in which the woman was faithful in my life--up to the present time. I don't know whether I believe even the possibility of such a relationship. As a result, my level of trust is not very strong. I tend to feel that I am a trusting person, and I trust people until they become untrustworthy whether it's in business or other relationships. I learned that this was an area, the area of sex and physical sexual relationships where you can't trust people. That doesn't seem to matter to me anymore. It did; I was very jealous when I was with Jane. I mean, I couldn't do much about it because she was in charge, and I was hysterically jealous thereafter. I now can experience the emotion but it doesn't have the intensity for me, and I can shrug it off. But I don't trust my wife; I know she lies to me about that and about other things. I feel that that was true with all the other women that I've related to in my life, that they lied to me. I don't know what that means; I don't generally feel that I can extend my experience to everyone's experience. I believe that there may be people who were very

different in the world and have had different experiences. And I know that in other cultures, things are different. In the culture that we're speaking of, I think this is extremely typical and the majority experience. I've heard it from lots of other people of both genders, whereas people claim to a level of propriety--I don't think it exists, actually. Most people that I've dealt with have a very sexual side, a very wild side, of their persona, and when they have an opportunity to engage in it whether it's a positive experience for them or not, they go for it. They don't think of--hey, this is not going to work for the rest of my life; they do it, and they hide it. I've done that over and over and over again in the past. I'm at a period in my life where I am sad that it no longer happens to me, and I don't know why. I don't know whether it is just that the climate has changed so much because of AIDS and other kind of reasons or whether it's my age. I mean, I know that I'm not capable of very much sexual performance at all any more. Basically because of the fact that my wife and I are not intimate, for some years I've had to resort to things like massage parlors, which is something that in most of my life would never have occurred to me to be even a possible kind of experience. Now it seems like an adequate release, especially when it's not too expensive, and a way of avoiding the pitfalls of getting rejected. The rejection experience is something that for decades I hadn't been familiar with. I was familiar with it when I was in my teens, you know. Over the decades, it just about never happened until the last few years in my present marriage.

### Sexual Thesis in Poetry ##

Stern: I would say that--and you'll see it when you read my poems--that a lot of my poems either touch on or are centrally about this topic. It's not that I want to expose all the relationships that I've had, but I've had affairs which have lasted fifteen or twenty years through various marriages on either side, which were very intense affairs and which changed my thinking about life. For instance, when I was here in San Francisco with Judi, my nurse, and I was preparing to do the performance at the San Francisco Museum and to mount the show, I needed help. Two long-term friends of mine--a wonderful, wonderful painter and poet, Bob Rheem, and Liam O'Gallagher, who had lived together for many years and were friends of people like Huxley and Jimmy Merrill--lovely people--they introduced me to a young extraordinarily beautiful--I don't know what to say anymore; whether to say girl or woman--in any case, another angel named Judith McBean.

She was interested in the arts, and she was looking for something to do. She helped me organize the show and this performance. The attraction was extremely magnetic, and it took a while, and it really wasn't consummated by a sexual relationship until much later, but it was so intense that she asked me to go away with her to Greece. I was strongly tempted, but I had been involved already with a society marriage which had failed, and I had been involved with someone who had grown up with a lot of money; it had been a destructive influence in our relationship. I couldn't do it. But on the way to Greece--by this time I was back in Woodstock--she came through New York, and I took her up to Paul Williams' place on the Cape, and we made love. It was a transcendent experience, at least for me. I had very mixed feelings about my decision. We wrote, and we stayed in touch, and she then married a friend of ours--another socialite here in San Francisco--and our relationship was just kind of touch-and-go. Then she had a child, her marriage broke up, she went into a horrible period of drugs and alcohol and self-destruction, and she called on me for help. I tried but she was too far gone. It's taken like twenty-five years for her to get herself physically rehabilitated and psychologically rehabilitated. She bought one of my big kinetic pieces years before and donated it to the Oakland Museum. Now she's remarried to a cowboy; she's a horse woman. We haven't seen each other for a number of years, but the tug of that relationship and the thread of it has persisted throughout my life for decades.

I couldn't really say that it's a question of regret, but my image of Judith--it's odd; I've been with a number of Judiths in my life. My wife whom I was never married to was Judith. Judith is Judith. My present wife's name is Sara Judith. [laughter] To a poet, the sound of names is a sonority which has significance. Judith is also resonant to "Jew." The fact that none of them were Jewish [inaudible; laughter].

There's my other friend who is also from San Francisco society and with whom I actually--while I was married to Ann, we had a little secret retreat in North Beach at which we would meet for lunch and engage in hours of acrobatic sex together. Through her three marriages and my--well, the first one had been over already when we met and our friends in the artistic and social circles in San Francisco we keep meeting and remeeting and keeping the relations going, although no longer maintaining the sexual union. She's been like a mother to my daughter.

Now we haven't had a physical relationship for ten or fifteen years, but the reality of the physical relationship that we had is still very much part of our relationship. It's a bond, and it's not a cause for suffering; it's a cause for joy. And the



fact that, for instance, at this time when I'm sixty-seven I haven't had a holding physical relationship with anyone for the last four or five years--while I haven't been actively looking for a new relationship, the fact that I've missed that contact, I mean, for a person one of whose important poetic phrases was "contact is the only love"--I had a response from an artist who made for me a beautiful graphic piece which said, "Love is the only contact." [laughter] I don't think this is one of those places where both directions work equally well, though; I think "contact is the only love" is the correct sequence of that phrase.

These things that go two ways are fascinating to me. I wear a ring which I was given first by Rabbi Zalman Schachter--a little silver signet ring that he had gotten in Israel saying "Gam Zeh Yavor"], which means "This too shall pass." The incredible thing about that phrase is that if something is really painful and disturbing and destructive, "this too shall pass" is an effective mantra. If you are in the midst of a--whether it's sensual, sexual, emotional, artistic--experience of bliss, "this too shall pass" is also a very interesting piece of information.

For many years, I was conscious of Goethe's last words which were "Mehr Licht" ["More light"]. Now I've always been involved with light as a medium, as a source of illumination--lux. "Mehr Licht," in my early years of thought, meant that he was asking for more light as he was going out into darkness. I was sitting at Millbrook years ago with a lady named Susan Firestone, and we were talking about this, and she said, "Gerd, he was seeing the light." He said "Mehr Licht" because he saw the light; it was an out-of-body experience. You can read about it all over the place. I mean, read the Tibetan Book of the Dead. You don't understand it? He saw the light, and God knows which one it was or whether it was either, but both those possibilities are there.

### Kinetic Poetry

Stern: One of my favorite expressions, a mantra which I wrote during the USCO days which kind of came out of this ring--funny thing is, this ring, I was snorkeling on the reef at [Negril?], and my little silver ring--which was fairly tight on my finger--just fell off, and fell into the coral reef. I couldn't recover it. That ring had passed through many hands because my custom with that ring was if I saw somebody who was in trouble or somebody died or somebody was sick, I would take it off my finger and slip it on theirs and say, "Wear this for a while." It always came back to me. But within recent years I had these made for myself and my

wife and for Radha, my daughter, and also for Reb Zalman. It's an important kind of symbol to me. But the mantra goes, "Take the No out of Now, then take the Ow out of Now, then take the then out of now." Of course, you can repeat it ad infinitum. I've given it to a number of people who say it works. There's a short form of it, which is "NO OW NOW." When we were doing our kinetic poems, we built electronically--I still have one of them; we built quite a few of these things which flashed "NO OW NOW" because you've got the three letters, and the three words are composed out of the same three letters.

We built the first one on a commission for Sister Mary Corita and Magdalene Mary who at the time were involved in the Convent of the Immaculate Heart in Los Angeles; these were two artist nuns, and they had incredible energy and an incredible collection of art, a lot of it kinetic, and they taught--and I did some workshops for them. I was introduced to them by a German professor of art who lived down there and who had worked with the Bauhaus crowd, a friend of Ivan Majdrakoff's, Paul LaPorte. You know, the networked friendships in my life have been, I think, in a sense the most important sort of intellectual and artistic influences.

The opportunity to do this oral history is kind of an endgame product of this network--by endgame I don't mean to suggest finality, but I'm feeling now that I'm recouping and regenerating materials and experiences that have been influential and effective--effective in terms I was talking about "never mind the content; look at the effect." In all of the multimedia work that we did, that was the principle that I had taken out of McLuhan and that I was trying to put into practice.

One of the performances that I conceived of--which happened in San Francisco in those same years as the first museum show at an old movie theater in North Beach--was called "The Destruction." You will see in that brochure I gave you a copy of the announcement for it. The idea there was to have people come and bring objects which were meaningful in their life, but which no longer were necessary to them. We would destroy them on stage in a symbolic act that would perhaps free them of whatever possession that that object had of them or whatever necessity that it represented. It was a period when the world was conferring about destroying weaponry. The question was what reverberant effect mounting such a performance in a tiny little place with a small group of people would have on the world at large. We got network television coverage, we got print coverage on the wire services, and we got local coverage, aside from the effect on the hundred or so people who were in the theater and who paid admission to come.

We had a crew on stage; every object that was presented was destroyed in a different fashion. It was an exciting evening. What I wanted to illustrate was the content of that evening was not the important solution; the attempt to influence was the reverberant effect that it had on both the people who participated--the audience--and the millions of people who were exposed to it through the media. It probably cost--aside from the rental of the theater which was fifty or sixty bucks or something like that--I don't think we spent \$150 on doing it. The media probably spent fifteen, twenty, thirty thousand dollars on pushing this thing out. That was the kind of idea I was experimenting with in the same sense as when I was talking about the three simultaneous movies of the motorcycle, we were trying to basically fuck around with people's sense of time and to impress them with the effect that distorting time perception had on their personals. What is really real? Is it the motorcycle on the center screen which is ninety or a hundred frames ahead of the one on the left, or maybe the left and the right sides which are in total sync. What's in sync in your life in terms of time? What's happening out there? What's happening in here? Talking about it is one thing; putting it into the form of art is a completely other thing.

### Disillusions, Obscenities, Corruptions

Stern: Working in the media was very exciting, and it was very engaging. Over time, I lost it. Didn't want to do it no more, no more, no more, no more. Why? Partially, I and the other people who were working together started it experimentally and on a pure level of dealing with consciousness and artistic forms. I'm not saying that I wasn't personally responsible for it, but over time these ideas and these ways of dealing with each other--you know, using strobe techniques, cutting up film into tiny little segments, dealing with multiple channels--got out into the world. We used it, other people used it, in ways which had to do with buying things, selling things, dealing with material which I find obscene and unsavory--mostly violence. [chuckle] That's about the only thing that I really feel is obscene and unsavory. Like I told you about Venezuela, I got disillusioned. Here we were, "Caracas Para Todos," and we had this 360 degree projection environment, and we had this little boy playing an old tire hoop as if it were like a toy hoop, and you could see him going straight around you on the screen, and there was a beautiful song that was written by a folklorical Venezuelan, Fredy Reina. A gem of a genius of a man. A cuatro player--a four-stringed little folk guitar.

Yet, at the end it was propaganda for a regime that was repressive, unconscious of real democratic intention and motivation and I, we had been used to promote their agenda, and here I was showing the president of Venezuela and his retinue what we had done. I was already conscious of the corrupt nature of what had happened to our original experimental impulses. So now to be co-opted as propagandists for something which I had felt was for the people--"Caracas Para Todos," "Caracas for Everyone."-- became painful. It wasn't really Caracas for everybody; it was Caracas to make the president and his ministers rich and enable them to be bigshots. That wasn't the only experience of that kind that I had. And I kind of withdrew; I kind of decided that writing poetry in the stillness of myself and dealing with cheese which, despite what nutritionists say, I think is a healthy thing to eat and is not harmful to other human beings, was a better way to go than to stick your head out into the world and deal with art collectors and museums and other patrons who want to use your work toward their purposes rather than your own.

We have two words in Hebrew; one of them is "dayenu"--used in Passover--which means "it would have been enough." It's like if he had parted the Red Sea and drowned all the Egyptians, it would have been enough. In that way, I've always asked at each Passover Seder my friends to say what would have been dayenu in their own life. I used to say to my father, "If you had brought me to the United States out of Germany, and you hadn't done anything else for me in your life, it would have been enough." And he would say, "Oh, what did you think I was? Stupid? Of course we had to leave." But I didn't feel that way.

And the other thing that you say is "omain," which is like "om" and "amen." That's how I feel right now, like "dayenu" and "amen."

## VIII POETRY

[Interview 6: April 19, 1996] ##

Poetry

Stern: Poetry. I'm going to read from *First Poems and Others*, a book which was copyrighted in 1952 and which I haven't looked at in years. The frontispiece and the drawings for the poems were done by Ivan Madjdrakoff and the actual lettering of the poems by Julia Pearl, who at the time was his wife. It says, "Reproduced in direct image multilith, Clarence Roth, New York." This is a private limited edition, and the one that I'm looking at is my daughter's. I think it's 207 of 280. I must have still had some copies when she was born some years later, although the time this book was put together was when I was living with Jane. I think it was before we were married or about the time we were married, but I'm going to have to look that up.

We were living in New Paltz, and our very close friend, Herbert Vogel--he came from Europe, and his father was in the business of cashing checks in New York City after he arrived as a refugee--a philosopher and a small man with an intense stare through heavy glasses and an accent, and a person with whom I spent countless hours discoursing about various philosophical and aesthetic theories and ideas and constructs. A circle of people I hadn't really mentioned around an early love of my life named Doris Adelberg from Vienna, whose parents were middle-class but relatively cultivated, and whose older daughter, Lotte, was--and still--an outstanding painter coming out of the Expressionist school--Eric Marder, a practically violent presenter of Nietzschean ideas; Henry Loebowitz Lennard, a Columbia and University of California psychologist, with later bonds to the media--a documentation of family situations at UC; he had a lab with video cameras. It kind of fascinated me that our multimedia ideas--that was really--oh, I knew him, the great theoretician who

was married to the remarkable anthropologist, Margaret Mead--what was his name? Gregory Bateson.

Anyway, I think I will start reading Herbert's introduction so you can get somewhat of the mindset of the time.

All art is an expression of spiritual freedom. It is a unique transmutation of the universe through the artist's representations, but since all Beings partake of this universal fountain and bring forth the fruit of interaction with their natural surroundings, they all contain aesthetic truths. Wherein, then, is the artist exceptional in his comprehension of the universe, in enveloping in his breath the latent meanings of life? Is it in his possession of a scope whereby the manifold nuances of nature may be encompassed and thus provide a beacon for the endless manifestations which life affords; or is this ultimate truth, to be founded upon renunciation, a liberation of the soul from the circumstantial determinations of life, that is, that the latter are to serve as points of reference, as vectors of life, without being life itself. Those who see an inexorable psychogenic nexus in our Being will find in these verses a proclamation of freedom, perhaps illusory, perhaps mad: for them, I reserve the words of Santayana: "Had we not license to be mad, we should not be our own masters, but the ignoble product of other things; and to be mad is simply, in spite of Gods and men, to be indomitably free." For others who find in these works an elevation above temporal reality, there will be revealed an asymptotic movement from the conditional to the unconditional, from the finite to the infinite. Our situation is only the initiation of universal truth within us, but in conceiving of it in its circumstantial arbitrariness, in experiencing the fact of experience; rather than in participating with it directly--the tie toward life and its determinants becomes increasingly tenuous until in its perfection it remains wholly aloof and an end to itself. This emancipation must remain ideal, because, however remote to life, the thought remains incarnated within

the protagonist. Nevertheless it is that to which he aspires--to depict life in its eternal truth. Thus the artist becomes a mirror of humanity: as he encompasses the world in the sanity--no, no--in the vanity, in the unity of his Being. He is as plastic and malleable, almost chimerical in his catalyses, as the creations of the universe.

September 1952, Herbert Vogel.

### "The Poet's Premise"

Stern: My own preamble, titled "The Poet's Premise"--you understand, I haven't seen or read this for many years. I'm as amazed at Herbert's ideas as I was in 1952, particularly as applied to early poems. "The Poet's Premise":

Poetry, as any art, is necessarily perfect, therefore inviolate. The Poet, contradistinctly, remains subject to unlimited question and criticism. His definition provides delimitation, an afterthought attempting that measure of analysis which would approach full knowledge of the (poetic) experience itself.

As Poet I demand meaning, the universal relating terms of existence. I intend my poetry attain the effect of reception, be impression, neither description nor imperfect facsimile. I posit that impression as meaning; define 'content' as active manifestation of meaning. 'Form' becomes inherent, being discretely the temporal definition 'content' assumes.

Belief I extend to knowledge, dogma, tradition. These products of analyses bear their beauty in structure. Dead, they exist statically; existing, enhance function.

Faith I place in my senses. Impressions actual, fantastic, contrived, are intensely alive beyond subject. Then create my poetry in their excess . . . . .

And it's dated New Paltz, 1952.

"Reflection, A Fragment"

Stern: The first poem in the book is a poem that I wrote that I deemed as publishable. It was not the first poem, and I don't have any idea what happened before this. It's gone, I'm sure. It is not only called "Reflection," but it is part of a series through the years of reflections which are not titled "Reflections" but which have some type of mirror image content. But this is called "Reflection, A Fragment."

I fist the mirror.  
Crashing, it spreads the crackèd lines  
Doubling and redoubling  
The he's to she's, and him's to her's,  
The I's to them, those me's that were.

I see in this poem--of course, I've been aware of its existence but I haven't even looked at its physical reality for many years, but I have known that this poem and the poem I wrote about ten days ago in Buenos Aires, which is the last poem that I have in typed form--I have probably since then a hundred scribbled pages of notes for poems that I'm still working on--is a direct descendant of this "Reflection, A Fragment," and the experience and the handling of sounds and words--which are sounds--from then to now is, as Herbert put it, inexorable [laughter]. Inexorable.

"PEAK Song"

Stern: The next poem in the book is called "PEAK Song." Interesting; this is long before "The Peak Experience" from--what was his name? We'll have to get that. This is an interesting story. When Reb Zalman was doing his year of sabbatical from his post at the University of Manitoba at Winnipeg, he was living on Broadway in Cambridge in the apartment we later took over. This psychologist came over, and I happened to be there at the time, and said to Zalman, "I'm Jewish, but I don't know very much about being Jewish. What happened to me is a story which I will tell you: I had a fairly ordinary academic career, and I wasn't getting very much of any place when I had this idea. The idea became a compulsion with me, and I said to my wife, 'If I follow this idea out and publish, everyone will probably think that I'm mad and



that I've lost it completely, but I really need to do it; I want to do it, and I must do it.' She said to me, 'Do it.' So I went ahead and did it and within a year I was published, and I was becoming the president of the American Psychology Association, and I was known throughout the world very soon thereafter; it completely changed my life. Now I'm not carrying so much of a load, and I would like to go back and find out what it is to be a Jew. So what I came to you, Rabbi Schachter, for--because I've heard a lot about you--is I would like you to give me a reading list."

Now Zalman and I were, as usual, somewhat out of our heads. After our distinguished peer had departed, we laughed like hell. Why did we laugh like hell? Because we felt that this man had taken the first steps on a spiritual path, and if we do the reading list, it wasn't going to do him a damn bit of good. But it was in his world a necessary key to a door which he doesn't understand what it would unlock.

Then I realized sometime later that the "Peak Experience"--I had written this poem called "PEAK Song":

infinitesimally faster  
 slower and faster and Faster  
 firster and laster my Faster  
 infinitesimally FASTER.

imperceptibly faster  
 firster then laster my Faster  
 slower then faster then Faster  
 imperceptibly FASTER.

Elaine Goldman & "Harvest 1"

Stern: Actually, I'm wrong about what I said about that being the first poem. The first poem is this poem; it's earlier than "I Fist the Mirror," and it's dedicated to E.G.--Elaine Goldman--who was the first leading-to-mature relationship that I had with a woman. She was a great lover. She was very motherly. She was a large, well-endowed woman who was educated in literature beyond anyone that I had ever met to that point and who opened a lot of doors for me. I'm sorry that somehow she disappeared out of the mainstream of my existence. It's called "Harvest 1."

In my spring; when yellow fruits hung with green leaves  
 waiting,

I saw brown fruits fall, the brown leaves wither.  
 Brown in my season was that love's red colour,  
 as she, mine, lay on our dead bed.

Dead bed of our loves, red bed of our dreams...  
 I awoke in fall, walking the streets.  
 My pockets were full of viscous fluids.  
 Kissing the passerby; I became assassinated.

I guess you can tell the poem fell into place when our relationship was over. The drawings in this book--by Ivan, with whom I had dinner last night and acquired another one of his paintings for my collection of his works through the years because--I immediately knew, and I wrote eight or nine lines about his new paintings last night, I immediately knew when I looked at his new paintings such a stream of pleasure and recognition and understanding of the path that as an artist he has taken and the reverberations of images through the years and of objects. It was a transcendent experience. We are almost of an age--he's a bit older than I am, and we've been together a long, long time. Last night he thanked me for putting him into touch with people and situations throughout his life which have been transformational for him and which had actually effected his creative doings strongly. I was very touched, although I have not had that feeling that I had really done anything for him. The process of working on a film together with him was one of the finest collaborative temporalities that I've experienced. The other one was working with Michael Callahan--particularly early on, and then later too, when we were able to assemble tapes. The extraordinary tape of that period, which was a tape that we used at "Who Are You and What's Happening?" and which still exists, is called "Billie Master." It's named after Billie Holiday, who appears on it along with Franklin Roosevelt and Alice B. Toklas and others too numerous to cite. It's a tape which must be placed in the archive.

Byerly: Let me ask a question about the drawings. Are they representative of the early fifties?

Stern: Representative in what way?

Byerly: Well, I've looked at a couple of journals--The Circle, The Ark--and what struck me right off was the drawings they reminded me of, the drawings in this particular--.

## "He"

Stern: Yeah, well, you see the one on the wall right up there. Ivan came out of the High School of Music and Art, a very sophisticated institution--of course, we didn't realize at the time what we were in--and he later attended Cranbrook in Michigan, which is a leading modern art school--he and Julia Pearl both, and others of our friends. I visited there while they were going there, I think twice. It's outside of Detroit in Bloomfield Hills. Actually, there's "Harvest II," too, but I'm not going to read it, and there's a bunch of poet songs. This poem, "He," is interesting because I refer to Hashem, and there's always been that vein with God in one form or another in my poems. I think that when I was younger, I thought I might be an atheist. But it didn't work. I think I have an excessive faith; too excessive to become either an atheist or an agnostic for sure--even at an early age. It goes:

He

Drew fish from that belaboured sea  
and snared birds from one illicit heaven  
Murdered the Carnivores  
after his own fashioned

Became again from this punished limb  
and feared shades from an open door  
Doubted the Deity  
after his own fashioned

Caught breath from his burning throat  
and swallowed liquid from a barren vine  
Assassinated the Chosen  
after his own fashioned

Willed havoc  
Fell victim

## "Yin Chant"

Stern: I remember this "Yin Chant" as a poem that I fell in love with while and after it was written. Again, I see it being the ancestor of a concept of construction that I have worked on over the years and which--there have been a lot of modalities but they all lead in the same direction. It always amazes me--not only to go back but to go on. "Yin Chant":

Penning scrawl to lie with mine  
 Cover down this blackened sheet  
 Name these letters a word to dye.

Give way we dozed lie with yours  
 Cry me in whose mouth you trap  
 Believe her bereaved, prick nether be whether.

Thinging together to childe will ball  
 Foundered on merry griffins roc  
 Flew on or stippled ocean bloc  
 Name these letters three words to dye.

Bespoken a token we married  
 He broken asked for a glass  
 his pain to wipe

##

Stern: There are touches in these poems which need both sound and vision because "roc", for instance, without a k. And "dye" is d-y-e. [spells]

#### "L'Autre 1"

Stern: This poem I wrote for Antonin Artaud. It doesn't mention his name, but it's called "L'Autre":

Je suis enchanté  
 Suis que je suis  
 Suis un pauvreté infini

J'ai l'argent d'aujourd'hui  
 Et l'odeur d'ici  
 Suis que je suis

It's very odd; I wrote these two poems in French, and I don't know French. Remember, though, where I got the French.

#### "L'Autre 2"

Stern: This is "L'Autre 2":

'Je suis' et abolie  
 "le rat et cheval est aussi animaux"  
 Le tigre et le negre  
 le poete et l'autre joue  
 par le visage de Dieu  
 Sur son lit secret  
 un démon crie "Ci gît".  
 et tout le monde repondit "oui"

### Sami Rubinstein

Stern: We were living on 101st Street and Columbus Avenue in a railroad flat, and for a long time we had someone living with us whose name was Sami Rubinstein--no relation to that other Rubinstein. Sami was from Belgium, and he was the son of a world-famous chess player named Akiva Rubinstein. He also was a chess player. He didn't have any money, but he would go down to the Marshall Chess Club and play and come home with a few dollars all the time. He was not his father's equal, but he was tops.

He was an artist; he drew like Rembrandt--and I don't mean to put them on an equal level. By "like Rembrandt," I mean that he drew in that style. He knew all Rembrandt's work, particularly the drawings. He would draw portraits of you in that style, and they were fantastic.

He was a crazy guy. He got hung up on the white queen, and he went mad.

Byerly: The white queen?

Stern: On the chessboard. It reverberated through his mind. His father had gone mad. What had driven his father mad is that he was on his way to Russia to play the chief player of the world. I can't remember if that was Capoblanco or Alekhine. I'm not even sure I'm pronouncing them right. And the war broke out when he was on his way, and he couldn't go. He went mad.

More Poetry

## Marga Richter and "Relations (One)"

Stern: Some of these poems are very sad. Here there's a cantata libretto which I wrote with Marga Richter. Marga was at Juilliard; she was a composer. I think I mentioned early on that she had moved up to New Paltz into one of my reconvertd--I don't mean mine; they belonged to Thorberg but I had reconvertd them--chicken coops. And then it burned down, along with her grand piano. This was previous to this. Marga and I also had an affair; short-lived, but lived nonetheless. It [the cantata libretto] was later played both at Juilliard and by a small symphony orchestra in New York--performed, that is. A lot of it is based on mystical or kabbalistic texts but transformed to a different level of my own. It was called Relations, and in parentheses it says One to Infinity, but it's not the word infinity; it's the symbol. There are quite a few parts to it: one to four are called "The Concepts of Realities"; five to eight, "A Relational Progression"; nine, "The Catalyst"; zero, "The Destruction," and then infinite, "Operating Function."

"Relations (One)" goes--of course, this is with lots of music, somewhat atonal music--and chorus:

One Is enough

All Is

(All Is only everything (Is))

One and All · Is · One and All

Am I It Is

I Am Is Am It Is

Be ings (End and Beginning)

All Is and enough

All Is enough

Yesterday I was driving to the East Bay, and on the radio station I was listening to a partial broadcast of Gertrude Stein's *Four Saints in however many acts*. Three, I believe. But there are more than four saints and more than three acts. It's a great work, I think. It's a lovely work. This has nothing to do with that work, although people have wondered whether I had used it as a kind of a model, but to tell the truth, in 1952 I had never heard *Four Saints in Three Acts*. Sadly.

The last part of it, "Relations ( $\infty$ )" is:

Universe · id est · relation · id est · Universe  
 and being relation is  
 Universe and I am

Are Relations

It keeps on doing it in slightly different ways. There's a little poem called "Dicotomie":

was only Is being Chaos  
 Still no-thing moved  
 Altogether

forbicause d'it done Divided  
 up to down with plus fro minus  
 Yes and No

I used to even get some laughs when I read these poems.

How too and wherever was when  
 toward always possibly  
 perhaps returning then  
 forever without end

This one I really thought I was--it took me a long time to write this one, and I kept changing it until it finally took this form not long before the book came out. I think I was really conscious of the fact that we were working on the book, and I was finishing it. I was really pleased with this poem. It was the longest poem--except for the cantata--that I had written at the time. That seemed significant to me at the time, although it doesn't any longer. I mean, I write short poems and longer poems --I prefer short poems, really, maybe because it's nice when something completes itself. I have a lot of incomplete poems and a lot of fragments. I have what I call a line bank. Whenever I start a piece of paper, and I have a few lines, I write "line bank" and the date on it. None of those lines usually ever get employed; it's hard to find jobs for words in this world, right?

I've had a hell of a time to find jobs for lines that don't fit into poems [laughter]. Then you try and make a poem out of it, and it doesn't work. It never works. I get very frustrated when I look back on some of those sheets, which I usually don't. They are push-down storage; the worst kind of storage. I'm talking about archivism, and that's what I've got: boxes of push-down storage. The problem with push-down storage is that you can't retrieve what's on the bottom without going through the top.

And if you don't know where it is in the pile even if you know what the pile represents, what are you going to do? You're going to spend hours. Most of the time I don't even know what the pile represents anymore. That's a poem, in case you didn't notice, but it's never been written down. Now we have it, see? Now you don't.

That's tape. I wonder about tape. It's much harder to deal with than paper even, because retrieving something on tape--unless you've got some kind of digital control over the analog process--is mind numbing.

For video they have SMPTE code. It's an acronym for Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers. You can take a piece of equipment, and you don't have to do it when you're recording the image, and you can subtract it out of the image; it isn't inevitably there. You put a frame code so that time and identity are established basically for each scan, for each raster image. You can stop it, you can cut, you can edit, you can order the editing equipment to make a fade or a dissolve or whatever you prefer. And if you have the right equipment computer-wise, you can just give that number after you've jotted it down because you saw it go by and you needed it. It will recover it for you fairly quickly. The further move now is that it's now all on computer rather than on a video tape, or it's on CD-ROM and the retrieval of it is getting speedier all the time. Retrieval time is history, right? Terrible. I mean, the more retrieval time you get, the less reality is in whatever you're redoing, re-collecting. Why are we re-collecting when we could be collecting?

Byerly: That was a long answer.

Stern: Oh, it was?

Byerly: Yes. [laughter]

Stern: Well, we have time.

Byerly: That could have been the response to expound on the philosophy of history.

#### "Day after Year"

Stern: Could it? Okay, well, this is about that. It's called "Day after Year":



Hear on this sing song day  
 Here he me lay down  
 Sound on a sound at  
 of or if too

Why for to can with those will  
 there could do full as that no  
 nor way finding down done  
 found some did think these not gone

How if than piece did fair best  
 losing all more from last try  
 sure now been then and see too  
 lost you are lest when was so

Sex of a one and eleven  
 Pair quadrupled breaks seven  
 Numbers out letter is same

When would better be least  
 ever stay under cry which  
 whether near neither while none  
 being but always brought each

Where may since become still  
 might hardly sometimes just seem  
 could every either yet pray  
 rightly should pass leaving by

Sex of a pair in eleven  
 One quadrupled makes seven  
 Letter out numbers are same

What withal fallen together  
 chosen about beside nearly  
 dropped came apart through believing  
 fell without moving the matter

Ask any almost makes even  
 true taken next on the changing  
 gave a first bit until finished  
 wait itself end never really

Here on this sing song day  
 Heard he me lay down  
 Sound on a sound (at  
 of or if too)

"The Idea of Order at Key West"

Stern: One of my very favorite poems--if we have some time, maybe I'll read it to you because it also reverberates through my life--is called "The Idea of Order at Key West" by Wallace Stevens. I didn't know that poem at the time, but the whole "sound on a sound, sing-song day," I now realize reverberates for me in that poem. That poem was one of the poems that we worked on for the Ford Foundation at KPFA to illustrate listening to poetry and thinking about poetry--Lew Hill's project, which I worked on with him.

"Fragment; after W. B. Yeats"

Stern: At the time, my favorite poet was W.B. Yeats. He still definitely is in my top ten of all time. This was called "Fragment; after W.B. Yeats," and it was dedicated to Herbert Vogel:

Red Rose, new Rose, this Rose of all my days!  
Come free me, as I find these finite ways:  
Remembrance hoarding every loss to hide  
The Past, lay full-knowing, ready-tried;  
So seems false Future gone, and Present bold;  
And your same Beauty, bearing blood grows old  
While reaching Time; where Passion always free  
Flees Search in Love of our Reality.

I finished with this poem which seems a little tough line to go out on at this point:

Know that you as the forever sun  
light brightly through my emptied shell  
the ineffable breath of decayed virtue

and Find in this one consolate word  
a memory of now and is  
which lingering knew me as I am

Afterimage

Stern: Somewhat odd. There were a number of poems published in other venues, but that was the book--until *Afterimage* was published.

That was dated 1965, the copyright. So we've got thirteen years--that was '65--and now we've got thirty-one years, and I haven't published another book. Not, by the way, for lack of having enough poems, but I think of not having enough *koiach*--strength--to go through the process and not wanting to publish it myself. I did publish a set of eight poems with silkscreen lithographs by David Weinrib called "Conch Tales." A conch is a shellfish that lives in the Caribbean and various other places. They were done in Jamaica.

But *Afterimage* was printed and first published in England by Villiers Publications, Ltd., London, N.W.5, for Maverick Books, Woodstock, New York. This is when Judi and I and Michael were living in Woodstock. The Maverick Press didn't exist. We had these books printed and bound; there were two editions. One was paperback and the other was hardcover. I had started, in the last few years before that, in doing collages, and we had one of the collages which I particularly did for the cover--printed black and white. It doesn't have the textural quality of--. But these collages are not just meant to look at or just pick out words from, but you can read them if you have a mind to.

"Zum Gedächtnis"

Stern: "Zum Gedächtnis" is a German phrase for "to think"--no, this is more like "memory," something you have or will have in memory.  
[reading from collage]

Blow  
Promise to you  
In our tough  
Liabilities  
Om harvest  
Age tubes  
On the spot.

"Stern Airlines"

Stern: Then there's "Stern Airlines." That was a throwaway, obviously.  
It goes:

Flexible  
Hey, grow up

Hundred million  
 Our apart  
 One of a kind  
 Body's squeezed in  
 All the way in

I mean, these are just--these last are all in a row, but usually I don't do all in a row; I skip from one part of the collage to the other as I'm gluing. First I do rough cuts, and then in order to fit things in I do fine cuts. The question is whether there really is sense--as I see here this little phrase: "Contact is made." Contact, keep it cool--it's not "keep it cool," it's "keep in cool."

It's fascinating; it's more fascinating, I think, to do it than to experience it. I really got off on it because these words would bounce around in my head, and they got down on paper and people bought them, what's more. Which is more than you can say about written poems, usually.

*Afterimage*, the hardback edition, was meant as a limited subscription edition, and I did get a number of subscriptions which covered the printing costs, and then of course I had books left over. I still have a few but not very many.

Byerly: How many were printed?

Stern: It should say, but I'm not sure that it does. No, it doesn't say. I think there were 150 of the hardbacks and 500 of the--. I'm not sure. The dedicatory phrase in the book is from "The Last Sun" by Theodore Roethke: "Snail, snail, glister me forward." It's a lovely poem. He was a great poet.

### "Afterimage"

Stern: The first poem, as the first poem is in *First Poems and Others*, is a mirror image poem. In fact, it's somehow very close even though it's a completely different poem. And it's the title poem of the book, *Afterimage*:

When I struck down  
 by rod  
 or my soft mummy mate  
 was laid in the mimic twitch of tick  
 and knock by all who would

who didn't find me wandering  
 when the stranger curves inside  
 were margins for my sibling pain

By last and always swore  
 when I struck down  
 to find by vein, the pool in rock,  
 the core; a cry, cry  
 for next and last again

when is a time  
 and where a place I can't go on  
 to find by name  
 is nothing but this same, dumb,  
 easy source of faith in glass

When I struck down my image  
 then the roots took fire  
 my years grew scattered  
 few and inbetween  
 I took the fast and hollow slide

down was it where I am  
 and count the broken glass  
 I know the mirror's fist  
 that struck me down.

Byerly: And when was this written?

Stern: Well, I don't think I know. It certainly was written late fifties, early sixties.

Byerly: Do you know what part of your life the poem was written about?

"Bad to Believe" ##

Stern: My first book is very clear in terms of timing. It was published, or it was made--that's a more correct expression--at the time I was with Jane in New York, and the poems were all from then and before then. From then on, you have the whole period of Jane and I in California, then the Maya period, the Ann period, and now here I am with Judi in Woodstock after having been with Barbara. You see how I mark my periods. I don't really mean that to be ironic; it sounds ironic, I guess. A lot of these poems past--in the first book and this book--are about those relationships. Talk about relationships; this next poem is called "Bad to Believe":

Not as man in woman  
 tests against the rest  
 his tail of woe and prime

My ring in the box wife  
 goes breech tonight  
 High cards, sly laugh,  
 quick stakes for chance-a-beast

Ass, snake, owl  
 Toll round-eye home  
 Swing noose to knell  
 Peals layered back from back

Heart pipe is glut  
 with father's right  
 by child spent rage  
 A man he never was  
 splits limb and root

"Grounds"

Stern: The next one is called "Grounds":

that chick so far out  
 she got to fake  
 witch doctor route

mother waiting  
 along one track  
 when the real thing  
 comes go now

paying later  
 back she splits  
 here and where  
 her balling pawns  
 on broken wind

terrible cat  
 flushing my chain  
 take the ride  
 or bump your log  
 in a hole bottom  
 of the sea

You know that song, don't you? [sings] "There's a hole in the bottom of the sea." We used to sing it at camp. "A bump on the log in the hole on the bottom of the sea." And that's where that image came from. These images kind of fly in or they rocket in; they just jump right out of your past into poems all the time. I love them.

We used to sing this other song. When I was a counselor-- you know, you had a bunk, and you all sat at the same table together. Our group used to sing, "There are no flies on us, there are no flies on us; we brush them off. There may be just a few great big black flies on you. There are no flies on us; we brush them off."

Byerly: Did that show up in any of your poems?

Stern: I don't know. Undoubtedly, but not as itself. This one is like the other one.

### "Eppes Epic"

Stern: Eppes is Yiddish for "something." "Eppes Epic":

for the father, Old Sol  
and that other member  
of the triple dick litany  
who was no Jew

Man can you get strung out  
on the cross begat  
a holy spike of grace  
His eye is on

birds  
don't get high  
they can't look down  
and fly

up your  
nailed not screwed  
crucified seed  
Who needs it

and all that jazz  
 like stained glass  
 "Christ, geometry  
 is an Almighty cope"

"Reflections Before Rising"

Stern: And this one is definitely when I was married to Ann, as a lot of them are. It's called "Reflections before Rising," and it's a dialogue:

She flipped the lid at him.  
 Man you got any want,  
 An overcoming desire like?

Baby don't wriggle me,  
 Can't we slip without touching?  
 I'm done in, screwed; Stop!  
 The grotesque advantage you take;  
 Gimmeup, Cave, you hear, we don't want no struggle.

What kinda nadir every morning?  
 Quel bring down, Riiing, Raaangng, Ho Ilac!  
 Brother Murican attention l'addition.  
 Itchygoo, fire up dolink,  
 Break fast in a hurry cause it's a short day's biz  
 and someone's coming up fast.

Who's manic in their company?  
 That's le bull vraitment.  
 Friends there are few of us,  
 If you're under thirty,  
 This warm bit of everyday is for you.

So what arya gonna do with the little ones?  
 Why succor muthamia? She's gone daddy,  
 and you too could find yourself empty one of these.  
 Make it. Go to it already.  
 Believe me baby I'm with you  
 and so long it's nothing he wanted,  
 the least you could say is:  
 "We're up."



## "Mirage"

Stern: These poems reflect what we were talking about yesterday. I'm not going to read a lot more of them, but this one was also written with Ann on the barge, and it's called "Mirage":

All horrid noises in my throat  
 as life becomes this burning boat  
 where voices probe beneath my mind  
 to seek the me they dare to find  
 and leave the self pronounced by rote  
 with these same noises in my throat

Who cannot sense the low or high  
 of drift or wrack which passes by  
 and leaves your spindrift bottled note  
 in time to set these lines afloat

Be with me mine by burning boat

Her ashes over stern I reached to haul  
 there seemed no bottom rise or fall  
 of tide laid heavy by the moon

I wrote at night with friends  
 beside my burning boat  
 a heart of rime sick in my throat  
 For love and labor could not float  
 this foundered berthed and burning boat

That's too much; I shouldn't let myself get away with this one--

You remember my tale about moving the barge. [laughter]  
 This was all about moving the barge and about Ann. "Her ashes over stern I reached to haul"--that's too--[laughter] I really hadn't remembered that. That's funny.

"Mea Culpa"

Stern: I'm not going to read this poem. This is a strange poem called "Mea Culpa," and I think I mentioned it previously. There was a magazine published in Sausalito called Contact by Bill Ryan and Herb Beckman. There was an issue that they were doing on prisoners and justice and crime. I had obtained some of the content for them, and I was supposed to be co-editor of that issue. And if you ask me with whom, I won't be able to tell you. I don't think it was with Philip. Anyway, I wrote this poem for the issue specifically; they wouldn't publish it because it was too abstract.

"Harvest Tale"

Stern: I wrote some things which at first I really thought were prose poems. This is a very long harvest tale, but the first strophe or stanza goes--and it's called "Plow":

A probability of the sentence demanded paradox,  
which eliminates any purpose that could dilute  
the possible sequence of events,  
or resolve these following improbabilities:

And it goes on from there. It has a lot of sexual images.  
The next part is called "Furrow":

They had achieved this fusion in the past,  
but now, with the maturity that follows success,  
celebrated marriage as a matter of course,  
and became inseparable.

The next portion is called "Seed". If I had had the choice today, I probably wouldn't have published it.

Byerly: Why?

Stern: Oh, I don't know. It's lame. It's all right, but it's kind of lame. I love a lot of the poems in this book very much. "After":

## "After"

Stern:       The color I give things  
               is mine remembered  
               shared when the familiar past  
               comes between us

To give you my joy  
 I wake you  
 Disturb and pain you  
 Take you by words and patience  
 stiff with the memory of laughter

              and the young girls  
               ran after purple grapes

Was your dream only tonight  
 Or did wings burn  
 when I touched your name  
 and sang our breath  
 into my quick shadow  
 left by the turning light

## Untitled Poem

Stern:       I stand behind myself to see the same  
               To find this other world  
               where there could be  
               another me that was tomorrow

Today the difference never being new  
 You are myself  
 for I have found  
 the nothing that there is to do

## "Oh You"

Stern:       This is "Oh You":

              meaningful  
               a word like interesting

like  
 leaving your dirty panties  
 smelling of someone's sperm  
 near the telephone  
 for me

I was requested to leave that poem out of the book. Not by Ann, but by--it was real. It was real that I wanted to keep it. Was it real? I don't know whether it was real or not.

Byerly: It's how you were feeling, right?

Stern: Yeah, and that's what my image of it was. Were there really a pair of panties by the telephone? I say there were. She's dead. Who knows? Do I really know?

This is just a four-liner:

in bed  
 I try  
 against you  
 to laugh

[laughter] Same period.

And the other one I read to you the other day:

"Why Yes"

Stern: a brief enthusiasm is hardly the thing to be  
 of someone else's  
 it's roses in the snow and of that genre  
 not quite so much of a surprise  
 but really shocking  
 if one's in love

After Ann.

Sidonie

Stern: I don't know if you can manage this story, but let's try it. There was a madam and grand whore in San Francisco at the time named Sidonie. Sidonie was a complete gâsse. She was

sophisticated, she was bawdy, had an incredible body with skin of alabaster, and she knew everyone. When I first met her, she was a lady kept by Ben Swig in a grand apartment on Nob Hill--all white, white couches, white rugs, a view. She entertained Percy Heath and me in this apartment unbeknownst to Ben. She was on the jazz scene, she was on the arts scene. She was around. She had a mouth like the proverbial velvet glove. She moved like the purple sea described in Greek poems.

She did not come from some elevated station; she came from Bakersfield, the Valley. But she was fashionable. Her musical and artistic tastes were high level. Still she could get right down to it without any trouble at all, right? Many years later I was having dinner in a restaurant in New York, and I met there a friend of mine--an artist and photographer who also came from San Francisco--and he was having dinner with a lady friend named Carolyn Zacca. We started talking, and I began to realize who the lady friend was. I said to her, "You know, I shared a mistress with your grandfather." She started crying. She said to me, "You know, that's the nicest thing I ever heard about Grandpa."

I love that. I felt so good, because it had come out unhehsted. I wasn't sure that I had said something that would embarrass her about her grandfather. But she was a real swinger, in any case. Her grandfather was one of the major powers-that-be in the City by the Bay.

"'Difficulties in the Beginning'"

Stern: All these poems now sound to me that they're about the same thing, you know? I'm not sure whether I'm getting the right take on it. This is called "Difficulties in the Beginning":

Get her  
 Right out of King Arthur  
 and his Arabian Knights  
 No eyes for the cross  
 No ears for the magic fart  
 Big blame  
 Lots of reward  
 "Perseverance furthers"

In the I Ching  
 there is "No Blame"

Why peace  
 when there's hate  
 why not love  
 when we're together

why scream  
 why not  
 empty your head  
 Now

"About Us"

Stern: The practice of each word is its constraint  
 A line's four corners and the place  
 Where tension was a form  
 That held space round us

Now and then we stuck to fact  
 Tracing the pattern with a lack of method  
 Up to date in copied records  
 and the act of love

"That Y Am Matt . . ."

Stern: And this one, the title and the last line are from the Sixty-first  
 Ballade of Charles D'Orleans. The line is: "That y am matt."  
 That's from the ballad; it's a chess poem. That one line is not  
 mine. It's not mine.

To have no body for the one you love . . .  
 Only two voices touching through the wire strung  
night  
 seeking the tightness of each other's clasp

Asking themselves what substance lasts  
 when the opposing click chants dark  
 Ravens we are sparks of image  
 thinned by reluctance on our own stages.

Draw me no pittance bargain  
 waged in the fire of my middle days  
 O sweet musician must I pay your scale  
 that I prevent myself from rut or sale  
 "without so be y make a lady newe".

And that last line, "Without so be I make a lady new," is also from Charles D'Orleans. Of course, it refers to getting a new queen by taking the pawn all the way to the other side of the board. This was long after Sami Rubinstein and going mad and being taken away because of his hangup with the white queen. Talking about reverberations.

### "Go Man"

Stern: I'm driven not driving  
 All I'm allowed is to shift the gear  
 Or blow my horn

Where will they take me  
 Who's turning the key

You understand that these poems which I was writing, and other poems which are not published, I felt that I was somewhere in the--whatever you want to call it--the hierarchy or the world of poetry and that it made sense. But I couldn't find very often, practically never, could I find other poets to whom they made sense to--in the sense that they felt about each other often. For many years that disturbed me a lot.

### Hugh Hefner and "Hip Hip for Hef"

Stern: This is when I was really frustrated with Hugh Hefner at Playboy. I wasn't really working closely with Hef because I was working with Spector, but Hef kept getting in my way. I think this was when I offered to write a major story on marijuana, and I was about ten years early or five years early, and Hef really blasted me--how could I think of doing such a thing? Of course, later on they got right into it. But I was by that time out of it. Not out of pot but out of touch. Spector had died, but he would have done it. Hef was a prude, believe it or not. "Hip Hip for Hef." It's a little thing from Wittgenstein which says, "It is a

sign of an elementary proposition, that no elementary proposition can contradict it." It goes:

Are the indefinite they?  
 Ennui is wee-wee with boredom,  
 On the rocks, or straight.  
 Who needs questions?  
 I go along with you--  
 We are not making Our life.

"Baby Blues"

Stern: This fits right into that jazz line which a lot of people were writing. This one's called "Baby Blues":

Far out people  
 Whoever they are  
 Break me up  
 Like dig the cat  
 Blowing his ass off  
 Or the chick  
 Turning herself on  
 The end

"Prejudiced or Something"

Stern: if the Son was a Jew  
 you know Jesus the carpenter  
 the Father must have been one too

Some of my best friends  
 are Holy Ghosts

"Strength of Inaccurate Convictions"

Stern: And here's one I told you about--Dr. D. Prest, the psychiatrist:

cock on a leash  
 walking the dog  
 throw ball



after tail  
follow beast  
or man

#### Untitled

Stern: Only time is kept  
Who will for us  
Put it away

Keepers never finders were  
Necessarily  
Plain clothed keepers  
Out of our mind  
In time

Byerly: I like that one.

#### "My Joint is Out of Time"

Stern: There was a guy in the Village named Hube the Cube. What was his name? Hubert? He wrote things, and he had a tattoo. The subtitle for this is his tattoo, which was "Blessed blessed oblivion--Hube the Cube's tattoo." And the name of the poem is "My Joint is Out of Time":

Old Golds are straights already  
Soon bread will be so scarce  
they'll be selling grass on the streets  
I used to be a swinging head  
now under stone  
I'm rolling my own shit  
like a syllogism

#### "Paradiddles"

Stern: This thing I did on television with a famous bongo player named, I think, Jack Costanza, on one of those, like, magazine shows that they had at that time in San Francisco. It was written

specifically for that, so it needs that rhythm behind it. It's called "Paradiddles" which is a form of drumbeat.

Them that wants  
and those what get  
if they're not the same  
who's to blame

money is funny  
when you don't have any  
even things are fine  
one at a time  
many to go  
bet the winner  
much too slow  
calling heads  
flipping tails  
is not success  
with a capital  
whatchamacallit  
to fit the crime

Them that wants  
and those what get  
if they're not the same  
who's to blame

##

thrown on water  
count it like bread  
authorities say  
two heads are better  
than one for what

Them that wants  
and those what get  
if they're not the same  
who's to blame

sell for more buy for less  
 close your eyes take the rest  
 put it in a bank  
 laughing at the kill  
 if you can't count it  
 nobody will

Them that wants  
 and those what get  
 if they're not the same  
 who's to blame

you know what I mean  
 straight with the scene  
 if you have no eyes  
 don't want any  
 odds on a penny  
 are just as good  
 to try your luck

Them that wants  
 and those what get  
 if they're not the same  
 who's to blame

### "The Cock Horse"

Stern: There are different sections to this book. This is called "The  
 Cock Horse":

What are you  
 I need a precise image  
 to look through

Who got into my merry-go-round  
 Was it a broomstick horse  
 or your toy soldier  
 Is it my glister on the trail

Bless you  
 Keep you  
 Hold me down Moses  
 Dig me back Pharaoh

It's fixed  
 Hands in their laps  
 they fly again  
 come hung  
 from a silver yoke  
 on doubled chains  
 swinging

The precise image is from Kenneth Rexroth. In a workshop--I think I mentioned this before--when I wrote "bird" he fulminated and exposted and said, "'Bird' is never enough. It's gotta be a precise image; it's gotta be *that* bird, not just any bird."

"Enjoy Gravity"

Stern: This was in Life magazine, actually, with a dancer, a wonderful black male dancer who I worked with. It's called "Enjoy Gravity," and it says, "This poem is an interlude for dancer and voice."

Enjoy gravity  
 Swing wild  
 moving with air  
 as you are

Swinging free  
 the child within  
 breaks the ground  
 leaping away

Move the world  
 with pushing air  
 swinging the wind  
 Enjoy gravity

The wind flies  
 where when it moves  
 does the air  
 stop swinging

Held from above  
 with each swing  
 the earth's pull  
 brings us down

Sparrows and apples  
 fall swinging  
 the harvest weight  
 takes us down

Our moon turns the sea  
 one swinging star  
 is light for the world

Come down where you are  
 the sky is swinging  
 your body in time  
 with love

Swing wild  
 moving with air  
 as you are  
 Enjoy gravity

We performed it quite a few times around San Francisco.

#### "Watch Out"

Stern: No peeking around corners  
 to see what is there  
 No looking behind  
 it just isn't fair  
 Lots could be said  
 for looking ahead  
 to find yourself  
 riding a tiger  
 in bed

#### "The Priestess Gagged"

Stern: She was really a Leo. Philip was living with a lady named Gogo Nesbit. Gogo is still around; a very fine poet, as a matter of fact. She had a line which was "The priestess gagged." I really got into that. The name of this poem is "The Priestess Gagged":

Night is curtains  
woven by a friend in New York  
falling three times  
to mewsicke

the Tarot pasted on glass  
hides her dishes from the room  
She gave herself one at a time  
to the black and strong  
She had it coming when she went  
further out of the continent

Take your journey to the East  
with Leo from Morbio Inferiore  
back to the Seilergraben  
They say he's stolen the original manuscript  
Doesn't dig the sacred document

"Poetry at the Paraclete"

Stern: The journey to the East, and Leo, that's from Hesse. This is called "Poetry at the Paraclete." "The Paraclete, a New York bookstore specializing in Catholic materials presents poets reading from their own work." And I won't say who the poet was. She will know because the line is from her poem--the title is "Poetry at the Paraclete":

"The poem ascends," she finishes  
with her broken smile.  
In the front row  
a black frocked father nods agreeably.  
His svelte blonde consort  
exclaims, "Marvelous!"

*The poem ascends . . .*  
weightless I wonder,  
flies or floats gossamer,  
exercising some mystic form?

*The poem ascends . . .*  
out of reach,  
explodes height,  
to disappear,  
one with the universe?

*The poem ascends . . .*  
 elliptically perhaps,  
 by virtue of named nature,  
 assuming familiar shapes,  
 down to earth?

"One of Many"

Stern: Here's the one I told you about that Hayakawa objected to.

stone of god  
 easily laughed at  
 who needs an object  
 to know love

washed idol  
 cure me  
 with my power  
 to keep you on the shelf  
 or throw you out

"The Bomb Syndrome"

Stern: In New York I did a lot of demonstrating and meetings and thinking of dramatic street theater and performance art type of public actions. Some of these poems came out of that. "The Bomb Syndrome":

Poets are what  
 poetry is all about  
 ideographs and history  
 delirious serious  
 Making it is no  
 cure for constipation  
 Hair in the bath  
 Elephant tail  
 keep me quick  
 zipped from Africa  
 where they kill like lovers

(If you don't catch them  
 the words are gone  
 like money or an erection  
 false illusions  
 mountains cut by dozers  
 Blown pine don't drop  
 needle green sky frame  
 crissed lights dusty through  
 recollection of stretched sound:  
 Screaming like peacocks  
 Bamboo growing  
 You under me)

\*

where they throw, shoot, push  
 hard like fuckers  
 into blood, shit, sperm  
 tear people for good  
 with their own screwing  
 quick on the point  
 of coming death

\*

No person-to-person kill flash  
 for you mother suckers:  
 Truman, Ike, JFK and big red K.  
 Testing your hard ons: cream us  
 by panic button megatonmania  
 down-home ass-hole buddy style  
 a Nero capping sensational act  
 of total destruction and anonymity

\*

"Now"

Stern: This sound of one hand clapping has always been something which has gotten me into a silly frame of mind. It's taken a lot of manifestations. This poem is called "Now":

driving is important  
 a way to get there  
 nails through the savior  
 one into another



if now is true  
 was something else  
 what will be

touching is important  
 through the always space  
 between hands words circles  
 you me they

if now is true  
 was something else  
 what will be

believing is important  
 only made like tree  
 flood miracle with fish  
 two by two to bombs

if now is true  
 was something else  
 what will be

nothing is important  
 when you know  
*the sound of one hand clapping*  
 is nothing

"Public Hanging"

Stern: This is a strange poem because it was written in a car, a VW bus driven by the sculptor John Chamberlain, and it was written in a car when I was going to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. I was going through a block, and I couldn't go because cars were stopped ahead of me. Over my head there was a crane--not too many feet higher, but high enough to be extremely dangerous--this big steel beam. It was turning, and I could just see it out of the windshield, and it's called "Public Hanging":

Sweet hanging steel  
 Bigger than thou  
 Smashed in blacktop  
 Like an Indian head  
 Before a crossing  
 Because a red light  
 This very now  
 Was here too  
 And stopped us dead

"A Dirty Story"

Stern: This is one of those poems I was talking about regarding walking on those endless resistance demonstrations of that time. It's called "A Dirty Story" and the subscript is "...nothing to fear but fear itself," from FDR.

Told by three wise guys  
to two far out strangers  
you and me at the bar  
had a few bucks in common  
a degree and a couple of broads  
living it up and down the hatch  
sorry about not being safe  
without faith to move molehills  
scared of the bomb  
the nothing to fear there is

one had jokes about new cereals  
kikes wops niggers bitches  
in case of fallout put it in again  
civil war military logistics  
prepared him for emergencies  
said love was a cloud  
to wipe his trembling blood

Him with you and all of us  
living up wild high  
down the hatch ma pa  
afraid of the nothing bomb  
the nothing to fear but fear

the other sat superior  
peeling a sodden onion  
free of skin seed roots  
as if stripping cells  
discarded layers  
would get him to the bottom  
not of this being  
but becoming  
said love was a cloud  
mushroom to his music

He with you and all of us  
living up kicks crazy  
down the hatch to shelter womb  
afraid of the nothing bomb  
the nothing to fear but fear

took her kids to picket for peace  
 believing we would drop it or they could  
 unless you and I and all  
 find a way without end  
 the way of peace  
 said love was a cloud  
 her miracle of fish

She with you and all of us  
 living up nervous on  
 down the hatch to cave grave  
 afraid of the nothing bomb  
 the nothing to fear but fear

we puts arms around each other  
 you me brother  
 first time touching  
 not a bad get together  
 making up for lost time  
 live it up and down the hatch  
 afraid of the nothing  
 to fear  
 bomb

"Necessity is a Mother"

Stern: I read an essay by--I'm sure it was Hannah Arendt, and she said, "Love, according to Augustine, was 'I want you to be.'" I used it in a poem, couldn't find the quote out of Augustine, wrote her a letter, didn't hear from her for a long time. Didn't know her, by the way. Finally got a note saying, Sorry, couldn't remember where she had picked it up, but it wasn't necessarily somebody else. I read a book recently by one of the new California novelists, Jim Dodge; he used the line. Now I wanted to write to him, and I haven't; I will, I hope, if I get around to it. I don't get around to everything. Do you? I want to ask him if he read the essay by Hannah, if he took out of my poem--he's a friend of Kesey, so Kesey would have had the book--or did he actually get it out of St. Augustine, right? [Laughter] The poem is called "Necessity is a Mother":

I'm going to tell you  
 I want you to be  
 love according to Augustine

we sat too close not to touch  
 I tried to fly  
 your brush got stuck  
 the bell was going to ring  
 I'd had enough

break your neck  
 under the ice  
 my boot made a hole  
 kissed old luck

I want you to be

about the subway Priscilla  
 we didn't do it together

I'm going to remind you  
 there about here/now about then  
 because that's who I am

"If You Can't Count Don't Blow"

Stern: "If you can't count don't blow." It's a quote from a musician named LaNoue Davenport--originally a jazz musician who was in the Pro Musica Antiqua. Playing baroque music, medieval music. But the poem is "If You Can't Count Don't Blow":

it's the same fear  
 of falling from heights  
 when under me  
 you hold on  
 to yourself

*Eat Eat Eat*  
 flash on a coming beat  
 but won't explode  
 losing my poke

not spit, balm  
 always the receptacle  
 for bread

does a centipede  
 move every other leg

if you count  
 you don't let go  
*believing is not knowing*  
 like Jake said

does she dig or complain  
 if you count to make sure  
 of only what was

record and possess  
 how many fractions  
 of whose law

"Take Five Jungle"

Stern: This one has something to do with writing a sonnet. It was written--it doesn't say that, but I know it was written for Bird, for Charlie Parker, listening to his music. I ignored Kenneth's axiom about precise images as far as "bird" was concerned, because it goes:

if only some unbelievable turd  
 that falls keeping his eye  
 makes out to happen bird's  
 sound turn on out mothered sky  
 riffs blue flash given skin  
 wheels straight stone swinging night  
 blow bombed kicks too much in  
 nowhere scene screwed spade tight  
 like beard is mask a map for trap  
 counted down out of your head  
 split burn take loaded crap  
 score bang dig ball through bed  
 jump heavy hard push under sick  
 lay flip come crack up stick

"You Think You're So What"

Stern: This one is written for John Chamberlain, a close friend of many years; haven't seen him for a long time. He's the sculptor who sculpted mashed car parts. He had an incredible understanding of polychrome, color, and form. Wild man, a terrible, terrible wild

man. At least he was; I don't know what he is. "You Think You're So What" for John Chamberlain.

*show me the top of the world  
where everything is  
you can be there  
without knowing  
where we are*

put her on upside down  
below BOMBED sand and white  
stenciling LIKE above  
in Slomon's glue

can you see  
o say show me  
by early light  
you said what?

two of them in a row  
one a spade two a jew  
were only trying to tell me  
my left blinker was flashing

WORK AREA AHEAD  
the leader  
's got to go faster  
than the man on his tail  
got to make it coming  
like a hill turning  
morning all day  
once was two bit broke  
now am ten buck flat

now passing  
The Museum of Natural History  
driving my black Singer  
I read incised in stone  
I think the face is Caslon  
TRUTH VISION KNOWLEDGE

"Shock Strike Toggle"

Stern: Then here's a poem which has as the subscript "Goethe dying: Mehr Licht."

tripped out  
switch gone on  
one pole  
double throw  
(bat handle  
no balls)  
your time  
field base  
here now  
real

double pole  
screens  
perspective  
in focus  
the way coming  
high through free safe  
together distance  
who knows you  
time after time  
is again  
beat  
against  
sine

going the distance  
base real  
time  
x and y  
are either  
way out  
one hundred eighty degrees

block flowing  
hard stop  
not going anywhere  
why know x  
when one's vertical  
the other's horizontal

input any ow  
out of now  
yours and mine  
turns on the light  
and i am here  
turns off the light  
and i am there

Other Poetry; Michael Callahan

Stern: And that's really the last poem in this book. These last poems, we were already living in Woodstock, and Michael Callahan had come to join us to do the engineering, the design of the equipment, all the technical work, the sound editing, also visual editing. I was beginning to get very metaphorically language-involved in the names of the various electronic and electromechanical parts like "double-throw single-pole switch." I was using a lot of that kind of language in some poems.

More Poetry**"Poppa-Wopper"**

Stern: Then there are the poems since then. There are various kinds, and some of them are quite long. I'm not going to read them in sequence. I want to read this one which is called "Poppa Wopper". It was written for Radha. Was it? No, for Abram! Is this the one? Well, I would like to read it anyway. It's December '94; not that long ago. "Poppa Wopper":

for Abram the avid Aphid at eighteen

quest like do she care  
 if there nothing to lose  
 attention but what itself  
 except perhaps to come  
 Lenny's favorite preposition cum verb

humming sotto voce lonely as cloud  
 scored for and by itself  
 connection bridging ampersands  
 out of our limbo and into de light  
 Count signified, "don't know  
 whether to love you or hate you"

"I do," said, gave head  
 way to indian given go  
 window of blue-note oportunology  
 recognition over frequency modulated air  
 Bird's mantic lick rising



how rare to be right; left mostly behind  
 whatever eight-ball fancied her cue  
 that/then I and I introduced as  
 "manager and man" or "man and manager"  
 depending who you, heshemale, was to  
 badmouthing Maya, "no ofay mothafuckah  
 gonna call me bitch"

all in the crossing, pass ahead  
 drives Dylan said, "my green age"  
 spun off impasto diffracted rainbows  
 heady pools of polychromatosoming compositions  
 Ted's dead line glistering us forward

featherweight birdbrain airhead  
 what did you think this was  
 an elegiac jeremiad on madness at St. Elizabeth  
 Ezraversity's unwobbling imagiste fascishtick  
 Rex Kenneth prescribing precise images

rules what and how many times when  
 to get every littlething accomplishcated  
 bedstead atilt on underlying bargain piles  
 when image makers/takers turn  
 turn, turning time for every season  
 evoke Electro's, "I Inc. representing USCO"

it; whatever will be over soon  
 used to cut ice off Rockland Lake  
 to melt, cool, lower, change,  
 has-beens, would have-nots, tryers,  
 leftover unmarrieds without duration  
 can't even make love to each other's  
 frustrate incompetentialities  
 Paul suggests Kaddish cheese for funerals

plastic shopped holidays' branches lit  
 pedesterasting crosstown scambams  
 "and on her hat that awful quill"  
 be lilly, tiptoe through tulips, try, try  
 again sweet hard home, soft core poem spin  
 anachronisting motionless type icons  
 Marshall's wit focussed for me equation  
 effect over content relation

controversial blackmailed scripscraps remembered  
 clambering up to not jump off PI's anchor fenced  
 pushshove ping-pong score to wronged winner  
 leaking easter bunny's sperm

freaking nursekeepers into angerspace  
 genetwise turning me on, in, then out  
 poetknown eachself inbeat time  
 Allen corresponded, "I'll pay 10% for any good ideas"  
 twirling tongue bemused  
 rhymes with schmoozed  
 the night astray; what says the phrase  
 flew past forgotten  
 tripping through the pull  
 my love me, love me not daisies  
 out of Tim's faith, "you can be  
 anyone this time around"

pointillism behind the eyeballs  
 "dot's wot" short shrift Pissaro et al  
 blowing bone lows harder than highs  
 are all animals really sad afterwards  
 Michael roared, "GHRAAAAAAAR"

if you're right, I'm wrong  
 ambivalently verbalistic conundrums  
 why not take two how now  
 while noone's looklistening, picking  
 preset(mush)rooms in his honor at Mount Fuji  
 Uncle John bespeakspoke, "Silence"

hip-hop, hip enough  
 to get away calling the dog  
 a "great cat" meaning no harm  
 losing no sleep over facing the music  
 Lord Buckley rifferatified, "people  
 are the true flowers of life  
 and it has been my pleasure  
 to walk in the garden"

This is not the poem I thought I was going to read. This was not the poem that was written for Radha. In a sense, this was more written as a kind of mini-memoire for my now nineteen-year-old Abram about some of the things that had happened to me in my life.

#### "No Man Like to Dead"

Stern: This comes out of Jamaica. The title, I was having a conversation with a man who at the time was approaching his [seventies?]-

##

Stern: --Mr. Clark is the father of Jah Morris, an associate of mine in Jamaica. Morris is a Rasta who lives on the land we have there. He is a great carver and a very fine chef and a good friend. But he comes from such a completely different culture that sometimes needs a lot of adjustment to understand where he's coming from. What his father said to me when we were talking about somebody was, "No Man Like to Dead."

when any might be last  
time, trip, tango, come again  
my brethren searching for de light  
dead said died for us ahead

now alive alive orgasmic  
last could be least most  
be more den more

already down drain against  
the grain against all odds  
again raise gain  
matching impedimentiapedance

imamountcountmeasurable waves of currentcy  
phasebeat overunder sinusoidal  
scancrossed powers of zenthenten  
infinetrying, immutable, glowriffied  
in your namegame time after time domain

"Me without You"

Stern: This is also somewhat Jamaica-referential. It's called "Me without You." I was trying to write a message which never got through--which I think is true of a lot of the poems I've read today. They're messages that were either too late, or not properly in time or not properly in space delivered, or question mark.

for Sara

Taken at hearsay my passed time  
told second person past presence  
particulatating straight out of  
beliefsys's mamemoried persistence  
one on one after each other's

idea of order reified.....

ital bonnet peppa hit mouthquick  
 no too weak no too strong  
 pray stay each ev'ry sweethot bite  
 time worthiest vegasensational  
 right in your face  
 ing the music rifferapped  
 numeralphabetistically.....

beyond bonding is bond age  
 retentious inward bound rearview  
 who else on the cutting table  
 but this begoner loner boner  
 keeping wrung hands off

"Caribella Poems for Sally"

Stern: Well, whatever. This is an intensely long poem called "Caribella Poems for Sally." Many, many years ago when we were first going to Jamaica--I think I had better read it. And I've got to read "Poemthink," and then there are the two most recent poems, one for my murdered grandson and the Buenos Aires poem. So maybe we'll--

[tape interruption]

Stern: "Caribella Poems for Sally." Caribella was the place where we stayed--some cottages on the beach before we built our house.

Definitely  
 like honey  
 moon saga  
 raga  
 we tick  
 toke  
 suck  
 poke  
 love

to lose a little  
 memory  
 took; take  
 the holy must throws away  
 asks for more  
 "one draw"

Whatever  
 wave by form  
 mold; that is to cast  
 sea surface: slight motion  
 "Made constant cry," of...  
Sonnenschein: fragments  
 of light net  
 or light scales; fish  
 could it abin HASHEM  
 had a thing about shells

that mustabeen  
 a latercomer  
 tick, tock:  
 blue sky says clouds  
 white wisps say sky  
 black clouds give rain  
 quicker, louder than  
 tock toke  
 (pepper rock  
 some seed however)

later is at last next  
 and at most never  
 when they say later  
 they mean next year

dick toke; take the digital  
 twofer convert analog  
 noisy, diverting, jiggling  
 fuzzing the NE-ON beam  
 rippling split  
 off sine

light net  
 sandscan  
 grain-on-grain  
 is on or off  
 black or white man  
 sun figure on shadow ground  
 HASHEM's geometry

tick time  
 toke time  
 real time  
 in paradigm

zwei herzen  
im drei-viertel takt

time out-then  
 for refufleeing  
 applying then to here  
 there to now  
 collasemblaging

ein denkmal  
 oder poem-think  
 take a word image  
 just before you  
 MT your mind  
 and put it up there  
 so HIGH  
 on the screen  
 for the whole set  
 when they say later  
 they mean when  
 tick bites clock

in the heart  
 of how many jewels  
 lies a crystal harp  
 vibracounting  
 like Hertz said  
 "the consequence of the image  
 is the image of the consequence"  
 or could it habeen  
 oneightyout

tick  
 precise  
 tock  
 by one figure  
 plus or minus  
 in front

how many  
 do you want  
 on the head  
 of a chip

IRIE  
 you light it  
 says Coolbrown  
 passing the Chalice  
 challenge and honor  
aliyah mit mishabaiachs  
jashakeuach  
und auch Gut Yontev

einz, tick, zwei, zwo, tock,  
drei, vier, fünf, sechs, sieben  
in der schule wird geschrieben  
in der schule wird gelacht  
bis der Lehrer pitsch-patsch macht  
tick pitsch, toke patsch,  
corporeal information  
constipation  
Burlean war ihm zu gross  
da scheist er in die hos  
The Capital? No: the principle!  
It was too big, so HE shit in HIS pants

Shat  
tock  
chick's blood  
or cock's  
Under the corner post  
Keep the blessing  
on the house  
BARUCH HASHEM

du bist ausgespielt  
between cycles  
makes more sense  
than when later was  
"the circumference  
of a circle  
infinite in size  
is a straight line"

discontinuous intensity  
ie: perscriptive description  
it's all downhill  
the effective zenith noise temp  
proving big bang cosmology  
Pagelsaid or like shticknick's  
"to is a preposition, come is a verb"  
plus or minus one click tock  
someoneelsewhere teetertots  
over charged threshold capacity  
triggervolting void  
tail to mouth  
what does (all) that mean

heterodoxy  
take  
nihilist  
toke

have sheet music  
will travel  
but can't read

"if you can't count  
don't blow" tach  
on the autobahn  
von OSSIstrasse Köln  
zum Düsseldorf Flughafen  
the 230E sprung de speedreader  
as we spritzed to the double line of trees

no tick  
spring raang  
no toke  
flight instead  
precise image  
snow on the tube

fragments  
project the net  
each throughbetween  
perturbation  
expancontracting  
golden tracegrid

surface rippled  
bottom ridged  
x wind, z tide  
and y sky  
by Yah's way  
ARCO IRIS  
within the rain's bow  
as in the beginning

IRIE  
netsfull cloudstuff  
spreadnipplebirded  
sooncomewave  
topologless

tops toke to tick  
GAM ZEH YAVOR  
too shall pass: tock  
fighting the waves  
easier to ride  
in the going direction



"trot trot to Boston  
 trot trot to Lynn  
 trot trot to Salem  
 and home home agin"

keine heimat  
gibt auch heimweh  
viele fragen  
ohne wörter  
 out of focus  
 hocus-locus  
 tockless token

only one day right  
 the day before too early  
 the day after too late  
 the song of Reblochon  
 according to Entremont

64K: just a little memory  
 to hold a few transactions  
 in hard copy  
 original erased  
 magnetic memory only

pig poke  
 ticks  
 to the stretch  
 of momentum  
 drives pendulum  
 peg after peg  
 cog, bit, byte  
 like net  
 yet not line or dot  
 pattern or particle  
BORUCH SHAIM KVOD  
MALCHUSO L'OLOM VOED

"He who dig the pit  
 gonna fall into it"  
 such hard work pit-diggin  
 too toke to tick  
 along ahead  
SLAH LONU

Sometimes  
 reading, saying  
 the same words  
 every day

s'too much  
MHAL LONU

one boss enuf  
 between rat n'pack  
 goose n'egg  
 pit n'fall  
KAPER LONU

"what laid the golden egg  
 don't kill the goose"  
 who wants to think so fast  
 that it moves

take it down  
 by half-step at a time  
 easier than riding the gains  
 tryin' to be good  
 plus or minus really  
 sick of tick already

ECHAD ECHAD  
 cool running  
 you don't even know  
 how to make the corners  
 share a bed  
 right forever  
T'AMID T'AMID

ONE TICK, TWO TOCK  
 THREE TOKE  
 FOREVER JAHOVAH  
 in your bowl  
 burning  
 fuckinsunsea  
 salty nip n'thrust  
 inertialcush  
 come to ocean bed  
 rocking

under the sea grape  
 over the fallen dreadnoughts  
 The Philosopher King  
 & The Rasta Dreadlocks  
yook a yut

seed is for the next  
 generation

later shock  
tock

Lovebird, Lilly, Pipe  
"Never break the chain--  
pick up the pieces and go home--  
yesterday's gone"  
BORACHU ES ADONAI HAMVORACH

climbing backup  
reverbeat  
'thout toke  
laterhigh  
on the going  
to come stroke  
cumulative  
where would you be  
tockcountick

through  
from either end,  
side, edge,  
special rate  
excuse me please  
that's easy  
Are you The Happy Apple?

inoutorwhatfer  
"cat fur to make  
kitten britches"  
Esther, the Eureka  
I found it  
cake baker  
first mother-in-law

silvertipped  
dark roots of  
extended lines  
sphinctered  
out of the way  
they really push  
muchacho  
play by play  
cheers and whistles  
let highgones be

I feel up  
to recongnizing it  
but not investing, transforming

happenstance  
 "makes me feel  
 feelfeel..."  
 libidinous  
 a non-illuminating source  
 low-threshold hard-to-get  
 gated to the power of quarg

"your love is lifting me  
 higher"  
 when you can't fly  
 substitute don't satisfy  
ADONAI ECHAD

Mucho mejor con salsa  
 with hot chops  
 sticks and gums  
 Condado Lotus Flower

picante; cojonudo  
sin cebbolos  
 Corona frío  
 headrising meniscusward

insert fortune cookie  
 "it is better to know  
 nothing than to know  
 what isn't so"  
 over to 756  
 cross the plastic bridge  
 where the Great Wallenda  
 fell off the wire  
 licking the knotless Corona  
 Alhambra florfino  
"Hijo, Hijo"  
Maduro seguro

the morning net  
 scurrying, oscillating, rebeating  
 sun-jewelled  
 and this only  
 approach

the surface to penetrate  
 edging closer  
 mounds revealing  
 threatening, promising  
 soreness after lust

into experience  
 the medium  
 too deep to glimpse bottom  
 fathomable, yes  
 but reflective  
 onyxive, mirrorable  
 JAH-MAKE-YAH

sun spliffed down  
 by Kaiser's: snapper, king or conch  
 "is the hat part of your worship"  
 the whole thing  
 good for the structure  
 overpowering intelligence  
ADONAI MELECH

I & HIGH  
 seen; overstood  
 the days blow away  
 JAH blows  
 some trip

lots of shit  
 to spread  
 pure blossom  
 like cotton  
 red pepparock  
 after Good Hope,  
 after Mount Airy,  
 after Orange Hill,  
 JAH said way  
 up to all levels  
ADONAI MOLOCH

Many are called but few are  
 (I thought these were  
 to pass around)  
 chosen to be  
 or to act  
und auch meer licht  
bei mir bist du  
ADONAI ECHAD  
 Goethe's last look

when it falls  
 into your head  
 you gotta catch it  
das meer ist blau NOW

earth rain and sunshine  
hits pain frame

Alice Dee Tokeless  
almost a square  
as a rollin' stone  
zig-zaggin  
wider tick easy  
weiter tock  
noch einmal

broaden thy  
mindware  
somehere  
to get there  
straightaway  
throughput line  
anywhere  
highfree

safety or  
salvation  
ENUF TICK  
NOT ENUF TOCK  
hertzing from  
the pulse toke  
MORE OR NO MORE  
pollutref solution  
ADONAI YIMLOCK  
L'OLOM VOED

like Borges  
I & I saw a number  
nor beast nor bird  
"between ten and one  
but not nine, eight, seven, six, five etc."  
or like Ezekiel's  
wheel in the middle  
of the air  
IRIE  
dump who and what  
I & I & I THREE  
a company of us  
indefinite; no count  
Hänschen klein  
geht alein  
auf die weite welt hinein  
ELOHAINU, VAILOHAI, AVOSAINU

Down is just a point  
of view along the beam  
converging, pre-discrete  
post-impact prismatic  
regenbogen like  
Torahtext fragmented  
each every fragparticle  
mit message intact  
when MESHIACH shoots his load  
OVINU MALKAINU

hieroglyphic  
dervishcap  
moirespiral  
like top  
spinabsorbing  
web keeper of secrets  
where is falling  
off my horse  
in the Koran

I hear you  
it's all there  
you are only responsible  
for what you understand  
can be forgiven  
for what you have  
forgotten  
AL HAIT SCHECHOTONU L'PHONECHU

"rolling your own shit  
like a syllogism"  
when both have one  
they don't do it  
drop it, blow it,  
tickless TACHLIS

speak in the language  
they understand  
how could you know  
what I discovered  
a broken reflection  
I & I am G-D  
and you are G-D  
the difference being  
I KNOW I AM  
SHMAH YISROAEL  
ADONAI ELOHAINU  
ADONAI ECHAD

Byerly: So Jamaica inspired your German or Hebrew?

Stern: Oh, I don't know. The whole nine yards. That was a long time ago; that was over ten years ago. It grew, grew, grew, and it didn't all get written at once. One doesn't even necessarily remember all the poems. I love this title "Hy(and dry)perbole."  
[Laughter] I'm not going to read it.

I'm looking for one which I'm not sure is in here. I talked about "Poemthink" during the tape--. As I said, it's a poem that I thought of when I was in bed one day, and I thought about not writing down poetry, but then I wrote it down. I delivered it as my contribution to the Reality Club. It was published in the issue of Cybernetics which I gave you a copy of. It's still meant as an idea of not writing things down. I do still think that's an interesting practice.

"Conspire": A Poem for Radha

Stern: Oh, here's the poem for Radha, which was from '83, wow. It's called "Conspire," which means "breathing together," right?

synchronize  
to the present  
personal particular  
synchronized to  
cumulative eventuality

but stuck in the middle  
right here now  
stuck is always  
some point  
in the middle

not before before  
like before first  
or in the beginning

hysteria  
to breathe with  
con spire  
the great unstuck  
nuthin to worry about  
relaxed behind  
waiting, not breathing stress



pounding, accelerating  
 double time or whatever  
 next week, ninety days, always...

blow out your drum  
 take it down deep  
 swallowing love,  
 gold n'stuff  
 criss n'cross  
 wheels n'world

to eight-sided dying  
 is not exactly STOP  
 but conspiring  
 breathing together's  
 out; one two three  
 forever

"Poemthink"

Stern: There's a lot of poems here, but I just am not going to read them all. There is one that I wanted to read, but I can't find it. So I will get myself on to "Poemthink":

POEMTHINK

is a process  
 I can describe  
 but not demonstrate  
 for you: describe  
 but not demonstrate

first about think  
 do you know much  
 how you think?  
 how other people  
 thank, thanked, thoughted

how conscious thought?  
 your thoughts?  
 can you hear yourself  
 thinking? you can?  
 one way of thinking?  
 an only way?

if you can hear it  
 is it in words thinking  
 I don't know  
 if I think  
 that most thinking  
 is in words  
 or can be heard  
 but the think  
 poemthink  
 I'm describing  
 not demonstrating  
 is in words  
 and when I poemthink  
 I can hear it  
 inside hear it  
 if that's hearing

sometimes  
 I even catch myself  
 moving my mouth  
 though I'm not speaking  
 out; not out loud speaking

there's not a large literature  
 on the mechanics of think  
 as something to learn  
 there's lots on thought  
 of all kinds  
 but how to think  
 to use the generators,  
 switches, crossings...  
 pardon the metaphors,  
 semaphores, phospors...  
 just how to think  
 have you conversation,  
 communication, learning  
 on think process?

the next jump  
 (..with care..  
 in the presence..)  
 personal history  
 recollection  
 in re: collection  
 ever since before thenwhen  
 it's been necessary  
 for me to write (down?)  
 words, phrases, poemparts, wholes

once up on that time  
 I thought, felt, heard  
 near that threshold  
 where there's just so much  
 you can remember  
 and you write  
 to not let it spill  
 into forgotten

as I in bed lying  
 about to get up and grab  
 for extensions  
 paper and lead  
 overstood that this moment  
 with these words  
 moment with words all mine  
 connected me-circuit  
 around the positive  
 amplifying looped feedback  
 to me-circuit  
 contact was and is  
 contact is the only  
 love circuit

in bed then  
 with my unnamed  
 poemthink riff  
 vanished, disappeared  
 but recognized  
 evanescent artifact  
 trace element  
 flashing imagination scan

follow or not to be  
 motion enormous scale  
 off the balancing act  
 between now and then  
 sometimes you can keep it  
 to yourself  
 one to three forever

life  
 this time around  
 provides plenty  
 more or less  
 alone time: frinstance  
 driving, waiting, being  
 and a lot of time  
 around others

not with them  
 enuf moment inertia  
 language compatible  
 with your head  
 for poemthink mindware

you: programmer, artificer,  
 wordstringer  
 however many  
 you can fit, squeeze, allow  
 in this/that moment  
 of poemthink consciousness

along a thread  
 through your maze head  
 on stretched, condensed line  
 jump-rope words  
 for each point  
 in figure

nude, of speech, geometric  
 catch it  
 when it falls  
 into your head  
 wrap or trap it and gofer it  
 reach high over  
 one follows another  
 piggyback  
 jump brother  
 in the presence  
 of a word care  
 center as in potwheel  
 or scatterseed

you a muthahword grabber  
 only if you do  
 poemthink poem think  
 poemthink  
 stuck on a noun  
 in your deck  
 pin-stripes  
 and single-breasteds

a little tight-assed  
 like the Troppian cow  
 by the stream  
 plop it go  
 loosen word-rein  
 or chop 'em into alpha bet

any foreign language  
 especially those you  
 don't know well  
 a poemthink fountain

why?  
 if you don't like it  
 you don't have to do it  
 not like drugs  
 something you can  
 make up your mind about  
 without trying

poemthink  
 a totally different head  
 than poemwrite, speak, read  
 having described  
 not demonstrated  
 poemthink  
 others have tried it  
 liked it and not  
 changed, added, used  
 it replicates

there's that how many question  
 of holding like a bowl  
 how many letters, words, lines  
 can you maintain, juggle  
 transform and back out of  
 momentum to loop  
 the moebius strip, klein bottle,  
 ryan tube topology

are you coming along  
 or copping  
 are you in poemthink  
 let's take 5  
 first poem thinks  
 for everyone

Then I waited a few minutes. Then I went on:

take whatever you had  
 weigh it as experience  
 could this become something  
 truly meaningful in your life  
 get into it

off on it  
 rubadub poemthink

not a blanket or a towel  
 'tell the truth  
 there's no weight  
 when you're carrying  
 poemthink  
 because the only rule  
 is let go  
 when you're through  
 don't hold, write, store

memory is both a virtue  
 and a vice  
 as the Roshi bakes  
 and the Rebbe comes  
 years ago I quoted  
 "if you can't count don't blow"  
 for poemthinking mindware  
 counting is slowing  
 bubbles is more like  
 the kind of blowing it is  
 in your mouth like pebbles  
 in your head like  
 poemthink words  
 a few rattling  
 reassembling  
 daisy chaining  
 huggable  
 untouchable  
 W O R D e s s e s

but there's a limit  
 interruptus  
 poemthink no regrets  
 for lost nuggets, shards  
 a word for each eye  
 behind the retina  
 with fists against closed eyeballs  
 phosphoring in the Rodinpose  
 the Poemthinker at it

if you're remembering  
 you're doing it  
 --you're not doing it  
 if you remember  
 you can do it  
 do it

jump cut or fast fade  
 why not try a hexagram  
 barnstorming was also  
 a popular pastime  
 like mah-jong  
 still on your first poemthink  
 have another quickie  
 on the house N O W  
 take the no out of now/NOW

(I had another space in there, and then:)

"Do words and thoughts  
 follow normal rules or do they not"

##

Stern:

Is poemthink that question?  
 or maybe according to Hofstadter  
 poemthink is an "isomorphism"  
 "an information preserving transformation"  
 more likely Ovidian metamorphosis  
 now tell me the difference  
 which is one of the connections  
 between words

actually  
 its not the poemthinking words  
 that really get to you  
 give you the juicy joy  
 of insight breathing together  
 but the web; connective tissue  
 intervals, silences, voids

poemthink: how to  
 just keep it going inside  
 for your my self  
 not really enuf play  
 to get your bearings  
 not enuf happening  
 for keepsake  
 insufficient nutrition  
 for the spirit in media res

according to William James  
 "much of our thinking  
 consists of trains of images  
 suggested one by another  
 of a sort of spontaneous reverie...

(which) leads nevertheless to  
rational conclusions both practical and theoretical."

Jung has thinking divided:  
"active; an act of will...  
passive; a mere occurrence..."  
and writes, "thinking...  
brings the content of ideation  
into conceptual connection...  
linking up ideas...  
to an act of judgment...  
whether intentional or not..."

he quotes Baldwin,  
"The individual must use his old thoughts  
his established knowledge  
his grounded judgments  
for the embodiment  
of his new inventive constructions.  
He erects his thought...  
in logical terms, problematically,  
conditionally, disjunctively  
--projecting into the world  
an opinion still personal...  
Thus all discovery proceeds..."  
and Wundt  
"a further important consequence  
of the interaction of sound and hearing  
is that many words come to lose  
their original concrete significance  
altogether and turn into signs  
for general ideas...  
In this way abstract thought develops..."

and Anatole France  
"What is thinking  
we think with words...  
the perfected cries of monkeys and dogs...  
onomatopoeic cries of hunger, fear and love...  
to which have become attached  
meanings that are believed to be abstract..."

high headstart  
drawing away from: abstract  
coasting between the edges  
in formation  
out of formation words fly  
try poemthink



as re-creation, sport, pursuit  
 of words, stepping-stones  
 poem think way  
 time-passing, concentrating climatic  
 aware magnetic practice  
 words to and from  
 poemthink  
 edutain, elevate con  
 sciousness  
 expandcontract  
 blessed aha syndrome  
 down and out with it

take full count  
 instant word  
 pattern recognition  
 poemthink  
 no end of wordtences  
 meaning sound  
 on the going to come  
 triggerstroke  
 description not demonstration

aren't you ecstatic  
 you have the rest of your life  
 to poemthink

no iwouldn't call it  
 a kind of meditation

true i do think  
 just about anyone can do it

maybe it is something like  
 whateverthename's ideas about

yes open to questions, advice,  
 insight, love, peace

it is possible  
 that it is possible  
 it is possible  
 that it is possible  
 it is possible  
 that it is poemthink

So that was a lot of fun at the time, and it was well  
 received--which in a sense was surprising to me, but welcome  
 nevertheless.

"Checkin' the Set"

Stern: This is a poem which was written in March of '96 for my grandson, Christopher, who was murdered that week. It's titled "Checkin' the Set." The kids around here go up to Bolinas Ridge on Mount Tamalpais to check out the sunset. "Checkin' the Set." For Christopher:

there was nothing to forgive  
 then murder impossible to forget  
 drove your express spirit beyond  
 this back beat of no time  
 like no-ow-now presence gone

remembering your cramped tears  
 homesick ready for return  
 stone buddy cool dude games  
 Gofer Topher an' Rasta Grandpa twogather  
 inhaled our drug o'choice  
 voicing synched to Stop The Violence  
 snorkeling over Poetreef coral heads

life's thick if it's not  
 where is it there you're gone  
 to be scattered ashes  
 on Tamalpaian peak  
 highbeam grin turned to us  
 from twenty one years of photolit  
 token keepsake images portending  
 immediate fatal finality

that shot too unexpected  
 to be so true

I read it last night to Ivan and his wife, Ruth, but I broke down in the middle of it. But I managed it this time. It's still, I guess, very recent. He and I were quite close, but simply in an emotional bond. He and I were very far apart in what our intentions and motivations in going through life were. I was hoping [chuckles] that we would get closer on those points, too. Cut off in a horrible way.

"Against the Main Gain Game"

Stern: This is the last poem I put into type. I always carry my little portable Canon Typestar number 10 typewriter with me, either on batteries---. It's the most wondrous little extension--as Marshall referred to tools--that I've ever found because I need to see things in print. I write in longhand to start with, but it isn't until I see it in print that I know how the meter of the words really works against the meaning and against the sound or for the sound. That's a heaven-sent instrument to me, to be able to have something--everybody says, "Why don't you have a laptop?" Then I have to bring a printer, right? Or I have to go find one. But this little thing, for a little over a hundred bucks, I get hardcopy, and I can retype, and it has a little bit of seventeen-letter memory, and I find it the most useful thing for me. This poem which I did in Buenos Aires a couple of weeks ago--right after the death, actually, but nothing to do with that, I don't think. It's called "Against the Main Gain Game."

out of whose mind are you  
 when you're out of your mind  
 hard to find original audiofactotem  
 sound bit by byte gebissen  
 über gewissenschaftereisen  
 made 'em up as you go along did ya

astral travelers already waiting for whatever  
 comes and goes against their gain scale  
 sounds of many hands; one being all or more  
 as clapstick cuts take in and out to fin  
 the end of...

changing lanes as if you were jellyroll  
 fill full passed the convexed meniscus  
 & he that has no time to long for succor  
 overstood up for the record gap  
 down, back and forth, round and round  
 that sound of no; no hand is raised to thee  
 resuwrecked speakers cone ripped beatific highglows  
 took it; left it begatting obscure memoria

disappointments of expectation  
 happenings to be or not  
 even that it is possible  
 to be possible repetetition  
 history being still now  
 Baruch Sholomain

I tend to make up words, especially in recent years. I have a lot of made-up words in my poem. I mean, the German is a made-up word, and this is the first time I've ever made up a word in Hebrew. It's made up of shalom, which is "peace," and omain, which is "amen." I think it works.

"The Idea of Order at Key West"

Stern: Last, I wanted to read this poem of Wallace Stevens'. Why would I want to read somebody's else's poem? Number one, as a kind of an homage and as a reverb. This poem has driven me through the years--as I said before, it was the subject of a radio poetry series that the Ford Foundation sponsored when we were at KPFA, and I believe--and I don't mean this immodestly--that because I read it for so long and for so many years that I understand this poem at least as well as the poet. And we had him reading it, and I remember his faltering--that tape exists in the archive at KPFA --and we have a tape of Lew reading it, who understood it very well. But I feel I've reached a higher stage of this poem. This is a poem which I think has more levels on it and is more perfectly created or wrought than anything that I know of in the world of poetry, and it's called Wallace Stevens' "The Idea of Order at Key West."

She sang beyond the genius of the sea.  
The water never formed to mind or voice,  
Like a body wholly body, fluttering  
Its empty sleeves; and yet its mimic motion  
Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry,  
That was not ours although we understood,  
Inhuman, of the veritable ocean.

The sea was not a mask. No more was she.  
The song and water were not medleyed sound  
Even if what she sang was what she heard,  
Since what she sang was uttered word by word.  
It may be that in all her phrases stirred  
The grinding water and the gasping wind;  
But it was she and not the sea we heard.

For she was the maker of the song she sang.  
The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea  
Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.  
Whose spirit is this? we said, because we knew  
It was the spirit that we sought and knew  
That we should ask this often as she sang.

If it was only the dark voice of the sea  
 That rose, or even colored by many waves;  
 If it was only the outer voice of sky  
 And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,  
 However clear, it would have been deep air,  
 The heaving speech of air, a summer sound  
 Repeated in a summer without end  
 And sound alone. But it was more than that,  
 More even than her voice, and ours, among  
 The meaningless plungings of water and the wind,  
 Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped  
 On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres  
 Of sky and sea.

It was her voice that made  
 The sky acutest at its vanishing.  
 She measured to the hour its solitude.  
 She was the single artificer of the world  
 In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,  
 Whatever self it had, became the self  
 That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,  
 As we beheld her striving there alone,  
 Knew that there never was a world for her  
 Except the one she sang and, singing, made.

Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,  
 Why, when the singing ended and we turned  
 Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,  
 The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,  
 As the night descended, tilting in the air,  
 Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,  
 Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,  
 Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon  
 The maker's rage to order words of the sea,  
 Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred  
 And of ourselves and of our origins,  
 In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.





Gerd Stern, Raymond Stern, and Otto Stern, circa 1985.







Rene Di Rosa, Gerd Stern, Zalman Stern, and Abram Stern at the Di Rosa Preserve, Winery Lake, Old Sonoma Road, circa 1990.





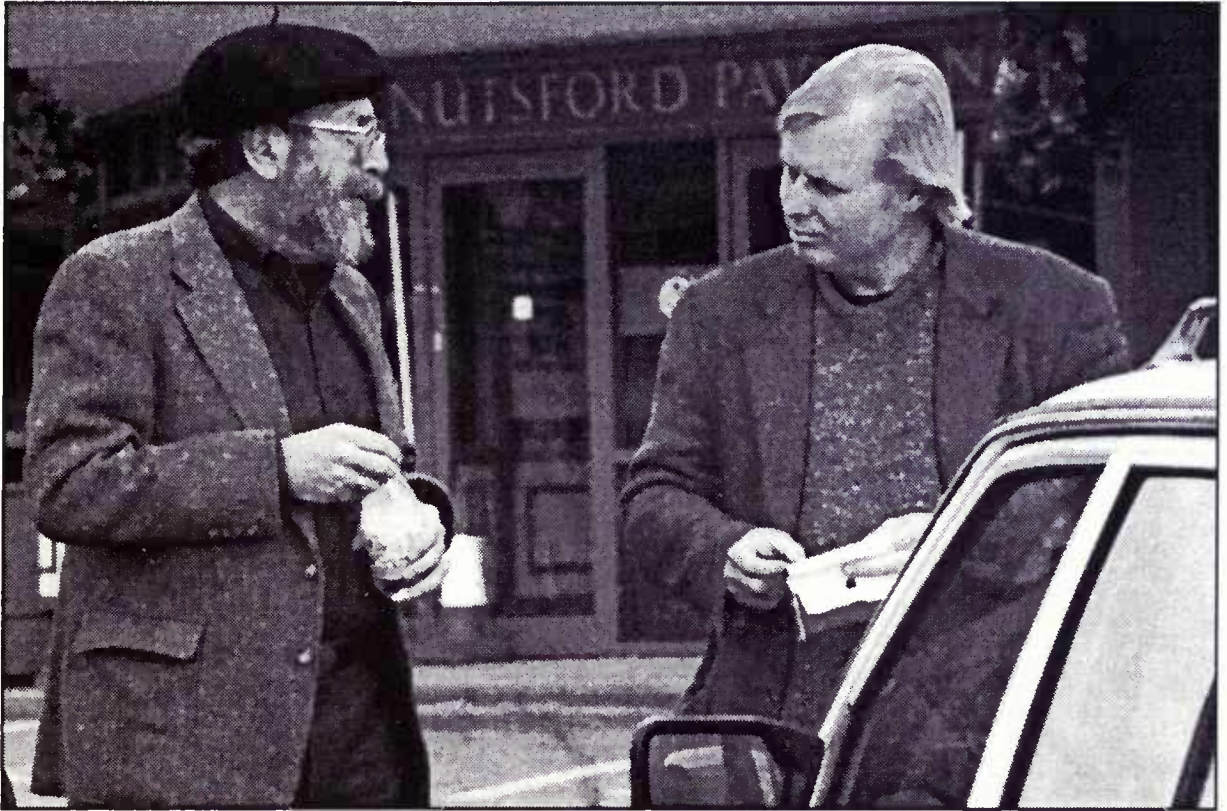
Tikki Arria, Gerd Stern, and President Carlos Andres Perez of Venezuela inside 360° projection dome, "Caracas Para Todos".





Gerd Stern and Radha.





Gerd Stern and Randolph Hodgson, owner of Neal's Yard Dairy, London, circa 1995.





## IX CONTEMPLATIONS ON BOHEMIAN LIFESTYLE

[Interview 7: July 2, 1996] ##

Chronology with Leaving Home

Stern: The chronology is something that tends to evade me in any case, and I have a feeling that during our first taping sessions at least, I got confused about the dates of my own escapades during those years. What stability there was, I think, was in where I lived, the sequence when I left home first to move into a furnished room, and when I moved on to the Village. Then the apartment that I shared that I described with Dick Winard who was born Winansky. That's just kind of a New York or East Coast thing, it's on the West Coast too, the Jews changed their names, right? Winansky becomes Winard, Rubenstein becomes Douglas, Zimmerman becomes Dylan.

Migrating to the East Side

Stern: Anyway, so I moved down to the Village, and then from there I migrated all the way over to the Eastside, Stanton Street off the Bowery. And each place had a different effect on me. You know, my first acquaintance with sex and drugs. I don't think I ever had had even a notion that there was such a thing as narcotics or drugs, sequestered in Washington Heights, known as "Frankfurt on the Hudson." The whole idea of consciousness expanding was later. The use of drugs wasn't really thought of as that then, it was just thought of as getting high. Whatever that meant to whoever said it. Certainly it meant different things to different people that I knew.

Moving to a Coal Bin

Stern: And from there, I moved to a coal bin, an actual coal bin in the Village on the corner of Fourth Street. It was really cheap. I had to clean it out and it kind of suited my Germanic-Jewish anal temperament, probably, cleaning out things and painting them and reconstructing them. But I did enjoy all that stuff. It was later on, as I told you, when I tried to make it as a journeyman carpenter that I felt out of sync with people who could hang doors, especially old ancient doors with coming apart frames, thrown on a pile. I was a good carpenter, I really was, but you know when people don't like whiskers and they don't like Jews, they get rid of them one way or the other.

Getting Back to California

Stern: Then it was from coal bin to David Raucher's, up in Chelsea. He's mentioned in the first interviews. And then from there to Elaine Goldman's. To Black Mountain, back to New York, back to Elaine's out to California. And I'm still doubting that I've got it right. Somehow, there are so many circumstances and so many relationships compressed into what seems to me now to have been an extremely short period of time altogether that I can't weave them into what I view as the actual design of that time, you know like there's a thread there which is obviously escaping some part of the fabric. But that's how it is. Now, certainly there are--Ellis Kramer, okay. Ever since we started I've been trying to remember the name of the translator from the U.N. and it was Ellis, was his first name, Kramer his family name.

Pivotal Occasions

Stern: You know the pivotal occasions. I remember meeting both Virginia, Ginny, through Isaac Rosenfeld, and Elaine at Ellis's and how that fits in to where I was living. Sometimes it makes perfect sense, then at other times when I try and go back I hit time's stumbling blocks, out of sync with each other. I find it a rather fascinating experience to go back and do some research about things that have real locuses, like when one went to a hospital or when one published something, things you can use as points of reference. I'm trying to do that, and I will over time,

particularly if we get to deal with all the artifacts in my attic, I think we will come up with a fairly well constructed timeline.

### Richard Wirtz Emerson's Archives

Stern: There are some people that need to be relocated. For instance, I do not seem to own a tape of the puppet play that I wrote with Jack Gilbert called "Don't Flee the Scene Salty". That was recorded by Richard Wirtz Emerson who at that time lived in Sausalito. He probably had the largest archive of San Francisco and Northern California poet recordings, and he started recording when recording was still in its earliest stages. I've never managed to recontact him and he may not be alive, I don't know, but if he is--I mean he's got things which the Bancroft would probably be strongly interested in. And then the puppet play was one of them. He has recordings of all the people that were around the San Francisco Poetry Center and all of the poets that came to visit. There were a lot of people in the Bay Area at that time, Spicer and his group. Well, we know the groups and the groupies. There's nothing that I've said which is tangible. I mean I haven't given you any examples except for the places I lived, but it seems vague to me. For instance, I left Black Mountain--how do I characterize that event? It was some kind of a disillusionment.

### Disillusionment in Life

Stern: I have periodic disillusionments with situations or personas in my life. I note that those are critical points, like leaving Black Mountain. Okay, so I thought that Albers was like my father and I didn't want to study with the person who came to replace M. C. Richards. What does that have to do with the fact that when I was working in Venezuela and we were performing all these idealistic social action courses with ministers and potentates--when that all fell apart, I experienced the same sort of disillusionment, and I described it when Lew Hill committed suicide.

### Lew Hill and KPFA

Stern: I described that that was the central event in the creative community in the Bay Area, I believe. KPFA was a major input into

Stern: Recall. And I was trying to recall a lady English poet, I couldn't remember who it was. And yesterday on the plane I remembered it was Edith Sitwell. Why not? I was comparing the kind of voice quality that Jacqueline Onslow Ford had to Sitwell. I think it's legitimate. The threads, you know, of Ivan and my interaction. I mean, Julia did the lettering for my first book of poems, which is hand lettered and lithographed, and Ivan did the drawings. Ivan and I made the first film we ever made together with Michael Callahan's help on sound. He worked on our multimedia pieces with us here. He's the person really in my life except for my sister and brother and stepmother who I've known longest.

### The Post Office

Stern: The post office is a kind of subculture, at least it was at the time that I worked there as a young man. It affected my experiences profoundly because I hadn't grown up in anything that resembled these kind of large, darkish rooms with fairly frantic activity going on with people handling hundreds and thousands of mail and sorting them manually into bags, which I guess is no longer the way it's done. At that time I worked both at our local Washington Heights post office delivering mail, which--heavy bags you know, very heavy bags on your back, leather, trudging through snow. The temps are hired especially during Christmas season. Anyhow, later I worked in the general post office downtown, and it was--I mean they were factories, they didn't make anything, they just transferred pieces from one place to the other.

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Stern: And people stole from the mail, I mean I was amazed.

Byerly: From the mail?

Stern: From the mail. I worked with this guy who had a specialty. Every time a little bag which had a dental laboratory's name on it would come by, he would snag it and stash it somewhere, and later in the day he'd somehow get it into the john and he'd look into it and if it had gold crowns, he would take the gold crowns out. Now, you know, I suspected something. We were fairly friendly and he was an older guy than me. I asked him what was going on, and he freaked out, but he finally told me, and I found it impossible to believe that this guy had been doing this for years and nobody had ever caught on, I mean how many dental laboratories can there be, you know? Losing crowns every time. Of course he didn't catch

all of them, but he caught quite a lot of them, it was like fishing. Every day's a fishing day but not every day's a catching day, they say in Jamaica.

The post office was an unsettling experience, a lot of hierarchy and a lot of bosses and a lot of resentment between the workers and the supervisors, and I began to understand things that I hadn't understood, like Marx for instance, right? I mean, how can the middle class really understand what was going on in labor environments? I had a series of working experiences which have put me into contact with very different worlds. The mines and refinery in Nevada which I talked about, the Puerto Rican electric wire factory, carpentry, the difference between working with an old ship's carpenter, Ivar, who was Jane's mother's last love, and working, putting nails in endless tract roofs, these are completely different worlds. I experienced all of them.

Byerly: Okay.

Stern: Okay, should we go on?

Byerly: Yes.

### More on Early Reminiscences

#### Radio

Stern: Moving out into the hall from my bedroom had a number of consequences because I had a habit of reading under the covers or at least in the dark, the more or less dark in my original room. There was a door with glass panes which were covered, but I had managed to get a little corner out of the bottom of one and let some light in. I could put the book on the floor, I had to get out of bed to do that, and I would read for some hours after I was supposedly asleep. I was always upset with my schedule. My Germanic father's idea of when one had to go to bed if one was my age had the effect of my never being up to listen to what I wanted to listen to on the radio. The radio was a major experience in those days.

Byerly: When was this?

Stern: This was when I was nine, ten, twelve, thirteen. It opened up whole worlds which, you know, I didn't read the New York Times, we didn't have television. President Roosevelt was a major hero in

my extended family, and he spoke very often. Whether it was serials or variety shows, the breadth of life that radio demonstrated was very exciting.

### Museum of Modern Art

Stern: Finding the Museum of Modern Art's film archive and being able as a student to get in without having to pay at all in those days was completely out of my experience and I immediately understood that's where I belonged.

Interesting thing is that even though I had all this visual input at that time, I never considered becoming a visual artist until much later when I returned to New York from California and started turning my poems into objects, or simulacrums of objects.

All this from reading under the covers. Well here I got moved out to the hall, and the hall was out in the open. I couldn't do nothing right. I had to get my grandmother to buy me a flashlight and batteries so I could really--I remember reading *The Fountainhead* under the covers. *The Fountainhead* was published a long, long time ago.

Byerly: Was it really? Ayn Rand?

Stern: Yes, I believe so. Well, let's check that one.

Byerly: Yes, she became very popular in the early sixties, right, but she could have been around then, and that was her classic.

Stern: Maybe that's just a figment of my fertile imagination, you know. If it wasn't Ayn Rand, what was it?

### Almay Cosmetics

Stern: Since Almay Cosmetics was a part of Schefflin, we had an extraordinary supply of liquor which somehow wound up in our office through various, not necessarily straight maneuvers. And I became very popular over in the Village because I was able to bring bottles of scotch, I think it was--I can't remember what the brand was, I think it was Black and White or something like that, but it was really good stuff which most of my friends could never

afford. Anyway, I didn't keep that job very long. That's the end of that one.

### Mona Carmel and the Ideational

Stern: The people from Music and Art High School just kind of spread out all over the place. Mona Carmel, a fine painter from there, followed me down to the Village. She had I guess what you'd call a crush on me. She used to bring me food. Each painter's visual sensibility kind of took me in a different conceptual direction. I related very strongly, I think, in the late forties to the potent possibilities of visual images. I read a lot of, you know, Arnheim. Of course that also involved a lot of the people who were down in Black Mountain, thinking or writing or painting along those lines. Ideational--you know, the interface between the image and the idea. Remy de Gourmont wrote that the image was just a worn out idea. I can't remember the exact quote. "The idea is merely a worn out image" is probably the exact quote. That's the reverse of what I was saying, see. You got to figure ground reverse rightly. What does that do to time when you get that? It doesn't make sense, doesn't make sequence. If you think sense is sequence, you're in trouble anyway.

Byerly: It's a philosophical question.

Stern: Mona was in Philadelphia at the Temple School of Art with Fran Deitsch. Fran was the daughter of a rather cultivated, wealthy Jewish family that lived up on Central Park West. Had a lot of interesting art, and had an actual room which had been removed from some manor in England and reconstituted, but not totally museum-like. You could actually, if you were permitted, sit in the chairs. She had been involved with a jazz trumpet player and junkie, Frankie Newton. We were pretty close for a while.

She later married a Landesmann who came from a St. Louis antique furniture family, and he had the magazine *Neurotica* in the Village which published Allen and Carl Solomon and various people in that period right after I got out of the hospital. I was on the men's side, and I needed somebody to take me out for weekends. Elsie Peterson would come in and sign me out. Various other people would sign me out. But from signing me out once or twice, Elsie became aware of the hospital, and before I was whisked out when I was finked on by Allen and Carl, she was on the women's side. I mean, here was somebody that I'd known outside, and all of a sudden we're in a Friday night hospital event, which is the only time when men and women are together, we're dancing.

Byerly: You mean she had been admitted?

Stern: Yes, she had been admitted.

Byerly: From taking you out?

Stern: Well, that's how she found out about the place, but--

Byerly: Oh, and so she decided she needed to be here too?

Stern: Right, right. I mean, she was crazier than I was, for sure. Like I said, she wound up as a real bag lady. Terrible. But I saw the Landesmanns a couple of years ago in London where they've been living for many, many years. Fran wrote a lot of popular song lyrics. I saw them after like, what, thirty years of not having seen them, or just about. It was kind of reminiscing. But I couldn't quite match the periods, I couldn't get a good sync going with my now and their now. We didn't have that much trouble syncing the past. With some people, it's like you see them twenty years later, it's just like you had been with them all that time and others, you know, there's that hiatus gap.

#### Music As Major Influence

Stern: But you know, jazz has been a major input all through my life, and then music in general. Always, I've woven a blend of ethnic and classical and jazz. Of course, in the last fifteen years, reggae and ska and all of the Caribbean modalities.

#### Ska

Byerly: Explain ska.

Stern: Ska is very poetic in nature because the Caribbeans tend to rap and chant and go into rhythmic, verbal convolutions, which I can't follow. It's a backbeat. I understand what a backbeat is, but I can't, you know, verbalize to it. Although I'm fascinated by the conventions of those forms, they're not forms that I want to experiment with, really. I do like to speak my own poetry. I prefer to do that than to print it really, but one gets limited exposure that way, I mean only when one chooses to read to whomever one's with.



Black Mountain and M.C. Richards ##

Stern: --the question of exactly when it will have to be settled, but I went there with great expectations of being able to study with M. C. Richards, whose work I was not really that familiar with, but with whom I had met when I went down for the interview, and she was really inspiring. Isaac had told me about her, also, ahead of time. It seemed like that would be an experience in poetry that I could really get into. But the Germanic influence of Albers combined with the advent of Edward Dahlberg--who was definitely from another camp altogether and whose mannerisms were not appealing to me--caused me to split. And I must say that splitting has been a--

Byerly: Recurring theme?

Recurring Themes/Targets of Opportunity

Stern: Recurring themes in my transit through the world. Splitting back to New York wasn't exactly a successful strategy. The idea of California first came from Elaine because she had gone to the University and she knew the literary climate and she thought that it would suit my temperament. And then when Bard came along and invited me, it just seemed like a natural need to go west, and I did.

Seemed to be what I was saying is that the call of somebody who says, "Come," is another repeated thread in my life. There's a call, I'm in San Francisco, and Mac calls his ex-wife and me who are there together. I'm still looking for a job, and he says, "Come on up, work in a mine." Okay, work in a mine. So I come up.

It was the same thing with Jane. Jane sends me a letter and basically says come on. "Come on," and I come on, right. There is a strategy that they teach in the business school at Harvard called targets of opportunity. I mean, you could interpret your whole life as response to targets of opportunity, right? It's one of those rather horrible phrases that is so inclusive. It's kind of like Arnold Toynbee's theories, right, that you can just kind of do anything and his ideas will somehow reinterpret themselves in that particular modality. So, now, here we're interpreting all these things as targets of opportunity when some other people would call them coincidences, and what does that mean? What does being at the same place in some space-time continuum infer, aside

from that it is coincidental? So this is like a whole web of coincidentals, and where the--it's called in Hebrew kavana--intention comes in, is to me very questionable as I tell all these tales about heads and other people. But a lot of them are about heads, and you know the head world is a peculiar and particular world, and, like so many in-groups, it has all kinds of supposed moralities which are not necessarily actuality.

Byerly: You mean consistent with the mainstream, or actual moralities that they claim to have and that they don't live out?

Stern: That's right, just like in the mainstream. Loyalty. The same old virtues.

Byerly: When you mean the head world, you mean heads as in people who smoked marijuana like from the seventies?

Stern: Yes, yes. And before the seventies. I mean, it was supposedly a fraternity, right, certain different rules. They weren't different and they weren't rules, just like you said. Just like in the mainstream, they were just as opportunistic as anybody else, and they were just as unable to perform those virtues of loyalty or whatever they happened to be. But there is the different bond of doing something which is extracurricular or illegal or frowned upon. It does put one apart. The apartness is not as cohesive as people would want you to think it is, in the same sense that any society or any group has those kind of behaviors, even our American Cheese Society. You have the same kind of behavior. It's not really a cohesive in-group. Certainly we had the Reality Club for many years, boy, I mean people going in all directions and--

Byerly: Who was we? The Reality Club? Was this a seventies thing or a cheese thing?

#### John Brockman and The Reality Club

Stern: No, the Reality Club is a post-sixties/seventies/eighties thing which was founded by John Brockman. John comes in later. You want me to go through it now?

Byerly: Yes, this is relevant to what we are talking about.

Stern: John Brockman came out of Chelsea, Massachusetts. I think I talked about John and his father toward the end of the tape. Did I? Yes.

He became a leading literary agent in the eighties or maybe earlier. He formed a club at the time that his literary agency was really blooming, a club with founding members of which I was one, The Reality Club. It was simply a convening of a group of people, one of whom would speak to the rest about something that he was doing in his field which was current or fairly current before it became necessarily full-blown or public: maybe parts of a book or--it depended--scientists, artists, movie people, whatever. Interesting group of fairly recognizable names.

The protocol was that you couldn't become a member unless you had addressed the club. Now, that wasn't true. The founding members, although they eventually all wound up addressing the club--my address, which came--I think I told you about it--after Rollo May was "Poemthink", one of the poems that I read to you.

I think what John was doing, and I'm very sad that it no longer exists, was providing a real charge of inspiration through these convenings. I got a lot out of them. It wasn't necessarily a matter of who the principal speaker was. Also, it had a lot to do with who the people were who were sitting around the table or in the room, what they had to say, and their reactions, because there was always time for comment, and sometimes it could be very critical--negative critical. Scientists, physicists not agreeing with their con-freres or people in judgement on other people and even on the literary scene. But it went on for years.

I just spoke today to Paul Ryan, who's a video philosopher whom I met through working with Marshall McLuhan. He was a member, and he also misses it quite a bit. There aren't so many opportunities for people who are in multidisciplinary fields to get together and just kind of gab.

For John, it was a source of clients because his specialty was basically non-fiction books which needed to be presented to the publishing world. Stewart Brand, who as I told you was part of our early multi-media work and who did the Whole-Earth catalog, was a client or is a client of John's and John has gotten him tremendous advance monies.

### Jimmy the Greek of Greenwich Village

Stern: Yes, there were in the Village, as is classically sensed in the stories of the Village, a lot of characters, and they were very broadly drawn. Jimmy the Greek (his family name was Panagakos) was basically what we would call at this point homeless. He sat

in the cafeteria all day long and he drew. He didn't know that he was an artist, but he sold his work. He drew straight lines. He had an incredible ability to draw these straight lines with a very thin ink pen, and they would go on and on on the one page, they would cross each other, and then they'd become very dense. It would be some cheap pad that he was working on, and he would sell them.

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Stern: The piece would be finished either when somebody would buy it for maybe a cup of coffee or maybe even something to eat, or when the paper was covered with so much ink that you couldn't get anymore on it, right?

His ability to rap while he was doing this was intense. He had endless stories, and they were entertaining. And he was a pusher; he would sell you little toothpicks of grass. I don't know how we ever got high then. We were probably hyperventilating.

Anyhow, he was one of a whole cast that sat in the cafeterias in New York. There was one on Sixth Avenue, the Waldorf, just below Eighth Street. There was another on the East Side. It wasn't like you didn't know who was going to be there when you got there; there were people who were always there unless there were some real mishap. And many of them didn't have places to live. And others of them lived alone in little rooms or whatever. It was both men and women, and a lot of the conversation had to do either with the arts or with politics. The literary groups--there were definitely divisions now--a lot of these people were bi-coastal people. Very few of them had any relationships with anywhere else in the country, but from New York to San Francisco and from New York to Los Angeles there were steady exchanges of people, and I think that's continued to this time.

Ellis Kramer was a translator for the United Nations, and somehow, I don't--he used to come to the Waldorf because he found the characters to be extremely entertaining, a lot of them were old friends of his. People from uptown would come down to relate. There was Joe Gould who was writing the oral history of the world. When he died there were many volumes supposedly. I think some of it was published eventually, or maybe his manuscript never existed. He had a long beard, kind of like Father Time.

Byerly: Do you have a timeline, anything up here? What's the timeline on this? It's the forties, fifties?

Stern: Oh, this is like the forties, because the late forties, I believe, was when I was back and forth from the west coast, when I went on the ship to South America with John, when I lived around the Village both in the east and the west. I think that's enough from here.

### Nature

Stern: I've always had this rather pervasive interest in nature, particularly in fish, amphibians, and reptiles. At one point we used to--I thought I had told this, but I don't remember it in the transcription. We used to go at a certain point, I think late high school, a friend and I, hunting rattlesnakes and copperheads. It was during the war when you could sell them to the Bronx Zoo and they used them for anti-venom, even in the Pacific. We did this, I guess, two years in a row, just when the snakes were about to stop hibernating. They're very comatose then, and they lie out on these rocky ledges in the pine barrens in the southern part of New Jersey. They were fairly easy to catch. We would just throw them in these canvas bags, heave them into our knapsacks, and then we would hitchhike home. We used to laugh like hell in the back of the cars, and the people would wonder why we were laughing. It was because of the image of what people would think if they knew that there were all these poisonous snakes in our knapsacks. Once in a while they would move around and it would just get us totally hysterical. I think we got seven dollars a piece for them, which at that time was a lot of money. And we were aiding the war effort.

But I really had it in my head that I wanted to be an ichthyologist, which came from having worked with Dr. Myron T. Gordon of the Museum of Natural History. He was my English instructor's brother. It's funny, I really thought I talked all this out.

### The Sternist Movement

Stern: The group revolved around a family called the Kisburgs who lived at that time in the West Village. Later on when I lived with them, they lived way over on West Street, you know the final street before the Hudson River. Next to them lived a cellist named Seymour Barab. He was an extremely talented musician, instrumentalist, and I enjoyed listening to him practice. I mean,

there are these opportunities one has in one's life which-- How do you get to be in the room when somebody who's a great musician practices? That's an interesting experience.

But the Kisburgs--he was in the labor field, he was a labor organizer, and he later became rather well-known, but at the time he was organizing this group around the principles of a poet in Israel named Stern. And I became involved in that. My political leanings at the time were fairly leftish, although it was social causes that attracted me, as it did I think most of the people at that time.

Byerly: Social movements you mean?

Stern: Yes, and the problems of people caught in minority or critical situations. The refugees who were trapped in Europe after the war weren't really refugees; they were survivors who couldn't get out. I wasn't that much into Israel as a nation-state or as a military presence, as it later turned out, but I was really into these people who had survived what I survived. But I survived in such a luxurious state really, compared to them, so the opportunity to try to raise money to buy ships to get them out of Europe seemed a rather logical extension of what I believed in. Because I wasn't up to raising money when it came right down to it, but I was up to sealing envelopes.

It was interesting. One was conscious at the time of the kind of combination of ideology and the potential of violence that existed there. And, of course, the guys who got on the ship by luck, which I think I talked about, spent some time in Acre Prison, which was no pleasant environment by any means. In fact, not a month ago I passed Acre Prison and it's still on display, obviously a horrible place where the British kept their enemies.

My family's interest in Judaism was so peripheral and so robotimous really. It wasn't until, I think, through Yeats really--I early became practically addicted to Yeats and his writing about McGregor Mathers and the Kabbalists--that I became interested in the Kabbalah. I went--this is somewhat later but not much--up to the Seminary which is near Columbia, because they had all those works and you could read them there--like the Sefer Yetzirah, which is one of the concise mystical texts of Kabbalah. The spiritual side of Judaism has surfaced in me periodically, and later I told you about meeting Rabbi Zalman Schachter, but this was in this group of Sternists, which was really the first organized Jewish based activity that I became involved in. Although it was actually after I had been the counselor at Camp Kinderwelt which was the group that your anarchist San Francisco friends came out of in New York originally or their parents--

Byerly: From Italy?

Stern: From Eastern Europe, from anywhere.

Byerly: Oh, the Jewish side.

Stern: Yes, the International Workers, the Worker's Circle. Workman's Circle. This was the Workman's Circle camp. The other person who came into my life in the Village, the East Village, around that time was Ethel, now Ethel Hultberg, at the time Ethel Slutsky. Ethel came out of that world also, and she and a lot of her friends had been at a farm experience which is supposed to prepare people to make Aliyah--you know, to go to Israel and become agricultural on the kibbutzim. She never went, but she had another vast circle of friends from John Cage, and later on she and her husband Paul were at Rockland County when I went up there from California. And we're still very close friends, even now. Actually her son Lawrence has a gallery on Hayes Street and he's going to do a show in October. And he's invited me to show some of my early pieces there.

#### More on Mining

Stern: On page twenty-six, I pointed out that they had tales of losing people in the mines. Actually we lost one guy while I was working there. You had to clean out these many-storied-high tanks. They were full of fine ore, and if you slipped when you were in there, you had the safety belt on, but--

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Stern: You could slide down the hole, which is at the bottom, where it went into the next stage of milling, which is a ball mill.

This was the second ball mill in my life. The first one had been this tiny one at Almay Cosmetics which used little porcelain or ceramic balls. This ball mill at the Concollar Gould and Savage Mining Corporation was like a huge tank which rolled around and used hard steel balls which were about six inches in diameter, five or six inches, to further grind the ore into finer particles. There were four different stages of different processes to get the ore down to the point where you could separate it out with basically a chemical process.

There were silver and gold ingots. You weren't about to steal them because they had to be carried out, they were really

heavy, but when we cleaned out the ball mill, which we had to do every once in a while, you would get these little flat pieces which would be all that was left of a five or six inch steel ball. And they might have traces of gold and silver on them.

It was interesting, because you couldn't see it in the ore. The ore was called Andersonite, it was blue with kind of quartz veins running through it, little rusty places along the veins. Truly, this one guy--I think he didn't have his safety belt on properly--he was gone in this tank. He must have fallen into the ball mill and gotten--nobody knew. It was a very noisy environment and you couldn't see very far because of all the dust and--goodbye. An employee, and then no trace right?

### Early Marijuana Smoking

Stern: I mentioned that when I was in a hospital for supposed kidney problems. After the hospital, my family made me go to a friend of my uncle's who was a psychiatrist, but in between there I'd like to add something. They really thought I had a problem with my kidneys. What the doctor told me--not my uncle whom I hadn't confessed it to, but the doctor at the hospital whom I had told that I had smoked dope--was that after doing all these tests and worrying that I had to have a kidney operation, he told me it wasn't anything but the traces of the marijuana in my system that had caused the warning signs. Now, I've never really known after that whether that was some kind of a ploy or whether it was actually the truth, but I know that he told my uncle about it, my uncle was very forbidding. Thank God he didn't tell my father, for whom it would have been even more of an issue, not that I had easy issues with my father anytime in his life.

### Maya Angelou

[Interview 8: July 4, 1996] ##

Stern: As you know, Maya has written quite a few books, among them some books of poetry and kind of inspirational stuff, but also her multi-volume autobiography. After I read the first volume which I truly enjoyed, she's a good writer, I was somewhat apprehensive because the relationships that she had had with men with which I was familiar, because she had told me those stories, were in this



book and I was due to come soon thereafter. But when the next volumes came out she had done me the enormous--

Byerly: Honor.

Stern: Honor of leaving me out, which I considered a real boon on her part. Actually, I mentioned it to her when I saw her, and she smiled at me and she said, you know, how that wasn't a relationship that she wanted to write about. She was very angry about some of her other relationships, both in her family and outside of her family, and I think in a sense the autobiographical experience managed to kind of dissipate her anger into this kind of a--what do you call that? Would that be sublimation? No, not exactly. And despite the fact that we had a bad scene at the end, I don't think our relationship had caused her or me very much grief. We both got some creative energy out of each other, and, also, the time we spent together was usefully occupied, both in working and in social events.

Byerly: I have a question. Did she consider herself a part of the Beat scene at that time?

Stern: Hey, none of us did. We thought that the concept of Beat was a media creation. We used to joke about it, and we used the word beatific, you know, off-beat, on-beat, out of beat. It's interesting because the connotations are so broad: there's the musical connotation, there's the exhausted connotation, there's the beatific, I can't characterize at the moment connotation. But nobody that I knew of considered themselves as Beat.

Byerly: Right.

Stern: So to ask if Maya considered herself part of that world, the answer is yes. But I'm sure she never would have thought of herself as--

Byerly: A Beat poet? That makes sense.

Stern: As Beat. And she's certainly not a Beat. Her poetry is very far from the beat tradition. It's more in, I would say, maybe even the spiritual tradition, and she is a great verbalist. She can capture an audience with her charisma in a way that very few people can. She's a really great performer in that sense, and she has a set piece where she speaks and sings of her experience in the United States. It's just incredible. I mean, it makes you laugh, it makes you cry. Brings out all the emotions. That wasn't at the time when I knew her; at that time she was a cafe singer, but I recently heard her at a university in New Jersey and I was extremely impressed.

I think unfortunately she's suffering from a lot of arthritis. She's gotten very heavy. And all of us do inconsistent work. I thought the Clinton poem was a rather inconsistent piece of work.

Byerly: What did she sing when she was a café singer, what kind of--

Stern: She did songs like I think I sang part of it to earlier: "Don't let the sun catch you crying/crying at my front door" etcetera, etcetera. She did pieces in which the emotions were very vivid, where the message was very clear, and she moved that enormous skinny body with very little clothing in a way which was so evocative that the audiences just went mad. As I said in the previous paragraphs here, with a bill which included Phyllis Diller and the Kingston Trio, it was really a great evening's entertainment. Those kinds of clubs--that was at the Purple Onion--I don't know that they exist anymore, that genre of talent.

Byerly: Well the Kingston Trio and Phyllis Diller are playing here in San Francisco.

Stern: Really?

Byerly: Yes, I saw it in the paper.

Stern: Right now?

Byerly: Yes.

Stern: Where?

Byerly: I saw it in the paper, I didn't see where.

### LSD

Stern: When I talk about acid, what I was talking about is that after my initial experiences with acid, I got less hysterical, which was a revelation to me. Most of the people in the acid world, like Timothy and Richard and Ralph, etcetera, were people who'd been fairly straight and for whom acid turned them into whatever you want to call it--freaks or liberated consciousness or fanatics. I had not been straight; I'd been fairly far out, more or less crazy in some sense of the word, which didn't bother me. I didn't feel bad when people said I was crazy, I felt that it was true, that I wanted to be there. But after acid, I got a lot straighter. So I think one of the things it does is that it takes you where you

haven't been, or it gives you the possibilities of taking you where you haven't been. It certainly did that for me.

It was a brief experience. I wasn't one of those people who kept taking it forever. I never did it often enough to have the experience wear off completely during the year, year and a half, two years that I tripped. I had some very good experiences which reinforced my visions and my ability to deal with the outside world, strangely enough. Then, at the end, I had a couple of death trips which caused me to stop using it. I figured I'd had enough.

Byerly: What kind of trips?

Stern: Death.

Byerly: Death?

Stern: Yes, you know, feeling like you were going to die.

Byerly: Oh yes. Very familiar with it.

Stern: Yes. Anyhow, I actually have recordings of one of those trips.

Byerly: You could ask The Bancroft if they would like to have that one (ha ha).

Stern: They're welcome to it.

Byerly: "Gerd Stern on acid."

Stern: Well it's not only me, it's a few other people too. Hey, those are, I think, recordings of that time which--

Byerly: Yes, historical artifacts of the seventies.

Stern: This was in Paul Williams's A-frame at Wellfleet on Cape Cod. We used it, actually, at the psychedelic theater performances in the New York. Anyway. Okay, I think that finishes that part.

#### After the Mental Hospital: Life with Father

Stern: After I had gotten out of the hospital in 1948 and Dr. Hambidge had pointed out to me that I had to choose whether to live my own life or the life that my father was trying to impress upon me, I chose my own way. I basically abandoned the relationship with my

parents except for very desultory contact, and I didn't feel it necessary to relate to my father and my stepmother.

So, now, here Gerd gets divorced from his society wife and he's back being the old reprobate again, and, in fact, my next experience in which I met my parents was with Judi.

When we got together, I persuaded my parents to receive us and I came to the house, the apartment building in Washington Heights right, and I'm wearing this buffalo coat. It's like the shaggiest furriest, big and ancient, not something I bought, it's something we found right. My hair is like incredible.

The doorman says to me, "Who might you be visiting in this building?"

And I said, "Otto Stern."

He said, "You're not visiting Otto Stern."

I said, "He happens to be my father."

The doorman called him up, he says, "Mr. Stern, there's this guy down here who says he's your son."

My father comes down in the elevator, he reads out the doorman--I mean, first of all, the doorman is standing over there and my father's standing over there and the doorman says something. My father says, "If you want to talk to me, come over here." Yucky scene, and then he tells him, "Who are you to question whether this is my son or not?"

Okay, then we get in the elevator and then I really get hell, right? I'm there, I walk into this house looking like this, all right. So, you know, my relationship with my father is wrecked again.

On top of this, it's just before Passover and they take the bit in their mouths and invite Judi and me to Passover. I said, "Well, I would like to bring along Michael Callahan," who they don't know. Why would anybody named Callahan want to come to a seder? No!

I walked out the door and told my father, you know--I don't know if you know the custom, but you put a cup for Elijah the Messiah or the messianic messenger on the table, and you open the door and then you say, "Let all who want to come in here, come in here." It's part of the seder because it used to be held basically close to the street and poor people who didn't have

enough food could come to any seder. I said to my father, "If Elijah was to knock on your door, you wouldn't let him in." So that ended another chapter with my family.

Anyway, eventually toward the latter part of my father's life, and as I got older, we got back together and I felt that I was doing something which was very necessary in helping him. It was gratifying, I must say, although it took me away from my own preferred path. But I've done that a number of times in my life.

### Kinetic Art

Stern: Pieces in the show in New York which Paul Williams and I had worked on together were basically technology of various kinds of switching. I was trying to deal with matrices of words and having the words fit so that they could go in any sequence, and to do that with lights and mechanical devices seemed to me a very interesting and exciting way of expressing the relationship between words which couldn't be done on a page. And Paul, who had a certain style as a craftsman, developed the boxes and the way it worked.

Later, on the west coast, I showed those pieces and other pieces. The collage period was secondary to this initial kinetic period. There weren't any real collages in the show in New York. The collages started happening about the time that I went to California, right after the opening of the New York show. The principles of combining word and words and small worlds and universes and matrices rather than in either grammatical sequence or non-grammatical sequence on a page was an enormous liberation for me. When I stopped doing the collages and the kinetics and the audio-visual and started writing pages of poems again, the poems were of a more developed matrix style. In other words they more resembled the things that I had been doing in collage and the audio-visual, so it was a process of visualizing and then the visualization was kind of a liberation of my ability to put words together.

I'm still involved in that, although restrained by time and by not being close geographically to Michael Callahan who did all the audio engineering and the building of the technology which we used in audio-visuales. Being away from him, I haven't done any sound work, and I'm beginning to feel now that I need to return to using words and sound and voices.

As a Marginalized Poet

Stern: I lived in so many periods in worlds which were full of poets and painters and dancers and other people involved in the arts, and they were very different worlds, different cliques and coteries somehow, except for very short periods of time like the Seven Stray Cats where there were seven of us poets kind of working together, but each person's poems were very different.

I've never felt accepted by fellow poets. In fact I have felt a certain rejection or disdain for the kind of techniques I work in. That hasn't bothered me particularly, because I really like my work. The acceptance that I received in the visual world was so unexpected and so gratifying that, for years, I didn't even think of involving myself in the literary circles or of submitting poetry. I mean, what is the equivalent of showing at the Whitney and the Museum of Modern Art here and in New York and being asked to exhibit and do performances in Europe? I mean, this was all ferment. And then to submit poems to the little magazines even of smaller reputation or of larger reputations, or even the New Yorker or Poetry magazine, and you get instantly and repeatedly rejected, and you think, hey, what kind of a world is this?

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Byerly: And many poets of your era in the end self published, like Ferlinghetti.

Stern: Well, you see, when Ferlinghetti first came here, he didn't think of himself as a poet.

Byerly: He didn't?

Stern: No, not at all, he was just out of the navy, and he had written a navy novel. He was a prose writer and then he got involved in the bookstore. Wasn't until after he was involved in owning the bookstore that he started writing poetry.

Byerly: Oh, okay. Well, he had a Ph.D. in English though.

Stern: Oh absolutely. Oh yes, he's a first class intellect and he's a great writer. I thought that his new work and poetry was way beyond anything he'd done before, and when I heard his reading at The Bancroft recently, I was really impressed and also gratified. It's nice to know people--so many people sink beneath the waves through the years. To see Larry with such a great audience and to know how many copies his books sell, I think it's really wonderful. He writes in a vein which the public really

understands and I don't, and I don't expect that kind of level of understanding.

### Art as Preoccupation with Technology

Stern: Well you see, my art spans the historical era of the Beats to the preoccupation in art with technology, which was a major influence on me, art and technology, to the psychedelic era, which was also a technology. There's really not very much difference between psychological technology, chemical technology and electronic technology. They're all in the world of vibration and feedback and the principles obtained through them all.

As far as I'm concerned, LSD is frequency modulation. A lot of people don't agree with me, but I see that very clearly. And you know, the 60 cycle or multiple scan lines on the television don't appeal to me. I don't even like very heavy electric presence around the house. I mean, 60 cycles disturbs me when it gets too pervasive, but maybe that's simply because I have a lot of consciousness of it, having worked with technology and having thought about it and the effects of it. But the era of technological innovation, let's not even talk about computers, I'm talking about silicon controlled rectifiers, talking about chips in which you can contain information, audio-visual techniques in the arts, the back and forth between commercialization and advertising and media and the arts is what the context of my years in art have been all about. The speed from which an artistic movement, let's say, or an artistic style is pictured and multiplied and sent out can be very deteriorating to the process of art. Instead of developing a long term approach to your work, a lot of my colleagues and peers chose very easy solutions which seemed like that they would be profitable in the art world, and I always felt that that was not what I was into. I wasn't interested in exploitation of style as a way of making a living for instance.

Byerly: So you're saying that your art is a reaction to this kind of electronic media?

Stern: Not really, because I probably understood more about what the electronic media was all about through my work with McLuhan and through the work that we did in multimedia, overload work, and meditation environments than a lot of other people did. We used it, but, for instance, from the days of USCO to the days of Intermedia Systems, when our work was taken out of the context of

art and into the context of commerce, I very quickly lost interest in it.

Byerly: What is this guitar that I'm looking at with the collage on it? What is that about? That's a little bit of what I'm hearing you say that you are resisting.

Stern: Could you give it to me? Well, no, I'm not resisting that at all. That's what I consider the possibilities of poetry not being necessarily a poem on a page. In other words, there's no real sequence in this work. However, these are little associations that make sense. "How to get everything"--"how to get" is one line. "How to get everything from", on top of it is "spend". "And you can, what you said, leading nowhere / Yes people make for talent to receive your important, fixed assets it works with business, focus, up to the world...." I mean, you can read into it things which aren't necessarily any property of any of the individual pieces, but they are connectable if you want to connect them. The work on the surface can be viewed simply as materials that are used to cover a form. What does the guitar mean? And this guitar, which is a wooden guitar form for electric guitars, resembles for me the guitar forms--this guitar form to me represents the same guitar form that you see so often in Braque and Picasso and the art of that time as a kind of a symbol of muse, you know, of music, of the ability to express. And in Wallace Stevens's famous poem "The Blue Guitar", I mean, the symbol of the guitar is powerful. I found four of these which were being dumped, so I grabbed them. I've used a lot of dimensional forms to collage words on, but it seems to me this is the tune that you played on the guitar, Wallace Stevens on the blue guitar, but I don't care if it's blue. There's a lot of blue in this one as a matter of fact.

Byerly: When was it done? When was that piece done? It's a work in process always, right?

Stern: This particular one was done in February of 1982. Radha knew this period of my work because she was around when I was doing it and there wasn't another piece that I wanted to give her. I wanted to make one especially for her as my daughter, so I chose the words for what I felt would be an attention focus that had to do with her world.

Byerly: What you just described to me sounds like lots of ideas that haven't been categorized. You can associate, you can read into things, you can see what you want to see in some you know, and you can connect things. Do you think the symbol of the whole Beat generation and the seventies was an opening up, of getting away



from the staid, repressive fifties and kind of an opening up of new categories of kind of free thinking, free spirit, openness?

Stern: Well, that's one way of looking at it. I mean, I think the other way of looking at that--and it's really the same principle--is that what you're dealing with is not *product*, you're dealing with *process*. And I'm saying that very purposely. I think I brought it up before--the question of understanding that process is effect, rather than being product, which is content. This is what we're getting at.

These are words that I used all the time, and when I was asked with John Brockman and Michael Callahan to consult for General Electric's Lighting Institute, I went down there and their motto is "Progress is our most important product." I changed it on what we made for them, and I said, "Process is our most important product," and the guy who had hired us freaked out. I was talking, he got up on stage and he said, "But Mr. Stern, that's not our motto, our motto is progress."

I can't remember his name, but I said, "I'm quite well aware of that. What I'm trying to tell you is that 'Progress is our most important product' thirty years ago may have been a motto which led you to where you are today, but you asked us to come here and tell you what you could do to further yourself in this particular era and what I'm saying to you is think *process*. Particularly when you're talking about illuminating the world. Don't just think about light bulbs, think about illumination."

It was definitely above their heads. They hired freaks because they thought it was interesting and exciting and they might get insight, but then they blocked themselves from our insights. The problem with the Lighting Institute was that they were teaching detail product production and they were not dealing with the issues which people deal with when they decide what sort of illumination they need in their lives from light, and I'm not even talking about mystical illumination.

I love to work with light. I particularly like to work with white light, and with intense white light. You go to a restaurant and the illumination is supposed to be intimate; it's very low, and you can't see what you're eating, but it's supposed to create an ambience which fosters the relationship that you and your fellow diners want. I think that is appropriate for certain kinds of nightclubs or bars even, but, for instance, in a restaurant where you are eating preparations which your chef has spent time creating, the illumination needs to illuminate the food. I've made that comment to a number of restaurateurs and they're incredulous: "It's to eat, it's not to look at," which is baloney.

Presentation these days is what chefs are so involved in as a parallel to what the recipe and what the preparation is; the presentation is as equally important as the preparation, so you've got to illuminate it. And that's true in so many fields. I mean, in the museums there are principles which have to do with how you perceive an object, and a lot of those principles have to do with how you illuminate it.

Byerly: Literarily?

Stern: Yes, literarily. And that's true in works of art. For instance, if I'm not careful about the balance of black and white and color in a piece like this, it starts to get a surface that no longer involves you in the words. You just look at it as an image. But if it had enough vibrancy here and a lack of consistency there, then the words pop out at you, it's not just one little surface. So in all those things you think about it and then you do, and maybe they work and maybe they don't.

#### Relationship between Poetry and Artwork

Byerly: Is there any relationship between your poem, "Poemthink", and that piece of art?

Stern: No, not really, I mean--

Byerly: None whatsoever?

Stern: Well, sure, it relates, but the idea of poemthink, and I can relate it to this, I think I can probably relate any two things that you ask me to relate.

Byerly: Well that's what I'm asking.

Stern: I don't know if it's specious or not. In other words, the idea of Poemthink came to me one night when I was sleepless and thinking up poems. I thought to myself, "Now, do I really have the energy to get out of bed?" I had left my notebook and my pencil somewhere. Usually I've got one at the head of my bed because I'd write day and night sometimes. So I thought, do I have the energy to get up or should I just play around with these lines and not write them down, I mean why do I have to write everything down, it's fun to just make them up and hold onto them and--then I was immediately struck, this was a concept which turned into "Poemthink". I started writing it. When it was my turn to talk to the Reality Club here in San Francisco, I got on the plane and

was going to do something else entirely as my presentation, but by the time I got off the plane I had finished the poem.

Byerly: But Gerd, to me your poetry seems like collage. This art work is collage, and I see a lot of similarity in your poems.

Stern: Well, I should hope so.

Byerly: But you're saying that there's not, it's not of the same--

Stern: Well, it's not connected, but sure they're related. This, in a way, you could think of as poemthinking, you take these words and you paste them down together.

Byerly: Yes, it's an action. What you're saying is that there are all these thoughts running around in the brain, and there's ways of connecting and associating and putting them together, and you think this is product of that and poemthink is a product of that.

Stern: If what you're asking is are my poems collages, the answer is yes, yes, yes. I started a poem yesterday and what am I collaging, you might ask. Very often what I'm collaging are words out of peoples' mouths, or off the radio or anywhere that I find them, and the associations are originally mine. Whether those associations are powerful enough or have the energy to convey my association to the reader is always a question mark. But, then what else you have is what's called the a-ha syndrome. You drop enough different information into any matrix and there's some a-ha for somebody to pick up. That's what we were dealing with in multi-media. When you've got one channel going in the literary continuum, like even an old-style movie plot, right--if a person isn't into it, they're not into it. There's no way you can persuade them that that's something-- Well, when you got forty or fifty channels going, number one, if one or two of them gets lost, big deal, there's plenty there. There's bound to be something for every person there to make a weave for themselves of some kind of informational and emotional content which is meaningful, and if you superimpose on that a level of meaning which is what your intention is, then you have an audience, and you have them in your hands, in your power.

Our major show for many years was called "We Are All One." Before that, the name was "Hubbub." Hubbub was from Martin Luther, but We Are All One was ours. The content of We Are All One is beside the point. We were trying to deal with effect, and sure, it came out of the psychedelic movement, it came out of the peace movement, it came out of the Beat movement. We Are All One is very obvious, right? How to make people feel that in their minds and hearts is--what we did is we presented this matrix of

images and we built it up to the point of critical overload and then we came down off the overload. Originally, we would stop there and it would leave audiences really fucking jangled, you know, in an impossible state of mind. It wasn't our intention, but we were experimenting; we didn't know what we were doing that well. But then we would come down into chanting and images which were much more conducive to mandalas and things and people would leave ecstatic. You know, oscilloscope images, waving infinity signs.

Byerly: So people liked that, people responded well to it.

Stern: Very well at that time, particularly. That was the time when people wanted to be reassured that we are all one. I don't think that's a reassuring concept in the 1990s.

Byerly: We are all one. Well, I don't think people relate to it.

Stern: Not at all.

Byerly: Now, you said that there was a reaction to your poetry that was not as affirmative as to your art, to your multimedia work. So, why do you think that was?

Stern: Well because, first of all, the visual arts is a more friendly community, or was then at least. They were more receptive to innovation and to experimentation, and we--when I say we I mean USCO--were ahead of the game. We were really pioneers, and we were playing with stuff which nobody else was playing with, and it was very timely and we knew the inputs and outputs relationships very well, and we had the venues. In other words, the universities and the museums were receptive. They didn't necessarily reward us very well for our efforts, schlepping tons of equipment around the world, but they wanted to see it and they wanted to expose their audiences to it. These days are very different. We couldn't do it in the nineties.

Byerly: Right, right.

Stern: And California was the epicenter.

Byerly: Say more about how that world was closed off to you.

Stern: Well we've talked about the homosexual coterries, we've talked about the rejection of women. The academic scene was another level of removal in terms of poetry. Even to this day, the American Poetry Society, which is the national poetry forum--where Allen Ginsberg is a big shot, a number of people I've known well through the past are people who were on the board--they will not

accept me as a poet member. I'm supposed to pay a subscription as a, like, I don't mean this badly, but like you would, like a lay person, because I don't have the status as a poet. That pisses me off. I wrote a letter to Stanley Kunitz who's another board member I've known. I don't know if he ever got it because I sent it to the society and not to him. I don't have his home address at this point in my life, and he never answered me. Of course he's a man in his eighties, he has that prerogative. But what do you have to do to prove that you're a poet in this culture?

Byerly: To the Literati?

Stern: Yes, what do you have to do to prove to the academy that you are a poet?

Byerly: What do you have to do?

Stern: I don't know. You have to have a certain amount of poetry published, and it's got to be published by real presses, and you've got to have awards and grants and things. Now the truth is that the ferment in poetry today way exceeds what existed in the sixties or the seventies. I mean there are literally hundreds of little magazines being published today rather than dozens.

Byerly: It's still really tough, I understand.

Stern: You can get published all you want if you don't care where you get published. I publish in a little magazine called Ozone which, I think the O stands for orgasm, and it's got kind of dimly offset black and white pictures of naked women in it. Why do I publish in it, I don't know, because they like my poetry, right? It's not that I don't submit poems to other places, but it's just like sending signals out into the storm with nobody to see them. And I've done enough work to do another publication, but I'm damned if I'm going to publish it myself. I think if nothing happens I may just put them all on the Internet. I'm not intending to make money on it anyway, so what's the difference.

You know my answer to the dichotomy of media technology and book culture is kind of a sentence which goes: in a world of simultaneous operations, you don't have to be first to be on top, and if you apply that to looking at the guitar collage, you can see the level of meaning that you can achieve by simultaneity. Simultaneity does not necessarily imply equality of each input, in other words if you're dealing with  $x$  inputs, some of them may be foreground, some of them may be background, some of them may have inter-relationships and some of them may just serve as carriers, there's a lot of possible relationships involved, but if you're conscious of the fact that you've been dealing with a simultaneity

rather than a sequence, I think it gives you a lot more liberty to express yourself in that type of form. I'm not saying it's necessarily a better form by the way. It's a very different form, it's a very different intention, and it's a very different communication. It happens to be something that I am very interested in.

### Michael Callahan and Video Technology ##

Stern: Michael Callahan was of the first generation to be exposed to solid state electronics and to technological theory which was behind the communications media that we were all using, whether that was audio tape technology or video technology or switching technology, telephonic, whatever it was. Michael was fascinated by it and he studied it and he worked with it. He was seventeen at the time that he and I locked into each other immediately and into new worlds. I don't even remember, you can ask him tomorrow how he got to what we were doing to develop into the tape center, which is an interesting California artifact. He not only knew how to do it, but he knew how to talk about it, I mean, I did not understand what a capacitor was all about before Michael. I mean that not on a physical practical basis, but on a philosophical basis, on a metaphorical basis. If you think of a capacitor as a device which charges up to a certain level, and then when that level is reached, the threshold becomes apparent, and the device discharges, then, as a metaphor, communications-wise, you can understand how it has a lot of reverberations.

He and I shared that type of universe, verbally, and he could talk endlessly on that level, and I would write it down and feel like I was getting a degree of some amazing kind and I felt privileged. We started collaging audio material, which at that time meant cutting them because there was no real electronic editing then. And it was a delight to work with him because he understood music, he had rhythm. He understood poetry even though he had no acquaintance with it. We worked together the rest of the time I was in California. Before I left for the east and when I returned to the east coast and kept on working, I felt like I was lost without Michael. Steve and I by this time had achieved a working relationship and I explained it to Steve and he said, "Well, I don't understand. Why don't you just call him up and tell him to get on a plane?" So I did and he did. For the next many many years we worked together.

Byerly: This was in--

Stern: This was first in California, then in Woodstock and Garnerville and then in Cambridge.

Again, we come to a personal problem here. Michael, which we may want to excise from this. Should I just not talk about it? I don't know. I'll talk about it and you make the decision. He comes from a home where his father abandoned them when he was very young, and his father was an alcoholic, and indeed Michael became or was an alcoholic, and it was very difficult to work with him. He would start drinking, and it would get to the point where he was totally incoherent. Eventually it was our little public company, Intermedia Systems. And one day--I'm cutting this all short, these problems kept on really--he was crawling up the stairs and down the hall and I fired him. It was hard, it was harder than divorcing my several wives, you know. It really was, but I had to do it.

And it took about two years and he finally got on antibus and corrected the situation, and he came to me and told me that it was the best thing that I had ever done for him. That really made me feel good, because I had felt very guilty about doing it. And he hasn't had a drink since, and this is maybe a decade and a half ago. And he's now very successful in building communication controlling devices. He has a business called Museum Technology, I wouldn't be surprised if the library or at least the university used their CD controllers somewhere. Most museums and educational institutions, commercial institutions use the stuff.

The relationship has continued on that level, if I have a question that relates to technology, I call Michael and he explains it to me not on the level of solder wires A and B together because I couldn't care less, I don't do that. But on the level of trying to understand for my poetry what the principles that flow through the currents. I think those are the rare kinds of minds that can impart these things to one another.

I think I told you about the incident when I was teaching in UC Santa Cruz, when Norman O. Brown got very upset with me because I had the technician from the media center come and talk to my students about electricity. He said, "This is not a trade school." I said, "You can't live in the twentieth century without understanding electricity." And he of course didn't have a ghost. Couldn't tell a volt from a watt. How can you understand what's going on in the world like that?

Steve Durkee and Stewart Brand

Stern: At the time I first met Steve Durkee and we started working together on various projects, a friend of his was Stewart Brand, who at that time was a lieutenant photographer in the U.S. Army. He had been promoted to lieutenant because they had gotten him involved in photographing a lot of generals and officers and enlisted men weren't supposed to associate with the officers in that kind of situations where he was needed so they made him a lieutenant, even though he had been a noncommissioned officer, and he was a very, very good photographer. He had also done quite a bit of parachuting in the army and we knew him in the transition period when he was getting out of the army, and he started being very interested in the work we were doing in multimedia and got involved in photographing for us.

After he'd been involved a while, he moved to the west, he's from the midwest and actually he lived on my barge. Stewart loved heights. He would climb high tension towers and trees and anything that he could. So now, Stewart developed this multimedia show with his at-the-time wife called America Needs Indians, which--and Lois was a Native American, or is a Native American. And it kind of catapulted us into a relationship with Native Americans. I had previously had some association in the peyote times up in Nevada, and Stewart became very heavily involved in the peyote cult. He actually acted as a road man in the ceremony and he led several of them. He had a big tepee which wound up being a very strong kind of a bonding experience for a lot of people that we worked together with.

See, as I said before, the relationship between the chemical technology and the electronic technology is a parallel and integrative kind of experience and psychedelics and the borders of such technological theories as chaos and even deconstructionism are examples of how this kind of experience opens you up to understanding what can happen in the physical and emotional universe. That's the subject of poetry and it's the subject that we were dealing with in multimedia.

At USCO and our multimedia or environmental arts group, our high point was the show at the Riverside Museum in New York, and then we moved this tabernacle into the church and we opened it to the public. We became a kind of a focus for groups of young people who were involved in these streams of consciousness and yes, most of them were using drugs of one sort or another but also most of them were studying and working and became, you know, influential thinkers and doers. When they recycle back into my



life, I'm always quite impressed. The beat, you know as they say the beat goes on.

All right, beatniks--how can you recognize a beatnik, by the hair or the thinking process. The people who were attached to us were not the same kind of people for instance that were attached to Allen [Ginsberg] and Jack [Kerouac]. It was a whole different world, it was a world which was much more interested in the developments in technology, I mean, in a sense the Beat world looked backwards, they looked with sentimentality on alcohol and drugs. The psychedelic world looked forwards into a world of mystical experience and a world of peace and the use of technology for mankind's good. The political agendas of the beats were basically rebellion. I think the political agendas of the--

Byerly: Hippies--

Stern: Was raising consciousness and the peace symbol was the major symbolic element of the era.



X ART

[Interview 9: July 5, 1996] ##<sup>1</sup>

Michael Callahan

Stern: Michael, a bred Californian, if you will, came into my life at a time when I needed a lot of help, and what I'd like to do today is review the relationship in the context of the work and the play and the love and the life that we shared together for many years and we are sharing now, though with less an intensive day to day schedule, but that's our loss not our gain.

Callahan: Right.

Stern: You want to go over, Michael, what you were doing when I met you and some of the characters that were involved?

Callahan: Well, I guess that I first heard about you, I don't remember if it was the Life magazine article or Herb Caen or whatever. Yours was a name I certainly recognized or was familiar with. I guess I first heard about you in '56 or '57. I don't specifically remember the context, but certainly as a Beat. Then, around '60 or '61, always having been involved in electronics, I heard about Ramon Sender and Pauline Oliveros and Morton Subotnik doing electronic music, at that point, at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. So I attended a concert there one evening when I was in high school, I'd say probably around '61. And then the tape center, or that group outstayed their welcome at the Conservatory and set up operations in a quite nice house on Nob Hill, on Jones Street which was lent to the group. It was at the tape center that I started to meet the people I'd heard about, the poets.

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with both Gerd Stern and Michael Callahan.

Michael McClure was a neighbor of Morton Subotnik's, which I believe was the direct connection Gerd and I had.

Stern: Right, McClure told me to call Morton, and I came down and you were there.

Callahan: Yes.

Stern: On Divisadero.

Callahan: Yes, and then I got involved with the tape music center as a technician. I had no idea really what I was doing but I enjoyed audio.

Stern: He says technician but he was really technical director.

### The Tape Center

Callahan: Yes, I was technical coordinator or whatever, but the tape center was only temporarily on Nob Hill. That wasn't a good place for it because the neighbors were not too cool I remember. There was one great evening--I'm trying to remember who was reading--I think it might have been Gregory Corso who was reading at the tape center on Jones Street, and this is just a couple of blocks down from the Mark Hopkins, a fairly genteel neighborhood. I forgot what the aesthetic dispute was about, but it was being picketed by other poets carrying signs and saying "Fuck Gregory Corso." This didn't go over terribly well with the neighbors. That and the noise.

So, the tape center found space at 321 Divisadero Street, a lovely large old building which had formerly been the California Labor School, but I think the California Labor School might have packed up when the House Un-American Activities Committee came to town. We moved from Jones street over to Divisadero Street, I'm trying to remember maybe late '62, early '63. At that point I was just out of high school and going to City College, but basically I was virtually living at the tape center, wiring things up. We had a concert schedule. There were two studios there on the first floor, one of which we sublet to Ann Halperin's dancer's workshop. The other studio we sublet to KPFA. So this was a real sort of magnet, I mean between the dancer's workshop and KPFA and the tape center, it certainly made for some interesting times, and we had a performance schedule and KPFA had events and the dancer's workshop had events.

Stern: The performance space held--do you remember how many people, quite a few--

Callahan: Yes, at least a hundred.

Stern: About a hundred, right there on Divisadero Street. It was a nice performance space because if there were only forty people or if it was filled, the sound still worked. The acoustics were good, I remember a piece by Ramon Sender in which he gets naked in an old bathtub. There's a little bit of water in the bathtub, and with his elbows and his arms and with his knees and his legs, he makes all these incredible noises. Really a forward-looking definition of music. It took me years to persuade Ramon to find that tape and to make me a copy, what was it, twenty years, twenty-five years, but finally he did. I think we should have a copy of that. So what happened was endless milieu. I needed help with performance which was cooking, it was definitely not yet done. [laughter] Half baked.

Stern: So Michael called, I talked to someone I think he said come down.

Callahan: Michael McClure.

Stern: Yes, and there I met three of them, Ramon, Morton, and Michael. I don't think Pauline was there.

Callahan: She wasn't.

Stern: Which was just as well. Pauline was the, what would you say-- the anal influence, because tape generates mess. Lots of things generate mess but tape generates a lot of mess and Pauline was one of those people who was able to be like my father and try to manage--absolutely everything had to be here and there. She wrote, how long was the memo that she wrote?

Callahan: That was fairly long. Was it Pauline who wrote it, or was that the PR woman she hired?

Stern: I don't know, it had her name on it.

Callahan: Okay, yes, right, yes.

Stern: It was like five or six pages of instructions on how to keep the tape center clean. We had a marvelous time deconstructing it.

Callahan: I don't know if that tape exists but Gerd deconstructed this five or six page memo and read it as a poem.

Stern: I read it rather ironically. So I met Michael, I met the three of them, and I laid out this idea that I had and what I needed was a very complex audio system and Mort just took a look at Michael and said, we'd love to help. It's Michael's project right. Delegation. And the truth is neither Ramon or Morton had anything to do with it thereafter.

Callahan: They were there, at least Ramon was there.

Stern: They left the whole thing for Michael, this was like, why don't you describe the system and the process?

The San Francisco Museum Show: "Contact Is the Only Love"

Callahan: Oh boy. It was called "Who R U and What's Happening?" because Gerd had a show at the San Francisco Museum, downtown, you know, now the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. In the show was the epic piece, "Contact Is the Only Love", this eight-foot octagon with sound, neon. Gerd was very much into exploring the authority syndrome of the highway upon, as I recall, the contemporary sexual dynamics of America.

Both: Freeway, highway, safeway.

Callahan: Freeway, highway, safeway, throughway.

Stern: Throughway.

Callahan: You know, you know, you know what I mean, but that came later.

Stern: So did I. [laughter]

Callahan: And George Culler, who was the director of the museum at the time, was asked to help raise funds to assist in the construction of "Contact Is the Only Love" and some other pieces in the show. Gerd was living on Hayes Street around Gough, Buchanan. The 600 block of Hayes Street. That was pretty bohemian, definitely. So George offered Gerd the use of the auditorium, probably thinking it would be a poetry reading. At about this point, who was it that gave you the manuscript of McLuhan's?

Stern: M.C. Richards, before I left the East Coast--

Callahan: Yes, M.C. Richards.

Stern: --agreed to stall John Cage about my returning it. I mean this was before today's technology.

Callahan: You couldn't xerox anything. I mean, just totally incredible to think, you know, just fax out another one right now. But Gerd, I'm trying to--which one was that, that was Gutenberg--

Stern: No, no. Understanding Media.

Callahan: I'm sorry, yes of course, as a manuscript of Understanding Media.

Stern: It was the report that Marshall had written for the National Association of Educational Broadcasters on a grant when he was still in Canada. He then turned it into Understanding Media with very little, if any, editing. The sound for "Contact Is the Only Love" is something that Michael and I put together.

#### "The Verbal American Landscape"

Callahan: That was the first sound project, sound--it was a collage of highway themes--it actually was a prototype of what we did for the following number of years. The octagon which was what, eight feet?

Stern: Seven.

Callahan: Seven feet and had a speaker on each side and we had an endless loop tape machine so it would just play over and over and there were motor-driven cam switches which would cause the sound to move around from speaker to speaker. That was "The Verbal American Landscape". It called VAL.

Stern: Yes, I had conceptualized the VAL actually when I was at Barbara's as part of the transformer concept. I don't remember really whether it was a phrase of mine or whether Steve and I in conversation came up with it. Cause I remember that Steve was very into the term. It was such a concise description of what you could do, I mean I could certainly use it today. For instance, when we talked yesterday about the collage, that's "The Verbal American Landscape". It's all out of the scape. Do you remember, I had a feeling that Stewart did some of the original--

Callahan: Photography? Yes.

Stern: Stewart and Ivan and I went out in the streets of San Francisco and I would point to a sign or some word, but I wouldn't just want the whole thing, I would want a slide of some part. You can't crop afterwards, or you can but it's complicated even now. It was even more impossible back then.

Callahan: Beyond our technology, then.

Stern: So I would want one word close up out of the sign or out of the manhole cover and those slides exist, and should be part of the archive. We spent days running around the whole Bay Area photographing words. That was actually Stewart Brand's, you know the Whole Earth Catalog's first exposure to media, multimedia let's say and he and Lois doing "America Needs Indians" and a lot of other things before he did the catalog. But let's get back to how we managed.

I think you might describe a little the technology that you had available. Michael was able to put into reality ideas which had floated around in my head of how you can deal with words on tape. My only tape background had been with a little wire recorder and so forth of my own, and, at KPFA, I had produced and been involved in editing. But fairly doctrinaire stuff, notation really, not artistic efforts, poetry, things that I told you about that we did. Anyway, this was a long way from that, although Michael was quite familiar with the KPFA setup.

Callahan: Well, I guess just briefly touching on the technology, this little cassette machine here is recording in stereo with several multiple microphones. In 1963 that weighed a couple hundred pounds, literally, and big Ampex tape recorder with the separate mixer and the microphone, I mean it was a schlep.

Byerly: Was it reel to reel?

Callahan: Yes, ten inch reels of tape. Technology like tape recorders was around, but decent ones were hard to come by and expensive. Everything was expensive because nobody had any money. So everything was expensive and it was just early in the technology and things were more expensive, so basically we just had some loudspeakers, three or four stereo tape recorders roughly, a mixing panel, some microphones, not really a great deal.

Stern: You had built the whole system. You had some kind of a switching bay.



Callahan: Yes, we had switching bays to make it useful. And we did have a three-track, which was very state of the art then, to start doing some mixdown. I'd briefly like to acknowledge the generous donations of Hewlett-Packard, who gave us three audio oscillators which we used. And also to JBL that gave the tape center a pair of really fine speakers. This was just great, no strings generosity, and those are both California companies.

Stern: JBL's still in business?

Callahan: Yes. Harmon owns them.

Stern: No kidding. [laughter]

Callahan: Sid owns the entire professional audio business. He bought Studor, he bought AKG, I mean he just--yes, but that's another story. The main thing I remember about the auditorium at the San Francisco Museum is that it was reverberant. The other things, well, I was like eighteen or nineteen years old at the time. Even with the ensuing thirty-odd years of experience I don't think that it would have turned out much different, I mean that was a difficult hall to deal with. The idea was to have two performances, two evenings, is that right? On stage we had a pile of TV sets and some closed circuit cameras which were--I mean television hadn't been around that long, you know so--

Stern: I don't know how we managed to borrow those, but we did.

Callahan: Yes, from Sylvania or somebody, somebody big. And the phone company, they didn't quite know what they were getting into, loaning us a bunch of telephones. You see, you just couldn't go out to the hardware store and buy a telephone, because the telephone company owned all the telephones so the only way you could get a telephone was to steal it.

Stern: We had the imprimatur of the San Francisco Museum of Art and we used it. George was a paragon of help to artists who had no reputation, and San Francisco was famous for them. You couldn't get in New York in those years, and there was no parochialism out here when George Culler was the director. Anyway.

Callahan: I don't quite know where to begin so I'll just start with the panel of sociologists, okay.

Byerly: Panel of sociologists?

Callahan: Yes. This is as good a place to start as any. So there's a table up toward the front of the auditorium that included Howie Becker, he was at Stanford, right?

Stern: Yes, and then he went back north--

Callahan: To Chicago. He wrote the book on marijuana use called *The Outsiders*. His daughter Allison who was twelve or thirteen at the time was one of the greeters, if you will, and she was wearing a stop sign or yield sign.

Stern: Yield and merge, we have the photographs, we have beautiful photographs taken by Fred Lyon.

Callahan: Yes, and Barbara Somers, wife or ex-wife of Roger Somers who--

Stern: At that time wife.

Callahan: Wife of--

Stern: Soon after, his ex.

Callahan: For "Contact Is the Only Love," the octagon was built at Roger's place in Marin. And Barbara--bubblepacking had just come out--Barbara was wearing a bubblepack dress and nothing else. So there were four sociologists I believe at a table, each one with a phone. Then there were four groups.

Stern: And there were four transparent kiosks on stage.

Callahan: Around the periphery, weren't they? And each one, there were sixty-four people altogether I think who took part in the booths, Allen Ginsberg, who else?

Stern: Herb.

Callahan: Herb Caen.

Stern: Lots of people.

Callahan: Lots of people.

Stern: They were in groups of four.

Callahan: Yes, and each one was the responsibility of a sociologist who had the telephone. There was a microphone in each one of these four, and there were microphones all over. There were slide projectors showing "Verbal American Landscape," and speaking of

technology, these were the lovely slide projectors where you put a slide in one side, slide it in. [laughter]

Stern: So we had four operators.

Callahan: Yes, I can't remember. You know.

Byerly: God, I'm starting to feel really old. [laughter]

Stern: You know, the intention was that this was a phrase. In other words there were four slides next to each other each with a word or maybe even two words on it from the landscape. These were supposed to make context as they went across the screen and as they didn't all change at once either, so that the associative matrix that I was talking about which is at the heart of the possibilities of the logic here, that was like a breakthrough for me to be able to put up words on the screen.

Callahan: It was beautiful, it was really beautiful.

Byerly: Words like--

Callahan: UNO, off a candy bar, U-N-O.

Stern: Little types of different text and it would be distracting. So you can imagine the complexity of the audio because we wanted to hear the sociologists.

Callahan: The sociologists could monitor what was going on, and if they thought that things were stalling out, then the sociologist could ring up a booth and get things moving.

Stern: Intervene.

Callahan: Yes, intervene.

Byerly: With?

Stern: With the conversation. But we had four conversations going on.

Callahan: With four people.

Stern: At the same time, and we were feeding them into various speakers or Michael was.

Callahan: Yes, we were mixing all these conversations, and we also had a number of tapes playing.

Stern: And we were trying to tape it at the same time.

- Callahan: Yes, and we were also mixing in tapes, like we had the time signal, we just recorded the time off the telephone. The time is--and then we had a lost dog, and all kinds of information.
- Stern: It was definitely a high level of input channels, the highest I had ever experienced. We had two levels of actuality happening, because we had the intention that we were trying to put together this system [for effect?]. And then we had the environmental reality of the whole, the people and the different space systems that we had set up, and when they all interacted, they kind of blew their top.
- Callahan: And howled.
- Stern: And howled. *Howl*, this was before [Ginsberg's] *Howl*, was it?
- Byerly: After.
- Callahan: No, this was after *Howl*.
- Stern: And then we'd howl.
- Callahan: Howled, I mean you know because this marble room with all these speakers, with all these microphones and all the--
- Stern: Feedback.
- Callahan: Its feedback was lovely.

The Reviews: "Landmark of a Flop"

- Stern: It was really nice but it overcame everything and at that point in time feedback was not exactly an appreciated phenomenon. As you will see if you read, which I gave you Mr. Frankenstein's review.
- Callahan: "Landmark of a Flop."
- Byerly: What?
- Callahan: "Landmark of a Flop." Page one.
- Stern: It's rare to get an art review of a flop.

The Technology: Then and Now ##

- Stern: Michael conceptualized the system so that it would work and if indeed we hadn't done the environmental situation, it was a very clean system theoretically.
- Callahan: I think given the same equipment and the same space I'm pleased and I don't think it would be much different today, you know unless one threw 1990s technology and a lot of money in it. Just a quick aside on that, there was a retrospective concert of the tape music center in 1990 in a theater in the Mission. That was performances or at least playbacks of compositions which had been done with the tape music center from say '62 to '66. And listening to those pieces by Ramon Sender, Morton [Subotnik], Pauline Oliveros, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, hey, the technology never got in our way really. I mean, this was all done on equipment which would be laughably primitive, but it was great work, and it struck me that people made damn good use out of the technology as it came along. There was technology coming along which had been developed for other applications. Magnetic tape was certainly for radio and phonograph records, but then people started using it to collage poems and to compose music. We could have sometimes used some better speakers, but we did alright with what we had.
- Stern: Michael, until a year or so ago, was in charge of technology at the Carpenter Center at Harvard for many years and there he had to cope with a completely different generation of equipment, so he has the perspective of over thirty years on equipment for audio and visual imagery. By the way, we should mention that some pieces of equipment which Michael designed were built at the time of USCO at the Garnerville church which we haven't gotten to talk about yet, but we will. We thought about giving them to the Smithsonian, but if the archive were interested in them we could give them to The Bancroft. They're physical, they're not huge but they're not small either. They definitely have historic importance. In terms of "Contact Is the Only Love." Michael helped put that together also, basically electro-mechanical in nature, and for many, the first years we had use of electro-mechanical switches, what do you call those things?
- Callahan: Cams, stepper switches.
- Stern: Stepper switches.
- Callahan: Basically a stepper switch was a telephone device, an electrically controlled switch which could make a number of contacts. It was huge, they had hundreds and hundreds of

contacts on them, and we used those to do all sorts of things, like we semi-automated the slide projector routine. Three or four people out of work. [laughter]

Stern: And also the audio channel.

Callahan: Yes, and the audio channels. I totally respect Alfred Frankenstein, I mean he was a person whom I grew up reading, and he wrote a good review. As I recall, the headline read "Landmark of a Flop," and he says, "Some horrendous eggs have been laid in the public hall of San Francisco in my time but none so horrendous as to score a kind of success." I mean that's a good review.

Stern: Yes, exactly.

"Who Are You and What's Happening?"

Callahan: Oh, okay. Yes, "Some colossal flops have taken place in the public halls of San Francisco in my time, but Gerd Stern's show called 'Who Are You and What's Happening?' is the only one I can recall that laid so vast and horrendous an egg as to score a kind of success." [laughter] Yes, and there's Allison with her traffic sign. But you know, we kept going. One thing I'd like to mention too, my dear late mother from the south but she had come to California in the thirties, was supportive of this sort of work. I think a lot of parents would have wiggled out, but mother, and my Aunt Edith but particularly my mother, were supportive.

Stern: Oh yes, they became very friendly. Yes, they really moved into it.

Callahan: Yes, they caught on to what it was about.

Stern: In general I think at that period in time, our audiences after this time were very mixed. A lot of them were in universities and museums, but I would say we had quite a contingent of older people and we usually did very well. And then the next step was that we got invited and we had to move this whole system up to Vancouver.

Callahan: Right, in a Volkswagen Bug.

Stern: [laughter] Three people and all of it in a Bug. Do you remember the name of the guy there?

Callahan: It's not Alan. I remember what he looks like.

Stern: Me too. It was like Alan or Albert or, Alvin?

Callahan: Alvin!

Stern: Alvin, right. Can't think of his last name.

Callahan: Horn-rimmed glasses. Alvin yes. And he had a companion, didn't he?

Stern: Yes, they were a bunch who were into early male bonding.

### Billie Master

Callahan: That was in January, okay, so "Who are You and What's Happening" opened like a week before Kennedy was assassinated. Then Gerd and I basically went back to work and started on what was to become the "Billie Master" collage tape, which you should get a copy of if you haven't already. The idea was that we were going to make up, which we did, four tapes to be played simultaneously and mixed and switched. I think we had to have a proto, I guess today it would be called a beta. A beta "Billie Master." There was another tape track which was music. I mean it was the Beatles', "I Want to Hold Your Hand" radio collage. And I guess we also recycled some of the museum tapes like Time, the time is--

Stern: And I think we actually used some of the news tapes too.

Callahan: Yes, and we had some of our own voices because all our conversations had been recorded.

Stern: And that was for Vancouver.

Callahan: For Vancouver, yes.

Stern: I mean you can imagine how we felt, having immersed ourselves in Marshall's ideas, and then to have this guy Alvin, happenstance, to be at the performance in San Francisco and say that we've got to come up to Vancouver and he's going to get Marshall to come and speak from the other end of the country. He obviously had a little money. But it just seemed prophetic. Turned out to be.

We just kept on working together. In the meantime, I had a commission, right? What was that next from the--

Callahan: From the nuns, from Mary Corita and Mary Magdalene.

"Resurrection"

Stern: From the sisters. They run, do you know Mary Corita's work? Silkscreen, very inspirational stuff, I mean very avant-garde inspirational. Kind of the next step from Gerard Manley Hopkins. They were two nuns who taught at the--

Callahan: Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles.

Stern: And I had a good friend from the Bauhaus days who, he and his wife, he taught art there also.

Callahan: Paul LaPorte.

Stern: Paul LaPorte. A submerged talent. I mean a critic of the highest ability, and he had gotten me to come one day to do collage poetry with the students at Immaculate Heart, they were all young ladies. It was not a co-ed institution. I still have some of the poems that they put together. I met Magdalene and Corita at that time because it was their program, and we started talking. They had a collection of--

Callahan: Automatea.

Stern: Some of them very old from the French--

Byerly: Automatea?

Callahan: Yes, music boxes, hurdy gurdies, mechanical toys.

Stern: Things that moved.

Callahan: Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful collection.

Stern: Some things that were wound up. And they had a few contemporary pieces, I think they had a Tinquely. And I described to them some of the things I was doing and they said they would like to buy a piece. At the same time we were doing another little commission for that jukebox company. We had a friend there--



- Callahan: It's the same name as everybody--Geor--
- Stern: George Walker's friend.
- Callahan: Associated Coin Amusement.
- Stern: He was a consultant or something for them. And he got us a comission to build a little piece for their headquarters, which was in L.A.
- Callahan: No, this was a pinball and cigarette and jukebox exhibit.  
[laughter]
- Stern: They gave us a whole bunch of old pinball machines, right? I mean, quite a bunch.
- Callahan: Which promptly got moved over to Hayes Street. 619 Hayes? I can't remember.
- Stern: Michael took them apart, and that's where we first got into stepping switches, right? Out of those pinball machines. And we built a "Resurrection." A really amazing piece out of these pinball machines, and we delivered too.
- Callahan: On Easter. Or Good Friday or something.
- Stern: And they were so thrilled, and it had a coin thing that you had to start it with and we had inactivated it.
- Callahan: It took a nickel to stop it, you could start it for free.  
[laughter]
- Stern: Magdalene cut out a little diagram. We had left it so the coins would roll on the floor but she attached a little bag to catch them.
- Callahan: On the backboard, the display board on the pinball machine where normally the scores are kept, we put a piece of--is there a picture in here? We have a film of it in action somewhere. But in this white plexiglass which could be lit up, Gerd wrote a poem so like one corner said "high", "free", "safe" and "through" were in the corners, and the middle was a big "way". It was also written to the sound of all these hundreds of relays, because these were all electromechanical and they were noisy. But the thing I really remember about it was we had UNO, U-N-O, and then "What I mean," but there was this wonderful--"UNO, UNO, UNO what I mean, UNO, UNO, UNO what I mean."

- Stern: I'm sure that piece exists. I don't know, they left the convent afterwards, so I wonder what happened to those pieces. They also bought a new one, right?
- Callahan: Yes, that was a few months later. I'd forgotten about that picture. Except it's named in *Drama Review*.
- Byerly: You have this picture here? This picture, do you have this picture?
- Stern: The actual photograph, you mean?
- Byerly: Yes.
- Stern: Probably.
- Callahan: Yes, I think there's a film on it, an old Bolex film maybe.
- Byerly: Is this Yvonne Rainer? No. This is your friend Ivan right.
- Callahan: Does he go by Ivan or Yvonne?
- Stern: Ivan.
- Callahan: Yvonne Rainer was later. At this point I was--pretty clear to me what I was going to be doing. So I left City College which was boring anyway. And then I sort started doing the tape center and then working with Gerd. We would tend to do the collage work at night, start when the studios were free, go until morning, and then over to the tape center during the day. Schleppling out to City College wasn't worth it. Something had to give.
- Stern: It was fairly sleepless.
- Callahan: So were you.
- Stern: Sometimes he was in a real comatose state. That is not the kind of state that you want to be in when you're cutting tape and trying to get it to beat, I mean the problem was that when you had to cut it instead of electronically edit, you didn't really have a precise enough plus or minus point of reference. You had to be very intuitive, certain, even the inches weren't that easy to do, because each machine stops at a different pace, right? And as the days go on, the machine gets a little tired even the pace changed, in those days.

Callahan: You know, when you cut the tape, you had to be careful. You always made another copy of the tape, a backup copy before you start cutting. But then that would get messy.

Stern: Yes, you could lose quality very easy, and there was no way of regaining it.

Callahan: Yes, I mean quality--I mean pre-Dolby, pre-everything. Hey but that was part of the dynamic, I mean that was it, that was the process. Process was our most important product.

The Billie Master and NO OW NOW

Stern: The "Billie Master," as far as I'm concerned, I think Michael agrees with me, still stands up. We wouldn't want to make it any better or worse. It's a beautiful piece. A lot of it is thanks to KPFA. How did we, what did we do, we raided them?

Callahan: No. Went over one Saturday, went over there and Irwin Goldsmith--

Stern: Okay, you remember I worked at KPFA right? I mean Irwin who had been--

Callahan: He was the chief engineer.

Stern: We talked him into letting us come over and do some work there. I don't think he was aware that we wanted to use a lot of material, which I had really been responsible for a lot of it. It wasn't exactly policy to let independent artists use up all the tape archive. We copied a piece out of that and we copied pieces out of a lot of things, and that made the "Billie Master" possible.

Who was the architect? Anyway--

Callahan: Yes, the guy at Berkeley. Maybeck, yes.

Byerly: Maybeck?

Stern: So, but you'll get the whole list.

Callahan: "NO OW NOW" was the first thing in Woodstock, but that was a few months later.

Stern: And we actually did it for them in Woodstock. We built three of them, right?

On the Road Performances and Noteworthy Meetings

Salt Lake City Performance

Stern: Eventually, Judi and I took off across the country. We did some performances along the way, including a disastrous one at Salt Lake City, Utah, which I did not arrange. A friend of Ivan's taught there but I guess he neglected to tell the friend about the subject of the film which he, Ivan and I made and which Michael did the sound for. That was another project we did all in just a few short months. The soundtrack executes entirely the intention we had with mixing the highway signs with the travel across a nude body. When that hit the screen in Salt Lake City, Utah they turned off the electricity, packed me up without much ado and sent me packing.

Callahan: Didn't they issue arrest warrants or something for all of us?

Stern: That was Eugene, Oregon. Same film, I think I already told that story.

Callahan: I've never been able to get over that. I had this dream a dozen years ago when my children were little. We were flying out to San Francisco and the back door of this big plane blew open and my son was sucked out but I grabbed him and was holding him by his legs and he's hanging on. A flight crew says, "Oh, we'll be landing right away," and I look down and I see it's Utah and I call back, "No, I'm okay, keep going."  
[laughter]

Stern: Anyway, so when we got there, Michael had met Steve and Barbara by this time because they came out when?

Callahan: Yes.

Charles Campbell's Gallery, California State University at  
Hayward, California College of Arts and Crafts

- Stern: Or was that afterwards, no it was before. We did that one piece at the gallery at the architects'. Was that Charles Campbell's gallery? I don't remember.
- Callahan: We also did a thing over at California College of Arts and Crafts.
- Stern: We were doing all these performances and the essential thing for the performances was of course electricity. So we had to cement relationships with, never mind the professors and the administrators, janitors were the important scene.
- Callahan: Janitors are the true flowers of life. We were always blowing fuses.
- Stern: Never had enough juice.
- Callahan: We had never seen such old slide projectors, basically from the gas age.
- Stern: That was true with California, it's still is--we blew lots of fuses.
- Callahan: Yes, we also blew Hayward in '66. And the panels were locked, circuit breaker panels.
- Stern: We committed mayhem at various institutions through the years just trying to get the show on the road, or in the street. We usually managed to deliver despite the obstacles.
- Callahan: I remember coming back from CCAC, Gerd and I were driving back to San Francisco. Ken Kesey was over there, first time I met him. I remember we were stuck in traffic, Gerd rolls down the window of the Volkswagen, hollers to no one in particular, "I'm Gerd Stern and I've got to get through." [laughter]
- Stern: I don't remember those years. That was on the way to the performance.
- Callahan: Yes, I can't remember, yes, I remember I was over in Oakland.
- Stern: We were often late.
- Callahan: No, not that often.

- Stern: Not that often. I mean it took forever to set up these things.
- Callahan: You never knew what the reaction was going to be, because there could be some hostility but some people would get it. It would be like there's this guy in Rochester, an English professor who sponsored us. He said, "You know, I never could stand the supermarket, I always hated the supermarket." That after seeing "The Verbal American Landscape" he could see, because a lot of the collage, both Gerd's collage and the collage that we were doing on the screen with multiple projectors, a lot came from the marketplace. From commercials. But, at the same time, this other English professor came staggering up, this was after performance, came staggering up, the same evening, the same reception and said, "You know, you're nothing but a middle-class bourgeois apologist." So we had those responses, and now Rochester was fairly tame, New York. I'm skipping ahead, that is the second time we did a joint thing with McLuhan, later that year.
- Stern: We had a lot of negative reactions from people.
- ##
- Byerly: Steve [Durkee] had hired the band?
- Stern: The band which was local to that school, RISD, actually Steve had heard them rehearsing somewhere. While we were setting up he wandered about so he asked them if they would play during our show. That enraged this professor. The next day--oh I don't know, you know, it was so noisy--he was literate, you know. Nineteenth century literature professor--
- Callahan: There was enough going on without the band. We had three or four movie projectors or a half dozen slide projectors, and the audio mix.
- Stern: Anyway, the next morning he invited us to a seminar of his, and he absolutely took us apart in front of his students.
- Callahan: Oh yes, it was vicious. For the RISD student paper, there were some students there with the long lens getting our faces. They took a picture of me rubbing my temples under the headline "Visual Rape". [laughter]
- Stern: We had a good time, and they had a good time.
- Callahan: Just one more thing on that. A couple of years ago, a very talented media producer in Boston, Fred Brink, and I were at some Christmas party or something, and I asked him what he

thought about a particular new technology and he says oh, no, that's just a rehash of the old stuff. I mean, there really have been only two good things. One was the Czech pavilion at the 1967 Montreal Expo, and he said the other, when he was a student at RISD, these people showed up in this old limousine with a trailer full of slide projectors and they had dancers and they had strobe lights, and they had slide projectors, and they had a rock band, and they had film, and they had a big oscilloscope that some guy was sitting on. [laughter] And I said, "Oh yes, that would have been around December 6, 1965, wouldn't it?" And he said, "Well yes, how do you know?" "Well I was sitting in the orchestra pit at the control panel."

I think maybe Fred's case is extreme but seventies psychedelic art really catalyzed his career for him. He got it, and he knew exactly what was going on.

Stern: There was a lot of that, we attracted a lot of people who were coming out and hadn't quite understood the possibilities. That was very gratifying.

#### IBM Meeting

Callahan: In the summer of '66, we went to see IBM to straighten them out. I think also to get grant money from them.

Stern: We went to where?

Callahan: IBM on Madison Avenue.

Stern: Oh, right.

Callahan: Sounds egotistical because the technology was not really there to implement it, but basically we tried to explain our work to this guy who had this like ten foot wide desk. You and Steve and Stewart and I were there and this was IBM white shirt Madison Avenue. But we laid out the whole damn multimedia world to them, and boy, did they blow us off. We were out of there in a hurry. It would have been interesting if the guy had paid a little more attention.

Stern: So, Michael arrived in New York. Steve and I were very anxious even to have him come and eventually it happened. We were actually commuting because I was still living at the Maverick house in Woodstock, Judi's house really. Now there were three of us in a fairly confined space. It was so confined that

Michael used to pile up everything under his bed, and after a while the bed arose from the floor, and was ensconced on top of piles of other things. But it was a lovely little house with electricity but no plumbing, and an outhouse. We did a lot of concentrated work there, but we commuted back and forth from the church in Garneville and eventually we moved down there, but that was some time later. What was the first thing we did Michael when you came back?

### University of Rochester

Callahan: I left San Francisco, let's see August 18th '64. Then got to New York and went to the church, then we went up to Woodstock, you all greeted me at six o'clock in the morning at Kennedy. I think that at that point, was getting ready for the October event at University of Rochester with Marshall McLuhan. They basically gave us like a month or a month and a half or whatever to build whatever. And also there was a, what was the name of the box with mattress ticking?

### Woodstock Artists' Association

Stern: Oh, I don't know. This was a piece that we built for the Woodstock Artists' Association annual show, I think I was at that time vice chairman of the association which is a very old artists association in the center of Woodstock, New York. It played a fairly large role in our work during a couple of years there, because a lot of the younger artists in Woodstock became involved with and worked on our pieces.

Callahan: Yes, I think that I worked on that piece and showed it in New York, someplace on Fifth [Avenue]. Wasn't really a museum.

Stern: Architectural Forum or something?

Callahan: Yes, something. Architectural Forum or whatever. Oh yes, and the Byron Gallery.

Stern: The Byron Gallery Box Show is what we were fixing "NO OW NOW" for. It was interesting--



The Box Show

Callahan: The box show.

Stern: The box show, we had built some pieces which were basically boxes and we were solicited for this box show and the guy looked at our work and he said, no, no, no, no, no I can't manage. They were all very funky pieces, and he was a kind of a glitzy gallery, so--

Callahan: Upper Madison Avenue.

Stern: We had to repackage the "NO OW NOW". "NO OW NOW" comes out of a mantra which somehow came to me while we were high at the church, it goes, "Take the NO out of NOW, then take the OW out of NOW, then take the then out of NOW-NO-OW-NOW-NO-OW-NOW." And Michael found these pieces, you tell about them.

Callahan: Getting back to the available electromechanical technology, there's this wonderful place in Kingston, New York called P and D Surplus, Phil and Don. And Kingston, at that point, was home base for a very large IBM mainframe computer factory where they would make big computers. In 1964, IBM had just brought out the 360 series of computers, which was designed to replace everything they made. IBM, at that point, was leasing computers, so they were able to call in all their older vacuum tube and early computers on lease and basically get people to upgrade to 360s. So P and D was where all these old computers would go, and so this was a great source of parts, I mean like the stash of pinball parts we had here, this was even better. So we found these little tiny light bulb matrices which we wired the bulbs in to form the letters N, O, W. And then had a stepper switch which made a resounding clunk, which would go and turn on the lights in the order that Gerd just described. And it had a remote control for your convenience at the end of a twenty foot cord so you could vary the rate at which it stepped through, or it could be single stepped, you had push buttons. It had a manual and auto switch on it, so it would either run by itself or you could flip it to manual.

## Prayer Wheel

Stern: If you want to know what kind of the prototype or the, you might even say, inspiration for this kind of a piece was, I don't know, maybe you could guess, but it was prayer wheels. I

had been exposed to ghost traps and prayer wheels at some lectures here years ago. Also, one of those influences that I haven't talked enough about was Grace Clements. She and I produced a series of talks on Jung at KPFA, and she got me involved in helping her garden for money because I was really strapped at the time. We worked in her terraced, succulent gardens in Richmond, developing this idea of a symbology that we were going to produce together which we never could find any funding for. But, the prayer wheel is a fascinating kind of exercise, taking prayer outside of the mouth and "NO OW NOW" was simply an extension of that kind of idea.

#### Remsen and Rosie Woods, Process for Making Diffraction Gratings

- Callahan: So we worked on "NO OW NOW", and we also had a commission from Remsen Wood who founded the Diffraction Company in Riderwood, Maryland. Rem had invented a process for making diffraction gratings, and that was the first time that it was possible to produce a really brilliant spectrum, because with this technique, they were just stamped out like miniature phonograph records, rather than being produced by an extremely expensive laboratory process. And the diffraction gratings are certainly around today and they're all made using Rem's process. So we were working on various diffraction grating. We had some diffraction gratings imprinted with "NO OW NOW" around the periphery.
- Stern: Talk about the piece that we built the technology for that you figured out for the triple diffraction hex and the seven diffraction hex. The one that was sold to Malcolm Forbes.
- Callahan: Right. That was, go down to P and D Surplus, Kingston is only fifteen miles from Woodstock. Make these frequent trips down to P and D and Phil and Don are both very sweet and gave us a charge account, which was very helpful, not that the stuff was all that expensive. We got some motors and Judi made up these elaborate diffraction grating wheels about six inches in diameter. We were also starting to work with strobe lights. We were interested in time, time and motion. So we had this box with these three spinning diffraction wheels and again controlled by a stepper switch with its thunk. The wheels would spin in different directions at different speeds and incandescent lights would come on at different angles to bring out the color, and then there would be a strobe light to stop the motion. We still have that, Gerd's triple diffraction hex,

and that was shown quite widely. Yes, and then there was a larger piece that Malcolm Forbes wound up buying, which was seven. In the USCO retrospective book, that's "Our Time Base Real." It's called "Our Time Base Real". And that was sort of a "NO OW NOW" as it went together, dots there are the lightbulbs. And that's the circuit that drove it.

Stern: Yes, tell her about the circuits, it's a fascinating circuit. It depended on something which had just come in, right?

Callahan: Yes it was in the early sixties, about that time in the sixties certain types of transistors and semiconductors were just coming on the market, I mean which allowed things to be done which just really either couldn't have been done before or just not practical like things we take for granted today like little light dimmers built into walls is no big deal, but up until the invention of the triac and the silicon controlled rectifier, it was just not easy to dim lights up and down. We were trying to get away from motors. "Contact Is the Only Love" was basically driven by a motor. A motor would turn around and there would be these cams and there would be switches, riding on the cams, sort of like a music box. It wasn't very versatile in terms of being able to change the program. So this point we were taking surplus IBM, old computers. We weren't really using them as computers, but we were taking these computer parts, trying to advance our own state of the art if you will.

### Our Time Base Is Real

Stern: This, "Our Time Base Is Real" is a timing circuit, right? And what does it depend on? It's a triac or--

Callahan: A Unijunction transistor. And that was the basic circuit that we used for years, because as it turns out we could control lights in it, we could control when slide projectors changed, we could control how bright the slide projectors were, so that was a very useful circuit. I think that's probably why it's included in that book as "Our Time Base Real", or as Durkee would say, "Is Real".

Stern: But, having a foundation like that, a technological foundation of a circuit which Michael developed just made all kinds of things possible and the shows that hadn't been possible before. And it was possible to do them as a control function rather than as a manual function. We didn't have to go actually manually trip the slide projectors, they tripped themselves and

we could decide when they tripped either beforehand or during the show itself, so there were dynamic possibilities that were opened up for such a performance. It was really the basis for us eventually going up to Boston and putting together a little business, because it was Michael's circuits that made the hardware. There were no hardware control units at that time available, now there are what, twenty companies making things like that?

Callahan: Now at least. Countless.

Stern: Michael himself has more lately developed control units which of course are what, two or three generations ahead of where we were then at least.

Callahan: Yes, so far ahead because everything has a little microcomputer in them. You know what we ought to do in our retirement is go back and apply nineties technology to our sixties aesthetic and see what we could come up with. What do you say about that Mr. Stern?

Stern: I'm all for it, 100 percent. IBM went right ahead and did exactly what we suggested to them was the next step, except it took them about five or ten years. They put together a very elaborate audiovisual, multimedia remote communication center, and it was I would say nonfunctional at the end because it was so highly designed that they designed the people right out of it.

Callahan: Just jumping back a little bit, when the tape was off I just wanted to go over what seems to be incredible how much we did between October of '63 here in California and Easter of '64, you know the six-month phase included "Where Are You and What's Happening," "Contact Is the Only Love," and "Resurrection," for Magdalene Mary and Mary Corita. I mean there was just something happening constantly, "Billie Master," we pretty well finished the "Billie Master" here, the tape.

#### Visual Gallery Shows

Stern: Two or three different visual gallery shows and another couple or three, didn't we go to San Jose too?

Callahan: Yes.

Stern: I remember I did a poem about pop art with slides at San Jose State which I think I found the other day--the poem, I don't know that I have the slides. It was quite an interesting history, I've got to get that for the Bancroft Archives.

Callahan: And also during this time in March of '64 approximately, the tape music center had the Tudor Fest. And David Tudor and John Cage came out in a week long concert series. That certainly attracted a crowd, and a very interesting crowd, those who would come for John and David. That was a major event.

### Counter Influences in New York

Stern: Absolutely, David, I knew him from New York because he lived with M.C. Richards in the community, at "The Land" and John also, he had an apartment in New York but mostly he lived up at "The Land." There were a lot of the counter-influences, in other words M.C. and David were very involved in anthroposophy. We were doing multimedia and the rock world was very receptive, then the psychedelic world intruded and these liquid light shows became very popular, we never got very involved with them because we were dealing with actual images more but a lot of our associates and friends were involved, Tony Martin for one. I had originally met Tony because he was David Stone Martin's son. David was a famous cover artist and kind of political painter who afterwards settled in California from the east. Tony was his son and he was probably the best of the light show artists. When Subotnik went to NYU he went with him or shortly afterward and I think he's still there.

Callahan: Yes, Tony's in Brooklyn. Tony did some light shows at the tape music center which were the first ones that I had seen, also a fellow who I've never heard of since, Elias Romero.

Stern: [laughter] That's right, I forgot about him.

Callahan: Did a wet show at the--

Stern: And we called them wetshows.

Callahan: At the tape music center, and then Tony was doing light shows at the Fillmore in '66.

Stern: That's right.

Bill Graham

Callahan: I remember I went to visit him there and Bill Graham chased me out of the booth.

Stern: [laughter] Bill, he was an interesting type, you know? He was a refugee, that wasn't his name at all. When I first knew him, he was doing the management of the San Francisco Mime Troupe. He had a lot of ideological tension in those days, and of course he kind of kept them on a super level, even later on but he got very greedy. Very greedy. Greed has transformed a lot of people in our worlds into kind of monsters.

The Wetshows

Stern: The wetshows, that has a slightly pejorative flavor for us, but I don't think we initially meant it that way, do you?

Callahan: No.

Stern: It's very easy to do a lousy wetshow. It is not quite that easy to do a lousy show with images, because they speak for themselves. We took later on a huge wetshow down to Venezuela, probably at that time the best in the business, the Pablo Light Show. That was an immense success, they had never seen anything like that, it was on an immense screen. Anyway, that was much later. What are we up to Michael?

Ronny Davis and the Mime Troupe

Callahan: I was just doing a quick rehash of the period of fall '63, spring '64, the Tudor Fest. Ronny Davis and the Mime Troupe were also in and out of the tape music center at 321 Divisidero. Everybody was in and out, as I started off by saying, between KPFA, the dancers workshop and the tape music center.

Stern: Ann Halprin.

Ann Halprin

Stern: Ann Halprin was one of the most respected artistic personalities at that time in the Bay Area. We had bumped into her through Harry Partch and she was a good friend of the Onslow Fords, et cetera, et cetera and Ann--I tried very hard to get Ann to commission a piece for Harry Partch and you know how some peoples' egos were. She felt that--

Harry Partch's Morals ##

Stern: --the power of the visuality of the instruments of the music would overpower the dance. So she wanted him to write a piece for normal, as she called them, instruments. Well, I mean this was total anathema, right? Harry had spent his whole life developing a theory and a practice of music and here she was supposed to be one of his fans and she was asking him this, I mean it was war. It was often war with Harry, Harry was no compromise, I mean we had an opportunity to do a science fiction movie in Hollywood with his music and he just absolutely wouldn't hear of it. You got to remember he was the child of missionaries in China, had a strong moral sense. And Michael became involved with Harry also. I dragged Michael into every situation that--

Callahan: Needed recording. And here I am still holding the microphone.  
[laughter]

Stern: You want to say something about Harry?

Callahan: Well, in '64 Harry was living in a chicken coop in Petaluma and had just I believe finished, I don't know if it was his last but certainly one of his later compositions, "And on the Seventh Day, Petals Fell in Petaluma." And we recorded it in this chicken coop, he had all his instruments there, beautiful. And Gerd had helped build--what all instruments had you worked on, I mean the marimba, or the Eroica.

Stern: Quite a few of them. The Kithara, the Marimba Eroica, and then a lot of variations of other instrument. But Harry, I think I've said this before, Harry's main phrase was if you want it done right, do it yourself. And then he would get together works which took twenty or fifty people and yet, everyone of those fifty tasks, he believed wholeheartedly that he could do it better himself. Not an easy guy to work with.

Callahan: We had a number of recording sessions in this chicken coop, and among the other technical difficulties, one was the wavelength of the sound of the Marimba or Eroica, which was just too big for the room so it was difficult to record. That was putting out sixteen hertz or something close, so it posed a number of problems there, and not the least of which was that the chicken coop was being demolished around him. I guess in '64 real estate values were going up in Petaluma so this chicken coop in Petaluma had more value to the owners than renting it to Harry Partch for probably not much money. That was quite an experience.

Stern: What were you recording on at that time?

Callahan: Ampex and some Altec microphones.

Stern: Now where did you get, is it Grandpa?

Callahan: Gramps, yes.

Stern: Gramps, right.

#### Gramps: A Classic Big Ampex Tape Recorder

Callahan: Gramps was actually a classic big Ampex tape recorder. I got that out of Alexis.

Stern: Ah hah, right! I forgot all about that.

Callahan: One of the things that delayed my departure to Woodstock was, Gerd used to do public relations for Alexis Merab, of Alexis Tangier Restaurant.

Stern: This was in a previous incarnation, right, when I was married to Ann, but I kept up old associations, like a free dinner at Alexis was not something that you passed off very easily. So Alexis wanted a sound system?

Callahan: Yes, I think he was getting on in years a little bit and he had the idea of having a discotheque in a converted banquet room at 1001 California Street, Nob Hill, diagonally across from the Fairmont and the apartment building where the Hearsts had their San Francisco place. It was quite a scene. So we put in a sound system, discotheque sound system, July and August of '64 and that's what delayed my getting back to Woodstock. But that was a funny scene.



- Stern: But how did you abstract Gramps from that scene, I mean this was at the time a valuable, valuable piece of equipment.
- Callahan: Well, he had a background music system and they had this big tape recorder there and--you know, it'd use big ten inch reels of tape but even on ten inch reels of tape in those days, you've only got an hour. And then you'd have to rewind it and put on another reel of tape every hour. This task was assigned to either a waiter or Andre, the maitre d', who was fearful of it because you'd have these 2400 foot reels of tape that would rewind in sixty seconds, you know, start torquing out and he was terrified that it would put an eye out.
- Stern: A prototypical Frenchman.
- Callahan: So, I replaced that with a background music machine which played at a slower speed and would automatically reverse. So part of my compensation with Alexis was that I got this tape recorder.
- Stern: That tape recorder served us for--you still have it right?
- Callahan: Still have it. Used it just the other day.
- Stern: It's a classic, it's what KPFA was built on and what all the early music recording studios were built on. I mean, then when we got our music studio in Boston, we got the first of the sixteen track models of that same machine really, not descendants, two or three generations up from that. And it wasn't very different really, except that it was bigger, and it used two-inch tape instead of quarter inch tape.

### Magnetic Tape, 1963

- Callahan: Basically, the one enabling technology was magnetic tape, because collage performances were all made possible by magnetic tape. Speaking in 1996, that sounds a little strange, but in 1963 magnetic tape had only been a practical--
- Stern: Medium.
- Callahan: Medium really for about ten years. I mean certainly the earliest was 1948, 1949, but it didn't really get out there.
- Stern: Where did it come from, Michael?

Callahan: Well, largely from Germany. Ampex, Jack Mullin who lived in San Francisco brought back two German magnetophones and Ampex was casting about for products. People at Ampex improved it and brought the magnetic tape recorder into production.

Refugee Syndrome

Stern: I felt kind of funny at first, because I was aware that it was German war technology. I mean the refugee syndrome is definitely a paranoid syndrome which has to be repressed often. And it's pursued me all through my life. I haven't allowed it to get the best of me yet I don't think, but it affects your whole thought process, having to flee from--what?

Byerly: Marriages?

Stern: [laughter] That too.

Callahan: Utah.

Stern: Utah, Germany, I mean having to flee for your life. So I'm fleeing from, I'm continually fleeing from my life, right? And she's right, marriages. "Cave canum", you know, right? Beware of the dog.

Callahan: You know there's one thing too which I don't think in any of the earlier times we've gone on record that--in USCO okay we triumphed for weirdo, beardo and electro. One thing.

Byerly: Weirdo, Beardo and Electro?

Callahan: Yes, I didn't have a beard then, but all of us had lost a parent at an early age. I mean Gerd his mother, Steve his mother, and me my father. I don't know how that affected us, it's hard to say exactly how that affected the dynamic of us working together but I'm quite sure it did, in many ways, some subtle, some not so subtle. I don't really know what to say about that but I did just want to work that into the record, that that was something that has not really been addressed in any previous history--is that right Gerd?

Stern: Yes, absolutely. In each case there was a feeling of abandonment. I don't think I've expressed it too much in my work, it certainly influenced my work. Steve expressed it very literally on a number of occasions. Michael--

Callahan: Yes, my father was an electrician and I think at age four I picked up his wirecutters, soldering iron and just continued his work. So the loss of my father basically determined my career. I had his tools and my mother, bless her, didn't freak when I started plugging things in at an early age.

Stern: Unlike my father, who when I fixed the lamp took it back to the hardware store and said, "fix it" and they said it's fixed. He said "I want you to check it out." He didn't believe any son of his could fix or even unplug an electric wire.

Anyhow we went on to Rochester. Yes. We had this relationship going with the people across the river at--what do they call themselves?

### International Federation for Internal Freedom

Callahan: International Federation for Internal Freedom. AKA Castalia Foundation.

Stern: Castalia Foundation, Millbrook the center, the epicenter of the psychedelic movement with an enormous house belonging to the Hitchcock clan which were kind of Mellon-connected and also the father, Tommy Hitchcock, had been a famous playboy in American annals.

Callahan: Polo playing.

Stern: Yes. And his two sons and his daughter were completely involved in the movement and extended the hospitality of their humongous estate--

Callahan: A hundred rooms.

Stern: All filled with freaks. Unbelievable, including us. You never knew who would be there when you got there, you know?

Callahan: G. Gordon Liddy.

Byerly: G. Gordon Liddy?

Callahan: Well he busted the place, you know.

Stern: All kinds of music people and jazz and rock, and artists and academes from all over the place, religious figures, and just kind of hangers-on. And a lot of nubile twits, who were

constantly taken advantage of, as if they didn't like it, right? It wasn't nice, it was not a nice environment. It was an environment where a lot of people were using, a lot of people were manipulating, and a lot of people were hanging on because they didn't have any other place to go. On the other hand, politically and in terms of a movement towards consciousness and toward liberation, was definitely the major sense of what was going on there. And we became involved because we believed what they were doing was akin to what we were doing. On the other hand, I believe that they were simply fascinated by the surface of what we were doing and felt that it was something that they could use to further their ends. When they kind of ran out of money and got badly into debt, a friend of theirs in New York extended a theater, what was it called the New Theater.

#### The Timothy Leary Lectures

Callahan: The New Theater. Midtown.

Stern: And, what are we going to do that evening, I mean their natural impulse was to call us up and say, you do the media show and we'll do the lecture. Lecture, mind you.

Callahan: Oh yes, Tim would lecture.

Stern: And we were bored.

Callahan: As I recall, ostensibly Tim and Dick saying, well we're looking for some way to give people a taste without actually ingesting anything, which I never totally bought.

Stern: I mean simulation.

Callahan: Yes, they were using us for simulation. But on the other hand we got some bread out of it, we split the gate or something. You know, we didn't have any money. And it was interesting, but it was also quite a schlep into New York every week from Woodstock to set this thing up and tear it down.

Stern: Was that where we had the fucking perforated screen?

Callahan: Yes.

Stern: Ay yai, this was the brilliant idea executed in a dangerous and essentially--I mean this is what you get into in technology,

right? What we wanted was to be able to strobe images from the rear.

Callahan: Yes, strobe lights.

Stern: So we needed either transparency of some kind or a perforation, well we selected perforating and the easiest thing to buy that was preperforated were masonite panels you know which had--

Callahan: Pegboard.

Stern: Pegboard.

Callahan: The thing that did us all in.

Stern: At one point it crashed onto the stage, I mean it was heavy, and we were flying it, in theater terms. We were very lucky not to have any dead bodies under it.

Byerly: Not to have killed anybody.

Stern: Under that. It worked fine, but it was impossible to transport, we gave it up pretty soon thereafter. They were very successful performances and we had also gave the opportunity to a number of other light artists to participate.

Callahan: Oh yes, that's true.

Stern: Jackie Cassen.

Callahan: Richard Aldcroft.

Stern: I can't remember, Jim--light machine people. And there was a real sense of camaraderie among the media people. As I told you before, we didn't get along too well with the purposes and theatrical ambitions of Dr. Timothy Leary. We remain close friends, but he wanted something that we weren't interested in delivering, and he bored the shit out of us with his--I mean he thought that the crowd that was coming to see this, which was a very hip crowd, wanted to be told on an academic level about psychedelics. I don't think there was a person in the audience who hadn't taken a few trips themselves. And then when we played part of our death trip and part of Antonin Artaud's screaming in the middle of his lecture, we got severely reprimanded.

Callahan: Tim had announced the week before that next week he would be talking about God. So back in Woodstock, setting up the trusty

Ampex around the table, we--just all of us were sitting around going "Oh, God."

Stern: But it was an acid trip.

Callahan: Yes, we had about a dozen people on acid going, "Oh God, God." Then we mixed in a little Artaud screaming and a few other things, and I was up in the catwalk above the thing with our trusty Ampex from Alexis' restaurant, having hoisted the thing up there. That was also the Public Address system which Tim was using, so it was easy to mix the Ampex sound. About halfway through his lecture I just hit the start button and the theater fills up with this "Oh, God." And then it stopped, a few minutes later, give them another little taste.

Stern: At first he thought it was an error, you know, that we had just hit the button at the wrong time, then the second or third round he got the message. [laughter] He sent Ralph back to tell us we had violated our agreement.

Callahan: Yes, he was suspecting Harry Smith. Ralph Metzner came charging up, "Is Harry Smith here?" Nope, just us.

Stern: We had a contract that nobody would get in free. At that time, everything was supposed to be free, you know. But, this was raising money, we needed to sell tickets so we couldn't let everybody in free, and everybody had some reason to get in free. But Harry Smith was an artist from here, very special person. He certainly didn't have any money and he was a raving drunk, and there was only one way to take care of him, which was to let him in free so Timothy and I had a big argument and finally Timothy gave up and Harry Smith got in free. But he started screaming from the audience too, right? It was a very public event, and it was very successful and how many weeks did we do?

Callahan: I think eight, six or eight anyway.

Stern: Full every time, and I mean a big theater too.

Byerly: Was it all for Leary?

Stern: Well part of it was for deficit financing for Castalia Foundation but we were doing probably 90 percent of the work and we split the gate for our efforts, so it worked well for us, and from then, we went on to do the first expanded cinema festival performances.

Mekas Brothers and the Avant Garde Film Scene

Stern: The avant-garde film scene was the property at that time of the Mekas Brothers. Jonas and Adolfus Mekas. Their understanding and their advocacy and their involvement in the film scene made avant-garde film production in this country, even other parts of the world, not only possible but viable and fundable. Jonas decided he wanted to do a kind of extended cinema festival because people were starting to work in other techniques using not just single film projection. At the same time he came from Latvia, and he needed to go back home. He was in the middle of planning this festival and he turned it over to a guy who had just graduated from Business School at Columbia and who was working as a china buyer at Bloomingdale's. He wanted to be involved in the arts and somehow had met Jonas. That was John Brockman. Well John got terribly confused by all these unreliable characters in the movement, and we became his bedrock, because he considered us comparatively reliable.

Callahan: Yes, we showed up. we were highly reliable.

Stern: And that was the Carolee Schneeman thing, right?

Carolee Schneeman

Byerly: Carolee?

Callahan: Schneeman.

Stern: A quite well-known performing artist and filmmaker and sexual liberationist. Lot of nude pieces, beautiful, beautiful performance artist.

Callahan: Dancer.

Stern: Yes, I don't care for all her films. Kind of endless Warhol-style films.

Callahan: I think that was where we were using the perf-screen. Well, Gerd had written a poem.

Stern: They were to go with Ghost Rev.

Callahan: Oh yes, right, to go with the film. These words would project on the screen and Carolee was there wearing a painter's coveralls--

Stern: White.

Callahan: And with a bucket of paint and a brush, she would paint the words as they appeared on the screen.

Stern: We had hung several layers of no seam photographers background paper over the perforated screen so she and her two dancers, also in overalls could paint wherever they liked and when the screen got full of paint they could tear it down, and there would be another layer that they could paint on. Eventually it exposed the perforated screen. She did that with us on a number of occasions. Even--at MIT Kresge?

Callahan: I don't think so.

Stern: There was somebody doing it though. Maybe we found somebody else.

Callahan: I think it might have been somebody else.

Stern: Steve maybe. Because Steve was no longer sitting on top of the oscillator, we had--

Callahan: Norman Berg.

Stern: Norm Berg, yes, I talked to him just two weeks ago.

Callahan: No kidding.

Stern: He's still on the same trip. Anyway, there were always people who wanted to be in the shows, right, or be--

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Stern: --in the company and we were willing to include other peoples' work as long as they put their egos to rest when they became involved. Norm Berg wanted to be in the show very badly, so we created a platform for him. His job in the meditation section of the performance was to sit in the zen position on top of the oscilloscope, which was a large display oscilloscope, and not to move. He was centered. We should talk about Ghost Rev.

Callahan: Ghost Rev was made in the fall of '65.



Ghost Rev

Byerly: Ghost Rev?

Callahan: Ghost Rev, Rev. The name comes from this particular motorcycle called the Ghost.

Stern: Racing bike. Fast and loud! It belonged to--

Callahan: Jonathan Ayres.

Stern: Another person who became very involved in our activities. Ayres. He runs a mule packing trip up in the Sierras now.

Callahan: But--Jonathan drove this motorcycle in the countryside around Woodstock at high speed, and Jud Yalkut who was sitting behind him--

Byerly: Who?

Callahan: Jud Yalkut.

Jud Yalkut

Stern: No, just one t.

Callahan: Jud had been working at what was it, Sam Goody's?

Stern: Yes, he was still working at Sam Goody's as a stock clerk in the record basement. He had this ambition to be a filmmaker. He was a friend of Bob Dacey's, who was another person who worked very closely with us, and is still around, in Woodstock. We had been doing these performances and gallery shows at the Woodstock Artists Association, and one of the members' sons had died and he had left behind a Bolex 16 millimeter camera.

Callahan: And some film.

Stern: And some blank film, and his mother got a hold of me.

Callahan: She was a nice woman.

Stern: Really lovely woman. She got a hold of me and said.

Callahan: Not Brown, not Brown, what was her name?

Stern: I can't remember. But she got a hold of me and she said I know you're doing all this work, would you have use for a movie camera and some blank film, I said sure. It was another one of these great happenstances where at the same time the camera came around and Jud wanted to make films, and we had Jonathan Ayres. What Michael and I were playing with is taking things out of real time. This seemed a very opportune image. We put Jud behind Jonathan with the Bolex tied to him.

Callahan: And a tape recorder.

Stern: And a tape recorder, and they zipped around these roads and the camera was pointed straight ahead. But then you could see the helmet, and we had three of these, we edited it, and we had three of these--

Callahan: Copies of the same film.

Stern: Then projected them simultaneously on the screen, next to each other.

Callahan: Three projectors.

Byerly: All on the same wall?

Stern: Yes. And the sound tracks were--

Callahan: Three tapes, we had three tapes and we would vary the speed of the projectors slightly so things would phase in and out and do the same on the tape. It was really beautiful.

It was, the image was on the screen in front. Our classic thing was we would put a speaker in each corner and have a control box where we could mix and match the speakers. Generally we always had four available soundtracks at least to switch under the four speakers as the spirit moved us. But Ghost Rev was really lovely.

#### MIT's Harold Edgerton

Stern: We used it at quite a number of performances, and it became the overload vehicle. It's how we met Harold Edgerton. Harold developed the strobe.

Callahan: Very famous professor of electrical engineering at MIT. And photography of course.

Stern: He was the one who did the famous milk drop photograph and he was the one who worked with Cousteau on underwater photography and he was a founder of a major I guess you would call it military complex company.

Callahan: Well, it's still around multi-billion dollar. EG&G Inc. Edgerton, Germerhauser and Greer.

Stern: Harold was already, what?

Callahan: Well into his sixties, yes, he was sixty something.

Stern: At the time.

Callahan: Yes, in the sixties.

Stern: And he came across from the EE building to Kresge Auditorium which was the grandest and the most famous and interesting auditorium we ever blew in. It was like, who designed it? Saarinen?

Byerly: Who?

### Saarinen

Stern: Saarinen. Anyway he came and he was a little put off, he was a motorcycle rider it turned out. He was a little put off by the way we did the engine sound--he thought it was too much overload as I remember. But he was also very disappointed in our strobe and he wrote us a note and asked us to come see him in his laboratory. Now the other thing we had as we did this, we superimposed as Michael said, slides of words on the screen.

Callahan: See, we could fade the images up, fade these words up using the time-based circuit.

### Michael's Kick-ass Controller

Stern: By this time Michael had built a really kick-ass controller, which looks like a piece of magic sorcery type of equipment. It was very funky, but it controlled everything for us for some years. Before we got into totally electronic. So we went to see him at his laboratory the next day.

Callahan: Well he had some constructive criticism on the strobe lights we had been building and invited us back, so we made a number of pilgrimages up to Cambridge. He had been concerned I wasn't using a large enough flash tube. EG&G made flash tubes. Several months later, came back to Cambridge and I remember him taking a look, smiling approvingly and saying, "Glad to see you're using a man's tube to do a man's job." [laughter]

Stern: He's a sweetheart. He lent us equipment actually.

Callahan: For the performance.

Stern: And he gave us circuit diagrams that he thought we could use, and he showed us his giant strobes. He had strobes, where was it that he had the strobes installed? Big building.

Callahan: The Prudential.

Stern: The Prudential Center in Boston, I mean for aircraft warning, right?

Callahan: Very bright.

Byerly: I've seen them. Is it the one that's there now?

Stern: Yes. Well, descendant of it probably. Is Harold still with us?

Callahan: No, he passed on about five years ago.

### Paul Lee

Stern: He used to come visit us when we were at Intermedia, and he was really interested in the arts and in encouraging efforts, which is unusual in that community, believe me. We had a lot of support people around the country who understood what we were doing and wanted to help us, a lot of them came out of the psychedelic world. Brandeis and MIT for instance were the product of Paul Lee. And Paul was a Tillich's assistant at MIT.

Byerly: Tillich?

Stern: Yes, famous religious philosopher.

Callahan: Paul also became the Protestant chaplain at Brandeis.

Stern: And he was part of the religious group that Timothy and Richard had turned on to LSD. When they were conducting, quote, "experiments", at Harvard. And Paul got us these performance. He later moved to Santa Cruz, teaching there, and he was the one who got me positions there when I taught there later on. At every place we went, there was somebody who had heard about us or seen something and then invited us. RISD was the sculptor who had seen one of our performances in New York.

Byerly: Who?

Callahan: Rhode Island School of Design. RISD. The RISD performance.

#### Rhode Island School of Design

Stern: Italo Scanga.

Callahan: I think also at this point we were starting to get a fair amount of publicity, which I think we were ambivalent about.

Stern: And we got more ambivalent about it as time went on.

Callahan: We were reviewed in *Newsweek* and *Life*.

#### Richard Kostelanetz

Stern: Richard Kostelanetz's first article, and then books, and all of a sudden we were the object of a lot of attention, most of it wanting to get involved by people who really had no business being involved, thinking that we were rich and famous, which we weren't. You know, all that kind of syndrome, and really--we enjoyed a little bit of it, but mostly it kind of pissed us off. But we were asking for it in a way, because we were putting ourselves out in public a lot and we did more and more of it.

#### Ken Dewey and Terry Riley

Stern: The next thing, John Brockman--I mean I won't go through the turmoil of the experimental cinema festivals. You know there

were problems with real druggies, hard drug artists and there were problems with people who just didn't show up and people who were totally boring, and yet there was some of the most beautiful media events, among them Ken Dewey and Terry Riley's piece called "Brides", which we later recreated after Ken's death at the Gugenheim Museum. Ken was a remarkable artist, unfortunately tormented. He had a thing called Action Theater, and he got me involved through the New York State Council on the Arts and a national organization that he founded called Planning Corporation for the Arts which unfortunately fell apart after he passed on.

Michael Myerberg

- Stern: So, really next John Brockman, who had business school background and a kind of commercial outlook, got involved somehow with a producer named Michael Myerberg. Myerberg was ancient by this time, he had been the person who had put on "Waiting for Godot" on Broadway. And he had been involved with Walt Disney on Fantasia and he was--how would you characterize him?
- Callahan: Irascible?
- Stern: Irascible, weird in a kind of a Charles Dickens way.
- Callahan: Exactly what I was going to say.
- Stern: A Charles Dickens kind of character. I mean he was so old and infirm that they would bring him in on a stretcher to rehearsals, right? But he was a control freak, total control freak. So he had gotten this lease on the airplane hangar which Charles Lindbergh had taken off from at Roosevelt Field in Long Island with the intention of making an East Coast based movie studio out of it, you know, that he could rent to movie production people. And for some reason the zoning didn't come through.
- Callahan: He outfitted his studios, I think there was some commercial shot there, but it just didn't fly.

Kublai Khan Styled Pleasure Dome

Stern: There was some use permit problem there I remember. Anyway, he decided he wanted to create a pleasure dome, you know, Kublai Khan style. But he didn't know how, so John Brockman, entrepreneur, goes to work for Myerberg and he recommends three groups to put this place together: Andy, Ken, and us. Now, Andy, had he started the club on St. Mark's Place, or was he about to?

Callahan: The Electric Circus? Just about to.

Stern: He wanted it and Ken wasn't that interested in it. Of course Ken didn't need the money, Ken came from a rich family, very wealthy family.

Callahan: Admiral Dewey.

Lily Ente

Stern: And also on the other side even more money. And we saw it as an opportunity to fund the show was coming up, and another sculptor in Woodstock. We had been involved in this cooperative gallery with a lot of artists, and one of the people was Lily Ente, who was a sculptress living in Woodstock, friend of Grace Wapner's who was another friend and sculptor who was involved in the gallery. And she'd seen a lot of our work and she was involved teaching at the Riverside Museum in New York, which was a little museum on the west side that had an extraordinary Tibetan collection and that fielded contemporary shows on the other side of the museum, and also at an art school in a building which had been originally connected to an artist called Nicholas Roerich. Anyway, she arranged for us to have this huge space. I mean there were like what, six rooms, something like that? And we were like overcome by this opportunity to really put our work in a space where people could experience it for, what was it, weeks?

Callahan: Opened on Mother's Day, closed on Father's Day 1966, it was like six weeks or whatever.

Murray Kaufman and the Multimedia Theatre Discotheque

Stern: And we didn't have the bread to get the scene together and they gave us a little bit at the museum. Hey, all of a sudden comes along this opportunity to do this discotheque and we were told that money wasn't a real object, and they went for us. We did presentations what we would do and so did Andy and Ken. And we got the go ahead and then we asked Andy if he'd like to cooperate with us, and Andy was not into cooperation except with his own coterie which, you know, I'm sure you've read enough about so you understand what they were into. And Ken really backed away from it. So here we were designing a really multimedia theater discotheque and the surprise after a while was that Myerberg had hired a famous at the time disc jockey, Murray Kaufman, otherwise known as Murray the K--he called the whole thing Murray the K's world. Anyway, Michael can talk about the technology there, which was at the time, way ahead of what they were even expecting.

Callahan: We had twenty-one slide projectors mounted--well it was an aircraft hangar, this building must've been like a 150 feet by 70 feet or whatever. And there was a steel beam running around and we had twenty-one slide projectors and twenty-one screens. On one end we also have two large, beautiful sixteen millimeter movie projectors which were surplus from the world's fair. And also we had a television projector which was quite rare at that point, again surplus from the world's fair, an Idofor 4.

The Incredible Idofor 4

Stern: Idofor 4, incredible machine, tell how it works.

Callahan: Yes, well--it was really a bizarre lovely machine. It had a pot of hot oil--it was built in Switzerland so you know this is all done with Swiss precision. But there was a pot of hot oil so it would take an hour to warm up, and there was this glass disk which would rotate fairly fast and the bottom half of the disk was in this oil, and this disk was spinning, and this was all done in a vacuum, and it took a while to pump it to a high vacuum because there was an electron gun, not unlike that in a TV set, but rather than the electron gun hitting the screen, the electron gun would hit this hot oil, which would form an image, and then a very high powered xenon movie projector light would refract off this image into a complex optical system that would give television pictures bright as the brightest movie



theater. And we had like three or four TV cameras with these straight union projectionists operating them. They would track the kids dancing.

Stern: There would be like 1,000, 1,500 kids on the floor, going like mad and we had lenses that you could see a girl's behind at forty foot wiggling on the screen. First the camera men were so straight. They wore ties, you know, they were real old style union guys. After a while we got them to move their zoom lenses in time to the music, then they stopped wearing ties and came in T-shirts, it got real comfy. And Michael had to go run this thing all the time because the slide projectors were controlled by a new controlling unit that Michael had built especially for it. And they had some great groups there: The Rascals, the Isley Brothers.

Callahan: Del Shannon.

Stern: It was a gas. We had a great time, and we made money.

Callahan: One reason I had to run it was that Myerberg ran out of cash and we had an agreement where I'd go out there and work the weekends. Friday and Saturday night, drive out to Long Island, I got paid for doing that but then also he'd work off whatever amount he owed us at three hundred a week, and I'd get a hundred or two hundred bucks for what he owed us. You know, that's five hundred bucks a week in cash, which is, in today's money, two or three thou. Not bad money. And so that helped support the Riverside show, and also that got us out to California for the acid conference.

### The LSD Conference

Stern: The LSD Conference which was put together by Richard Baker before he became Roshi Baker was probably the peak of our media grandiloquent expressions because of just the amount of materials we threw out at the audience. But we also returned to California, so it was euphoric. But before we get into that, at the Riverside show, we involved a lot of artists whose work we promoted and got exposed. Dion Wright was one of the painters. He did a creation painting which was enormous. Incredible painting. Paul Williams built a light garden and there were a number of other devices such as Bob Dacey's tie-dye cave. The rest of it was really our own work, which by this time had filled up the church and the tabernacle, which was a wooden hexagon.

Callahan: The wooden cover for the tabernacle was built later when it was at the church.

Stern: We later put the tabernacle in the church and we had to rebuild it for that, but it was originally the major installation piece at the show, I can't remember what we called it there. But it was a total experience where you sat down and saw paintings and projections and heard multi-channel sound. It was kind of a place where hip druggies would gather for six weeks, you couldn't barely get in because they would all be lying on the carpeted floor watching the strobed fountain in the center. Michael outdid himself at that show, I mean it was very hard work and he was also working at the World. Now Murray the K left very soon, so it was just called the World. Murray and Myerberg didn't get along, for various reasons. The Riverside show got us into a very, very heavy publicity trip. We couldn't quite figure out how to include it in our lifestyle. Would you say that's right?

Callahan: That's true, because we were reviewed on the Today show, on NBC nightly news. There was newspapers, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Life*.

Stern: We were deluged. Every hippie and every psychedelic hanger-on in the country was drawn to Garneville New York, after the show.

#### On the Cover of *Life* Magazine

Callahan: It was something we weren't prepared for. It was on the cover of *Life*, and an article was written by Murray Kempton's daughter, Sally. Sally flew out to New York to follow us around.

Stern: She followed us around and I followed her around.

Callahan: Yes, we followed her around. And that's thirty years ago, just about, almost to the day. But then the *Life* article came out later in the summer, at which point the show had already closed. But a lot of people all of a sudden were coming to see it and not seeing it there, came up to Garneville. So things were starting to get a little out of hand.

Stern: Was this the time we started thinking about another locale?

Callahan: Yes.

Stern: And--we have a marvelous film of the building of the tabernacle in the church. It's a documentary.

USCO and Jud Yalkut's Film ##

Stern: Like happens in so many creative enterprises, here we were, USCO, nobody's name you know. Now Jud was beginning to feel ambitious on his own and wanting to be a filmmaker and not to be part of USCO. And as Michael referred to it--

Callahan: USCO, represented by I Inc.

Stern: That was the first time Jud put his name on a film, unbeknownst to us and when it hit the screen we were--

Callahan: Less than pleased. Yes, I mean it was like--something like a film by Jud Yalkut for USCO.

Stern: Exactly. It's called Turn, Turn, Turn. And we had provided--

Callahan: Everything.

Stern: All the access, all the images. It is still a beautiful film, and it's been shown a lot because Jud has kept his work going through various periods.

Llama Foundation

Stern: Steve started working on a graphic image of what he considered another extension of USCO would be at first. He felt that we had this high energy place near New York and we needed a low energy place somewhere else. What did he call the drawings?

Callahan: Solux?

Stern: They're also in that--some of them are in that folder.

Byerly: Solux?

Stern: Yes. Here's the first representation of it, and it was later built in New Mexico, not exactly like that, but in that spirit. It turned into what's still known as the Llama Foundation. Did you know they had a big fire there?

Callahan: Yes.

The Confidet Commercial

Stern: All right. So this was a breaking point where Steve and Barbara left and we were left at the church. John Brockman was representing us and he wanted us to do more commercial work, because he was interested in making money and he was supposedly putting us in the way of making money. We did a few projects, one of which Ken Dewey really worked with us on which was for Scott paper, an introduction of a tampon actually, or was it a tampon or a sanitary napkin?

Callahan: Sanitary napkin.

Stern: A sanitary napkin called what?

Callahan: Confidets.

Stern: Confidets. It was kind of a--

Callahan: I mean you can see the sphincter, starting to get a little--  
[laughter]

Stern: It was at the same time a low point and a kind of a high point because it confronted us with people that we weren't used to dealing with.

Callahan: Yes, like marketing men, shirts or suits.

Stern: And it was a comedy of errors.

Callahan: Yes, I mean like when we did the gig in Boston or something, they wouldn't let us stay in the hotel--I mean we were totally behind the scenes, right? They wouldn't let us eat in the restaurant.

Byerly: They wouldn't let you eat in the restaurant?

Stern: With them, you know. We were like slavies.

Callahan: We were the roadies.

Stern: The hired help. But in addition they didn't listen to us.

Byerly: What were you doing for the sanitary napkins?

- Stern: We were introducing a very difficult product to the sales staff.
- Byerly: And you were coming up with the--
- Stern: It was a multimedia show.
- Callahan: Yes, it was probably one of the first travelling multimedia sales booths because the problem was, the Scott paper salesman could go into a supermarket representing the entire Scott line and they could walk out with an order for toilet paper and paper towels and that was easy. I mean it was difficult to get them to go ahead and convince the supermarket to carry Confidets.
- Stern: We had a beautiful Confidets girl, girlfriend of John Brockman's. Michelle, right?
- Callahan: Yes.
- Stern: And she also appeared live at the presentations as well as on the films and in the slides. And we had them wearing the kind of uniforms that people wear at the plant when they made the Confidets, the salespeople, which got us into trouble because when the President came, they looked at us--his assistant looked at us--"He's not wearing one of those." I said to him, "I thought he wanted to be one of the boys." And he said to his assistant, "Never mind, I'll wear it." So there were a lot of interesting byplays there, but it wasn't our thing and John wasn't really happy at our attitude so, there were no more of that order of projects.

On the Front Page of the Wall Street Journal

- Callahan: Yes, however, all of a sudden we're on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal* because Confidets sales went up 40 percent. [laughter]
- Stern: And all of a sudden multimedia became a tool, which we didn't want much to do with. Was the big thing in Washington next? We did a big show for the National Endowment on the Arts, or that was later?
- Callahan: That was later. We did General Electric, but that was a year later.

More on LSD Conference

Stern: And then we went out to the coast to do the LSD conference. Now the LSD conference was very odd. I mean what was the University of California doing putting on an LSD conference, right, at a time when the drug enforcement people were freaking out completely and busting people right and left. And here we were, a conference which Richard Baker, not with complete consciousness I think, had not realized what he was getting himself into. He had invited all the major figures to speak and us to do a performance, and it was what, a three or four day conference. The headline speech was by Richard Alpert. It was at the time when Meher Baba had sent his messenger who had been inspired to see Meher Baba by us, Bob Dreyfuss, to come back and tell us to stop using drugs. And Richard demurred. Steve stopped using, because he was into Baba.

But Richard said nobody who has not experienced LSD can tell me what to do. But later he gave acid to his guru, an Indian. He says the guru was not at all affected, so then he took a different attitude about that. Richard is a snake oil salesman, no doubt about it. He was the most popular psychology lecturer ever at Harvard and he could get people to try LSD who you would think would never have assented to anything that radical in their life. And then he sold himself as Baba Ram Dass. And I'm not saying that totally pejoratively although he and I did not get along at any time because he was very attracted to Steven. The major reason he was so attracted to Steven was because Steve and I were so close although we certainly didn't have any sexual relationship. Steve wasn't into homosexuality. But, you know, those lives are dangerous lives anyway. Tell about the psychedelic show we did there. It was a different type of show, wasn't it?

Callahan: Yes, because it was in this auditorium built onto a--

Stern: Gymnasium.

Callahan: Yes, it was in a gymnasium, yes. And so we just papered the walls with photographic paper so we were projecting on many more surfaces.

Stern: We had a huge scaffold in the middle of the gymnasium. This was at the San Francisco campus.

Callahan: Yes, at Haight. You know Page and Market, down there.

Byerly: So next to the medical school?

Callahan: Extension. Extension school.

Byerly: Oh, Extension.

Callahan: Yes, down on Page and Market.

Byerly: Right, Page and Market.

Callahan: Yes, we had the scaffolds. That worked really well, construction scaffold with planks and we just piled the projectors.

Stern: We had so much material by that time and so much audio and so much visual that it was a transcending experience, and of course a lot of the people were on LSD, we weren't, but they were. So they were totally into it. Did we use balloons at that show? I think we did.

Callahan: Might have. Weather balloons.

Stern: Yes, the first place we did that was in Antioch I think. Wasn't it? In the chapel?

Callahan: Antioch was later.

#### The Institute of Contemporary Arts in Boston

Stern: We had a ten, twelve foot diameter weather balloon being pushed around by the audience up and down and back and forth, and turning projectors on it at the same time. We did that a number of times, and then actually we installed a piece at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in Boston, which we also got into trouble with because Dion and Margaret were nude in the Shiva/Shakti posture. Beautiful film with beautiful slides, rotating, and they were projected on these balloons. When we got up to see the show in Boston, it was abstract color images. I went to see the director and she said to me well, we had some problems because Boston is not the most permissive climate, so I just defocused the images.

Callahan: Yes, Sue, yes, she also at one point thought one of these weather balloons was too big. And so to take some air out of it, she stuck it with a pin. Weather balloon like any good balloon pops when you puncture it.

Stern: You know, and we're coming to the transition between USCO and Intermedia, which is an interesting set of affairs. Andre Ruedi was a doctoral candidate from Harvard Business School who wrote case studies on various industries. And he was a skier and an avid smoker if you know what I mean, which I know you do. He saw one of our performances and he became rather addicted. He used to spend time at the church with us. He helped us schlep, and he was sure that this was something which could be of use and would be of interest at the business school. So he talked his friend and erstwhile professor George Litwin into inviting us up there. And all these people were also connected to Paul Lee and to Gunther Weil and to Timothy Leary and the whole gang.

Callahan: Yes. It's very circular here because Litwin, George Litwin and Gunther had shared a house with Tim at Harvard. So it was all very circular in a way.

Stern: They invited us up there and the initial idea which Michael and I accepted was we would do the creative work and they would do the business. It turned out that they weren't any more, maybe even less business minded than we were.

#### Maverick Systems Company

Callahan: Yes, I mean the irony of it was that USCO had set up this separate company Maverick Systems which made strobe lights and media control equipment actually. I don't know how much we took in, and this is 1967 dollars, it was sixty, seventy thousand. So basically we were operating toward the end, in 1996 dollars, maybe a third of a million dollar business down there. Actually these people at the business school weren't running anything, basically. In retrospect, we had more business experience than they did, running a small business.

Stern: And it was kind of a long term disaster with a lot of great things happening because we got a lot of interesting projects. It was not successful as a business, but Michael got an opportunity to develop new generations of equipment. On the other hand, he was overworked and underpaid and not necessarily well massaged in terms of the business climate. I got kind of co-opted into doing things I never wanted to do.

Callahan: Like being president.

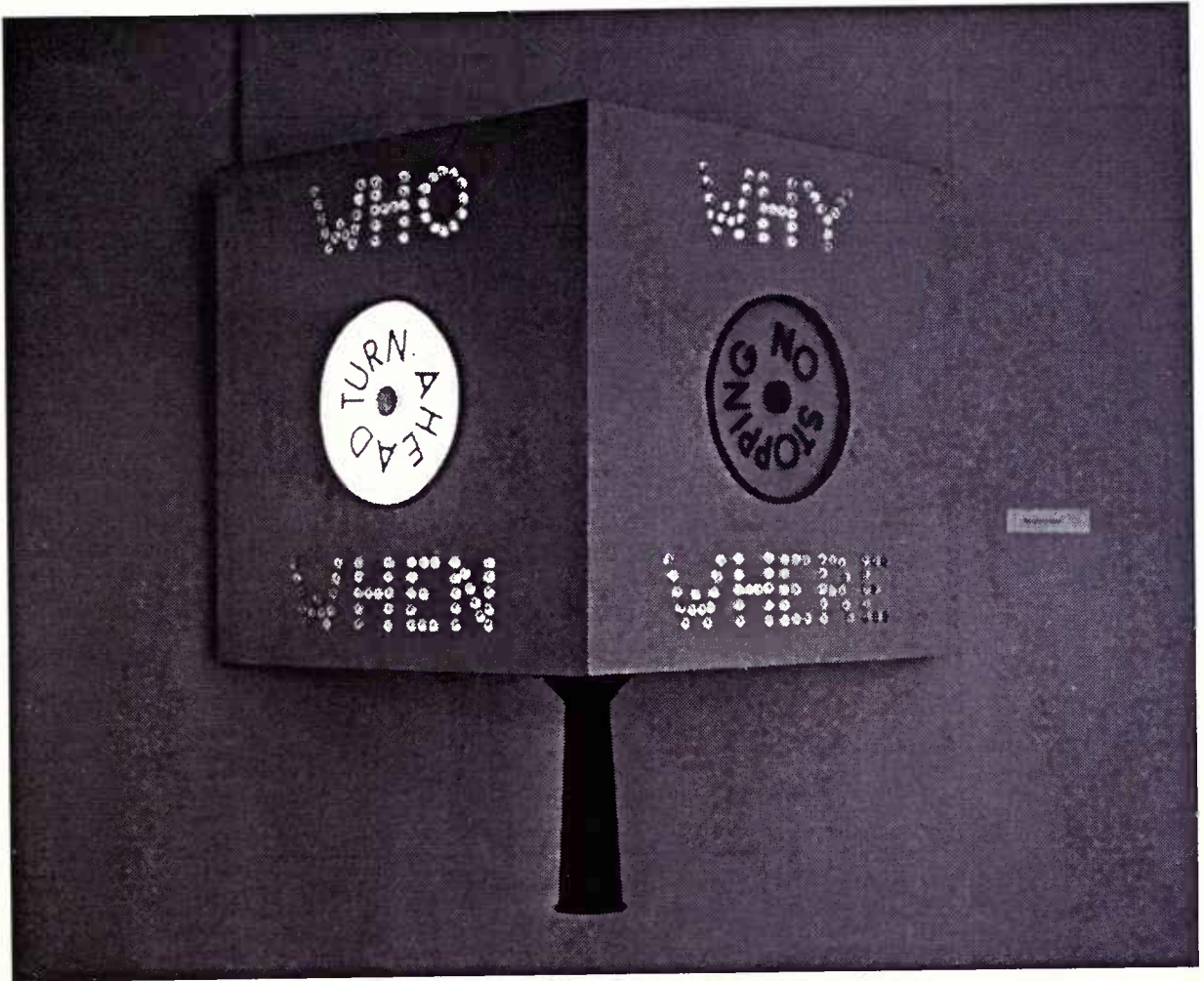


- Stern: Yes. But, vanity is a dangerous thing and having an appointment at Harvard and going public--Hey, even when we needed money, we had to find the guy in New York who took us public. All they had at Harvard Business School were big deals and big connections which meant they knew how to spend money but didn't know how to make it. They really knew how to spend money, I'll say that for George Litwin.
- Callahan: Dropped a quarter million pre-inflationary dollars on redoing the office.

Michael Callahan Becomes Technical Director at the Carpenter Arts Center, Harvard University

- Stern: Anyway, eventually we got out of that and Michael went to Harvard to become the technical director at the Carpenter Center where he stayed for many many years and I kind of wound the company down into chapter 11 and went to work for my family's company in the cheese business. And we have continued. We haven't done much actual work together but we've talked about it a lot and I think one of these days, maybe not too far away, we will do another nineties project before we get to 2000.
- Callahan: Yes.
- Byerly: Better hurry up.
- Stern: Well, you know, one millennium ain't so much different from another. [laughter]
- Byerly: Is that it?
- Callahan: Okay, I think it's been very interesting. My experience certainly would not have happened anywhere but in California, or at any other time. So I am grateful to the people who made it possible including the beats, the bohemians, the poets. So, it's been fun.
- Byerly: Great.

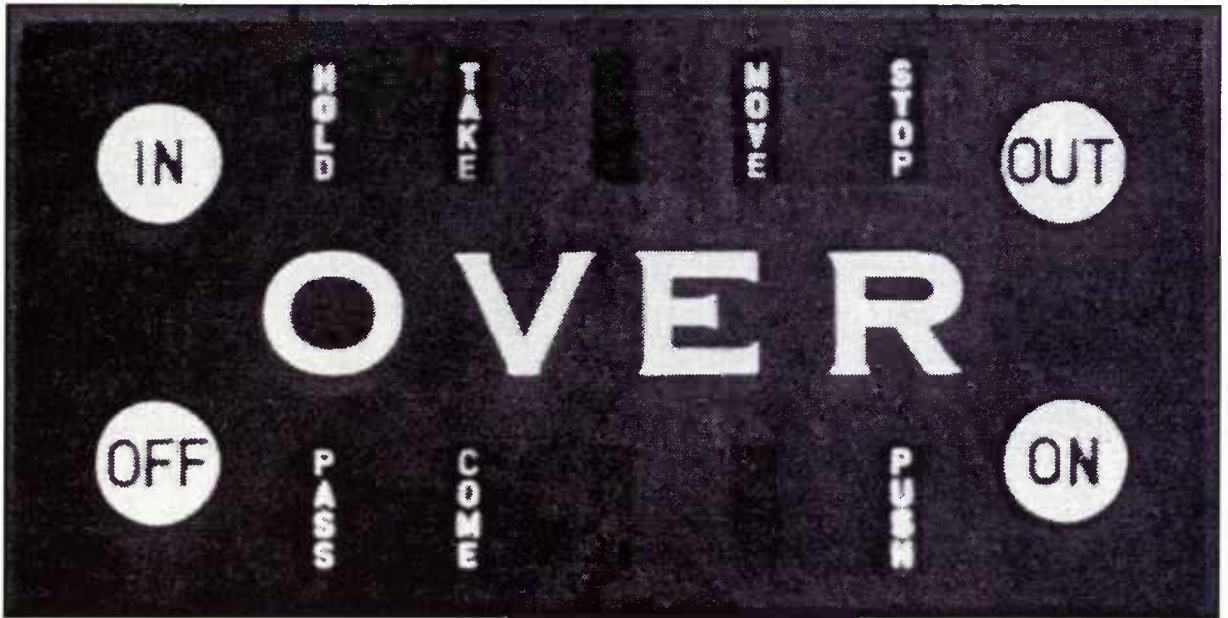




Gerd Stern's *Turn Ahead*.

*Photo by Vano-Wells-Fagliano.*

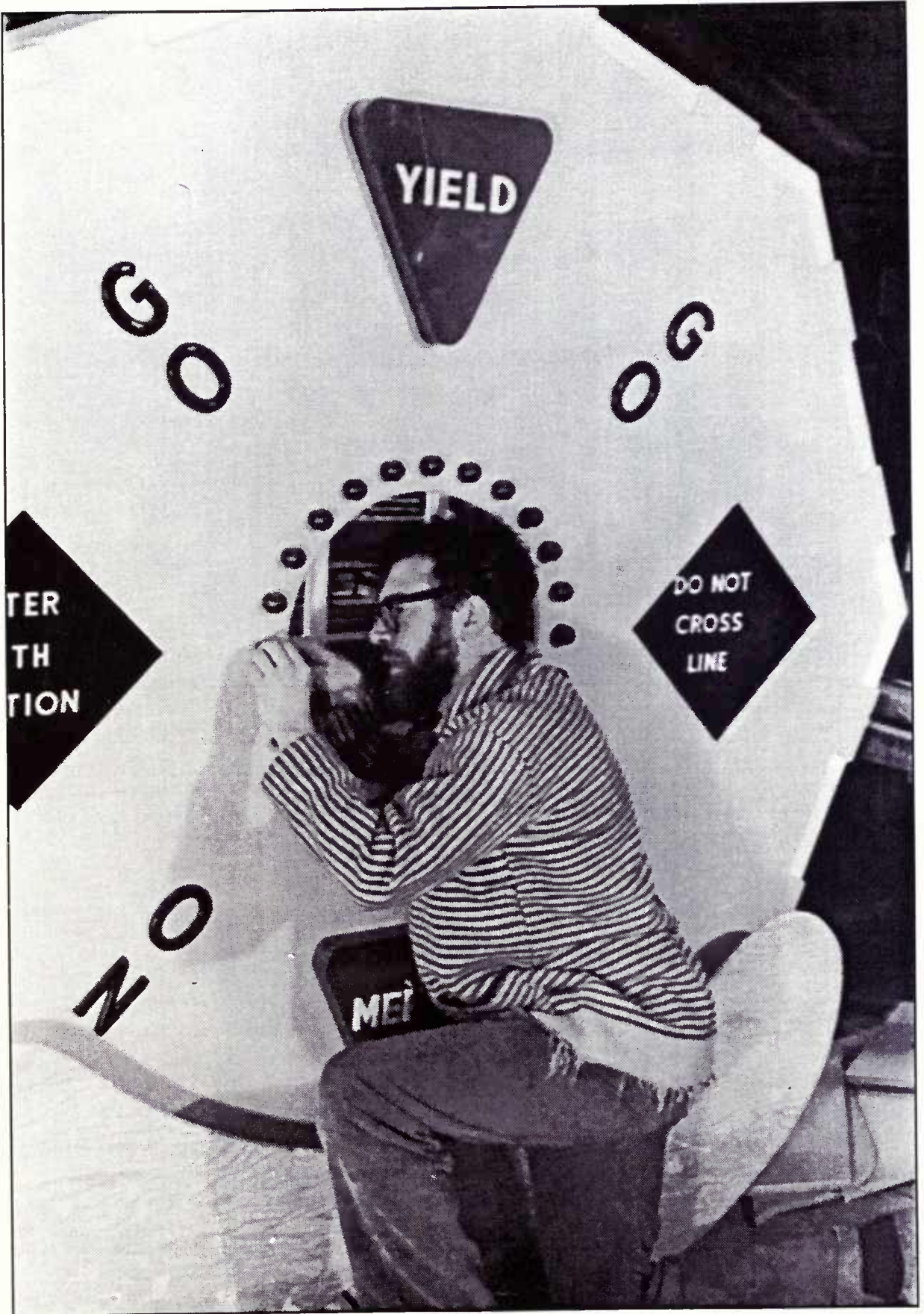




*Over* by Gerd Stern, circa 1962. A flashing light kinetic poem four feet high and eight feet long with circuitry by Michael Callahan.

*From the collection of Judith (McBean) Cosper. Donated to the Oakland Museum.*





*Contact is the Only Love, 1963.*







*Busted Head Monument collage column with votive light, circa 1963.*

*From the collection of the artist.*



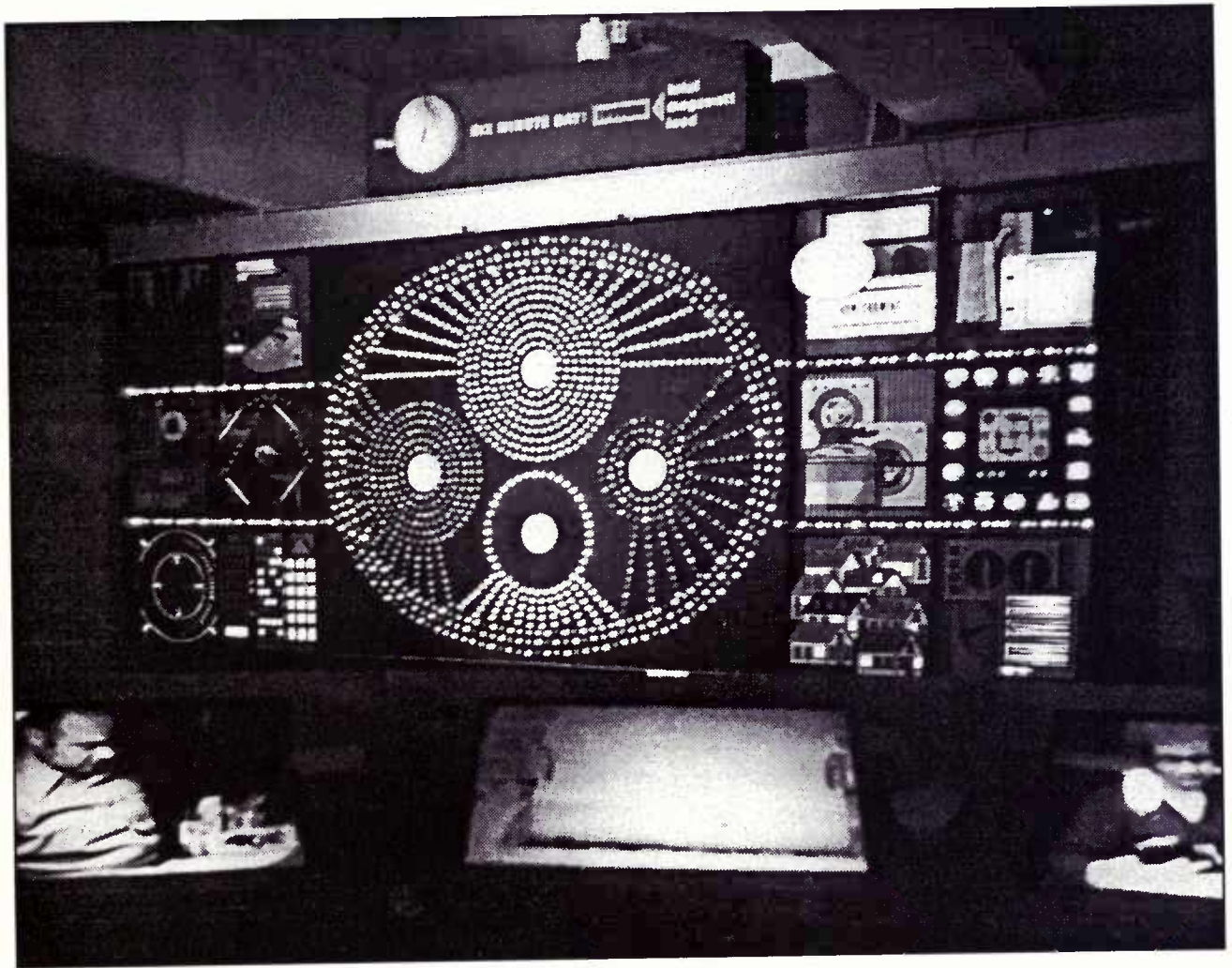


Gerd Stern working on NO-OW-NOW, 1963-64.









The Six Minute Day underground exhibit center, Bear Swamp Pumped Storage Facility, Intermedia Systems, circa 1974.





## XI CONTEMPLATIONS ON WEST COAST BOHEMIAN CULTURE

[Interview 10: July 9, 1996] ##

Influences of Spiritual Content on or Not on Intention

Stern: There's a question of foundation and information and influences on the spiritual content or spiritual intention involved in this exercise of oral history. A lot of our interview is somewhat inchoate and non-defined, or non-descriptive because it's an in toto, it's not a fragmented kind of principle that one is talking about when one describes decades of one's own life. However, the recognition of where it comes from and where it comes around to is certainly something that is a considered element. I know that from certain points of view and certain happenstances in my life, the reverberations still resound.

Obviously the initial leaving of Europe, of Germany because of Hitler and his cohorts, the fact that my mother died at a very early age, the adaptation to a new language and to the culture of New York, the city. The exposure I had to the refugee mentality of my parents and their--our relatives and their associates who were mostly from that same group. Washington Heights where we wound up living was a refugee colony as I think I've said before, it was called Frankfurt on the Hudson, for good reason. That community has been documented, by the way, by a number of sociologists and filmmakers. Then, in New York, my exposure to radical politics, to communism, to the ideas and the actualities and the kind of interest but then reaction to the excesses of political climate and not just in the United States but elsewhere.

Life Below the Skin of Society

Stern: The translation I think of those kinds of radical impulses from a political arena to an artistic arena, the life so to speak under the skin of the society, below the acceptable surface and the realizations that most of these people who were living below the surface represented very different strata. You had the preponderance of people who dove into a subterranean lifestyle coming out of the upper-middle classes, and then you had certain representation from the poorer segments of society, but everybody knew who everybody was and where they came from. It was obvious by their language, by their clothing, by what they drank and how they related to each other, their manners or their rejection of manners. That includes a lot of the pre-beat scene because I knew Allen and Jack, and Hunky, and Solomon, and I could name another dozen people of that group or people that I knew and associated with first in New York.

San Francisco's Openness to the Arts

Stern: The fact that the eventual locus of the so-called beat scene turned out to be San Francisco is important. The reasons behind it I think have not been exposed that much. It's just been accepted that this was the place where it happened. It happened basically because people were attracted here not by each other but I think at that point San Francisco was a fairly inexpensive place to be. It was a place where deviation of all sorts was accepted, it was still the post-goldrush era in a sense.

With due deference to the talents of my ex-father-in-law and mother-in-law, it would have been impossible for a couple to come out of the backwaters of Montana and the state of Washington and to arrive in New York City and become the President of the Metropolitan Opera and the head of the Chamber of Commerce's golden fleet, and you know, being two of the most important people in the city's society world. But it was possible here for Mrs. London to become president of the San Francisco Opera and for Dan to be that persona who welcomed the Shah and Eisenhower and all of the VIPs of the time. This was an open city in that sense, and it was open on a social level, it was open on the artistic level, it was wealthy enough to support people, there was not a tradition of workaholicism as there already was in the east. There was a lot of leisure, a lot of the people who had the leisure were also supporters of the arts. And it didn't matter whether they were interested in painting, poetry, the theater, whatever.

The Country Coming to San Francisco

Stern: It was an exciting place. Things like the Mime Troupe, the Poetry Center were San Francisco phenomena. But, and it's a big but, they were fed by an influx of people from other parts of the country. And I'm not just meaning the East Coast. The Midwest, the Northwest, the Southwest. San Francisco was the real hub.

It was Baghdad by the Bay and Herb Caen was the person who understood this energy that existed, and, on one hand, documented it, and, on the other hand, exploited it for his column. And if you think that these deviants and weirdos and hippies and beatniks didn't enjoy being mentioned, you're wrong. They thrived on it. Publicity and public relations were not practiced as a discipline, but they were very much appreciated and they were heavily cultivated in those days by the people who we have referred to. The word of mouth that spread so easily was encouraged. You couldn't have an event without it being full or more than full. In New York, if you have a poetry reading you catch flies, right. In San Francisco you have a poetry reading and there wouldn't be standing room. I mean airfares were inexpensive, gasoline was inexpensive, old cars were inexpensive. Buses, Ken Kesey's trip. everything seemed possible, and it was possible without a great deal of expenditure of either time or money.

I believe that the influences of that kind of ambient on myself and other characters in this tale are self-evident. The lack of discipline, the inconsistent values of the work that was produced are also very indicative of that time, and they exploded even more in the subsequent periods, the bohemian era, the Beat era, the psychedelic era, and ever since then, which is a period that I can't think of a characterizing phrase for at this point. Perhaps you can or perhaps someone will.

Byerly: Post-modern.

Media's Impact on Style

Stern: Post-modern. Post-now. Now was then, right? But--this phenomenon for instance of style, and of the quick passing of style because of an extreme exposure in the media, of a painter or a sculptor or an environmental artist puts out a small body of work and it's pictured and imaged and reimaged and broadcast all over the place, well, by the time this has happened, and this can happen within weeks, it doesn't take months or years anymore. Is

that artist going to spend the next decade working out the problems of that period or that style, the answer is usually no. When that artist is more or less insulated somewhere and only a few people understand what he or she is doing, the developmental characteristics of a style become very different.

Ivan Majdrakoff, who worked with me on our first film, why, I think he has more of that story than I have delivered. I've known his work for over fifty years, really. Since we were in our teens and he was already producing. And the work is consistent all the way through, I mean you can see the development. He's taught at the Art Institute in San Francisco for decade after decade. He's basically on the verge of being emeritus at this point. The influence that he has had has been low-key and below the surface, and he shows his own work all the time but not in any kind of grandiloquent or heavily publicized way. His art one would figure then had the opportunity to develop over years in a slow and distinct way.

#### Taking Advantage of the Historical Era

Stern: The development pattern now is get it out there and become famous and hopefully rich and disappear, because the next period doesn't coalesce or become publicable or publishable. I think in my own case, I became very disinterested in being out in public when Michael, Steve, and I experienced the problems which came with life in that lane, and really all of us withdrew from it. In a sense we've all pursued our work and our career paths away from that kind of attention, because we didn't enjoy it.

#### Bob Rauschenberg

Stern: That's been a choice that a lot of people have made. At one time we were going up to a birthday party for Jill Johnston who was a really well known writer, documenter of the art scene in New York for the *Village Voice*, et cetera. We were going up the stairs and Bob Rauschenberg was coming down. Bob looked at us and said, "Hey John, how's business?" And John looked back at him and he says, "Bob, how's art?" If anybody was an art businessman it was Bob. I mean he businesssed his way through art in a very successful fashion, and it was because his work fit the image, his work and his persona fit the image of what the media and what the communication potential thought that an artist could be. He was

presentable in that sense, he enjoyed that light and that lane and it benefitted him in a lot of ways. But there are other approaches.

Herb Caen and the "Beats"

Stern: The factor of this resurgence of interest in a period which we call beat and the very resonance of the word beat explores the kind of limits and the kind of nonsignificance of the term. I think what you will see about it is that first of all, when you think of beat in the musical sense, you have the whole arena of rhythmic and time period which is so important in all of the art forms then. You have the interpretation given by the dharmic school of beatific and beatitude. Then you have the other side of it and beat being defeated or tired or exhausted or, you see now what are we talking about when we say beat? Does the beat go on or does it go off? Is it really an expression of beatitude or are we so tired and exhausted and is everybody so entranced by that state, and how did we get to that state that it's kind of relaxing and reassuring that you can share those kind of vibes with the people who are the apogee of the beat image.

You take Allen [Ginsberg] and you see the photographs of him and his kind of rapturous ecstatic state when he delivered poetry and that's the beatitude or the beat goes on part. When you realize in a poem like Yage the Ginsberg struggle toward understanding and toward linking himself with his own past and his basic inability to manage that to his own satisfaction, then you understand the other side of beat.

You realize that where did it come from--I really think you ought to talk to Herb [Caen] and ask him where did he draw that from, what part of beat--how did he get that beatnik image? In fact, we believe that he created the word. In the beginning was the word and the word was question mark. It wasn't question mark, we start in the Hebrew scripture with "in the beginning." I think I'm, as always, more interested in the process than the product, and what I'm talking about in myself is the process of that ongoing experience. I was there, okay. In one sense I was there and I was not particularly present in the hierarchy of the time. The reasons for that I think are evident in this chronicle.

It always puzzles me that when I look back and I remember that I was there, I mean who was where? I was there when they crucified our lord, I didn't want to be there, you know. I was there at the Howl trial, why? Why was I present when all, as

McLuhan said, all these crossings, who knows what you get when the crossing takes place. But I was. So it's a question of acceptance, it really isn't anything that you question in your life and I'm not interested in the gossip level, but the process of getting to this place and writing poetry for the last fifty years in my life has been a very satisfying process. Whether it satisfies anybody else in the world, either in the academic or in the relational world seems to be beside the point. One manages to relate to one's work and to be either despairing or appreciative and satisfied and I've always somehow managed to be satisfied with what I have done, and what I'm doing.

### The Restrictions of Contemporary Technology in Process

Stern: That's a little different than exposing oneself to the judgment of one's peers or one's critics, which I've done also. The USCO period was very exciting because the appreciation and the critique of what we were doing was so immediate and I think again that's what gave me some of the insight into what happens in the world of contemporary technology when you can just go out there and do it and you get instant replay and instant criticism and instant response and you can play with it all in the same way that a football or basketball game is played. It's not a waiting game. After a while, the stress and the inability to give real long term consideration on a conceptual level to what you're doing and what the process is I think restricts you. You don't want to do anything that fast. The response time is not necessarily something that gratifies you in the end. You realize that the work you're doing is progressing at such a rapid rate that you don't have the responsibility factor involved that you would prefer.

But, here we are in 1996 talking about the years mainly from 1948 to 1978, and I think we pretty well covered the high and the low points.

Byerly: Thank you.

## The Cheese Industry

### Cheese and Its Metaphors

Stern: The whole involvement with cheese, and my family is really a matter of some four generations in Europe and here in America, is something which I didn't understand in my youth. I never thought of cheese as either a process or--it didn't occur to me that it was the turning of a liquid perishable nutrient, an important ability of nomads and primitive people to keep themselves alive, and the discovery that this very perishable liquid could be turned through fermentation into a keepable product which would nourish you on a journey or at home and months to come. And of course, there's the whole metaphor of fermentation, whether it's bread or wine or cheese or processing in the human organism. Those kind of metaphors I think escaped me for decades until I kind of inevitably sank back into the arms of my ancestral generations and rejoined the cheese business in order to make what we call in Hebrew parnosa, which is you know, a living.

### A Profession May Not Be an Occupation

Stern: In other words a living isn't necessarily what you do, and that's why I say by profession I'm a poet and by occupation I'm a cheesemonger. Because it's a question of parnosa, making a living, it's not what I choose to profess. On the other hand, compared to some of the other things I've done to make a living in my life, it's a relatively noble pursuit because despite all the people who will tell you about no fat and no cholesterol, cheese is a notably beneficial food.

### Becoming President of The American Cheese Society ##

Stern: Cheese does have a lot of health values. In addition, the entire ethnic domain of cheese is fascinating. You take California as an example, and you have a lot of counterinfluences here, the major one is Italian. I'm a cheese importer really, but my interest in cheese goes beyond that which is why I became the President of the American Cheese Society, which is an organization that promotes the making of farmstead and specialist cheese making in America.

### Cheese in California

Stern: Cheese in the United States, small production cheeses are a medium of production, not commodity factory type cheeses. Two, I think, to my mind, best cheeses--two of the ten best cheeses in the United States are produced here in California. One of those is Ignacio Vella's; he calls it Dry Jack. We were just up there in Sonoma the other day and I had a very pleasant conversation with him and I certainly enjoyed his cheese. I mean here's a man who can age cheese for up to two years and by that time you get a structure which is certainly equal to, maybe not similar and certainly not identical to a two-year-old Parmesan from Italy, and it's a cheese which is less than ten pounds where the parmesan is eighty pounds. So it matures quite differently but it is of the highest order of perfection that you can find in the world of cheese. And then he's developed this way of rubbing it with an oil and with cocoa powder and it has this lovely brown sheen of a rind. To me rinds are edible, some people don't like to eat them. The fact that he chooses to call it dry jack, I think, happens to be a problem, because people think of Jack as kind of a fresh and a commodity type cheese, which this is the very opposite of is beside the point.

### European Cheeses

Stern: It's a pinnacle in the idea of being able to produce cheese. The other one is Franklin Paluso's Telleme, which is a cheese that probably came as an attempt to produce something like an Italian Tellegio or some other fairly fresh ripening cheese. It's a cheese which when it is dead ripe, which can take a few months actually, is totally ambrosial. If you like a pungent tasty cheese, that's a square cheese. What we do, we wait until it really totally softens up, and we then inscribe a line on the top of the square, we peel back most of the skin and we actually spoon the cheese out, and eat it. It's the kind of eating experience which is hard to compass, hard to experience, and I'm glad I'm in this little world where I can have that experience a few times a year. And I feel the same way about a cheese that's made in County Cork in Ireland named Gubbeen, which is a washed rind cheese in which, probably, again is a simulacrum of cheese that comes from France, the Reblochon, what we call croute lavee, or washed rind cheeses but it's made by a woman named Giana Ferguson and she is a cheese angel. I mean this woman treats each cheese as if it was a living product of her own breast. She has that poetic quality that the Irish are so special about. They live in



an enchanted place and as a result, from the cow to the mouth of the person who eats the cheeses, there occurs a remarkable experience.

### Migrating People Replicating Ethnic Foods

Stern: The migration of people--whether Italians, Russians, or mideasterners--who are used to eating certain cheeses have these two choices. You've either got to pay a lot, go out and make a lot of money and pay a lot of money for what you want from the place where you came from, or you've got to replicate it. And I think you take a look throughout the United States and you will see that people have done that, whether they're Swiss who came to Wisconsin and made Swiss cheese there, maybe not exactly the same but basically close to the original, or whether you make English type cheddar on the Oregon Coast or Dutch style cheese here and there, it's a remarkable kind of identity with the homeland. And it's not the same thing as for instance teaching your children to dance the dance or sing the song, because it involves a lot of real dedication and expertise and business savvy to survive in that world, and it's also true for a lot of other foods that are replicated here by ethnic peoples.

### Computers and Technology Affecting Cheese

Stern: But the products of fermentation and the involvement in producing them are a unique experience in life. It's a feel, and a see, and a smell, it involves the senses. These days people will tell you that computers and technology can control the making of cheese, and it can. But it tends to wind up for the consumer with a product which is always the same, always rather mediocre and always part of a production and packaging culture which I find rather ludicrous. When you compare it to a person who milks their own animals, makes the cheese themselves and everyday that that cheese is made, the cheese is a little bit different. It's a little bit different because of the temperature and the climate, it's a little different because the cows are eating different food or the goats or the sheep. It's different because the cheese maker isn't feeling well one day, and the time, the temperature makes the cheese different. That's the nature of organic products, it's not the nature of organic products to be identical all the time but that's the attempt of a lot of our culture, is to make things the same all the time and to package them for optimum

length of shelf-life, which usually kills the product in one way or the other.

#### Preventing or Promoting Illness

Stern: These two tendencies are coexistent and in our industry there's a lot of aggression and bad feeling between the camps. The bad feeling comes mostly not from the cheese makers for each other for instance but from the government which attempts to regulate the industry in what they consider rationales of sanitation and consumer protection. Often due to naivete and due to bureaucratic misunderstandings. They obviously do the very opposite of what they are attempting to do. Instead of preventing illness they promote illness. Instead of protecting the consumer they endanger the consumer as far as I'm concerned. But there are a lot of sane people around who have made progress.

#### Being Creative, Responsible, and Ethical in the World

Stern: I think it doesn't matter whether you're working in the arts or in a pursuit like cheese mongering, the principles of being creative and being responsible and ethical are more or less the same, and as long as you are able to operate on that level and to understand what you're doing on that level, you can survive and feel that you are living for the world, not just in it.

Byerly: Okay, good.

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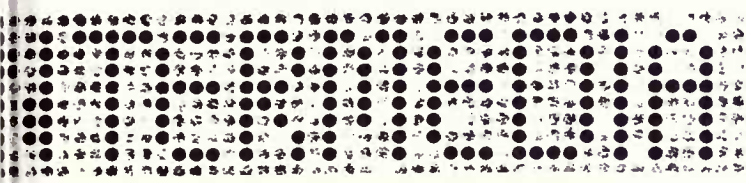
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PRESENTS

*from*

**USCO**

*through*



*1962-1979*



**OPENING SUNDAY, SEPT. 9**

**2-5 P.M.**

CONTINUING FRI, SAT, SUN. THROUGH OCT. 14  
OTHER TIMES BY APPOINTMENT

**ASSEMBLED BY  
MICHAEL CALLAHAN  
GERD STERN  
ZALMAN STERN  
LINDA VON HELWIG**

**914-359-6400  
ROUTE 340  
SPARKILL, NEW YORK**

# Thorpe Intermedia Gallery

Route 340 Sparkill,  
New York 10976

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

from USCO through INTERMEDIA 1962-1979

### Contact:

Gerd Stern 201-569-3373 (office)  
569-9428 (home)  
Adele Myers 914-359-6400 Ext. 233

Multi-media, film, video, collage, painting, and kinetic sculpture will be shown at the Thorpe Intermedia Gallery, Route 340, Sparkill (Rockland County), New York, opening Sunday, September 9, from 2 to 5 p.m.

The retrospective exhibition titled, from USCO through INTERMEDIA 1962-1979, highlights the work of USCO and INTERMEDIA, two groups active in the 1960s and 70s. The first group consisted of poets, engineers, painters and sculptors, who used the acronym USCO and worked out of an old church in Garnerville, New York during the 1960s. INTERMEDIA Systems Corporation is a small public company, founded in the late 60s, engaged in media design and production, operating out of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

This exhibition is conceived as the reprise and documentation of well over a decade and a half of work, and as a statement of past, present, and perhaps future, artistic purpose. The work shown ranges from collage and kinetic pieces to multi-media performance materials. Sounds and images first shown in San Francisco in 1962 as "Who R U and What's Happening" and in combination with lectures by Marshall McLuhan at the University of British Columbia as, "The Verbal American Landscape" are supplemented by more recent audio-visual production fragments, out of 360 degree panoramic shows for the Venezuelan government and a piece on Lincoln and the Law produced with funding from the National Endowment on the Humanities.

The works are from the archives of USCO and INTERMEDIA, lent by the artists and by private collectors. The efforts of over a hundred talents are represented. Two publications, one a booklet, the other an audio cassette, will provide the factual and conceptual background for the exhibition.

Thorpe Intermedia Gallery is located on Route 340, Sparkill, New York. The gallery, under the direction of Adele Myers, works in cooperation with Intermedia Foundation, an arts organization directed by David Weinrib and operating out of the old USCO church in Garnerville.

-more-



2. from USCO through INTERMEDIA 1962-1979

The exhibition has been assembled by Michael Callahan, Linda von Helwig, Gerd Stern and Zalman Stern, all of whom were associated either with USCO, with INTERMEDIA or with both groups.

LIST OF WORKS

## A.

Stereo sound chair with cut paper poem collage and continuous loop audio collage. The tape is, "Billie Master", first made in 1963 and used as part of the San Francisco Museum of Art presentation, "?WHO R U AND WHAT'S HAPPENING?".

## B.

Collage wall of graphic and dimensional materials. First on the office wall at USCO church this assembled collection grew at the first INTERMEDIA studios, then in a long hall of an apartment on Broadway in Cambridge, a house in Medford and now in the gallery. At present, the accumulation amounts to about 400 square feet of assemblage. 1965-1979

## C.

One of the Steve Durkee paintings out of the Tabernacle, installed at the USCO church in Garnerville from 1967-1972. The "Tabernacle" environment was first shown at the "Down By The Riverside" exhibit, Riverside Museum, New York, in 1966.

## D.

Collages and Kinetic Sculptures and Programmers

1. NO OW NOW - a contraction of an USCO mantra -take the no out of now - then - take the ow out of now - then - take the then out of now - then - ...an electro mechanical mantric device, with manual and automatic modes, utilizing the basic, Our Time Base Is Real, USCO timing circuit. A limited edition of three pieces out of IBM surplus. One in the collection of Immaculate Heart College, Los Angeles, one in the collection of Judi Stern, one in the USCO archives. 1965
2. TRIPLE DIFFRACTION HEX: a three wheel, programmed array of mosaics constructed of diffraction materials. Geometry revealed in rotation by stroboscopic light. Shown in U.S. and Europe 1965. A larger relative, SEVEN DIFFRACTION HEX, 1967, was shown at the Howard Wise Gallery, N.Y. and sold to Malcolm Forbes, who later donated the piece to the Princeton University Museum.
3. MONOLOG TO DIGITAL: (if you can't count don't blow) A voice operated assemblage of first-generation solid-state counting modules and other selected IBM surplus. 1966. Collection of John Brockman.
4. BUSTED HEADS MONUMENT: Collage column with candle. 1963

3. from USCO through INTERMEDIA 1962-1979

- 5. BOGGLE THE TOGGLE: Surplus switches from IBM tape tester plus collage. Good featured as immanent, bad as a temporary system. 1964. Collection of Grace and Jerry Wapner.
- 6. D slide programmer; first piece of USCO programming equipment 1965. D-10 punched paper tape programmer, INTERMEDIA 1968. IBM hand wired stepping switch, 1964.
- E. Video cassette works, "Teleportraits" and "Artists, Babies, Bodies" made under grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Massachusetts Council on the Arts, at the WGBH Experimental Television Laboratory in 1976-1977, and shown at the Museum of Modern Art, N.Y. and over public television.
- F. Strobe and mylar environment with rotating sounder: a recreation somewhat akin to USCO strobe pieces of the 60s.
- G. Documentation of, "from USCO through INTERMEDIA 1962-1979". Panels created for this exhibition, tracing the time/space lines with original and copied materials.
- H. Willie's Piece: an electro-luminescent traffic sculpture by Paul Williams.
- I. USCO AT THE CHURCH (mostly) : an assemblage of 60s footage filmed by Jud Yalkut.
- J. Projection Environments: featuring materials from "Verbal American Landscape", "We Are All One" and other USCO shows. Also partial panoramas from INTERMEDIA 360 degree projection surrounds and a single image slide show, "Lincoln and the Law" produced by INTERMEDIA for Sangamon State University with funds from NEH and installed at the Lincoln Law offices in Springfield Illinois. Also a group of USCO and Intermedia documentation slides.

+++++

We are interested to know your reactions to this exhibition and will try to answer any queries or comments. A number of the pieces in this exhibition are for sale. We are also prepared to consider selected commissions and design/production projects.

A limited edition of 25 reel-to-reel (7 1/2 i.p.s. 1/4 track stereo) and cassette copies of the "Billie Master" tape in individually collaged boxes, numbered and signed are available at \$50. A one-hour edited conversational audio cassette on the history of USCO is available at \$15. Additional copies of this booklet are available at \$3.00. All postpaid from Intermedia, 5 Cresskill Ave., Cresskill.N.J. 07626.

+++++

Biographies

Michael Callahan, a native of San Francisco, was the San Francisco Tape Music Center's first technical director. He was president of Maverick Systems, Inc. of Woodstock, N.Y. As a founding member of USCO he was responsible for the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of the group's electronic and electro-mechanical technology. He traveled for the group to exhibitions and performances throughout the United States and Europe.

From 1969 through 1975 Callahan became technical director for Intermedia Systems Corporation in Cambridge, Mass. During the past several years he has held an appointment as Supervisor of Film Services, Harvard University. He is also engaged in consulting and in the design of audio visual systems technology.

Linda von Helwig, is Vice-President and was Art Director of Intermedia Systems Corporation, Cambridge, Mass. She has specialized in the design and creation of graphic materials for multi-media, laser projection, and other audio visual formats. Her work has been utilized in production for government, education, the arts, and business. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in painting from Syracuse University.

Gerd Stern, poet and media artist, was one of the founders of the USCO group. He is the author of two volumes of poetry, First Poems and Others, and Afterimage. He has been an Associate in Education at Harvard University and a visiting lecturer in the History of Consciousness program at the University of California in Santa Cruz. His work has been shown at museums and galleries throughout the States and abroad. For the past eight years he has been President of Intermedia Systems Corporation in Cambridge, and is now associated with his family's import business.

Zalman Stern, attends Vail School in Tucson, Arizona. His interests lie in computer language, photography, and music.

USCO was a group of artists, poets, engineers, who worked out of an old church in Garnerville, New York during the nineteen sixties. Their work included images, sound, and technology executed by a community of participants, some living at the church, and others in various parts of the country and world. The performances and exhibitions were sponsored by universities, museums, galleries, theaters, etc. and became the subject of a considerable body of journalism and critique.

During the late sixties some members of the group initiated the Lama Foundation in New Mexico. A number of others helped found the Intermedia Systems Corporation in Cambridge, Mass.

Intermedia Systems Corporation is a small public company which, since 1969, has been engaged in the production of multi-media, film, video, and laser graphics for business, government, and the art and education fields.

Intermedia Foundation, which was formed during the latter days of the USCO group, now operates out of the church in Garnerville, New York, under the directorship of David Weinrib, sculptor, filmmaker, and educator. The Foundation supports various artistic projects, sponsors workshops and seminars, presents performances, and is involved in the operation of the Thorpe Intermedia Gallery.

FLASH - DOT - DOT: from Doubt and Certainty in Science as quoted in The Gutenberg Galaxy by Marshall McLuhan.

"The effect of stimulations, external or internal, is to break up the unison of action of some part of the whole of the brain. A speculative suggestion is that the disturbance in some way breaks the unity of the actual pattern that has been previously built up in the brain. The brain then selects those features from the input that tend to repair the model and to return the calls to their regular synchronous beating. I cannot pretend to be able to develop this idea of models in our brain in detail, but it has great possibilities in showing how we tend to fit ourselves to the world and the world to ourselves. In some way the brain initiates sequences of actions that tend to return it to its rhythmic pattern, this return being the act of consummation of completion. If the first action performed fails to do this, fails that is to stop the original disturbance, then other sequences may be tried. The brain runs through its rules one after another, matching the input with its various models until somehow unison is achieved. This may perhaps only be after strenuous, varied and prolonged searching. During this random activity further connexions and action patterns are formed and they in turn will determine future sequences."

# LOVE

to come to a real

# DESTRUCTION

at the

## BELLA UNION THEATRE

825 Kearny near Washington, San Francisco, 825 Kearny near Washington

> FRIDAY · DECEMBER 27 <  
9 P.M. - 3 A.M. - continuous

\$1.50 admission at the door\*

You've got much more  
than you want  
much more than you need  
---  
It's hard to give away what you need  
harder to give up what you want  
---

Time moves fast  
[haste makes waste]

there's not ENUF time  
to use up  
what you've got  
not ENUF time  
to LOVE  
what you keep  
---

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS  
ump a piece of your load  
BRING VALUABLES

BRING · BRING  
something you've got  
anything you need  
nothing you don't want

BRING IT TO THE BELLA UNION THEATRE  
825 Kearny St. Friday Dec. 27  
9 P.M. - 3 A.M.

THE DECISION OF THE JUDGES  
IS FINAL

IF your possession  
is accepted for destruction  
it will be destroyed  
before your very eyes

ONLY  
animate objects  
objects which can be carried by one  
person

NO  
concrete blocks · boulders · intangibles  
libraries or garbage

- WELCOME -

good stuff.

es will refund total or partial price of admission as a prize for objects  
highly valued for destruction

art goes faster and faster



Photo by Pete Peters

Photo by Stewart Brand

Photo by Stewart Brand



Stern is reflected in another of his highway sign contraptions while a sweatshirt is shown in what appears to be its natural habitat.



AT LEFT: Stern works on "Contact is the only love" and at right a model models a sweatshirt and very little else while Stern poses with an auto tire.

GERD STERN, the local poet, is now fascinated with highway markers. "TURN LEFT, TURN RIGHT, STOP, YIELD"—all the signs that seem so authoritative, so direct when viewed singly and personally are dulled by the speed of the freeway driver until responded to almost subconsciously. Stern's latest efforts are directed toward the end of re-establishing the authoritativeness, of evoking a conscious reaction on the part of the motorist.

This is his theme. His "creations" in this respect are varied. There are the sweatshirts impregnated with facsimile traffic signs. There is an experimental motion picture in which the camera analyzes the speed and the mass of directional signs on a freeway and contrapuntally examines a female nude (micrographically). Then there is, for lack of a better expression, the "controlled happening," which was presented at the San Francisco Museum of Art auditorium last month.

Entitled "Who R U" and "What's Happening" this performance was an experiment utilizing tape recording, telephone, television, projected images and a cast of 16 persons selected from all walks of life. It was presented as a poem in light and sound and explored the effects of simultaneous communication and media-interaction. The result, according to Alfred Frankenstein in his Chronicle review of the opening, was a "landmark of a flop." Added Mr. Frankenstein, "(The show) laid so vast and horrendous an egg as to score a kind of success."

A further exhibit of Mr. Stern's at the San Francisco Museum of Art includes a work called "Contact is the only love," a large electronic "sign" with flashing lights. The "sign" emits 400 flashes per minute and says, among other things, STOP, YIELD and GO all to the accompaniment of a rather nerve-shattering grunting sound.

Of course, if "Contact is the only love" doesn't make it for him, Mr. Stern still has sweatshirts which are available in the racer marts. These could possibly do a great deal for him. Look what they've done for Beethoven.

Thomas Sank

W H O R U

TWO PERFORMANCES

by

TAPE - TELEPHONE - TELEVISION

PROJECTED IMAGES

STARRING LIVE PUBLIC FIGURES

out of

THE VERBAL AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

conceived and produced by poet Gerd Stern, in association with painter Ivan Majdrakoff, sociologist Howard Becker and the San Francisco Tape Music Center.

Starting at 8:00 p.m. sharp

Tuesday, Nov. 12 - Thursday, Nov. 14

in the auditorium of

THE SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF ART

McAllister St. at Van Ness Ave.

Tickets: \$2.00 general public - \$1.50 Museum members available at the Museum Book Shop, by sending your check to the S. F. Museum Education Department or at the door. Student tickets \$1.00 with student cards at the Museum Book Shop or at the door. GET YOUR TICKETS NOW.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

"... in the electronic age whose media substitute all-at-onceness for one-thing-at-a-timeness. The movement of information at approximately the speed of light has become by far the largest industry in the world... Patterns of human association based on slower media have become overnight not only irrelevant and obsolete, but a threat to continued existence and sanity." - H. Marshall McLuhan

WHO R U? & WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Conceived and produced by poet Gerd Stern in association with painter Ivan Majdrakoff, sociologist Howard Becker and the San Francisco Tape Music-Center. Judy McBean, co-ordinator.

Starring Live Public Figures, Tape, Telephone, Television, Projected images...

from

THE VERBAL AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

On Tuesday, November 12, 1963 & Thursday, November 14, 1963 at The San Francisco Museum of Art

These performances are studies toward a larger multi-media presentation, The Verbal American Landscape. In my Guggenheim Foundation proposal for this work, I wrote: "The audience may be regarded and valued, from a viewpoint of effect, as still another recording apparatus capable of multi-level operations." - Gerd Stern.

Sociologists on the control panel are Howard Becker, Sheldon Messinger, David Sudnow and Paul Verden. Intermission inquiries by Paul Verden.

Word-images for the slide poem were chosen by Ivan Majdrakoff and Gerd Stern and photographed by Ivan Majdrakoff who is also in charge of projection.

Projectionists for Tuesday are Max Feinstein, Jacques Overhoff and Simon Perkoff..

Projectionists for Thursday are Ron W. Davis, Carl Glicko and Joe White.

The performance photographer is Fred Lyon.

Audio engineering is by Michael Callahan and audio-mix by Michael Callahan, Ramon Sender and Morton Subotnick - all of the San Francisco Tape Music Center. Most of the audio equipment is by courtesy of the San Francisco Tape Music Center.

Telephones courtesy of Pacific Telephone.

Closed circuit television cameras and monitors courtesy of Sylvania Electric Products and monitors courtesy of Airtronics, S.F. - specialists in closed circuit television.

Television receivers courtesy of the Women's Board, S.F. Museum of Art, Victor di Suvero and George Walker.

Publicity by Lorrie Bunker of Consultants Inc.

Much thanks is due the entire museum staff, Julius Wasserstein and the initial encouragement of the museum's director, George Culler.

These performances are experiments in the effects of simultaneous communications. We would be grateful for any observations, impressions and critique. Please address such to Gerd Stern, in care of The San Francisco Museum of Art, McAllister St. at Van Ness Ave., San Francisco, California.

PAGE 6 FHE\* Wednesday, Nov. 13, 1963 San Francisco Chronicle

A Landmark of a Flop



ALLISON BECKER She handed out non-programs

By Alfred Frankenstein

Some colossal flops have taken place in the public halls of San Francisco in my time, but Gerd Stern's show called "Who R U?" and "What's Happening?" is the only one I can recall that laid so vast and horrendous an egg as to score a kind of success.

At least those who attended its first presentation last night at the San Francisco Museum of Art are not likely to forget it in a hurry. It is announced, God save us, to be done again tomorrow night at the same place.

Stern never provided a clear statement of his intentions and it is difficult to describe what went on. As one arrived a lovely child named Allison Becker, dressed like a stop-and-go signal, handed out a kind of non-program on which one read the motto of the evening's design, quoted from H. Marshall McLuhan:

"... in the electronic age whose media substitute all-at-onceness for one-thing-at-a-timeness. The movement of human information at approximately the speed of light has become by far the largest industry in the world... Patterns of association based on slower media have become overnight not only

irrelevant and obsolete, but a threat to continued existence and sanity."

TV In keeping with this philosophy, some seven television sets were placed on the stage of the museum's central court and they ran all evening, on different programs, silently. Three screens were erected for the simultaneous projection of slides.

A vast turmoil of electronic sound equipment was on a table, and experts from the San Francisco Tape Center fussed over it all evening as if it wasn't working properly, which was probably true: the show started 45 minutes late. Four groups of people sat around tables just talking. Two of these groups were (apparently) in covered booths on the stage and the other two were in the large niches on either side of the room.

Eventually the proceedings started. The lights were lowered and the slides came on three at a time. They were photographed by Ivan Majdrakoff and many of them were quite beautiful. They were pictures of public words - words on street signs, doors,

traffic signals, trucks, and similar things.

Most of them were monosyllables and many were commands. The idea, it would seem, was to reflect the bombardment with words that surround us constantly, and this worked, for a time. But then it began to be a bore.

Meantime the tape was emitting a continuous, nerve-racking, monotonous, relentless spew of noise. Presumably the conversation of the people around the tables was part of this, but not a word could one distinguish in the general uproar.

This went on for 40 minutes, and then there was an intermission. After the intermission the same thing started all over again, with some of the same slides and the same noise.

This time the audience revolted. There were catcalls, stamping and whistling. A young man went to the piano and played "Chopsticks," both straight and in tone clusters, as if to say the whole thing was infantile and an insult to the public intelligence, and no critic ever said it better. For a moment it seemed as if a serious riot might take place, but then the good nature of the crowd asserted itself and after awhile it was all over.





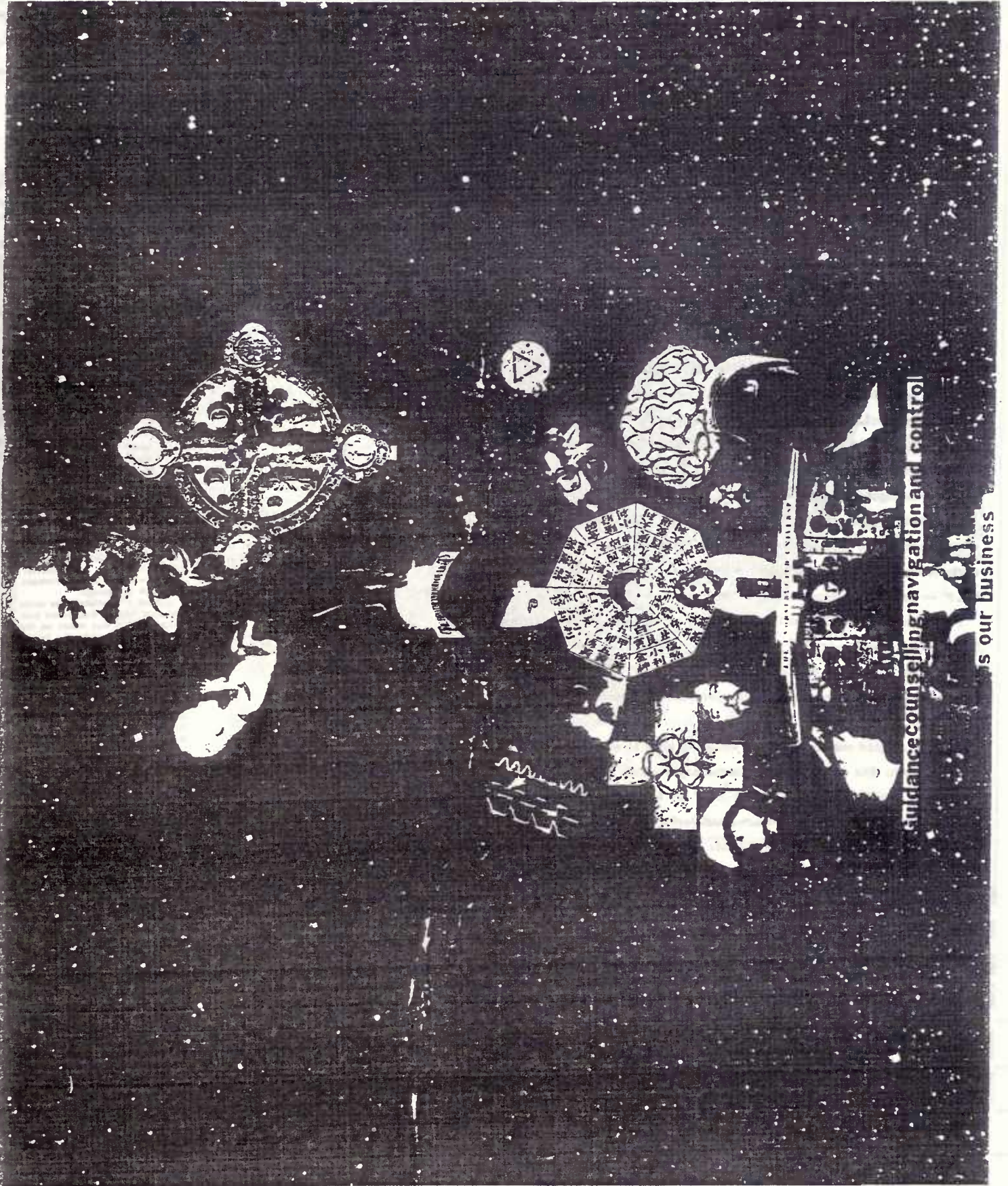
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we are all one on and off in and out a switch is thrown contact  
 is the only love open up your hearts flashing along the through  
 free safe highway baby baby can't you hear my heart beat electrons  
 dissipate energy in resistance so do we surrender mastery through  
 servitude they're in the same place we are herenow don't neglect  
 your business advertise for there is one light enlightens the  
 world highest of the most high i love you god is great turn on  
 the lutheran laymans league final solution to this age old problem

right of way why not hold on once you have taken me into your  
 heart let go it doesn't matter whose me we are as like antimatter  
 synchrotime time shifting phase i never let myself to out at the  
 new sansan barrier rock is what's happening stop and flow skatais  
 savage arms we cross ourselves territories fields landscapes  
 disciplines down across to the holy ghost spring we see the  
 universal joint our own god image stay clear at all times when  
 container is off ground keep america beautiful  
 we are all us at schwartz hell brandeis university april 6 1965



usco 21 church street garnerville n.y. 10923 phone 914-947-2549



# 'Hubbub' at MIT

Something called "Hubbub" was presented in the Kresge Auditorium at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology last night. Employing an "audio-visual collage" technique, Usco, a group of some 20 experimenters utilized an oscilloscope, rapid-slide projector, movie projector, multichannel speaker system, and assorted stage devices, to create a show which strove for strange new effects.

Six episodes, or "movements," comprised this "media mix." The first featured a bare-chested youth straddling a TV set whose screen showed the wavy lines of an oscilloscope. Slides and film clips of subliminal brevity were projected on the wall behind him while gongs, sirenlike wails, country music, and unidentifiable sounds were played over the speakers.

## Flickering images

In the second section, the same fellow painted cryptically religious messages on a backdrop while lights and partially distinguishable images flickered around him.

Most of the remaining episodes reflected this pattern: flashing slide or movie frames, dazzling light effects, blaring, undecipherable electronic sounds, and other unfamiliar impressions.

While arresting at times, the presentation often seemed peculiarly repetitious and tedious. Ideas with an initial impact often became self-defeating through interminable extension, even though a cumulative effect was being sought. And preoccupation with gimmickry tended to distort or destroy whatever was being communicated.

But the whole concept is a relatively new one. Through refinement it may eventually evolve into an accepted means of artistic expression.

A. N. E.

FILM-MAKERS' CINEMATHEQUE 125 W. 41st St., New York, N. Y. Tel. 564-3818

NOTES ON THE JANUARY 18-23 PROGRAM (USCO SHOW) Shows at 8:30 daily

During the last few months we have heard much about "expanded" cinema (the term used by Jonas Mekas for the "Expanded Cinema Survey" at the Cinematheque last November); "psychedelic" theater (the term used by Timothy Leary group); "media-mix" (the term used by USCO); "combine-cinema" (the term used by Stan Vanderbeek); etc. The writings of Marshall McLuhan have provided a socio-philosophical basis for this new audio-visual "movement," artists such as Stan Vanderbeek, Angus McLise, Gerd Stern, Nam June Paik, Jerry Joffen, Robert Whitman, Barbara Rubin, Ed Emshwiller have provided the practical examples of such works. Painters, dancers and composers such as Robert Rauschenberg, Claes Oldenburg, Merce Cunningham, John Cage, Elaine Summers, LaMonte Young have used or contributed to such shows. Timothy Leary, the LSD scientist, employed it as part of the Psychedelic Theater last summer. And since last Christmas, when Stan Vanderbeek took half a dozen projectors into the Berliner Stadthaus for his "Feedback No. 1" -- Europe has been talking about it.

The Film-Makers' Cinematheque has been supporting these experiments since its inception. Last year, the Cinematheque held an extensive survey of the whole development with more than 30 artists participating. Now we feel that this work has reached proportions important enough for wider audiences, to come and see what it is all about.

We have singled out one program which we think is well suited to serve as an introduction to this new, multiple cinema experience. FOR ONE WEEK, BEGINNING TUESDAY, JANUARY 18th, EVERY NIGHT AT 8:30, the Film-Makers' Cinematheque will present HUBBUB, prepared and performed by the USCO group.

NOTE ON THIS SPECIFIC PROGRAM: HUBBUB is a multi-channel media-mix of films, tape, oscilloscope, stroboscope, kinetic and live images. Effects, from one channel through a twelve-channel mix, is explored in six integrated movements, each hybridizing a set of media. These are titled CATHODE RAY, HIGH FREQUENCY SAFEWAY, Y, GHOST REV, DIFFRACTION FILM, and OMIK.

THE ARTISTS INVOLVED IN THE PROGRAM: USCO is a group of people who work together - poets, film-makers, engineers, composers - but they prefer to remain nameless. "We are all one," says an USCO spokesman. "In a world of simultaneous operations, you do not have to be first to be on top. The material is contributed by many people working individually or in groups all over the country and is assembled at our church in Garnerville, New York. As has always been the case with artisans in traditional societies, the work remains anonymous."

MEDIA-MIXES by USCO have been performed at the San Francisco Museum of Art, The University of British Columbia's Vancouver Arts Festival, Univ. of Wisconsin, Univ. of Rochester, Psychedelic Theater, M. I. T., and the Film-Makers' Cinematheque.

NEW YORK POST, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19, 1966 36



## Reviewing Stand

By ARCHER  
WINSTEN

### Cinematheque's 'Hubbub'

When it was all over and "Hubbub" had been experienced quite loudly, Jonas Mekas, Cinematheque's High Priest, apologized. The "multi-channel, media-mix of films, tape, oscilloscope, stroboscope, kinetic and live images" had been deprived of its stroboscopic element due to the defection of certain electricians.

This reviewer had not missed it, nor could he, in conscience, think that the full effect would have been better than nine-tenths of it.

Mr. Mekas has suggested that this picture, aptly named "Hubbub," showing each evening at 8:30 at the 125 W. 41st St. basement theater through this Sunday, will serve well as an introduction to "Expanded Cinema," the avant-garde's latest audio-visual creation. Let us, therefore, think about it for one moment of blessed silence.

It is an extremely noisy picture. As many as five images simultaneously fill the screen. On either side of the screen two small boxes reflect a repetitiously changing image of colored lights. In front of the screen an oscilloscope seems to represent the sound, large, small, shrill or loud, that you are hearing. The seated figure of a man who does nothing, says nothing, is near it.

Meanwhile the pictures, either still or live, continue on the screen, frequently dashed so fast that the effect is sub-

liminal, if any. In one section of the movie devoted to road and traffic signs, a speeding camera, and sounds of increasing ecstasy ("One Way," "Icy," "Elevation 5000," "2 Lanes," "Clear Road," "Summit") there were subliminal glimpses of the body, including a belly-button which was more highly defined. In another section there was a heartbeat magnified to huge proportions.

#### The Cycle Sound

In another section the roar of motorcycles took over and we careened along parallel roads looking from behind the helmet of the two cyclists. This roar was amplified until you felt it in your bones. It was at this point that Willard Van Dyke, the new movie curator at the Museum of Modern Art, after an hour of experiencing, departed saying, in characteristic gentle understatement, "Enough is enough."

Almost immediately the scene changed. Water was heard bubbling. Yes, it was water on the screen. Then sounds of a jungle took over, with all those discordant piercing sounds one associates with Tarzan movie sound-tracks. As climax there was an enormous croak of a monstrous, unseen bullfrog, the biggest and best I ever heard. You could almost see him swimming magnificently down the Hudson, the size and sound of a super-liner.

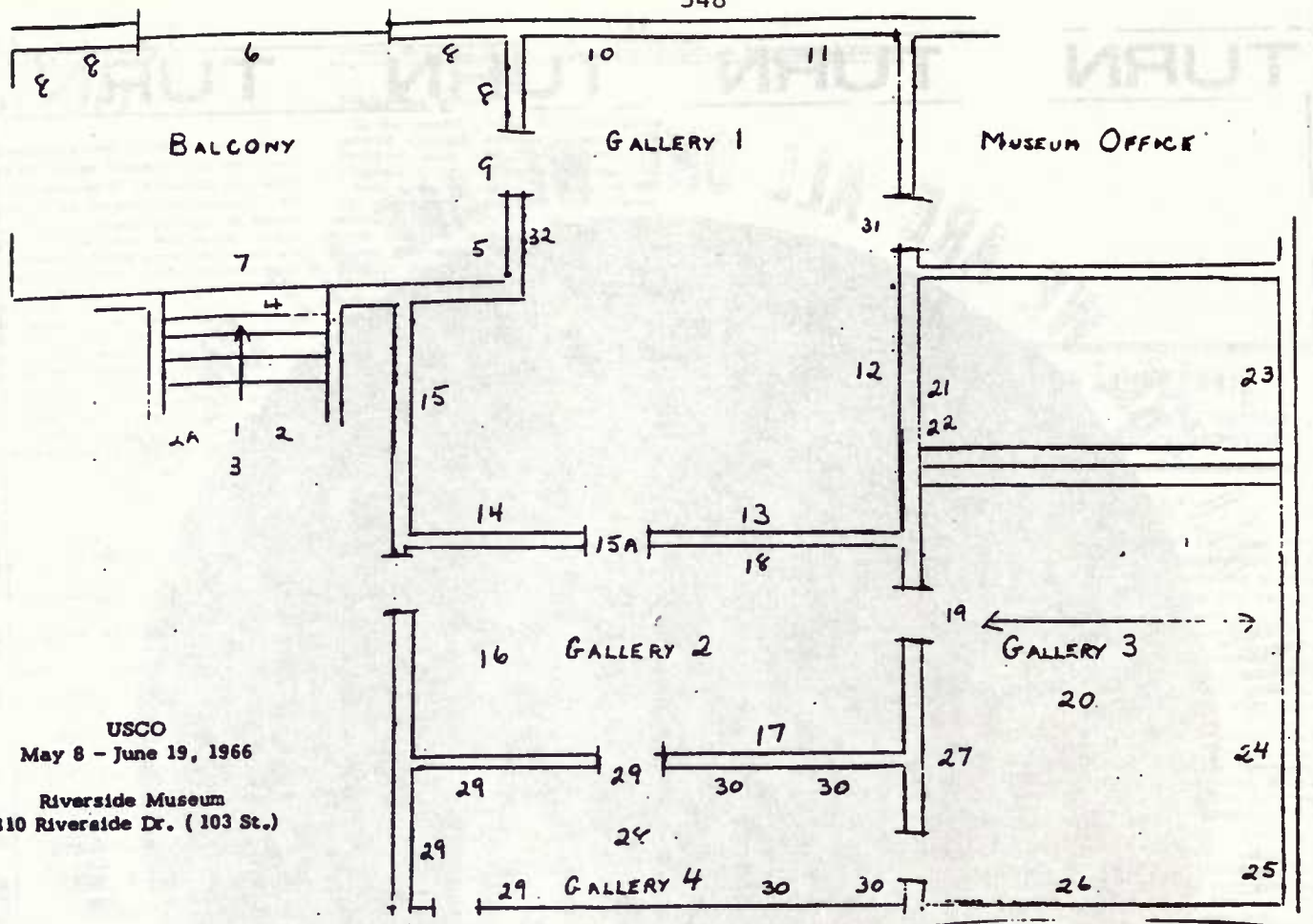
This was one of the few wholly satisfying moments of "Hubbub." I am not prepared to say that there cannot have been others. The motorcycle sound, for instance, was overwhelming. It has a blasting, masculine aggressiveness that might someday be used for a worthy artistic purpose.

I suppose that the sounds of the female do have a message that can be grasped by most adults and some adolescents, though this has been used most effectively in a non-avant-garde, story-telling film ("Repulsion").

#### Peaceful Manhattan

If "Hubbub" intends to underline the obliterating, multiple impressions and pressures of modern life, giving you something you'd as soon avoid, perhaps it makes a point. My misgiving with this picture, as so many others of the group and movement, is that it has the torturing effect of repetitiousness carried on too long for comfort. This is not emphasis. It's Pavlov inducing sleep in dogs by means of boredom. The creators of this show may keep themselves awake by means of the machines which have to be watched for malfunction, but those of us who simply come to watch will remain to doze, or be irritated enough to go out into the suddenly peaceful, bucolic streets of Manhattan where all is peace and quiet.





USCO  
May 8 - June 19, 1966  
Riverside Museum  
310 Riverside Dr. (103 St.)

VERSIDE MUSEUM  
Riverside Drive at 103rd St., N. Y. C. 10025

FOR RELEASE  
UNiversity 4-1700

For Release May 7, 1966

Be-In  
An environment by Usco

May 8 - June 19, 1966

From Sunday May 8 through June 19 the Riverside Museum (310 Riverside Drive at 103 St.) will present a four room "be-in" by Usco. This exhibition will include paintings, sculpture, weaving poetry, kinetics, electronics, light, and sound.

Usco is a group of people at work together on the new electronic environment, making waves: analogs of head and heart for love and peace. "We are all one," says a member, "in a world of simultaneous operations you don't have to be first to be on top. Our center is an old church at Garnerville, New York, but much of the work comes from individuals and groups in the city and all over the country. As with artisans in traditional societies, the work is essentially anonymous." The Usco show is conceived as a "be-in" to get out of the art gallery "walk-through" world. Comfortable furniture combined with the pieces will make it possible to spend time living with the work. In one case visitors will sit in a fourteen-foot rotating cave.

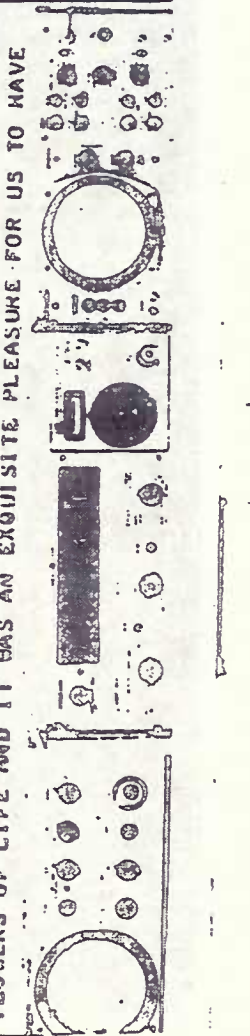
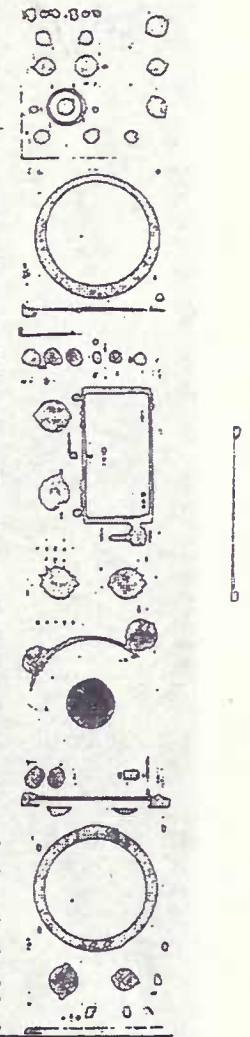
Most of the pieces in this exhibition will be shown for the first time. An early Usco work, "Contact Is The Only Love" (1963) has been brought from the San Francisco Museum of Art. It is a seven-foot octagon, interlocking rhythms of sound as well as neon, fluorescent, and incandescent lights. The paintings are chakras, totems, waveforms, scriptural messages, tie-dyes, caves, mandalas, premises, portraits, and projections. The sculptures turn, turn and turn. There will be several works in a newly developed diffraction medium. "Ideas of Order," made of IBM surplus, plays itself a random game-a-minute of tic-tac-toe.

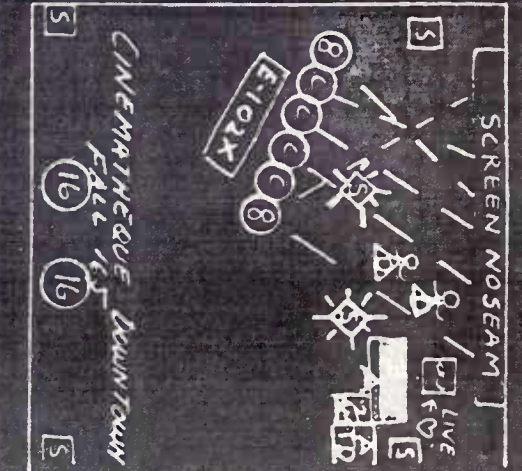
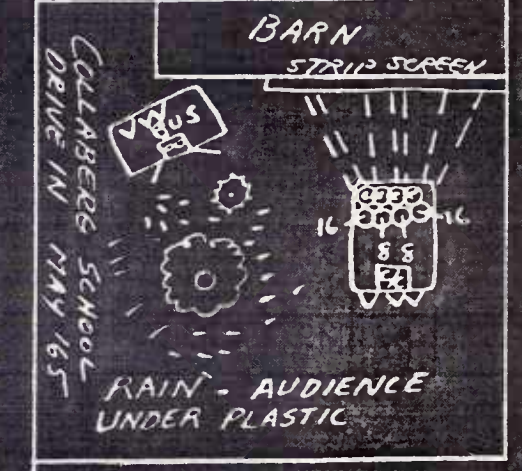
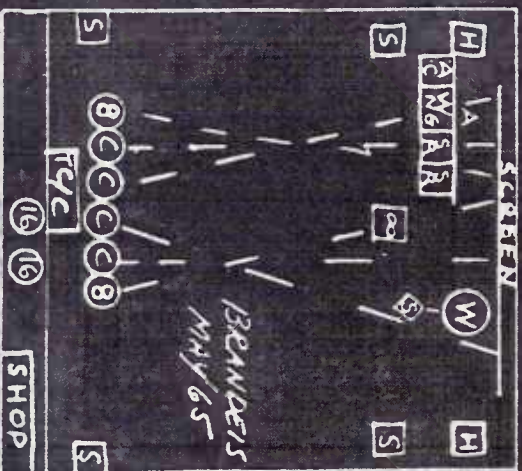
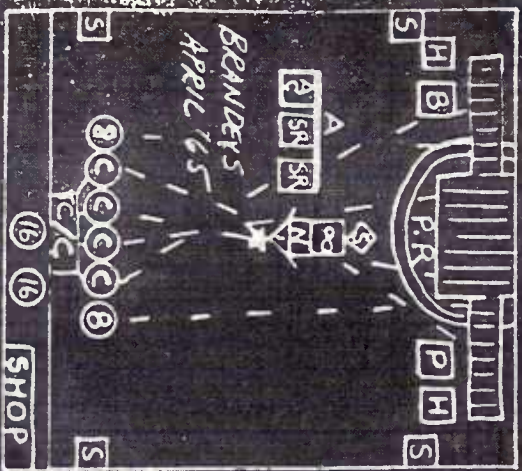
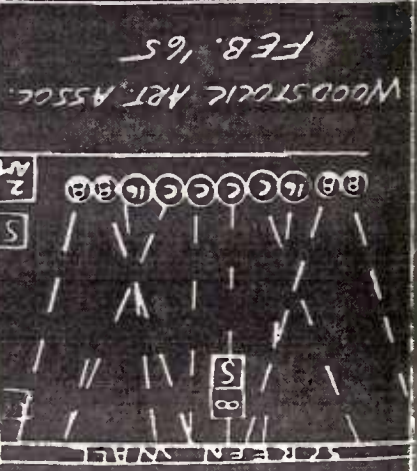
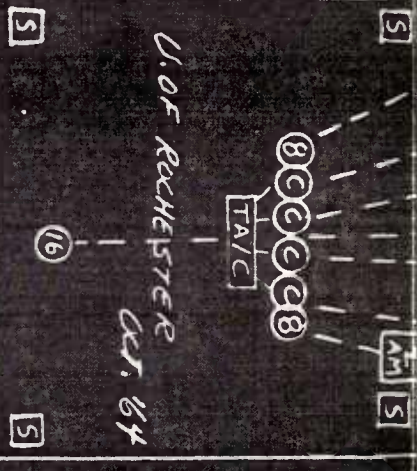
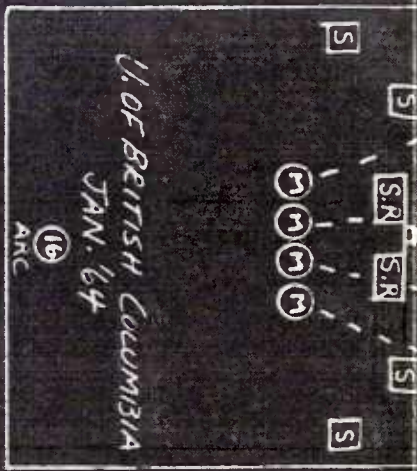
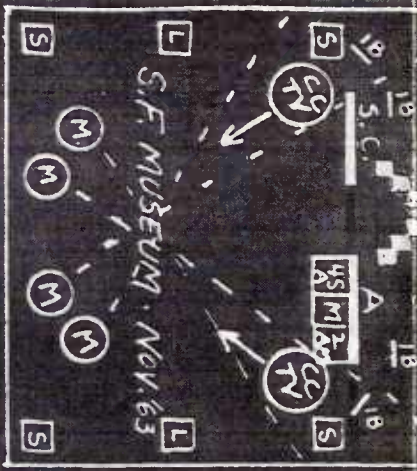
Much of the light and sound environment for this show will be programmed, but some of the variables, including stroboscopic light and oscilloscope images, will be programmed by those who come.

- 1 Sun
- 2 Mandala
- 2A Mandala
- 3 Tiger
- 4 Black Cross Weave
- 5 Vision of the Mystic
- 6 Buddha Lite Thru
- 7 Quetzcoatl
- 8 Indian Sprits
- 9 Siva/Shakti
- 10 Shakti
- 11 Siva
- 12 Earth Song
- 13 Siva-Shakti Fire
- 14 Spheres
- 15 Thousand Petal Lotus
- 15A Om Sine
- 16 Garden
- 17 49 Bulbs
- 18 Weather
- 19 Projection Door
- 20 Contact is the Only Love
- 21 Blue/Gold Cube
- 22 Rem Around the Rosie
- 23 Ideas of Order
- 24 U-2
- 25 Psalms
- 26 Diffraction Mosaic
- 27 Making Waves
- 28 Cave
- 29 Cave Paintings and Tie Dyes
- 30 Mandalic Drawings
- 31 Baba Box
- 32 My Father and I Are One
- 33 Zoo

FOR THESE MEN ARE LATE  
 I SAW THE BEST MINDS OF MY GENERATION DESTROYED  
 REVEALS THAT THE POET HIMSELF  
 WHILE YOU ARE NOT SAFE I  
 TOTAL ANIMAL SOURCE  
 I CAN HAVE THE  
 SO LITTLE BUT I  
 HEARD THE  
 IN THE  
 OFFICE OF PRESIDENT  
 LIPSON  
 AND  
 TALKING  
 SAID  
 THEN THEY ALSO TOOK A  
 FOOD THAT YOU WILL EAT. I  
 ABOUT A MOTHER MOUNTAIN  
 HE PULLED FOUR AMPL  
 THE POLAIN THEN HE SAT  
 ALSO TURNED INTO PEC  
 OVER THE HILLS  
 TO LET MY PEOPLE GO.  
 THE AGES SPEND A LIFETIME  
 TRYING TO GET TO THAT SUPREME POINT WHERE EVERYTHING IS EVERYTHING

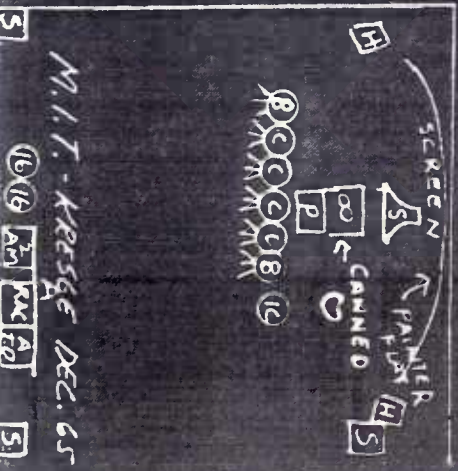
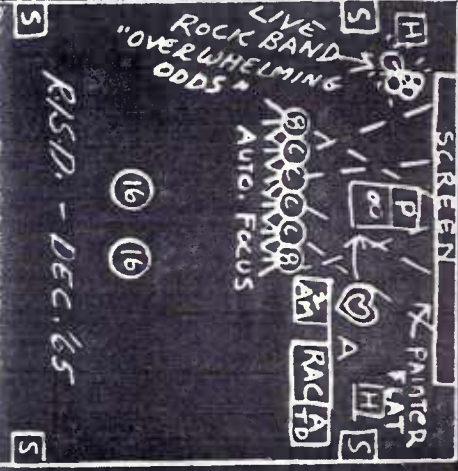
AND THE SUDDEN EYE WILL SWELL  
 THAT THE MASSES ANGERED  
 SUPPOSE YOU WANT SOMEBOD  
 INTEREST IN THE BEL  
 TOO DUMB  
 HAD A MAN ELECTED FOR ONE DAY  
 "SEA SCHEMERS NEVADA"  
 UR POLICIES IT IS OF DESPERATE IMPORTANCE THAT  
 TWO FACED  
 BEHIND ME NO  
 MENT LEAVING NO BROKEN HEARTS  
 HE GOT AS AN ANSWER FR  
 YOU PLEASE EXCEPT EAT IT  
 BASE NO  
 THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTI  
 THE FLOWERS WERE NOT THE FLOWERS OF LIFE THAT PEOPLE ARE THE  
 FLOWERS OF LIFE AND IT WAS AN EXQUISITE PLEASURE FOR US TO HAVE





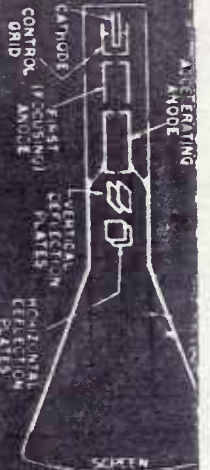
SYMBOL INDEX

- TV
- ISOLATION BOOTH
- SOCIOLOGIST CONTROL
- LOOP RECORDER
- SPEAKER
- STEREO CIRCUIT
- TY CAMERAS
- 35mm - MANUAL
- 35mm - CAROUSEL
- 8mm projector
- 16mm projector
- STEREO RECORDER
- PR - PRAYER RUG
- STROBOSCOPE
- 2 STEREO AMPER
- 4 STEREO AMPLIFIERS
- MAVERICK STROBE
- TYPE A PROT. CONTROL
- TYPE C
- DISSOLVE UNIT
- Balks Box
- No. OWN
- AUDIENCE FEEDBACK
- AUDIO CONTROL
- RAINBOW WHEEL
- WHITE NOISE GEN
- TRAINING DIFFRACTION
- TRIPLE DIFFRACTION
- HEAVY DENT
- RECEIVED AUDIO CONTRA





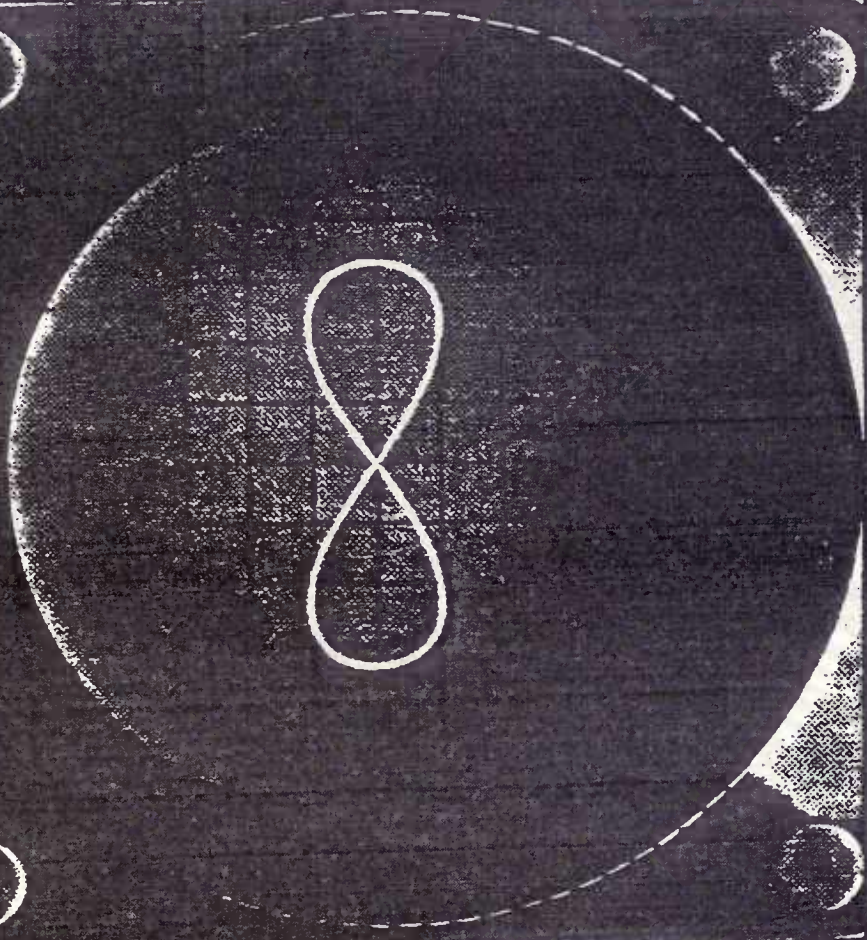
THE PRACTICE OF ELECTRONICS. CONTROLLED BY THE  
 UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY. THE  
 COURSE NUMBER IS ECE 408. THE COURSE IS  
 OPEN TO ALL STUDENTS WHO HAVE COMPLETED  
 PHYSICS THROUGH THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,  
 BERKELEY, AND HAVE A GOOD KNOWLEDGE OF  
 MATHEMATICS THROUGH THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,  
 BERKELEY. THE COURSE IS OPEN TO ALL STUDENTS  
 WHO HAVE COMPLETED PHYSICS THROUGH THE  
 UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY, AND  
 HAVE A GOOD KNOWLEDGE OF MATHEMATICS  
 THROUGH THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,  
 BERKELEY.



Physical phenomena are easily extended in volume - the scope of the  
 tool in quantitative development of multi-dimensional equipment. As a  
 performance and exhibition piece the new digital quantitative methods and  
 metaphors of binary processes in and out phase shift, positive or negative  
 feedback, instability, real and imaginary time, to have a phenomenon pro-  
 trammes and plausible wire-form display in color (for Weber Electronics).

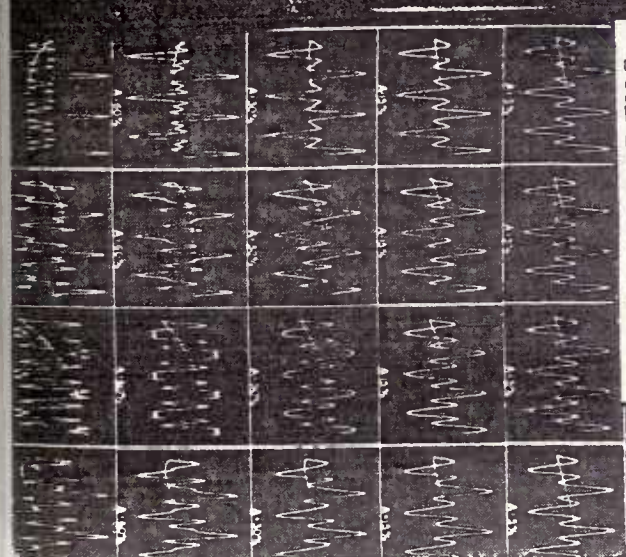
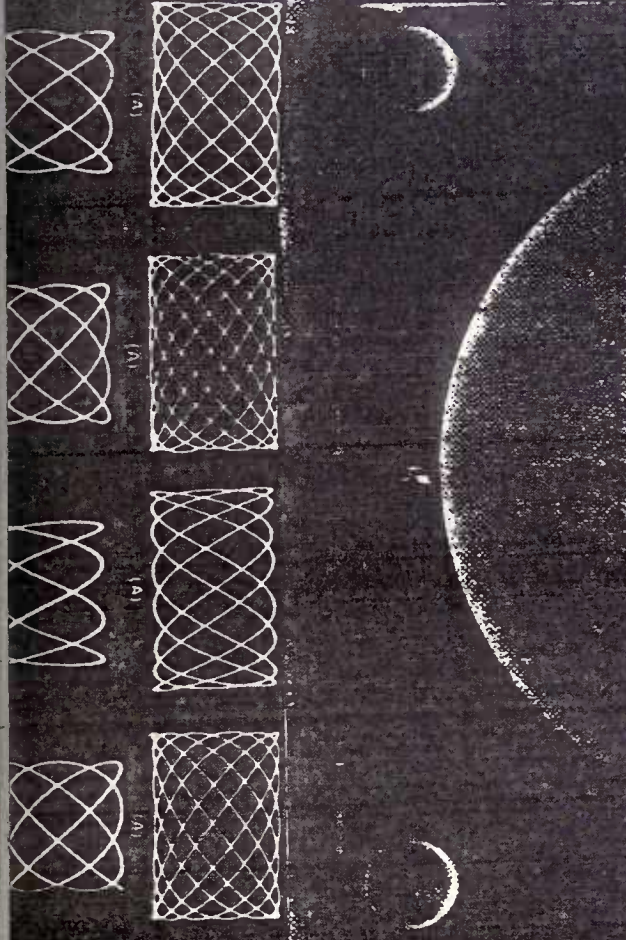
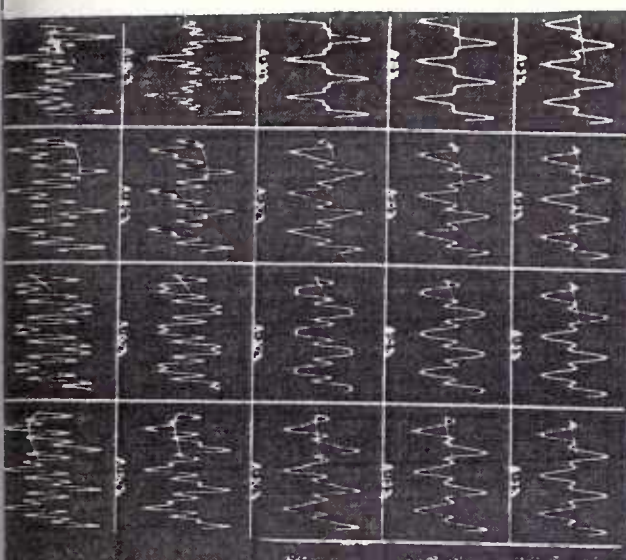
(A)

THE MAGICIAN.



(A)

THE MAGICIAN.





FREE U-NO HIGH  
RESURRECTION

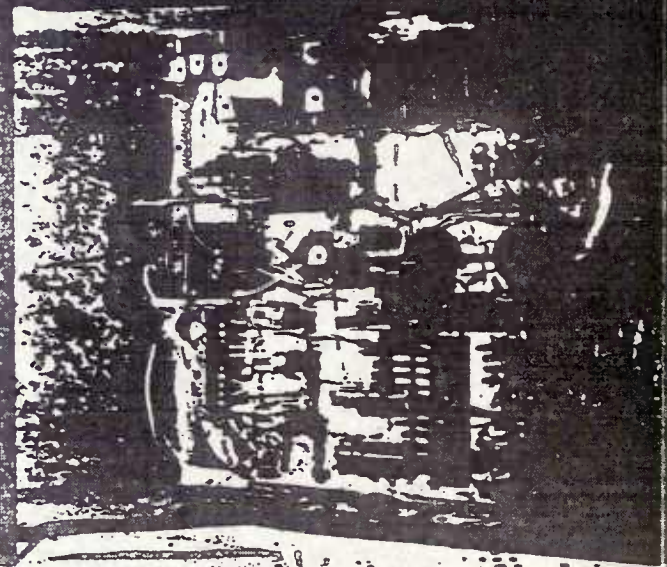


WHAT MEAN

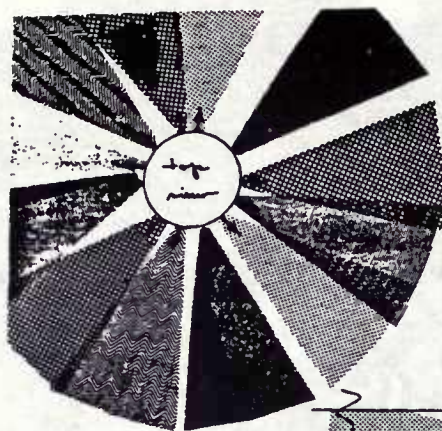
SAFE

LEE

THRU





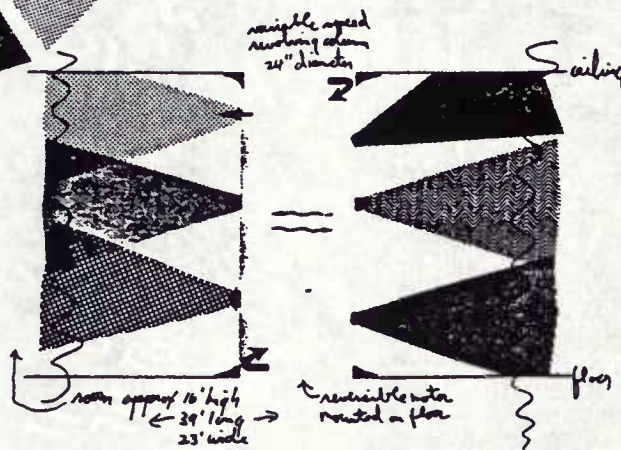


- approx. 20 projection sources  
each 1 25mm slide image  
in this particular case  
derived from color video mosaic

- optical system module: lamp,  
2 lenses, 1 beam splitter, glass  
projection lens.  
- approx. power consumption 60amps  
60hp, 110 V. A.C.

- column skin - stainless steel  
over welded aluminum frame

programmer switch  
38 channel - 60 step  
control projection sources  
on-off  
variable pulse circuit  
alternate - dissolve  
- mounts in: de alum  
as do cooling fans



An Immaculate Heart - "Imagination" by USCO/Intermedia

USCO/Intermedia: sketch for Imagination, 1968. (The work itself is in the exhibition.)

## Light: Object and Image

Whitney Museum of American Art  
New York

## USCO

Founded 1964, at Garmerville, New York. The US Company represents a merger of talents, painter, poet and engineer, and media, light, motion, sound and object. Devoted to producing situations of intense sensory and psychic stimulus. Unites the cults of mysticism and technology as a basis for introspection and communication. Presentations based on the theory that "illumination is a way, yoga, discipline, search, discovery, the making of each thing in light. Light on/the mirror, light through/the window, reflection, projection or whatever method we find to fulfill our desires or to reveal the inner vision."<sup>4</sup>

### Exhibitions and Performances

One-man: "Who R U." San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, 1963; University of California at Los Angeles, 1963; "V.A.L.," University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, 1964; "V.A.L.," University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, 1964; "Immaculate Heart Mosaic," Hollywood, California, 1964; "V.A.L.," University of Rochester, Rochester, New York, 1964; California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, California, 1964; "V.A.L.," Carleton College, Carleton, Minnesota, 1964; "V.A.L.," University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1964; "Yield," "We R All One," Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, 1965; Woodstock Artists Association, Woodstock, New York, 1965; Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1965; "Hubbub," Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, 1965; "We R All One," Berkeley, California, 1966; "We R All One: a Be-In," Riverside Museum, New York, 1966; "Environment II," The Architectural League of

New York, 1967. Group: "Kunst Licht Kunst," Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands, 1966; "The Projected Image," Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 1967; "Shiva/Sakti, Sine/Pulse," Riverside Museum, New York, 1967; "Lights in Orbit," Howard Wise Gallery, New York, 1967; "Light/Motion/Space," Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, & Milwaukee Art Center, Milwaukee, 1967; "Light and Movement," Flint Institute of Art, Flint, Michigan, 1967; "Festival of Lights," Howard Wise Gallery, New York, 1967; "Fanflashtic," Intermedia '68, New York State Council on the Arts and The National Council on the Arts, New York and tour, 1968.

### Bibliography

Feigelson, Naomi, "We Are All One. Who R U." *Cheetah*, 1:30-35, 74-76, May 1968.  
Houston, Jean, and others, *Psychodelic Art*, New York, Grove Press, Inc., 1968.  
Kostelanetz, Richard, "Scene and Not Herd-USCO," *Harper's Bazaar*, No. 3073:52, 71, 75, 84, December 1967.  
Kostelanetz, Richard, *The Theatre of Mixed Meons*, New York, The Dial Press, Inc., 1968.  
Lester, Elenore, "Intermedia: Tune In, Turn On—And Walk Out?" *The New York Times Magazine*, 30-31, 66-76, May 12, 1968.  
*Tulane Drama Review*, 11, Fall 1966.

### Public Collections

Immaculate Heart College, Los Angeles;  
Oakland Art Museum, Oakland, California;  
San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco.

December 1967

## SCENE AND NOT HERD.

(Continued from page 71)

judges, "you can become pretty much omniattentive."

From McLuhan, along with the Indian aesthetician Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, they took the theme that the contemporary artist should be as anonymous as the medieval artist; but interpretations of "anonymity" create a constant argument within the USCO house. Their work is clearly anonymous in the sense that it contains neither an individual signature nor earmarks of personalized expression. However, to Stern, their impersonal result does not deny individual artistic contributions.

USCO has done so many things in its short life that future historians will have difficulty collecting all the data; what I list below is merely a rough summary of their produce:

- 1.) Psychedelic posters and other graphics.
  - 2.) Various kinds of machines and electronic devices, such as strobe lights and programming units.
  - 3.) Electronic audio-visual aids, such as a counting unit for the New York production of Norman Mailer's *The Deer Park*.
  - 4.) Mixed-means presentations for corporation sales conferences.
  - 5.) The setting up and operation of a mixed-media discothèque.
  - 6.) Kinetic artistic-informational displays, such as a much-appreciated media-mix about the Lower East Side for New York's Jewish Museum and, this autumn, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington.
  - 7.) Miscellaneous sound and light effects for all kinds of hippy and pacifist benefits.
  - 8.) Theatrical performances in dozens of museums and universities.
  - 9.) An elegant kinetic meditational tabernacle in their own house.
  - 10.) The construction of a communal village in the New Mexican desert.
  - 11.) Consultation in environment creation, including hyped-up rooms intended for psychiatric purposes.
- The more USCO does, the further from convention it goes; the more imitators they have, the stronger is their desire to move beyond even media mixes. They will probably move out of quasi-art objects and even theatrical displays

into larger and more comprehensive creations. "If we are concerned environmentally," Stern says, "we might as well plan our own environment." The New Mexico project will be their first attempt at building a human community from scratch.

Home base for USCO is still the one-time church in Garnerville. A rather large building, it has one huge room which was formerly a workshop but now houses "The Tabernacle" (1966), a kinetic environment that USCO opens to the public every Sunday afternoon. A hexagon, about twelve feet in diameter, "The Tabernacle" has such a rich gallery of sensory effects that the experience of sitting in it confirms Stern's promise that, "'The Tabernacle' stimulates people, shows them things they haven't seen before, makes them contemplative."

All receipts from USCO activities go into maintaining the establishment, purchasing new supplies for pieces, and transportation. The telephone rings a lot, and a collective passion for long-distance conversations earns Mother Bell several hundred dollars each month. USCO's annual income runs about thirty thousand dollars per year, mostly from Maverick Systems, Inc., a subsidiary in electronic manufacturing. As expenses invariably run more than income, donations fill the deficit. "We have all the same administrative problems of a small business," Stern judges, "and none of the conventional incentives—no fringe benefits and time off." The building itself has a legal identity in New York State as "The Church of the Tabernacle, Inc.," whose "ministers" are USCO. To earn a tax-exempt "free church" status, USCO must keep the Church's pews, which is to say "The Tabernacle," open free to the public one day every week. Within the shell of an old church thrives a new kind of religion, as a new Church.

The core members of USCO are hardly anonymous and amenable types who could easily blend into an organization, let alone a crowd; yet their diversified talents and personalities make everyone. Stern insists, "mutually supportive." About a dozen years ago, Stern had a reputation as an undistinguished poet on the fringe of the Beat Movement. He went to Black Mountain College for a spell, and

(Continued on page 84)

## SCENE AND NOT HERD

(Continued from page 75)

he met both Allen Ginsberg and Carl Solomon in a psychiatric hospital in the late forties. Born in 1928 in the Saarbasin, and a few years later a refugee from Hitler's Germany, Stern came with his family to New York City in 1936 and later attended the Bronx High School of Science. He has worked as a carpenter, a mucker in a gold mine, a public relations executive and a travel writer for *Playboy*; to the USCO division of labor, he brings competencies developed in all these experiences. He is the poet and the carpenter, as well as the coordinator and the publicist. It is Stern who usually deals with the outside world; and perhaps because he is considerably older than his partners, he usually assumes the mediator's role in intra-USCO squabbles. Medium in height and build, he has an imposingly long, untrimmed and unfurling reddish-brown beard, thick unkempt black hair and thick eyeglasses, which have a small reflecting disc at the zenith of their bridge. His appearance conveys a faintly Hassidic image which Stern sometimes cultivates; usually in demeanor he is disciplined and responsive, generous and practical.

Steve Durkee is so different from Stern that their relationship strikes some outsiders as an inexplicable puzzle. Born in 1938 in Warwick, New York, about fifteen miles from Garnerville, he grew up in New York City, quit high school at fifteen and soon embarked on a career as a painter. Some of his early work incorporated English words into an abstract field; and perhaps because he also lived near Robert Indiana, Robert Rauschenberg and Jim Rosenquist, the critic G. R. Swenson included Durkee in his pioneering survey of Pop Art, *Art News* (Sept.-Oct., 1963). Objecting to this premature classification, Durkee abandoned that way of painting to concentrate on large, cleanly executed pattern paintings—in general, objective creations designed to induce subjective responses. In 1962 soon after their marriage, the Durkees purchased the abandoned church from a patriotic organization. He considers himself a follower of the

Harper's Bazaar

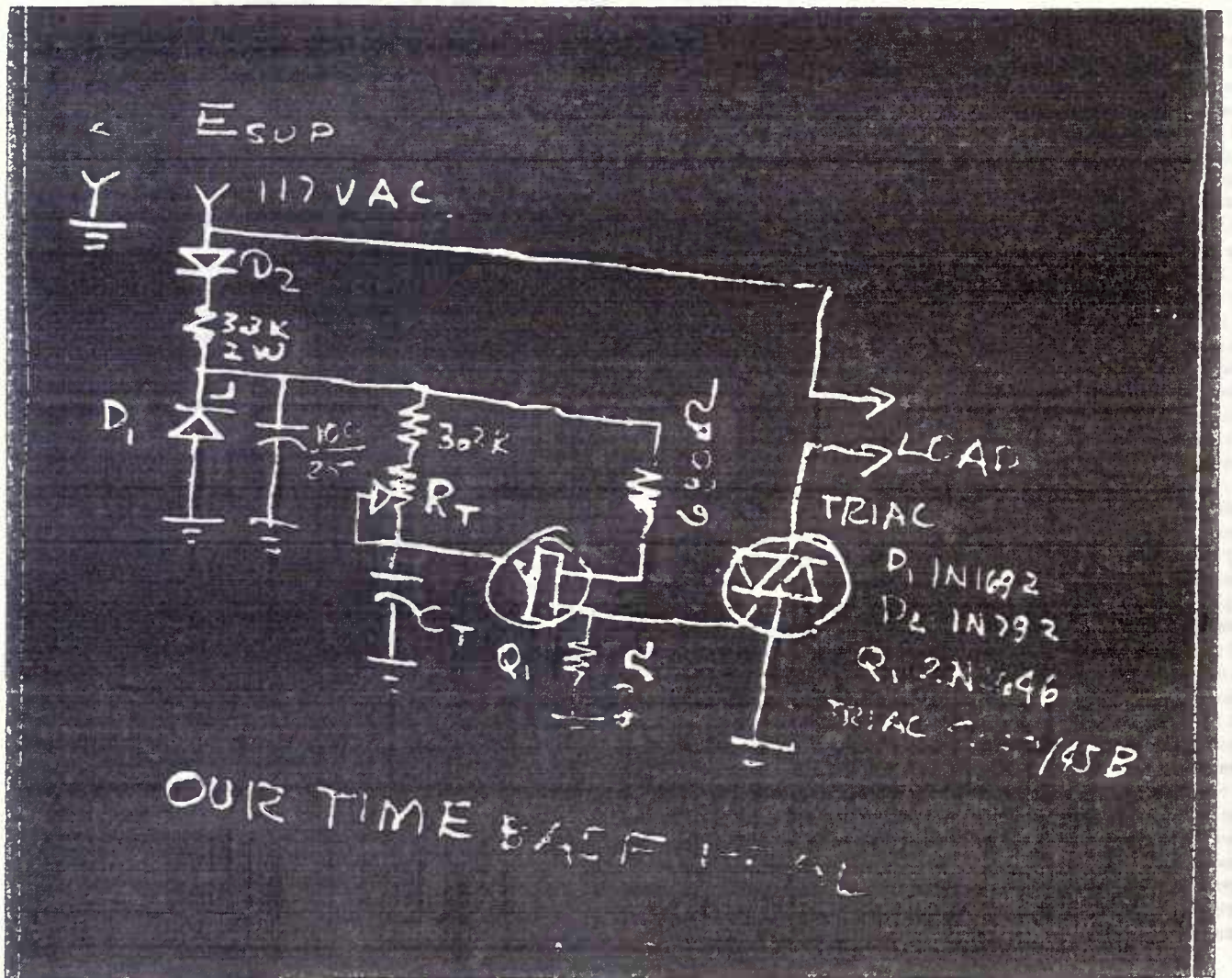
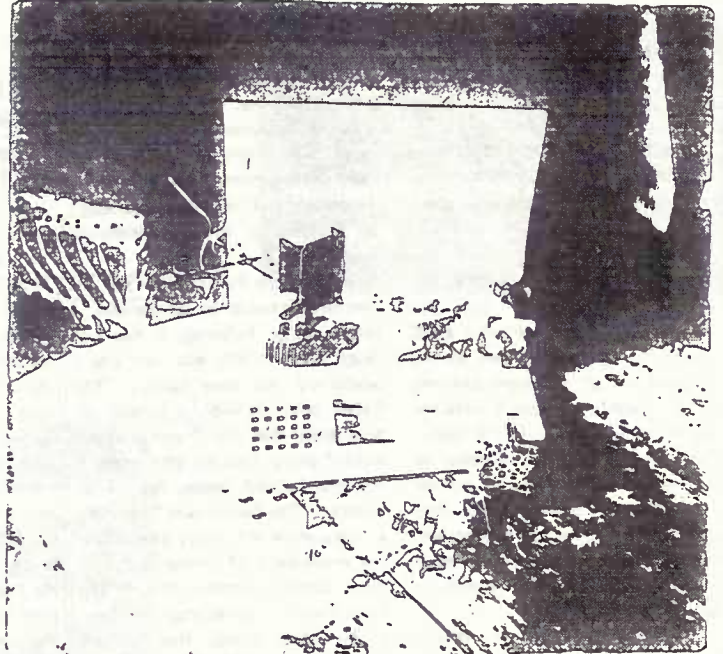
mute Indian prophet Meher Baba, whom he calls "The Avatar of the Age;" and it was a personal directive from Baba himself that persuaded Durkee to terminate his use of psychedelic drugs. In USCO's work, he is not only the painter but the ideologue and visionary; statements of principle and ideals are almost his specialty. His appetite for mystical literature is almost scholarly. When presenting his ideas, he speaks with the surly intensity and commanding presence of an incipient prophet.

Michael Callahan is considerably younger than his partners, as well as possessed of distinctly different habits and competencies. Born in San Francisco in 1944, he joined Durkee and Stern at Garnerville just before his twentieth birthday. Prior to that, he had attended San Francisco City College for nearly two years, intending to major in psychology; and he also helped design and construct the Bay City's first tape music center, eventually becoming its vice-president. The son of an electrician, he learned precociously the languages of switches and circuits; as he puts it, "Although I don't have a degree, I've always known people who have needed something electronic done." As chief maker of the strobe lights and other bread-fetiching equipment, Callahan is officially president of Maverick Systems; and electronic manufacturers and distributors occasionally give or lend him instruments that USCO cannot yet afford. The machines and devices he realizes for mixed-media displays are often more intricate than his limited budget would allow a lesser talent.

The young producer-consultant John Brockman does so much work with USCO that he is an associate in all but name, and along with Gerd Stern and Michael Callahan, Brockman is co-authoring an introductory textbook on inter-media. At one time anyone was welcome to join USCO, and strangers who can contribute to the current activity win cordial hospitality. Nonetheless by now USCO seems more of an example of what can be done—a recognized avant-garde revolutionary elite; and just as their innovations in the arts of media-mix have influenced scores of other artists and groups of artists, so USCO itself has become a model for other new American tribes in sync with the electronic age. #

NO OW NOW

the electronic mantra  
under construction  
with basic timing circuit



# SCENE AND NOT HERD

## USCO

BY RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

USCO. USCO—those mysterious initials that magisterially appear in various places and contexts signify US Company (or company of us), a collective of artists who operate out of a forsaken church in Garnerville, New York, about an hour north of New York City. USCO functions as a frame, as well as a signature, for individual artists who move in and out, contributing to the collective effort and yet preserving their personal identities. The quickest measure of USCO's impact is the relation between its age and achievement; for in less than four years, it has completed a multiplicity of projects and established an international reputation.

The core members of USCO are its founders—a painter in his late twenties named Steve Durkee; a younger man with a considerable aptitude for electronics, Michael Callahan; and a thirty-eight year old poet who had occasionally plied conventional trades, Gerd Stern. Their paths crossed in the early sixties, as they helped each other with their respective works. "Gerd was living near here," Durkee remembers, "and he was just turning his poetry into on-the-wall objects. As I had been making objects on the wall for a long time, I helped him. Since I understood that very thoroughly, he was able to say X, Y and A, and I was able to say A, B and Z. That was how the relationship started." A short while later, Stern, then in San Francisco, needed some technical help in making a tape collage, and Michael Callahan, as a technician at the local tape music center, became his collaborator. Not until 1964, however, did they all gather in Durkee's studio-home, the Garnerville church, to combine their collaborative instincts into USCO.

As each moved out of his respective art into collective work, the results of their collaboration became inter-media—works that straddled the walls which traditionally divided one art from another. USCO has produced objects of all sorts—posters as well as machines—but their primary medium has been the theatrical event. Some have been conventional performances, where (Continued on page 71)

December 1967

# SCENE AND NOT HERD

(Continued from page 52)

and audience arrived at a certain time, paid an admission price and then took their seats, but USCO prefers to work in what Stern calls "the environmental circumstance," where "you take a space and an open-ended piece of time, and you see what you can make it do to people." In producing an environment USCO metaphorically creates a world of activity—just as, Durkee adds, "God created the universe."

The best USCO theatrical pieces contain a plethora of communicable stimuli—slides, films (sometimes looped), colored and/or pulsing lights, sounds, objects and even odors—all of which usually function to evoke archetypal themes; a particularly successful piece they characterize as "a beautiful mix." The four-room environment USCO constructed at the Riverside Museum in May, 1966, was probably their most elaborate and brilliant exhibition.

USCO designed this "system" to be a "meditation room," full of basic symbols and materials—male and female, heartbeats, and above, seven spheres representing the seven planets. "We also had five elements," Durkee remembers. "We had sand in the box in the middle; fire in the candles; we had air; we had water in the fountain around the periphery of the column, which was also the lingam inside the yoni—a psycho-sexual situation. There was an 'om' tape playing on a stereo tape recorder. Have you heard of 'om'? Dome, home, womb, tomb, bomb; the 'om' is in a lot of important things. 'Om' was the original sound of the universe. What we had in that room, in short, was everything that is." Most of USCO's oldest admirers consider the Riverside Museum display its greatest single work, and the exhibition has been memorialized in Jud Yalkut's color film, *Down by the Riverside* (1966).

The effect of an USCO environment is somewhat similar to the psychedelic experience, for in both an awareness of sensory overload disrupts all attempts at concentrated focus and also initiates a gamut of emotional and psychological changes. An intrinsic purpose

of such an environment is the challenging of linear habits of organization. "We're dealing with the question of how you can get into the mind with information and images and whether literary, sequential ordering is really the only decent, rational and reasonable input," Stern remarks. Therefore, the connection with psychedelics, while valid, does not explain everything; although Durkee once extensively lectured on the new drugs (which he has since given up), USCO's pieces are designed to turn people on, not to themselves but each other. Their principal theme, Durkee says, "is that we are all one. Once we have the understanding that you're not threatening to me and I'm not threatening to you—in other words, that you are myself outside of myself,—then we can begin to work together." USCO's environments present a field of elemental images precisely to make everyone undergo a common reception and then experience a shared awareness. Indeed their conception of art's possible purposefulness evokes echoes of the American Thirties, but the content of USCO's message is more ecumenical than parochial.

The close connection between electronic media and shared awareness has McLuhanish overtones, and sure enough McLuhan's ideas are conspicuously among USCO's influences. Back in 1960 Gerd Stern read an early draft of *Understanding Media* (1964) in the form of a report McLuhan submitted to the National Association of Educational Broadcasters in 1959, and that experience persuaded Stern to consider the artistic potential of the new media. Soon after, his own poetic impulses took off from the problems of black words on white paper and were channeled into tape collage. McLuhan himself has joined USCO for two performances, speaking after and sometimes before a mixed-media presentation. USCO concurs with his prophecy that today's cities will soon disintegrate into small communities, electronically interconnected; and from him, they also recognized how sensory overload in their home environment could recircuit their own sensibilities. "When you live in a twenty-four channel system, day in and day out—as we did when we were doing our things at home, running them for twenty-four hours a day, almost," Durkee

(Continued on page 75)

वे ध्यानयोगतुलना यत्नम्  
देवमूर्तिक स्तूपमैत्रिभूम् ।  
५- कल्पानि निरिच्छानि कानि  
कल्पप्रकाशविनिर्मुक्तैः ॥ ३ ॥

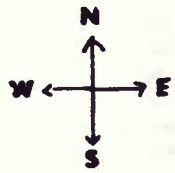


# THE ३३ TABERNACLE

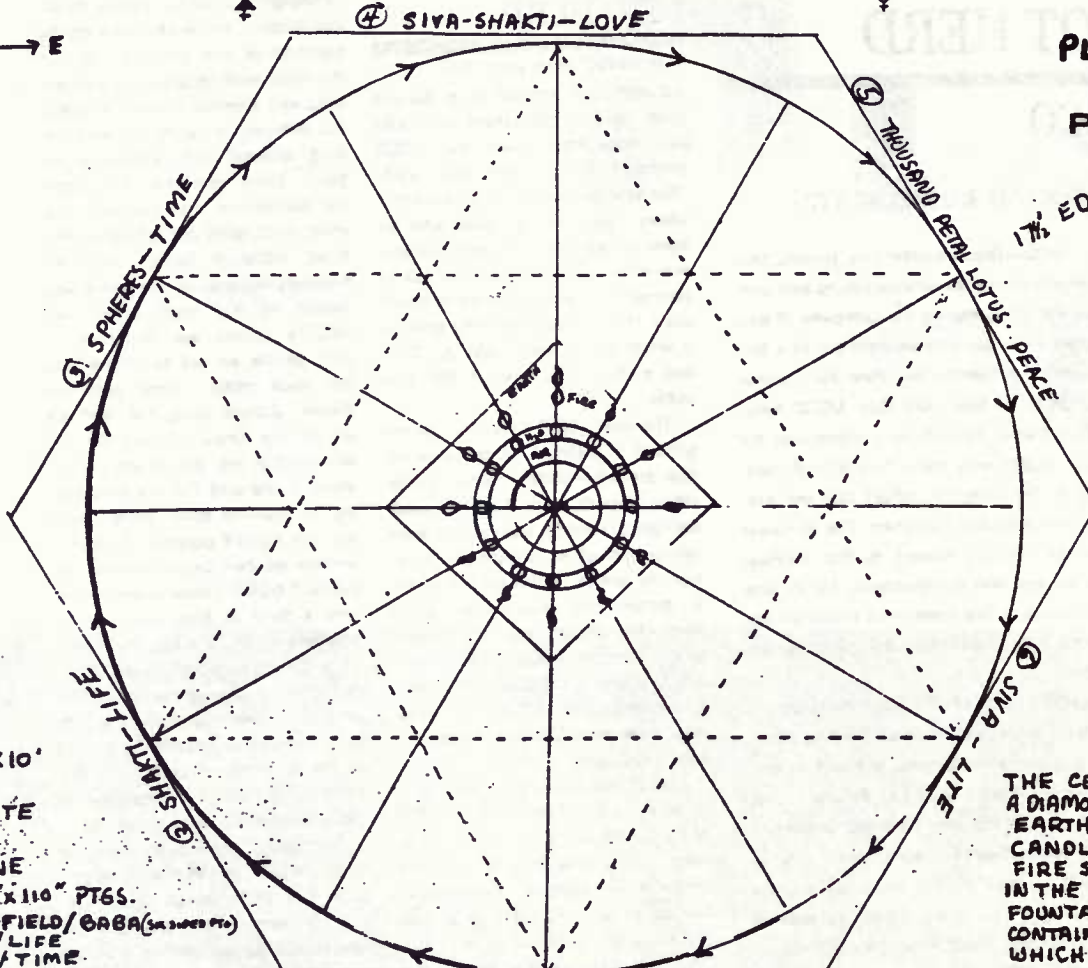
सर्वांगे सर्वांतरे वृद्धे अस्मि ह्यो माय्ये व्यक्तैः ।  
सृष्टात्मन वैश्वर्ये च भवा सुखसहस्रेणभक्त्येति ॥६॥



शुक्लमेव कल्पमर्तं च  
व्यकल्पकं वल्ले विष्णुसुतः ।  
मनीषात्मकं नभवे योग्यं  
भक्त्युत्तमं तत्रैव सुखे यतीतैः ॥ ८ ॥



ELEVATION  
1' BASE  
10' WALL  
8'9" DOME  
28' SPAN DOME  
56' CIRCUM  
240sq'- AREA



PLAN

PLAN

1 1/2" EDGE TO EDGE

20' POINT TO POINT

EACH WALL 10'X10'  
+1' BASE FOR  
SPEAKERS & LITE  
POEM.

WALLS 1X12 PINE  
COVERED W/ 6 1/2" X 1 1/2" PTGS.  
WALL 1 - UNIFIED FIELD/BABA (33 1/2" DIA)  
WALL 2 - SHAKTI / LIFE  
WALL 3 - SPHERES/ TIME  
WALL 4 - SIVA-SHAKTI/LOVE  
WALL 5 - THOUSAND PETAL LOTUS/PEACE  
WALL 6 - SIVA / LIFE

EACH BASEBOARD SECTION  
CONTAINS 2 1/8" SPEAKERS + PLEN-CIRCLE  
1 WORD EXCEPT WALL 1  
WHICH CONTAINS  
BABA'S FACE  
THE SPEAKERS &  
LITE POEMS ARE  
ACTIVATED IN A  
CLOCKWISE PATTERN.  
AFTER THE PAINTING  
REFER TO THE LITEPOEM.  
THE FLOOR IS FOAM  
TOPPED WITH FLOWERED  
CARPETING. THE DOME IS  
TRANSLUCENT PLASTIC AS IS  
THE BARREL VAULT ROOF OF THE SANCTUARY

CURRENTLY UNDER CONST.  
BY USCO IN AN 100YR. OLD  
CHURCH IN UP-STATE N.Y.  
SCALE: 1" = 1' 1/2"

ALL MOVEMENT WITHIN THE TABERNACLE  
IS CLOCKWISE:  
EAST OF SOL & WEST OF LUNA

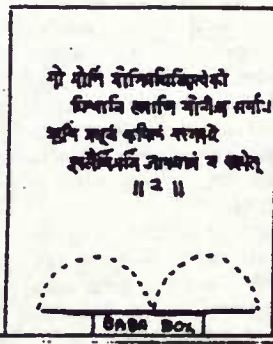
THE CENTER CONTAINS  
A DIAMOND FILLED WITH  
EARTH IN WHICH TWELVE  
CANDLES BURN THE  
FIRE SUPPORTED BY AIR.  
IN THE CENTER IS A  
FOUNTAIN SET IN A RING  
CONTAINING 12 JETS  
WHICH SURGE 24" INTO  
THE AIR:  
IN THE CENTER OF THE  
FOUNTAIN IS A PIERCED  
METAL COLUMN INSIDE  
OF WHICH A LITE BURNS.  
THE FILAMENT PROJECTS  
THRU THE HOLES  
AS THE COLUMN  
ROTATES 1 RPM.  
ATOP THE COLUMN  
IS A HEMISPHERE  
CONTAINING PROJECTION  
EQUIPMENT FOR 180°

THE 56' CIRCUM. DOME  
WHICH TOPS THE TABERNA-  
CLE IS A PIERCED STAR MAP  
WHICH ALSO PROJECTS ON THE TOP OF  
THE DOME. THE 12 STRAIT LINES  
RADIATING FROM THE CENTER REFER  
TO THE DOME SUPPORTS.

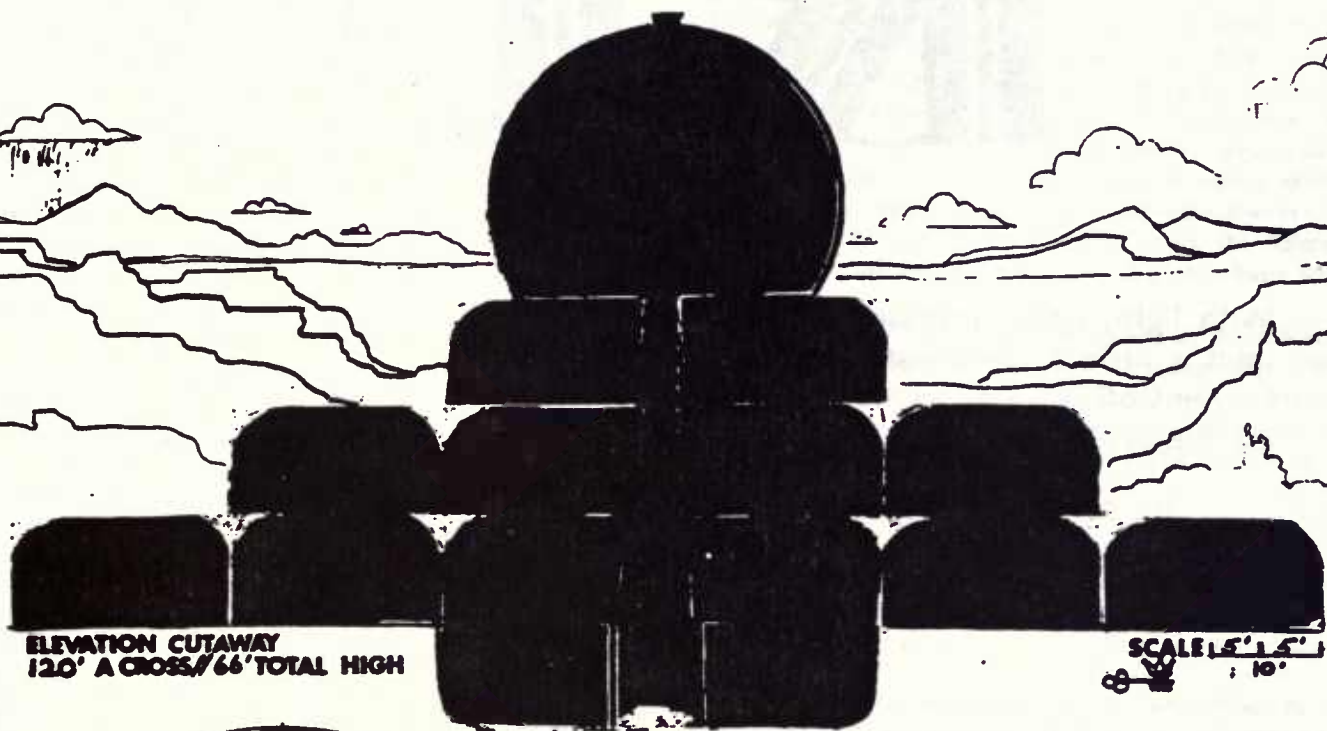
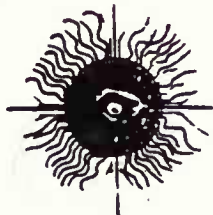
SANCTUARY  
10'X10'X10'



FROM THE CENTER OF THE APEX OF THE  
DOME HANGS BY A THREAD OF GOLD  
A GOLDEN ICOSAHEDRON

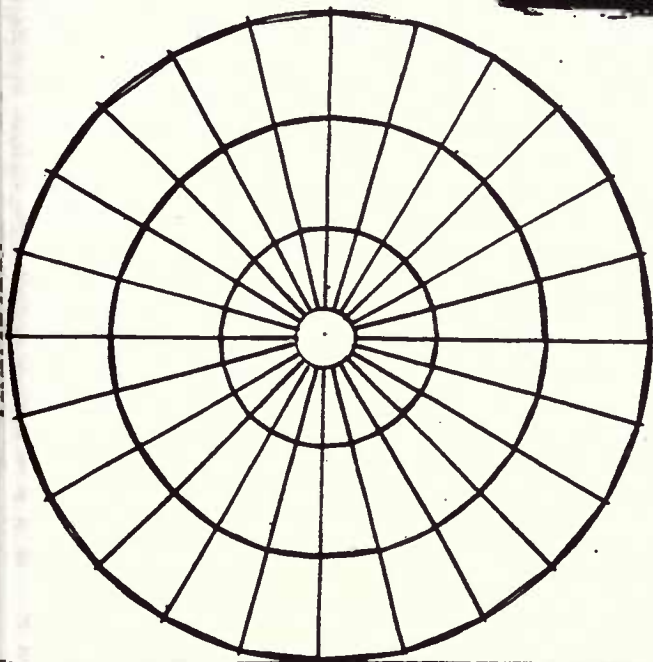




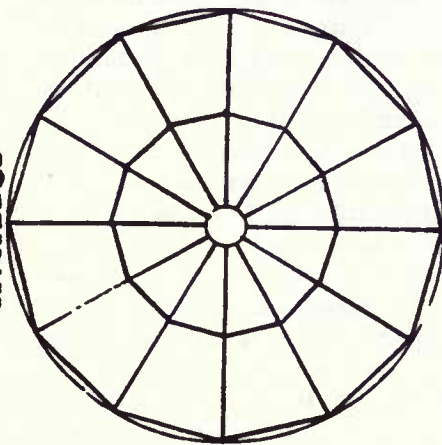


ELEVATION CUTAWAY  
120' A CROSS / 66' TOTAL HIGH

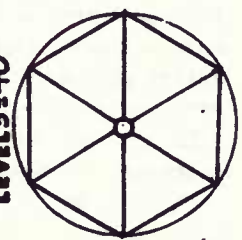
SCALE 1/4" = 10'



LEVEL 280'



LEVEL 340'



PLAN &  
SCALE 1/10" = 20'

# WE ARE ALL ONE. WHIO IRIU?

With light, color, motion, sound  
and a little McLuhanist theory,  
USCO tunes us in  
on the real vibrational universe.

by Naomi Feigelson

A continuous flow of images projected on the theater's cave-like walls assaults the audience. Flowers, larger than life, open and close, zooming in and out. The eyes, lips, face and shoulder of Jean Harlow; penguins, eagles, birds of prey. A volcano erupting. On the screen up front, a lion licks her cub. Over all this is a mixture of sound — animals roaring, Eleanor Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson, music from Bach, *Tristan*, and *Gone With the Wind*. In the semi-darkness, three musicians walk up to the stage with *yahrzeit* candles, sit a while in the light of the remembered dead, and sing about energy and love. They leave and the play, Michael McClure's *The Beard*, begins.

The prologue and theater design are by USCO (for US Company), a group of artists who live as a family and work in intermedia and environmental art. Combining lights, colors, moving images, sounds, and often human actors, intermedia is the end product of half a century of under and above-ground art. It shows the influence of psychedelic drugs, pop art, op art, junk art, kinetic sculpture, light sculpture, electronic music, and happenings. It has absorbed the perfumes of Oriental mysticism and the precepts of Buckminster Fuller, who emphasizes man's relation to environment, and Marshall McLuhan,

who describes technology as man's extension in time and space.

The prologue for *The Beard*, which lasted a full 35 minutes, excited responses ranging from delight and receptivity to boredom and even outrage. This was not too different from the effect of the play itself. During the pre-opening previews, producer Jim Walsh reported some anger in the audience during the prologue and occasional walkouts. At least one viewer asked if there was really going to be a play. She was afraid the prologue was "the whole thing."

USCO frequently does just part of the thing. For Norman Mailer's *Deer Park*, USCO devised an elaborate electronic toteboard which marked the passage of time and divided acts and scenes with a bell to suggest a boxing ring. As consultants to John Brockman Associates, the group has worked on mixed media sales meetings for Scott Paper Company, a Christmas lighting environment for Henri Bendel's and the East Coast's first psychedelic discotheque, *The World*, in Garden City, Long Island. These ventures have provided USCO with a living and the chance to develop and acquire new equipment.

But collaborations have drawbacks. The effect of an USCO production depends to a great extent on the audience's willingness to be drawn in. Ideally USCO should control the space, the program, and the viewer's state of mind. When it does the effect is spectacular, as it was at USCO's Riverside Museum show, which attracted so much attention that even *Life* mentioned it in a cover story about psychedelic art. USCO called it a Human Be-In, a coinage popularized by the organizers of the famed San Francisco Gathering of the Tribes, which took place several months later.

The Riverside Be-In was an environment where lights, music, painting, sculpture, all the elements invited the viewer to participate, to come in and meditate. USCO

wanted to get away from the usual museum experience of walking from one object to another. As spokesman Gerd Stern describes it, "We wanted a place where people could communicate more with themselves than with anyone else and in which there was a period of, in John Cage's terms, silence."

USCO turned one room of the museum into a light garden, where visitors could activate flowers made of lights by walking on floor switches. Inside a second room was a circular enclosure of painted cloth, called a cave because "that's where we're all from. We wanted to turn people back to their subconscious." Viewers came into the cave, lay down on a rotating couch, and contemplated the pictures of demons, gods, and humans painted on the ceiling and the walls all around them.

A third room was subsequently dubbed the Creation, because it sought to encompass the basics of life. It too was for meditation. In it were five nine-foot high paintings representing the planets in their orbits, the seven spheres, the Tree of Life, a male figure of Shiva, Hindu God of energy. His outflowing energy was symbolized by a central, pulsating light from which painted lines radiated. A dancing female, the Hindu Sakti, represented woman, with the light lines radiating out. In the center of the dimly lit room was a sandbox with a rotating light column. It passed the light to the paintings, illuminating them. A timer circuit lowered the lights every second minute. The other lights all flashed, pulsed. Over all was a tape of the original sound of the universe: "Om."

In McLuhan's terms, the spectators in that room were having a low definition experience: when individual details are not clearly delineated, the viewer becomes a participant, feeding himself back and forth into what he sees. In Stern's terms, the "input" was from spectator to experience, from person to painting. "I doubt if one out of 100 people who came to the exhibit saw the dancing Sakti in that painting," says Stern. "That doesn't matter because it worked. That Sakti was out there vibrating in the painting. Who cares if they're arms or legs? They're part of the vibrational universe."

The staff at the Riverside Museum was stunned at the show's reception. A small gallery far off the circuit, its exhibitions were generally more sedate, and counted five or six visitors a day—usually school children and teachers or middle-aged ladies—a crowd. Suddenly, USCO was bringing in teenagers and people in their early

twenties, and bringing them in by the hundreds. Many brought their lunch, settled down, and stayed for the day.

Gerd Stern believes that circuitry explains a large part of the show's effect. The key concepts are the computer terms "digital" and "analog." Digital experience involves a succession of discrete steps; analog experience refers to a continuous process. Flashing lights, going on and off, are digital phenomena. Pulsing lights are analogs. Stern credits Mike Callahan, another member of USCO, with turning the group on to the analog experience, which is more like what happens in the real vibrational universe. Before USCO, when Stern was working by himself, he used flashing lights. "It wasn't until Michael came along that I understood the whole contemporary preoccupation with whether a phenomenon was digital or analog, whether you had this organic process going or were always chopping things on and off. In electrical terms, the difference between digital and analog is a relationship basic to the last decade."

It is also part of the religious nature of the exhibit. If the viewer starts by forgetting the content, says USCO, and looks at what's happening as experience, he begins to see the religious reality that exists in the vibrational universe and in the nature of light. The reality is the metaphor.

Stern, who looks a bit like Allen Ginsberg, is USCO's bearded, bespectacled, long-haired guru. At 38 he has been in, around, and of most of the underground art movements of the last 20 years. He made the beat scene. He was a hippie long before Haight-Ashbury. A founder of Pacifica's first listener-sponsored radio station KPFA in Berkeley, he is a poet (two published volumes), a carpenter (he has a union card), a gold-mucker, film-maker, and kinetic sculptor.

Stern was just switching from written to concrete poetry when a friend gave him Marshall McLuhan's "Report to the National Association of Broadcasters," later expanded into *Understanding Media*. McLuhan's stress on the effect of the medium itself rather than its content influenced him enormously. "It took me on a long jump from poetry, to lights, sound, and film," he says.

At about this time Stern met Michael Callahan, USCO's 22 year-old hardware head. Mike, who had been experimenting with electronic music in high school, was then president of the San Francisco Tape Music Center, where he had designed their control

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(continued from page 35)

system. Along with Stern, Callahan made the jump from his groove into mixed media. Stern claims that the idea of hybridizing various media was made possible for them by the invention of Michael's circuitry, which allowed them to control, randomize, and program multi-channel operations.

The third founding member of USCO is Steve Durkee, whom Stern calls the visionary, architect, painter of the group. Durkee and Stern had been working together in New York since the early sixties. Durkee was responsible for most of the paintings in the Riverside show.

USCO's first performance, given in California, was called *Who R U?* It involved 64 people, one of whom was Michael McClure, and was an attempt to explore the mysteries of communication, both electronic and interpersonal. McClure and a number of other participants were placed in booths around a central auditorium. Their conversation was fed by loudspeakers into the various other booths, and into the auditorium as well, along with 18 channels of mixed media — sounds, films, and images.

In the beginning, claims Stern, they weren't too sure what they were doing. He adds that they were more strongly influenced by ideas at first "in terms of motivation for the performances. The materials have grabbed us more strongly as we've gone along."

Later group productions, like *Hubbub*, which USCO did for the 1965 Lincoln Center underground film festival, were less chaotic. *Hubbub*, which Stern's wife Judy, herself a weaver and graphics designer, describes as "a hard-driving performance all the way through," was a kind of programmed pandemonium. Using slides, films, sounds, etc., the emphasis was on frenzy — high decibel noises and frantic images. It was described by one critic as "an accumulation, not only of the senses that create the present, but also the past, all to be experienced simultaneously. One's life is accumulated and experienced in the same way." Another critic claimed the total effect was "stunning, almost to the point of physical impact upon the audience."

There are good reasons why USCO has made it as a communal art family

while so many other groups with similar pretensions have failed. For one thing, USCO started out as a group of artists and ended up a family, not the other way around. For another, the kind of work they do demands certain skills used in combination — in metalwork, electronics, electricity, kinetics. The nature of the mix requires that a group produce it. Finally, while they have as little patience with the hypocrisies of straight society as any other "hippie" group, they have an artistic point of view, a critical, philosophical approach to life, and a goal beyond today. They are a group of individuals and artists, each disciplined in his own craft, and all together they are on a work trip.

Stern, in fact, likes to define USCO as "a lot of us working together. It isn't trying to get out of names or responsibilities. It's not we who are anonymous, but our work. We're trying to get out of that pictures on the wall thing, that museum thing where people are like chickens, peering down to the left-hand corner to see who the artist is."

Their belief in anonymous art and group living as a social mode is conscious and deliberate. Stern rarely talks about it without reference to Marshall McLuhan or Amando Coomerswarmi, former curator of the Boston Museum. They agree with McLuhan that with television and "electronic tribalization," the world has shrunk to the dimensions of a global village. "We're going back to the more traditional society, where the craftsman does his work and never mind what his name is. If you went to Chartres when they were building the Cathedral," says Stern, "you wouldn't be likely to look up and say, 'Hey, that's Charlie who did that gargoyle on the left.'" On the other hand, he adds, "We don't go around saying 'No names. No names. No names.'"

USCO's headquarters are an old church and connecting house in Garnersville, New York. The church portion has been converted to a tabernacle, incorporated by the State of New York as a non-denominational church. It is open on Sunday and usually attracts a crowd, mostly teenagers. Inside, USCO has created a new environment from the rotating light column and around it five paintings from the Riverside Museum show. Also from the show is a piece of kinetic sculpture exhibited in California in 1963, a large yellow octagon, using the highway for a metaphor. It is called "Contact Is the Only Love." "Contact"

has sound circulating through eight speakers, neon lights, and flashing lights ranging from 480 flashes per minute to one. All the sounds and lights are putting across the messages "GO ON, GO ON, GO ON! TURN AHEAD, TURN AHEAD."

Some people never did get the message. The television reporter who interviewed Stern in front of the octagon insisted on calling it a Stop sign. Stern still marvels at it. "You've been imprinted for so many years with a small red Stop sign that a seven-foot yellow octagon which says "Turn Ahead, Go On, Go On," and is called "Contact is the Only Love" is perceived as saying 'Stop.'"

Anywhere from six to 30 members of the USCO family drift between Garnerville and Woodstock, New York, and Taos, New Mexico. Woodstock is the site of Maverick Systems, a company which Michael Callahan runs for manufacturing USCO's hardware. At the moment, USCO is working out another corporation scheme with a group of Harvard Business School students and professors, who want to market some of USCO's equipment.

Steve Durkee is in New Mexico with his wife and family, supervising the building of an USCO retreat. Although original plans for the retreat are quite grand, so far only one large adobe dome on 150 acres has been completed.

In a rather lengthy description of this community, USCO calls it

*... a spiritual center planned for construction in a remote area of the Southwest, U.S. ... free from the intense psychic vibrations of large energy centers. [It] is meant to accelerate/facilitate reintegration processes by tuning into elemental realities. ... Solux [a name since discarded] anticipates a radical change in current social structures, envisioning a cooperative, self-supportive multi-tribal union created for the release of love by spiritual awakening. ... The community will base some part of its economic structure on ... the hardware and software of current technol-*

*ogy ... It is not a matter of forms, rituals and ceremonies, but of acquiring discipline, developing a sense of perspective, and focusing awareness in real time. To find God is to come to one's own self.*

Collectively and individually USCO is hung up on light and its symbolic meanings, on the Kaballah and mysticism, on the divine geometry of living things and electrical phenomena. But as their flier on the retreat suggests, they are not seeking God or themselves through drugs. Some of them have made that scene and left it, choosing, as one put it, "other ways to get perspective on a mundane existence." Mike Callahan has never taken LSD, prefers liquor, and gets his vibrations from oscilloscopes. And Gerd Stern says: "I've been involved in the general world of drugs for about 20 years. People seeking revelation ... can find it there. But for relief and escape, hallucinations are unsatisfactory. The product is very low-grade and the claims made for it are not supported. I'm an old friend of Tim Leary's, but I don't see his life as being that beautiful or his being as that radiant. The chemical way is the most sophisticated way to get certain places, but there are simpler ways — in art, for instance, and science." Though the group does not condemn drugs, they are prohibited in the sanctuary.

While USCO is developing a group style and point of view, in matters of individual style, including dress, there seems to be no pressure to conform, even to each other. Gerd Stern, for example, is just as likely to show up in a yellow corduroy vest and pants with flowered shirt as in a \$200 Brooks Brothers suit, boots, and tennis socks. The latter outfit (minus footgear) was laid on him by John Brockman, the 26-year-old incorporator of Brockman Associates. John, who organized the Film Makers' Cinematheque, where he met Stern, is a short-haired, button down, conventionally turned-out whiz kid of the new technology.

One night, according to Brockman, he convinced Stern that anyone who lived

in as many worlds as Stern did might find more than one way to dress. (Gerd had just returned from Montreal, where he was talking to Expo '67 people from Philadelphia, where USCO is designing an overstimulation chamber for the Albert Einstein Hospital, and from Minneapolis, where they are setting up a museum guide for the Walker Art Gallery.) The next morning, according to Brockman, Stern walked out of Brockman's Central Park West apartment "with about \$1000 worth of my clothes, mostly on him. He had his beard trimmed and hair cut and went home to Garnersville. When he got there, his wife Judy was busy mopping the floor. It took about ten minutes before she recognized him."

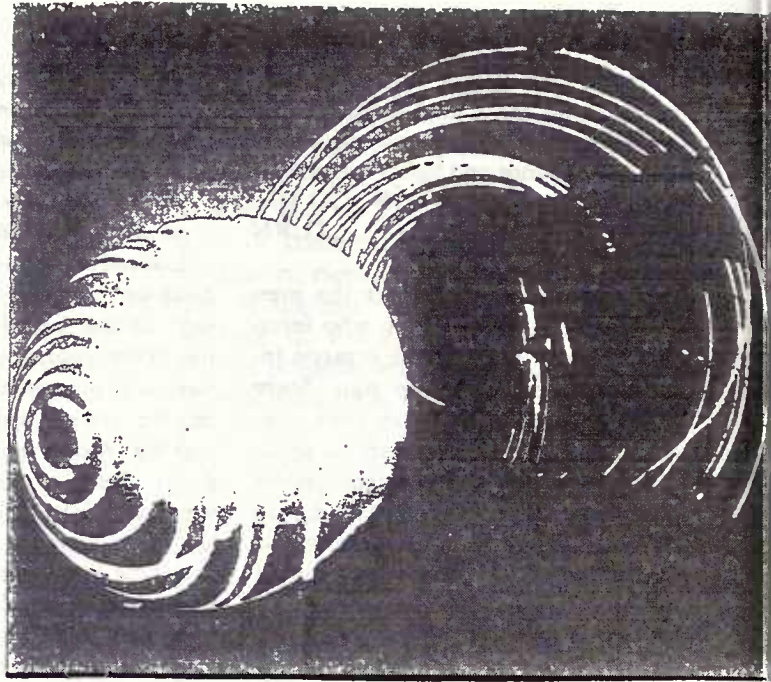
Although Mike Callahan grew up in Haight-Ashbury, he is no flower child. While Stern tends toward the flamboyant, Callahan is deceptively quiet. He dresses in a blue shirt and dark pants, wears ordinary plastic-rimmed glasses, and looks as straight as anyone from Middletown. According to Brockman, "Mike is in love with electronics." The romance started in childhood. His father, who is an electrician, remembers him dragging around an electric cord much as Linus drags around his blanket. Mike lives by himself, somewhere between Woodstock and Garnersville.

As a group, USCO has gone from the "you" of *Who R U* to the "we" of *We Are All One*. *We Are All One*, a line from the mystic Meher Baba, is the title of another USCO performance. Using slides, films, strobes, oscilloscopes, music, and a dancer, its theme is "the journey of being." It presents a series of visual and aural images, among them details from Bosch and Breughel, goblins, monsters, grotesques. The audience often sings along swaying to the music of "Turn, Turn, Turn." The performance ends with 10 minutes of total darkness, during which an "Om" tape is played.

Gerd Stern believes that the title expresses what USCO is all about. "It is very hard to sense at any one moment to what extent the message 'We Are All One' applies. At any moment the two of us or the 13 of us that live in the church may not be capable of that idea, in either living or working. But that is what we aim for. It becomes a question of human beings sharing time, of making the material productions of this world in an environment where community is possible."



# CRITIQUE



"Intermedia is the breeding ground of everything that will replace it." Above: Periscope sequence from *Black Zero* by Aldo Tambellini. Stroboscope, light machines, hand-painted slides. Photo by George Erlich. Below: Strobe Room at Environment II: Prisms, lens, water, light. Collaboration between USCO and sculptor Charles Ross. Architectural League, N. Y.

## Understanding Inter-media

### Passage Beyond Definitions

JUD YALKUT

Everything grows out of everything else. Op art is the crystallization of formal investigations into divine geometry, a continuous force in man's history of visualization. Kinetic art is an active step towards Inter-media, recalling motions in time to man's collective consciousness. Anything presented as a work of art that inspires the mind, emotions and senses with even a glimpse of the total awareness of conscious being could be termed Psychedelic art. These manifestations, together with Happenings and Events, have become the grass roots of an entirely new phenomenon, variously called Expanded Cinema (a term originating with film-makers), Mixed Media (not to be confused with traditional painting techniques) and Intermedia.

What is Intermedia? A glance at the myriad facets of 'expanding performing arts' in the *Film Culture—Expanded Arts* issue would give halt to any lexicographer. The very sense of the interpenetration of many forms of expression implies passage beyond definition. *Film Culture—Expanded Arts* includes "Happenings, neo-Baroque and neo-haiku theaters, expanded cinema, kinesthetic and acoustic theaters, events, readymades, puzzles, games, gags, jokes, etc." The 'etcetera' indicates the growing dimensions of an experiential experimentation requiring the greatest organic play. Approaches to Intermedia have been made from the avenues of musical composition, an area expanded by avant-garde composers like Nam June Paik, Takehisa Kosugi, Dick Higgins, Joe Jones, Ben Patterson, Yoko Ono, Tony Cox and La Monte Young, by the composition of pieces incorporating the other senses as well as the auditory. Dancers Carolee Schneemann, Merce Cunningham, Yvonne Rainer, Beverly Schmidt and Mary McKay have composed and participated in Inter-media-related events. Painters have presented pieces incorporating live action, slide and film projections (Robert Whitman, Aldo Tambellini, Brion Gysin, Al Hansen and Claes Oldenburg) as have slide-makers and photographers like Don Snyder, Jackie Cassen and Rudi Stern. Inter-media work has included Happening people from theatrical backgrounds (Ken Dewey), painting (Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts) and poets (Jackson MacLow, Gerd Stern, Emmett Williams and The Black Thumb and Something Else Presses). The use of multiple projection



techniques, with or without live interference patterns, is characteristic of not only the film-makers' approach to Intermedia (Ed Emshwiller, Takahiko Iimura, Jerry Joffen, Ben Van Meter, etc.), but also indicates the importance of the filmed image to our contemporary language. Most revealing of all the manifestations of this cross-pollination of the arts is the continuing emergence of groups of collabora-

tive artists and engineers like Experiments in Art and Technology (still in the state of coalescing), the Once group, Multimedia, and USCO. Such a compendium of diversified artists cannot avoid the confusion of the individual classifications and presupposes the emergence of a species of mixed-media renaissance man. Many of the artists mentioned, and others, have already transcended the boundaries of their original choices of expression.

The Total Theater concept embodied in the Intermedia trend is not new. It threads the fabric of art. Early experimenters who approached the superimposition of occurrences entered from the avenue of theater to find a reinforcing focus for their dramatic continuums. Walter Gropius wrote of his 'Total Theater' design for Erwin Piscator in 1926, ". . . by using a system of spot-lights and film projectors, transforming walls and ceiling into moving picture scenes, the whole house would be animated by three-dimensional means instead of by the 'flat' picture effect of the customary stage. . . . If it is true that the mind can transform the body, it is equally true that structure can transform the mind."

Moholy-Nagy postulated a new theater ('Theatergestalter') operating with "simultaneous, synoptical and synacoustical reproduction of thought (with motion pictures, phonographs, loudspeakers)." The Bauhaus experiment, embracing the entire range of visual arts, is archetypal, related to the artist group communities of today. Their commitment to "seeking a new synthesis of art and modern technology" is concomitant with the present need for beautiful natural functioning between man and his environment. Collaborative efforts by engineers and artists, nurtured by mutual understanding, are required for the integration of man's total vision.

Intermedia is the breeding ground of everything that will replace it. Out of technological and aesthetic interaction will come the transforming devices of our cognitive tools. The sheer bulkiness of today's equipment (film projectors, light machines, electronic equipment) dictates the format of present intermedia performances. The difficulties of transportation, the vast soft-ware of image-retaining celluloid, the shape and nature of any given theater environment, may all be changed with growing technology. Later Holography, now in its Daguerreotype-like primitive states, makes possible the dream of creating in three dimensions with light. The holographic plate, with its ability to retain and recreate countless images, may well replace the strips of frames in motion picture film. An entire projected presentation may be contained within a small rectangle of material. The development of laser projection devices with infinite scanning positions would move forms in space for long durations from this single photographic plate.

The environmental aspects of Intermedia stress its integrativeness with human life patterns. Each individual will be able to program by his own sequence of simultaneities, to spend as much time as he likes in one situation or another at any time he chooses. Man's home may become his own programmable vibratory environment. Bedrooms programmed to produce sound sleep, living-entertaining areas and playrooms, complete communication channels with the outside world, and ecstatic meditation rooms are within the realm of realization. Timothy Leary has said, "We are gods; let us live in the surroundings of gods." We are like the children in Ray Bradbury's *The Velds*, in a nursery which brings to full realization our wildest imaginings. The programming of beneficial vibratory food to man's nervous system is hence of vital importance. As Gerd Stern says, ". . . in terms of understanding humanity and understanding the possible relationships with God, the way is not either by looking in a mirror or by looking through a window, but by being able to see in the window the mirror and in the mirror the window. Then the reality becomes possible."

# Intermedia Systems: Cinderella Sweeping Up on Desolation Row

By PETER BEREN

Goethe died with two words on his lips: "More Light." That comes closer to defining the essence of Intermedia Systems Corporation than a library. In the early Sixties, environmental, multi-image art was an embryonic urge in the minds of a few creators. Revitalize the dead museums where works hung like signed sausages to be displayed and not eaten. An art form more attuned to this culture and its electronic nervous system.

The media people began to come together: poets, painters and technicians with a childlike interest in machines and gadgets. Kinetic Art. Not since the Social Realism of the Thirties was there a trust which promised so much for art in its relation to the culture. Shelley: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." Psychedelic art. Mind expansion. Shows were held in the San Francisco Art Museum and at the Riverside in New York. The culture zapped from both flanks.

The mass media began to pick up on it. Because the artists could not sign their live, ongoing performances and had no interest in personal notoriety, they called themselves: USCO — Company of Us. The art world was exploding with pop and op and now kinetic, environmental art: the media called them a "TRIBE" and they were famous and cocktail party chic. Imagine, Virginia, all those massive machines, slides, visual, audio, happenings, kinetic theater, all for Art, how marvy.

But they moved on. The media freaks turned to the art form that lives best in a total environment with its audience — Rock music. For example, they created environments for New York's Cheetah and Murray the K's World. The World was located in Roosevelt Field, the same spot Lindbergh had taken off from for Orly Airport in 1927. Lindbergh inaugurated the first step in global consciousness. USCO was involved in spiritual expansion within the global village.

USCO crossed additional boundaries in its anomalous art. For example, they combined painting, theater, sculpture, slides, movies, computers and a galaxy of seemingly contradictory forms of expression. Similarly, iron-clad distinctions about art and its relationship to its audience were also erased. When they felt they had completed a good show or a good environment, they characterized it as a "good mix."

Gerd Stern, originally an old time book poet North Beach beat, then media poet: college dropout and seven short years later

Creative Director of Intermedia and an Associate in Education at the Harvard Graduate school.

USCO presented its energy charged art form in Museums, institutions and discotheques. Every time we walk down the street, our senses are bombarded by millions of inputs, but our minds discriminate and close out much of our environment. The same thing is true of our relations with others. USCO provided a simple switch function, they turned people on. They overloaded senses by creating multi-leveled experiences and made people realize the extent to which they were censoring the information that was flooding their hearts and minds daily.

Sign on media poet Michael Callahan's wastebasket: Data Reduction System.

These early USCO projects demonstrate an important facet of Intermedia Systems. Every child lives in a universe of wonder and discovery that is gradually diminished as he grows older. USCO attempted to give people back the childhood grace of their senses. This relationship to the universe is one of the most natural of man's riches. To give this primitive gift back to mankind, USCO utilized the most sophisticated techniques civilization could produce. The same is true of Inter-

media Systems, only on a larger scale.

Intermedia's "family" still maintains their original country home, an abandoned church in Garnerville, N.Y.

In the museums and discotheques they turned people on... momentarily. What happened after the audience left the kinetic environment? Would the old blindness gradually set in? The art form was still in a developmental stage, but USCO knew instinctively that other modes were needed to open up people's heads. They had a road show, "WE ARE ALL ONE," and toured the country. Then they grew, making their biggest transition, they became Intermedia Systems Corp.

George Litwin became the Corporation president. Dr. Litwin, Assistant Professor of Organizational Behavior at the Harvard School of Business, Faculty Research Associate at the School of Education and prolific author, was interested primarily in organizational climates. Under his directorship Intermedia became interested in the problems of Corporate America. One of the problems was to help people inhabit their "organizational climates" more easily. Intermedia developed the concept of the "Media Report," first used at a Scott Paper Company sales meeting. Executives

see their interaction on film, salesmen learn how they are relating to people, not "clients," not objects described in a book or statistics... a chart. Each company is treated as an organism with its own ecological system. The concept permits an in-progress picture that provides an emotional learning experience, not just a summary at the end of the Quarter. Overreactions to Intermedia as a Corporate Hippocrates come in basically two extremes. Some "liberal" executives greet them as White Knights who can solve all of their company's problems with the waving of an electronic wand, while more traditional types view their procedure as tripe and cling to methods more apt to be found in Dickens than McLuhan. The actuality resides in the simple fact of moving a very rigid part of our culture, its petrified bureaucracies, more close to the second half of the Twentieth Century.

Intermedia Systems is also concerned with another anachronistic part of our culture, our educational system. Whether they are dealing with America's corporations, or its educational structure, Intermedia is ultimately concerned with giving people easier access to their full inheritance. Formal education often depletes more of a child's imagination

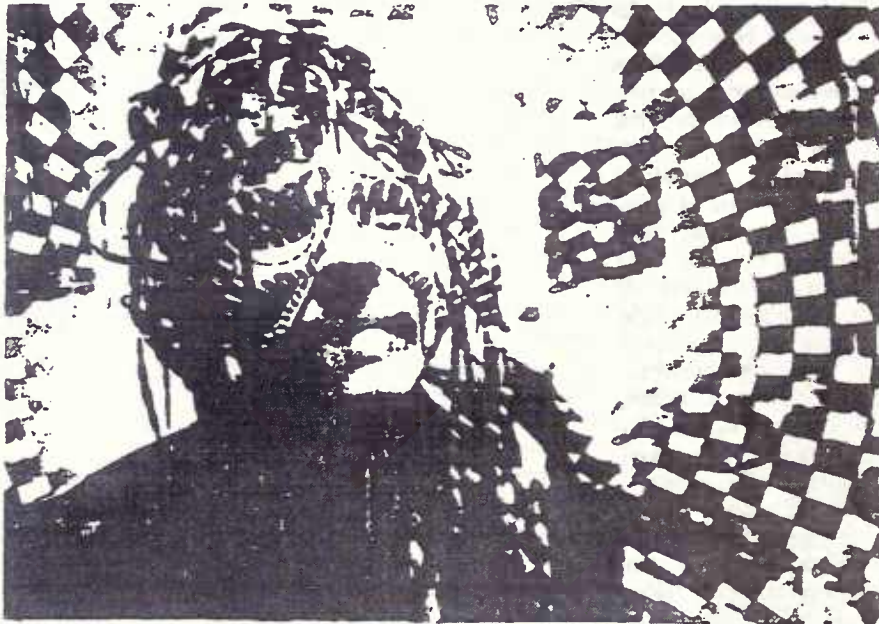
than any other force. Learning, ideally, should be part of a total environmental experience, not a fragmented part of a child's world. Intermedia is developing ways to create and integrate such environments within our present educational structure. Intermedia people have been invited to participate in this year's National Educational Association meeting on audio-visual techniques. They are the pioneers who will enable my children and my children's children to have their full inheritance as human beings, not just clogs in a technetronic society.

Intermedia is also currently engaged in developing an uninhabited West Indian island. East Caicos, part of the British West Indies, will be the site of the implementation of a centuries' old dream.

Man and his technology will attempt to construct a perfect environment. The natives who will move to East Caicos Island from neighboring islands will have technology, according to Intermedia, without disruption of their folkways. The plans, obviously, are exceedingly ambitious. Surveys of the Island's resources have been conducted. A viable economic base aimed at supporting the life styles of the inhabitants, not the enrichment of a foreign imperialistic power or individual plutocrat, is being mapped out. Fishing, farming and other activities are being planned, the concept at Intermedia is that in maintaining itself, the island community will learn about itself. Land at "Monastery Point" has been set aside as a sanctuary, a spiritual retreat for individuals or groups. A City, "Harbour Town," a place for replenishing physical and emotional resources, is also being planned. The only buildings on the island at present are the rotting remains of colonialism's guano boom. The ecology of the island is being carefully considered. Nature's gifts will be utilized and enhanced, not exploited and destroyed. The island community will have variety and vitality, growing out of its recognition and accommodation of a host of different life styles.

The Caicos Islands share other distinctions. Columbus made landfall there in 1492 and John Glenn splashed down nearby in 1962. Coincidence?

Intermedia Systems, then, is a new type of corporation, a living contradiction in our present vocabulary. A corporation born in art, aiming at expanding horizons in business and education. When the Navy approached Intermedia with the problem of making the environment on Atomic submarines more livable, Intermedia replied that some environments needed to remain nightmarish and turned the job down. During the Sixties, they grew enormously from the original "tribe" within a 'Beld that is still being born. Their potential in future decades seems to be uncharitable. Some grey flannelled MacNamara will shudder at the sacrifice of using computers in holy work, while others will realize that Intermedia must be the pattern for Corporate America, if the nation is to return to its natural inheritance as a





## Media in the Market

Seven years ago Gerd Stern, one of the founders of USCO—the “Us Company,” pioneers in mixed media—staged an extravaganza at the San Francisco Museum of Art that plugged 64 live performers plus spectators into a barrage of simultaneous electronic messages sent to the eye and the ear through television, telephone, audio tape, slide projections and more. On the seventh anniversary of that spectacular day, Stern recently performed in another way, before conservatively dressed stockholders in a company he partly owns, Intermedia Systems of Cambridge, Mass.

It was probably the world's first multimedia stockholders' meeting but, compared with USCO's previous electronic free-for-alls, it was tame stuff: three screens, slides and gentle rock music—nothing more. Stern himself, once addicted to denims and sandals, is natty and neat. “I didn't wear a tie for fifteen years before Intermedia,” he says. When it came time to talk, he did not shout the old USCO message, *WE ARE ALL ONE*; he talked about new products, expanding markets, invested capital.

The fact is that USCO has gone public. Its core members—Stern, engineer Michael Callahan, artist Robert Dacey and psychologist Gunther Weil—are now attempting to market on a broad scale the multimedia avant-garde techniques that once blitzed esoteric lofts, galleries and museums. In this sense, they are pioneering again, making a move with wide sociological implications. USCO's associates in Intermedia are all solid businessmen. One of them is Ruben Gorewitz, a wizard at the financial organization of the avant-garde, who specializes in saving the fiscal lives of preoccupied geniuses such as Martha Graham, John Cage and Merce Cunningham. Another, Dr. George Litwin, left a full-time post at the Harvard Business School shortly after he met Stern. “I could tell right away that USCO had a fantastic ability to create intense experiences through multimedia,” he says, “and I was sure we could market those insights to both education and industry.”

**Award:** After a year of haggling with the Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington (over the precise meaning of a term like “multimedia experience”), Intersystems went over-the-counter in November 1969 and sold \$600,000 worth of stock. Installed in an old theater building in the heart of Cambridge, Intersystems is now selling both its products (a line of low-cost, audio-visual programming units) and itself. “For a thousand dollars,” Stern tells his investors, “we will make a media survey of a plant or a school or a church and recommend what to program as well as how.”

The investors are cautiously optimistic. They share Litwin's belief that the future belongs to communication and education that hits the senses as well as the mind. They are encouraged by the award

of an important contract to Intermedia by the New England Power Co.—to consult on a multimedia showcase for the public at its new power plant near Beaver Dam, in Massachusetts. Only the USCO group has reservations. “There was less hassle in the art world,” one of them says, “or even in building discothèques.”

Stern himself has no regrets. “The galleries and museums never supported us the way New England Power does. That's the major project of my life. I'm going to visualize the country's electric network in that display, showing how it brings us all together, which is what I've been trying to do from the start.” Stern is attempting to realize one of the strongest directions in contemporary art—away from the cloistered gallery and the precious object toward strategies that directly affect the world. “I don't care whether I'm called an ‘artist’ or not,” he says. “All I care about is the work, creating an experiential flow of information, making a physical impact.”

November 30, 1970



One-stroke Bodhidharma: Sly spirit

# Arkitel

By Robert Fomares

The street is paved in asphalt. To the left of the street is a concrete sidewalk, scored by thin, line-like depression perhaps two-and-a-half feet apart. These lines are at right angles to the flow of the sidewalk. To the right of the pothole is a sidewalk; it is difficult in the dim light of night to discern any more than its lightness and its length. A large wall lurks beyond. In the dark is difficult to tell precisely what color this wall is, but it may be drab olive or gray. The large banks of lights on poles that tower above the wall suggest that in all probability a stadium slope (deceitful giant!) behind the wall, which is directly ahead, past the street. The wall runs parallel to the street both to the left and to the right.

On one of the poles there is a sign. The pole is sunk into the concrete on the corner of two streets' intersection.

There is white lettering on a dark background, in the only faint illumination that nighttime provides; the color of the background remains uncertain, but it may be blue. The lettering spells "Brookline Avenue." The concrete of the sidewalk is stippled and rough to the touch, to the sight. The curve of the sidewalk follows to the left the curve of the road. The sign says "Lansdowne Street." There is a large structure to the right. It is a stadium, but the inside is hidden from view by a large wall. To the left is a white stucco wall. Now there is a door in the wall on the left.

The Ark is located at 15 Lansdowne Street, in Boston, opposite Fenway Park. It is a former garage, now leased by Environmental Arts, Inc., and redesigned by Intermedia, Inc. of Cambridge. The link between the Ark and Intermedia is rather close, (though not financially), since Gerd Stern, one of the founders of USCO, is both Creative Director of the latter and on the board of the former. USCO is the pioneer communal art & technology group which designed "The World," first of the multi-media discotheques.

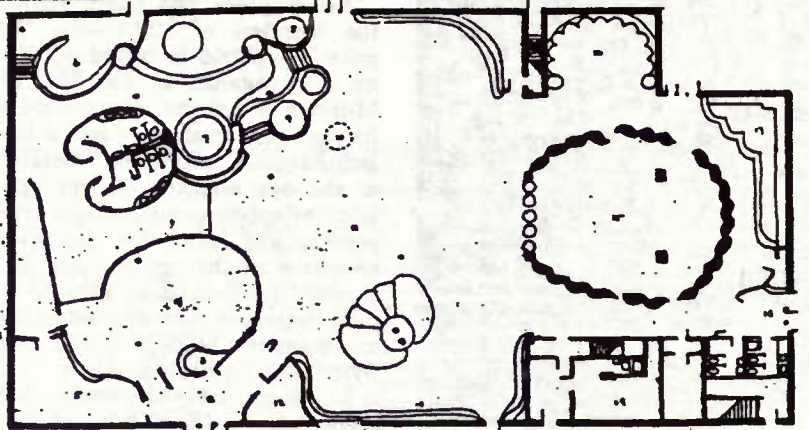
I would like to call The Ark a discotheque, a club, a multi-media environment; but basically it is a womb—a refuge. Or a tank. Precisely because it is multi-media, it is a potential engulfment—either a womb or a mouth. The weakness of the environment is that it is so mild that its totalitarian potential is not exploited. I have been to The Ark three times and was never engulfed mouthlike; forcefully, in terror. More often, I responded as a fetus. And once, when the Grateful Dead were on, the specific multi-media environment that can be had only at The Ark was irrelevant. What is important here is that, with so effort, I could ignore it. I don't mind this, frankly, because I was wrapped up in the music, but it points out the mawkish-like quality of the Ark's environment and the fact that, under ordinary circumstances, it is not as dominant a feature as the publicity might imply. Primarily because the Ark is a business, flexibility is the keynote of its operation. The initial capitalization of \$300,000 has been used up and now the Ark is on its own. It has to make money. Since money is made primarily on rock-discotheque activities, it is to these that the Ark is devoted on week-ends. But during the rest of the week, more "artistic" events can be presented, like the San Francisco Mime Troupe, and the Living Theater, and the Manhattan Concert, all of which

have appeared at the Ark. Presumably, more ambitious use of the technical facilities is also possible. The potential is certainly there. In a way, the area of design and audio-visual technology is the most impressive aspect of the Ark as a place. The Ark is definitely the most technologically competent multi-media caperium in Boston.

The old parking garage has been transformed by curved walls (white to receive projections), variations of floor level, ramps, and partitioning into an interesting, sometimes surprising (to the first-time visitor), frame for life in the Ark. Freedom and flexibility. In the Ark, one can wander around, in and out of several different environments; one is not trapped in a single rectilinear room whose qualities of sound and light are constant throughout. Not only are there different levels, but entirely separate rooms and sections are incorporated in the design. The "tent" area is essentially circular, with multiple hidden entrances, filled with projections and out of sight of the stage. There is another room lighted only by a luminous mural under black lights. This is the room where "body painting" occurs (hands and faces, day-glo paint).

A refreshment counter is located far at one end of the building and past the "tent." The core of the design is the large main room, with its sectioned, movable, leaf-shaped stage and "leaning" walls on the perimeter. These walls lean out slightly; at buttock-height there is a ledge for resting weary backs. The stage, under ordinary circumstances, faces the largest part of the room, and behind it, the cluster of raised dance floors and leaning "modules," mostly circular in shape, hold anywhere from five to thirty-five people. At the extreme left rear corner of the building is the "traffic pit," as yet incomplete, which is about ten feet lower than the floor at that point. The "traffic-pit" will be furnished with foam rubber mats and decorated with automobile and motorcycle sculpture, traffic signs, and projections of road imagery.

A great deal of the Ark's flexibility derives from its extraordinarily complex audiovisual hardware. Run off Intermedia's elaborate DC-9 control system, at least fifty visual sources, both slide and film projectors cover practically every vertical surface with a constantly shifting collage of light, color, and image. The DC-9 can control eight motion and eight lamp functions: forward, reverse, stop, and start; on, off, dim and variable time base alternates, dissolves, and pulses. Lamp pulsing can be input off live or recorded music. The DC-9 is ordinarily run by a punch-



Ark Floor Plan... 1-main entrance 2-center lobby 3-distant booth 4-main lobby 5-main room 6-"traffic pit" 7-main door 8-entrance down floor 9-entrance down floor 10-distant booth/control console 11-main down floor 12-entrance of office 13-band platform 14-"leaning" walls 15-projection/dance floor 16-entrance 17-entrance 18-auxiliary entrance and lobby 19-band room

of paper tape program, but it is possible to manually over-ride any or all of the program. To date, because the Ark is not completed, the full variety of effects possible has not been utilized; in fact, the same program has been in use since the January opening; the result is the subdued quality of the light show.

The Ark's sound system is nothing short of incredible—1400 watts with 1/2% distortion, amazing frequency response. Such a system can make an entirely fresh experience of hearing a record one already owns. Let me quote from the prospectus of Time\*, the original name chosen for the Ark:

"Recent findings indicate that high-decibel ratings used by rock groups and discotheques can result in permanent damage to the ear. The system we plan will provide a pervasive surround rather than an intensive directional signal."

This "surround" effect makes it possible to hear the music (especially live music) everywhere, in all sections, even the "traffic pit" without the necessity of being in front of the stage. Indeed, it is possible, with the Ark's sound system, to produce different qualities of sound in the separate sections; for instance, the "tent" area.

"All musicians using electronic instruments will plug their pre-amp stages through the house system, giving the booth complete control over volume, balance, vocal-instrumental mix. Multi-channel capability will be provided for live and recorded programs, plus sub-systems for localized electronic, acoustic, pre-recorded live, natural and distorted sound."

Especially interesting here is the set-up whereby musicians plug into the house system. Although they still use their own sound equipment located on the stage, their output can in some ways be coordinated better with the light show.

More important, they can be recorded on the Ark's excellent equipment. This is a plan that has not yet been effected; eventually every group that plays at the Ark will be given a recording of its performance. Given the technical quality of such a recording under such conditions each group will in effect walk off with a possible "live" album.

There is more to the Ark than the equipment. A house is not a house, etc. While the design of the

Ark contributes greatly to its atmosphere of freedom, its human policy is really just the natural outcome of the small community that operates it and pretty much "lives" there. They are especially enlightened in regard to musicians. I have already mentioned the plan to give tapes to all the bands that play there. Bands are also encouraged to dig Boston through help with getting hotel rooms and by being provided with a large private dressing room and lots of beer (much better than the Unicorn and the Ten Party).

A true illustration: Katrina hires the rock band: she called Otis Spann, the great blues piano player in Chicago to ask him to play at the Ark. Otis didn't have the "brand" to get to Boston, so the Ark sent him the money, and he drove across half the country to the Ark. Once here in Boston, Katrina helped him line up a place to stay. He played a couple of very well-received gigs at the Ark, and then Katrina started calling around to line up a tour for him. His old agent just didn't even think of sending him out solo; he had to go with some name, like Muddy Waters. Finally, Katrina found someone who dug it—y'know—and this agent sent Otis to England for an SRO concert. And before he'd been sitting in Chicago without a job.

But even the local bands fare well. The groups that George Papadopoulos of the Unicorn would see between sets and pay in "exposure" get paid at the Ark. In addition, rehearsal space and time is provided free to local groups.

This attitude and program may well do more for Boston as a music city than anything Dick Summer ever thought of.

A few weeks ago, a "bust benefit" was held to help out those arrested recently for drug possession. Ramways often come in for help—at any hour. The "Devil's Disciples," the biggest New England cycle commune, are special friends of the Ark. They act as the security force; to some degree, the "traffic pit" exists for their edification, and in their honor. When I was there to see the Grateful Dead, even the policemen were smiling, joking, and enjoying themselves as much as anyone—just like Eric Burdon (!) said. Of course, especially on week-ends, especially if a group has gotten a lot of AM promotion, a lot of up-tight suburbanites and jocks show up. But they are

welcome, welcome; everybody is welcome at the Ark.

There are more problems. The basic one, in terms of both multi-media artistic exploration and freedom, is the fact that the Ark is a commercial venture. Thus, it is subject to the law and regulation (by actual presence!) of police. One cannot smoke grass, ball, get washed, or—mercy! go naked. Freedom is certainly limited, in other words. As far as the multi-media exploration goes, there are basically two schools of thought that I run across. Stu Viockler, of Intermedia, is big on "content," i.e., he concerns himself with what is in the picture and how different pictures go together to "teach" (and entertain too, certainly). This content consciousness is a natural reflection of Intermedia's basic involvement in education. Jack Bernstein, advertising director of the Ark, but also a technical man with an MIT background, represents the "physiology" school, or the "form" school. In this case, the form of the light effects is calculated on the physiological properties of the eye. Flicker rates, alpha pulses, electronic music, sounds based on properties of the ear—this is the totalitarian multi-media environment that I mentioned earlier; the "content" directed environment results generally, I think, in the type of low-key show that the Ark now produces. The physiological program, on the other hand, is non-commercial in the extreme. It could only be done for the few people who would want it and who would be fully aware of what they would be getting into.

Another, less abstract problem, is simply that the Ark is not finished. It opened in January, several months ahead of schedule; to this date, the sound system is not complete, the visual matrix is not in full operation, and the "traffic pit" has not been finished. It is, therefore, really impossible to justly judge the Ark. With its drawbacks, the Ark is still the most ambitious entertainment spot in Boston. Remember, it is commercial, and it is entertainment; don't be misled! But with its policy of presenting lesser "draws" during the week and its flexible technical facilities, there is a great deal of promise here, especially sometime in the summer, when it will be completed, and energy can flow into development and creation rather than into mere building.

FEBRUARY 7, 1971

# Boston Sunday Globe

## The multi-media thing

By Deckle McLean  
Photos by Gilbert Friedberg

**'a blurring of the lines  
between psychology,  
business, art  
— and some other things'**



Gerd Stern, president of Intermedia

*Mass cultural communications is a basic industry, as basic as oil, steel, and transportation, in its way. Developing along with it, supporting it, and subservient to it, is an organized network of functions that are creative, administrative, propagandistic, educational, recreative, political, artistic, economic and cultural. Taken as a whole this enterprise involves what (C. Wright) Mills called the cultural apparatus. Only the state cannot see that whoever controls the cultural apparatus . . . also controls the destiny of the United States in everything in it."*

Harold Cruse, 1967.

□

*was trying to tell her about the Intermedia Systems Corporation, and since I liked*

her, I really wanted to explain it — a tactile thing I wanted to touch her with information, any information. But I was up against my old ambivalence about practitioners of media consciousness, and so I sidestepped back and forth over that line of boredom and interest; failing to get the message across and wishing I'd chosen some other subject. The land of the disciples of Marshall McLuhan can alternately seem preposterous and essential; but the terrain is so soft and currently so verbally inaccessible, that it is difficult to determine who is talking nonsense in it, and who is not.

So I said to her it's a corporation formed by some old multi-media artists, with some businessmen, to sell some things. Like what? Well, audiovisual equipment for example, for schools and businesses; they make a lot

of gadgets themselves. They also sell techniques and skills to people who want to do presentations for advertising or publicity, or for theater. And they have a recording studio.

At this point I could see I was getting nowhere, so I dropped a few electro-technological terms that the Intermedia people had dropped on me dissolve units, 16 track, multi-channel equipment. She just looked at me. And what could I do but just look at her. Then, determined to jar loose the conversation, I fashioned one of those foul nuggets of pop journalism; I said, "Let's say it's the post-psychedelic nitty-gritty." Quickly adding, to impress, "the people in the corporation are pretty interesting; one of them was studying with Leary and Alpert in the early '60s during the first drug experiments, and another guy introduced McLuhan to his publisher."

After a bit, we left the subject.

*"No society has ever known enough about its actions to have developed immunity to its new extensions or technologies. Today we have begun to sense that art may be able to help provide such immunity. . . The artist picks up the message of cultural and technological challenge decades before its transforming impact occurs. He then builds models or Noah's arks for facing the change that is at hand . . . In the electric age there is no longer any sense in talking about the artist's being ahead of his time. Our technology is also ahead of its time, if we reckon by the ability to recognize it for what it is. To prevent undue wreckage in society, the artist tends now to move from the ivory tower to the control tower of society."*

Marshall McLuhan, 1965

"Somebody said, nothing artists are doing can be shown in galleries." Michael Callahan, technical director. Intermedia Systems Corporation.

□

TEN years ago Gerd Stern was a poet. He still is but when he spoke of poetry a few weeks ago it was in terms of a mixed media design for the New England Power Company. The electric company wanted a display to help tourists at its new Bear Swamp power reservoir near North Adams understand what was going on. Intermedia won the contract from a field that included some "very professional conventional companies." "That says a lot about the climate today," remarked Stern. The display, called "the six minute day" because it condenses 24 hours of the reservoir's activity into six minutes of flickering and simultaneity, is, said Stern, "a kind of a poem." It is also, one might add, an example of Intermedia's software services.

"Software" is one of the things Intermedia does, or sells. Software is techniques, or really, total conceptualizations to handle or solve practical problems, in this case, the problems of coordinating images, sound and architecture to convey information. "Hardware" is another of Intermedia's enterprises. That is electronic hardware, the equipment you use and create in applying the software. The Bear Swamp project requires both software and hardware from Intermedia. When WGBH requested a rear screen projection device to point its cameras at, it was asking for hardware. But when Arthur D. Little sent its audio-visual people to the Intermedia Institute for training, it was requesting software. One of the characteristics that marks Intermedia as unique is that it is probably the only hardware producer staffed by people from the arts. There are some other roughly comparable software



Gunther Weil, recording director

outfits, like Raindance in New York.

STERN, 40 years old and now president of the corporation — it went public in November 1969 — has spent the past decade developing multi-media art. Most of the time with an art-technology cooperative he helped form, USCO, which for many years worked out of a church basement in Garnerville, New York, on the Hudson. Long ago, Stern worked for an ad agency. He dropped advertising for poetry, and then, after encountering McLuhan before most of us did (in 1960 John Cage, the clang-clang composer, gave him an early mimeographed draft of what became Understanding Media) took to the so-called artistic application of electronic technology.

"When we were beginning," he says, "art was the only place where we could get a good reception. The rest of society was frozen for a long time. But now that it's thawed, the place to be is outside art. There is some kind of sad romantic thing about the art world. It's re-

moved; and after you produce something, it's dead. But in business and education, what you do is absorbed and recycled and keeps moving."

THOUGH he is relatively unheard of, Stern can be assessed as a substantial influence on the past decade. USCO was probably the first group to put the principle of sensory bombardment to work. In 1962, 3 and 4 it took "total environment" shows on tour, joined some of them to lectures by McLuhan; and at least to some observers, thereby instigated that wave of be-ins, hippies and rock shows that has moved steadily toward the social middle. It is safe to say that USCO got in on the ground floor. The first multi-media discotheque, The World, in New York, was its work; and served notice in the mid-sixties, that the media artist was not far from commerce, entertainment and money, or rather, that from the media standpoint, such categorization is pointless.

□

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"The existence of the hierarchy of power has been largely neglected by humanistic thinkers because it does not conform to the ideal of man. But an ordered society can only admit the equality of all men in fields other than those which determine the hierarchy of power at any particular time. The establishment of religious equality was only possible at the Reformation because political power had displaced religious power and the various sections of the community had accepted their places in the new political hierarchy. Similarly political equality could be realized during the nineteenth century in communities where financial and economic elements already effectively determined the hierarchy of power. The overthrowing of an old social system from within is only possible for those who can call to the aid a new principle for the organization of power."

L.L. Whyte, *The Next Development in Man*, written 1941-1943.

FOR the sake of sport, we can paraphrase and ask a question here: what equality is being realized during the late 20th Century in communities where media elements already effectively determined the hierarchy of power? And to see where it takes us, let's consider:

It's not that Marx was wrong, only that the world used him for its own purposes and then didn't wait for him to prove himself; in the East he served as a device for social capitalization while in the West he was eclipsed by the unforeseen; the Marxian revolution has already been accomplished by technology?

□

DR. Gunther Weil says he got involved in USCO, which became, or is, Intermedia, because he was interested in psychological tolerances of multi-media stimulation. Now he lives in an environment of constant amplification: he manages the corp-

ration's recording studio on Newbury Street. The studio itself means something, the first big league recording facility in Boston, signalling again what has already become a quiet migration, the filtering northeast of creative people who find New York uninhabitable. The motion became noticeable among film makers several years ago.

# Presented at a Stern

Weil is still a psychologist and insists that he "can't afford to lock himself in the basement of the studio over here." He says, "It's just that I've got to get this thing off the ground." He has taught at Harvard and Brandeis—he's the one who was with Leary and Alpert at Harvard — and now teaches part time at Boston College, appropriately a course earmarked "psychology of media".

to come to consultants. Of course they don't look like but though I'm committed to it. But if you're in here; let me stay for five minutes in the eye of the storm. I catch on to the honest and intuitive. Actual work away from the studio is some way supposed to be

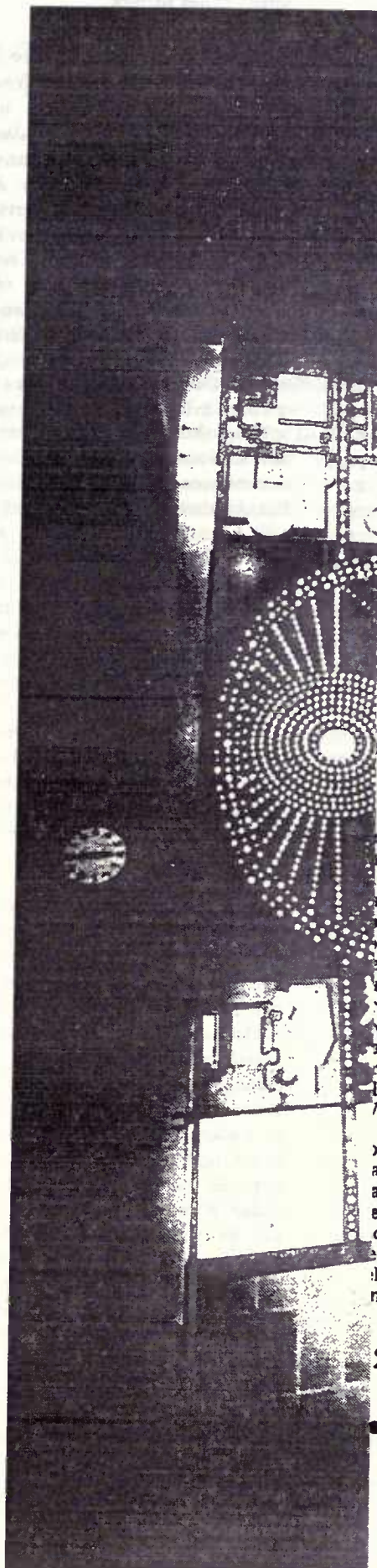
"IN the different tolerances to stimulation," he suggests, "one factor that comes to mind is the age factor, but that's not the only one. Older generations, now, are less tolerant to increased sound levels: and multimedia presentations with three images are enough for them. Any more images and they start to get confused and don't enjoy it. But generally people are more open to simultaneous information and presentations of material in a non-linear way. Take the younger people working in the studio. They've grown up with a tremendous amount of media stimulation. Their whole lives have been built around the television set and the record player. Their experience has propelled them into the technical end of it. And they're acutely sensitive to sound and to what can be done with it."

I asked him about the bits that linked the goings-on in society. His answer was to McLuhan: the word "medium" is "People prefer to work in small flexible groups. There's a disorientation towards sensualization."

II

7

CAMERAS



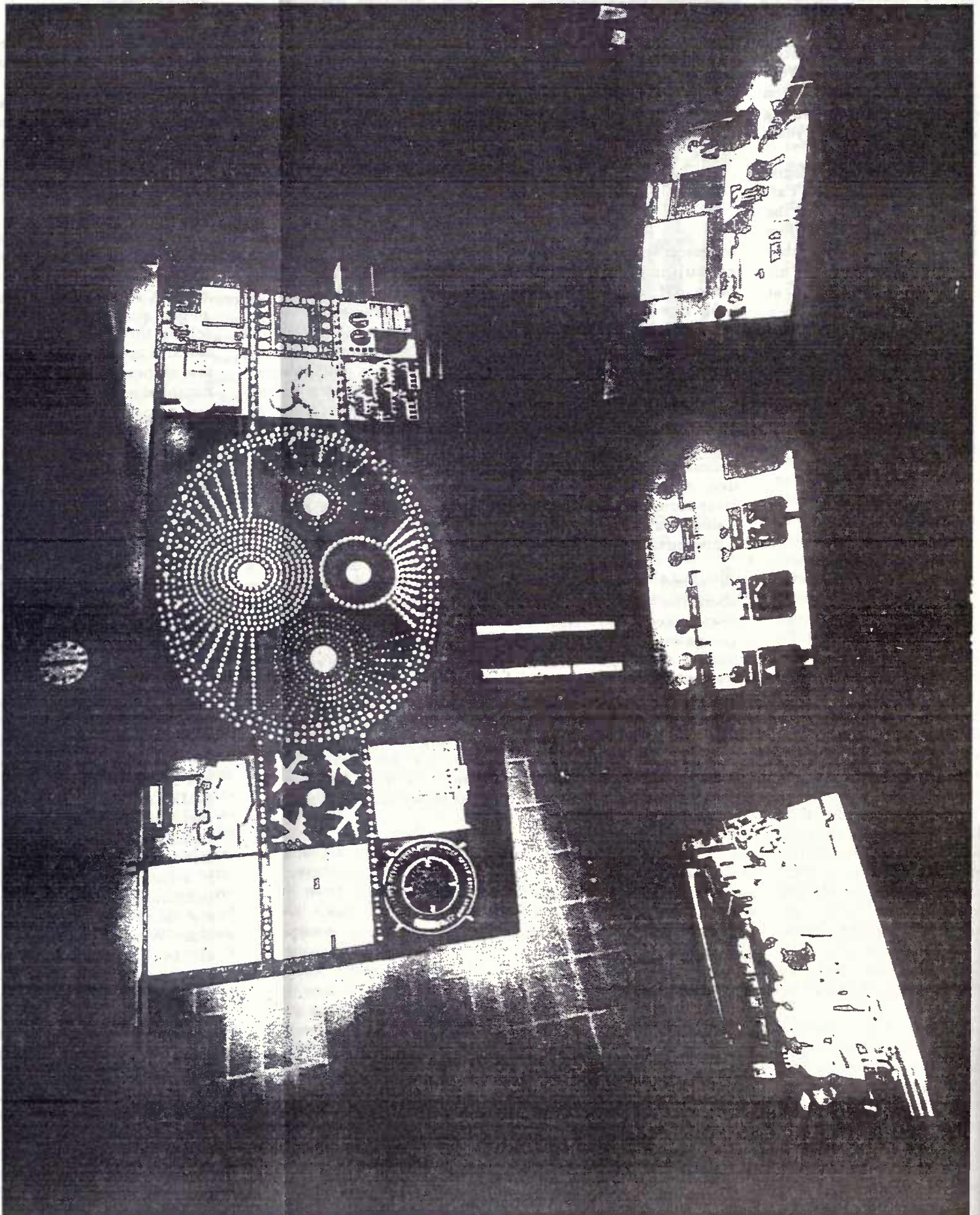
.../MEDIA WAS THE PROGRAM OF VIDEO IN THE PRESENTATION WGBH MASSACHUSETTS.

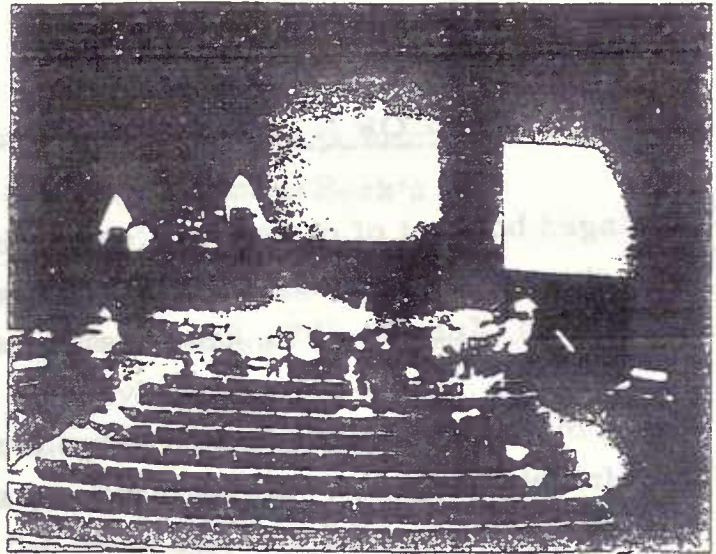
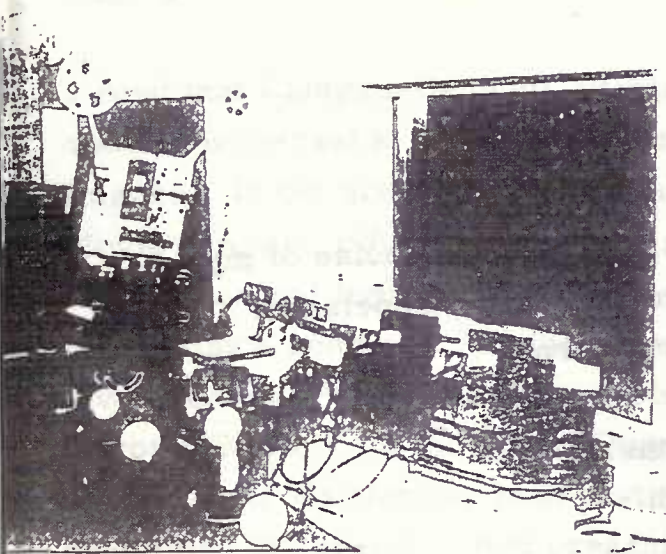
...s, Media" and produced by Fred Barzyk. Noted entertainer Max Morath served as narrator for the event, which touched upon the many uses to which video has already been put by artists throughout the country, as well as prospects for the future. The production, supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, was conceived as a pilot for a possible 90-minute special on the same topic. Among those at the session were such arts and media notables as Fred Wiseman, Eudora Welty, Rise Stevens, Giancarlo Menotti, Richard Leacock, Gyorgy Kepes, Lawrence Halprin, Mildred Fichandler, Merce Cunningham, and J. Carter Brown.

2, 1972

BEAR SWAMP PUMPED STORAGE PROJECT VISITOR CENTER  
NEW ENGLAND ELECTRIC SYSTEM

372





AT THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AUDITORIUM, ARTS/MEDIA WAS PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS. THE PROGRAM INCLUDED A MULTI-MEDIA PROGRAM DEALING WITH THE USE OF VIDEO IN THE ARTS, DANCE, THEATER, MUSEUMS AND NEW TECHNOLOGY. THE PRESENTATION WAS COPRODUCED BY EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION STATION WGBH AND INTERMEDIA SYSTEMS CORPORATION OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS.

## 'Arts/Media' *By Alan M. Kriegsman*

"magic" color concert was performed on a vi-synthesizer, computer-generated poetry, an "underground" television magazine, laser art, holons, infra-red photographs and liquid-crystal imagery were some of the wonders on display at the "Arts/Media" symposium yesterday at the National Academy of Sciences auditorium. Three large movie screens, banks of giant electronic consoles and television monitors dispersed through the hall were in constant service for the audiovisual portion of the program, which also included films and demonstrations.

The two-day conference, under the auspices of the National Endowment for the Arts, is intended to generate creative ideas and projects involving the new communications technology and the arts. The first day's session was presented to a specially invited audience of artists, media specialists, government officials, and representatives of public, private and educational organizations.

President Nixon sent a message of welcome to the members of the National Council on the Arts, who are attending the "Arts/Media" conference both as guests and participants.

In addition, the White House was represented by guest speaker Clay T. Whitehead, director of the president's Office of Telecommunications Policy.

Among the highlights of the day was a "performance" by video artist Ron Hays, the first ever done for a live public, on the Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer, an electronic apparatus that can produce endlessly varied abstract or realistic imagery on a television screen.

The synthesizer demonstration came at the end of an hour long audiovisual presentation by WGBH-TV of Boston, entitled "Arts, Ac-

cess, Media" and produced by Fred Barzyk. Noted entertainer Max Morath served as narrator for the event, which touched upon the many uses to which video has already been put by artists throughout the country, as well as prospects for the future. The production, supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, was conceived as a pilot for a possible 90-minute TV special on the same topic.

Among those at the session were such arts and media notables as Fred Wiseman, Eudora Welty, Rise Stevens, Giancarlo Menotti, Richard Leacock, Gyorgy Kepes, Lawrence Halprin, Zelda Fichandler, Merce Cunningham, and J. Carter Brown.

## A PHILOSOPHY OF MULTI-MEDIA

-collaged bouquet of quotes and, to serve as signal for the noise of my remarks at the Systems Council, National Audio Visual Association Convention, July 18, 1971, Cincinnati: - Gerd Stern

Where by the love of wisdom do we go from there  
as Heinrich Hertz, he who made waves, said:

"The Consequence of the Image  
will be the Image of the Consequence."

a pre-video scan in the same sense  
as the pointilists', "Dot's what!"

Remember - turn tools into toys: Zoom,  
don't pay no never mind to,

"that narrow place where three roads meet"

Focus, the real-time clock, to floating point zero  
and believe Yoko Ono - "The Past that I remember  
is the Past that I create Now because of the necessity  
of the Present" - which is by no means the  
for everything there is a season  
and a time for every purpose under heaven  
message.

"The business of art is to reveal the relation between man and his  
circumambient universe at this living moment." according to D. H.  
Lawrence. If that is the business of art, is the art of our business  
"-The image library, newsreel of dreams, culture intercom," which  
Stan Vanderbeek proposed in a 1965 manifesto? He suggested, "that  
immediate research begin on the possibility of an international picture  
language based on motion pictures... that we combine audio-visual  
devices into an educational tool: an experience machine...", echoing  
my own 1961 Transformer proposal, "... a Verbal American Landscape  
poem-instrument, played from a keyboard or pre-punched score  
projecting images and sounds in a multi-sense performance arranged  
so that each audible, visible image associatively develops the possibilities  
of its own expanding universe."



page 2

I read that Campanella in his Utopian, City of the Sun, dreamed about a universal knowledge depicted on central walls in powerful images. In the sixties we had Eames and Expo, VanDerBeek's Movie-Drome, USCO's Tabernacle and multiplied environments, industrials and light shows. In these early seventies we have Dr. Henry Ray's heuristic Special Experience Room at the Comprehensive Elementary School, Warminster, Pennsylvania and Miss Dorothy Bennett's Educational Programming of Cultural Heritage in Berkeley, California, both environmental learning surrounds, practicing the preach. And preaching the prophesy, VanDerBeek has it again, "Unconsciously we're developing memory storage and transfer systems that deal with millions of thoughts simultaneously. Sooner than we think we'll be communicating on very high levels of neurological referencing."

R. L. Gregory perceives, "The seeing of objects involves many sources of information beyond those meeting the eye when we look at an object. It generally involves knowledge of the object derived from previous experience, and this experience is not limited to vision but may include the other senses; touch, taste, smell, hearing and perhaps also temperature or pain." In his introduction to Gene Youngblood's "Expanded Cinema", R. Buckminster Fuller data-links "The human brain is like a major television studio-station. Not only does the brain monitor all the incoming, live, visible, audible, smellable and touchable 3D shows, it also makes videotapes of the incoming news, in order swiftly to design new scenarios of further actions..."

William Blake had it, "Systems struggling with systems to overcome systems." Now Lennard and Bernstein write, "Though different kinds of systems may vary as to the specific amount of intrasystem input required to maintain the system, most systems cannot continue to exist without specifiable minimum inputs from participants. "These inputs are the same cognitive and affective behaviors which the U. S. Office of Education is attempting to systematize for media specialists. Recently, introducing The Educational Technology Act of 1971, Senator Eagleton remarked, "It should be made clear that when we refer to

page 3

educational technology, we are not talking about hardware, nor even software. What we are talking about is a systemized approach to education... a tool to be used to enrich the teaching experience through a proper blend of planning, training and implementation."

Papers have appeared entitled, *Botanical Lights or The Light Show as a Teaching Technique* and *Learning Archaeology: The Use of Multi-Media in a Lower Division Course*. In parallel, Bryant Fillion advises in *The English Journal*, "Although we must not make of media study the overly-cognitive dull pedantry we have made of literary criticism in the schools, neither can we simply show movies or conduct multi-media happenings. We should encourage students to examine such matters as image intensity, juxtaposition, sequence, and proportion, to ask what goes with what to create a rhetorical impact.

((Why all these quotes? For the love of wisdom, philosophy!

A Hallelujah chorus.))

According to Youngblood, "...the intermedia network of cinema, television, radio, magazines, books and newspapers is our environment, a service environment that carries the messages of the social organism. It establishes meaning in life, creates mediating channels between man and man, man and society." He quotes our *Intermedia Systems'* definition, "Intermedia refers to the simultaneous use of various media to create a total environmental experience for the audience. Meaning is communicated not by coding ideas into abstract literary language but by creating an emotionally real experience through the use of audio-visual technology. Originally conceived in the realm of art rather than in science or engineering, the principles on which intermedia is based are grounded in the fields of psychology, information theory, and communications engineering."

In point, from (pre-1948) Norbert Wiener, "In the case of communication engineering, however, the significance of the statistical element is immediately apparent. The transmission of information is impossible

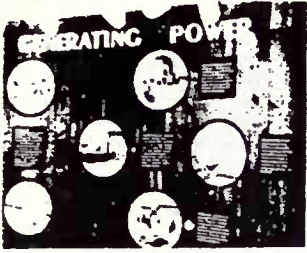
except as a transmission of alternatives. If only one contingency is to be transmitted, then it may be sent most efficiently and with the least trouble by sending no message at all..." and John Pierce, "In communication theory, information can perhaps best be explained as choice or uncertainty... All are merely choices or decisions between alternatives, and one can be represented by any other. By means of a sequence of such elementary choices one can enlarge the number of choices."

Information overloading is one of the easiest output possibilities in multi-media, a recognition by quantum jump from Luther's doctrine, "The whole world is God's masquerade, in which he hides himself while he rules the world so strangely by making a Hubbub." and McLuhan's voice, "The ecumenical movement, the liturgical movement, in the Catholic Church is entirely along the lines that you saw on the screen tonight. That is, teaching people how to yield and how to involve themselves in other people's lives. But it can, you see, in terms of programming, it can have strangely different contexts. Now let us suppose for a moment and I'm not trying to promote such a notion, just let us suppose for the moment, that the Western world has been hugely fragmented and splintered in its consciousness and its individualism for many centuries. And that under electric conditions it is being integrated and merged together again at a very fast clip. The question for us is, alright, if this is happening, what is a valid human strategy for conduct. Should we resist it, should we recognize it and detach ourselves, should we involve ourselves? There has been exactly no attempt at clarifying the issues. In as far as the artist can clarify issues in this way, he's doing a very important work."

Assembled by Gerd Stern, Intermedia Systems Corporation  
711 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 02139  
868-9880

## References

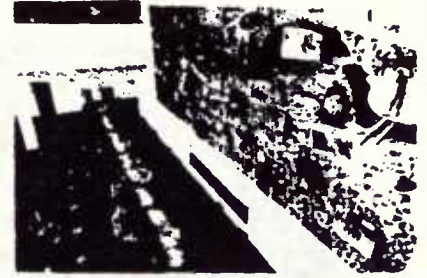
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Design and Production  
Maine Yankee  
Visitors Center



Government of Venezuela  
Multimedia Monument  
Battlefield of Carabobo



Feature  
Wall for The  
Manchester  
Bank



"Where to  
Get Off in Boston"  
for Public Television  
WGBH Boston

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# annual report

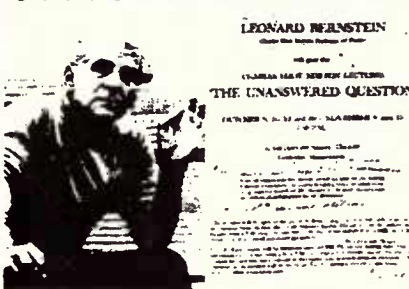
through February 28, 1974



Economic  
Development on  
Indian Reservations,  
Economic Development  
Administration, U.S.  
Government



Multimedia  
and Film for  
Expo Zulia  
Venezuela



Leonard Bernstein  
at Harvard University  
Norton Lectures

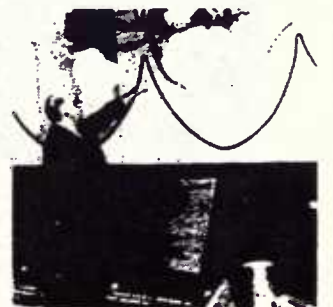
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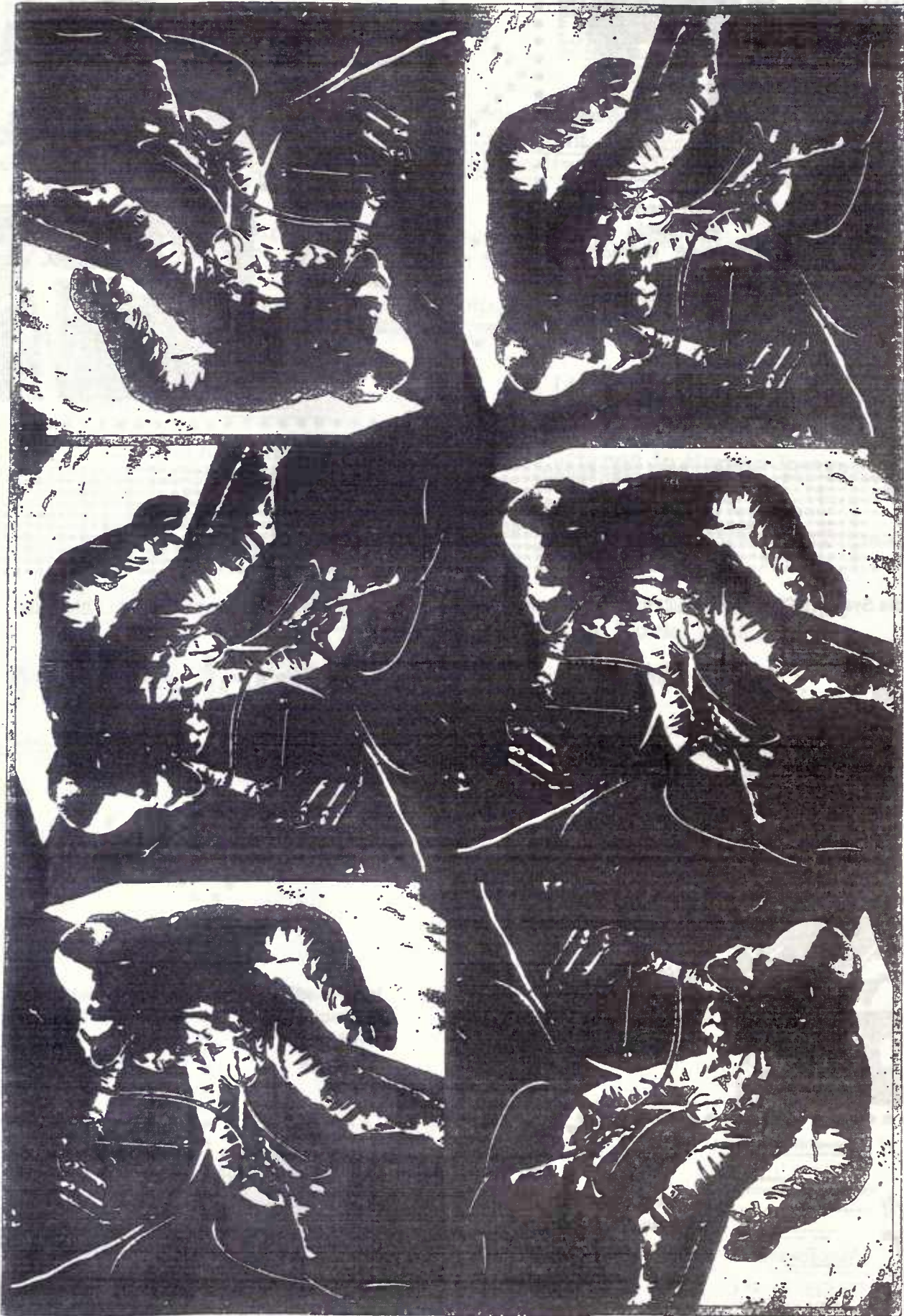
Cybernetic Map  
of the Diaspora  
Yeshiva University  
New York

ROGER POWELL

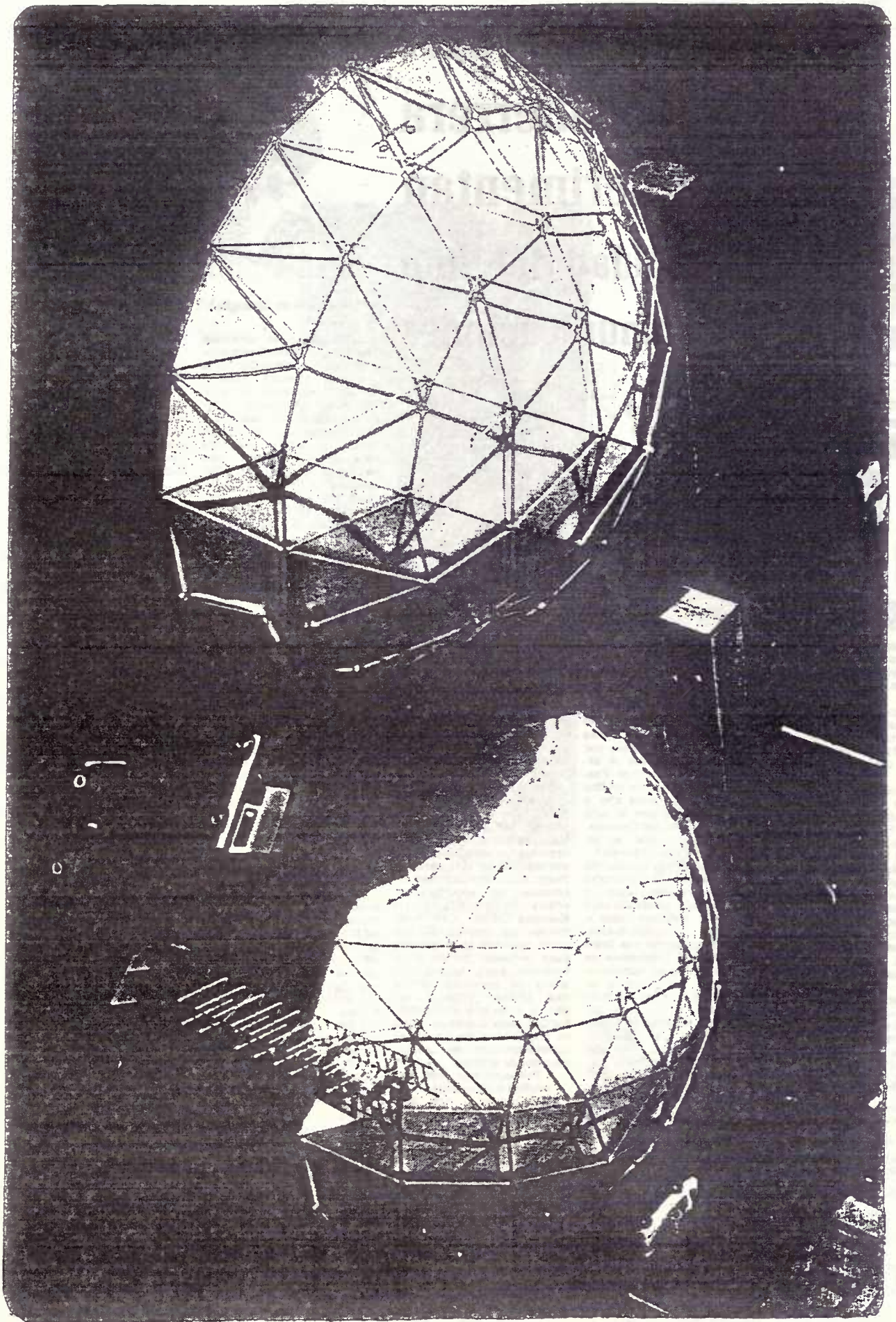


COTTA'S FURNACE





The images on this page and opposite are additional elements from "This is Federal Design" (see p. 31), a slide/sound presentation designed for the Assembly. This program was produced by Intermedia Systems Corporation, and funded by the National Endowment for the Arts.



# Gerd Stern y Carlos Peñaherrera Experimentan con la Sensibilidad del Niño Hacia las Comunicaciones

Están realizando un proyecto para la educación creativa de las áreas marginales

Maria  
Josefa  
Pérez



Carlos Peñaherrera.



Gerd Stern.

Con una amplia sonrisa y una gran barba, estaba Gerd Stern sentado en un café con un compañero de trabajo, Carlos Peña Herrera, que es un fotógrafo ecuatoriano, que colabora con Stern, en Venezuela por ahora. Stern siempre bien, con sus ideas nuevas sobre la vida, los medios de comunicación, el video, el cine, la Tv, Multimedia, Intermedia, Mixedmedia. Es un hombre simpático, que quiere comunicarse a como dé lugar con la gente. No habla mucho español, pero prefiere conversar en este idioma para entendernos mejor.

—Uno debe tratar de comunicarse—dice—  
Cuando le preguntamos que está haciendo responde que es un poeta y un presidente.

¿Presidente?  
—Sí—contesta—de la compañía... Y sonrío.

Gerd Stern es el presidente de una compañía llamada Intermedia Systems Corporation, que se ocupa de hacer programas audiovisuales de todo tipo, para compañías, universidades, museos, escuelas, barrios. Trabaja mucho en el aspecto de las comunicaciones entre la gente. Uno de sus trabajos, conjuntamente con la Go-

bernación del Distrito Federal, lo podemos ver en el Domo que está en la Plaza Bolívar, que fue ideado por Stern. También fue el organizador del Primer Festival de Video que se realizó hace más o menos año y medio en el Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas.

Usted dice que es un poeta, ¿cómo es su poesía?

—Yo he estado trabajando con juegos de palabras durante muchos años, y después fui cambiando esos juegos y combinaciones a trabajos audiovisuales. Pero la audiencia que tiene este tipo de programas es muy reducida, en cambio en la poesía estructural y de estructura cinética hay más audiencia, pero es un público para el arte y yo quiero que todos se puedan comunicar, pero creo que con el tiempo se hará mayor. Por ahora es más fácil comunicarse con las empresas y el gobierno, y a través de la educación.

¿Cómo trabaja su compañía?

—Más o menos, hace unos diez años fundamos, en los Estados Unidos la compañía Intermedia Systems, en el tiempo en que yo enseñaba en la Universidad de Harvard y en Cambridge, Massachusetts. Y hace seis años vine aquí a dar un seminario de Comunicación Audiovisual, desde ese año yo he realizado muchos trabajos en Venezuela para la Gobernación y para el Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, también he trabajado para otras dependen-

cias del Gobierno y algunas empresas privadas. Hacemos diseños de Comunicaciones, hemos hecho muchos de estos trabajos en Multimedia.

En el Domo de la Plaza Bolívar se presenta un espectáculo con nueve cámaras, y varias pantallas. Este es un método de desarrollar la sensibilidad y la percepción en otro sentido. Stern hace exhibiciones en museos, con escultura cinética, multimedia en los Estados Unidos y en otras partes del mundo. El explica que son para público muy pequeño, porque si se hicieran para mayor número de personas habría que utilizar grandes espacios y no hay suficientes fondos para pagar el gasto de alquiler de las salas y el mantenimiento de mayor número de equipos.

¿Trabajan con todo tipo de medios audiovisuales?

—Trabajamos con diapositivas, video, cine, o una mezcla de todo eso—explica Carlos.

¿Hacen trabajos comerciales o no?

—Sí—responde Carlos—, pero siempre que sea posible combinar el aspecto artístico con el comercial. Nosotros creemos que siempre es posible hacer eso. Bueno, si se podría decir que la mayoría de las producciones que hacemos nosotros son de objeto comercial.

—En todo caso,—continúa Gerd Stern—no son problemas ordinarios, sino exposiciones especiales y



"Un poema en Spanglish", realizado por Gerd Stern.

explica tones de procesos técnicos, didácticamente tratados, motivación para que los obreros puedan trabajar en mejores condiciones, tratamos los problemas de comunicación importantes para el mundo social y ahora nosotros estamos formando una compañía con la Organización Diego Cisneros. Nosotros producimos trabajos en cine y en televisión en varias formas, yo he producido obras de arte de video y televisión y documentales, recientemente producimos una obra grande, en los Estados Unidos para el Planetario, donde utilizamos solamente luces de laser, programado por un computador, acompañado de música, llamado Luces de Amor. También hicimos una serie de cortometrajes sobre Football, para enseñar a los entrenadores cómo son las condiciones físicas óptimas que deben tener los deportistas, sobre todo para el entrenamiento de los niños de los liceos, para evitar posibles accidentes en la práctica.

Desarrollo de la sensibilidad en el niño

Carlos Peña Herrera es un especialista en educación creativa para niños y está trabajando en Venezuela en un proyecto de desarrollo de la sensibilidad del niño, sobre todo en áreas marginales, hacen experiencias con cine, fotografía, video, artesanía, pintura y arte varias.

¿Qué tipo de experiencias hacen con los niños en este programa?

—El programa está basado en la idea de que el niño tiene la oportunidad de realizar la labor de un fotógrafo, o de un cineasta y de usar una cámara de video—explica Carlos—,

entonces se le ensancha el mundo perceptivo, comienza a ver las cosas de otra forma. Puede tener una experiencia fotográfica completa, el niño puede tomar las fotos desde el interior de la cámara y darse cuenta del proceso, tiene experiencias de conciencia ambiental con varios materiales como mezcladores de sonido proyección, cerámica, entonces tiene la oportunidad de expresarse, no sólo en una forma artística y creativa,

sino la oportunidad de participar en muchas experiencias creativas y luego puede escoger que es lo que más le gusta.

Pero si son niños de áreas marginales, después que tengan esta experiencia y hoy puedan contar con los medios técnicos para realizarlo de nuevo ¿qué pasa?

—Entonces, parte de las recomendaciones de este programa, en ese sentido, sería que este tipo de trabajo se prolongue o se haga en varias etapas.

Yo creo que el punto importante —dice Gerd Stern— es la experiencia de abrir los caminos de la percepción en otros sentidos. Esta es una experiencia única, pero que les va a abrir los ojos a estos niños y luego ellos van a estar motivados para buscar nuevas experiencias, pues, ya se les ha dado la oportunidad.

—Cuando el niño ha hecho algo con sus propias manos—sigue explicando Carlos—, ya está abierto el camino de conocimiento y de curiosidad para este objeto, que él ve y la próxima vez que tenga la ocasión de ver una foto o tener en sus manos una cámara se le abrirá la mente hacia el proceso, ya estará dotado de otro aspecto de sensibilidad.

¿Cómo se establece esta relación?

—Los niños saben que las cosas existen—dicen Stern— pero no se sienten personalmente involucrados.

—Ellos miran a diario la televisión—continúa Carlos— y ven los dibujos animados, pero mediante esta experiencia ellos tienen contacto con todo el mecanismo que rodea el hecho, de que esos dibujos animados o TV existan.

—En los Estados Unidos—señala Gerd Stern—este programa de áreas marginales se hace como un programa de integración, de demostración de permeabilidad social entre la clase media y dichas áreas marginales. Es muy importante.

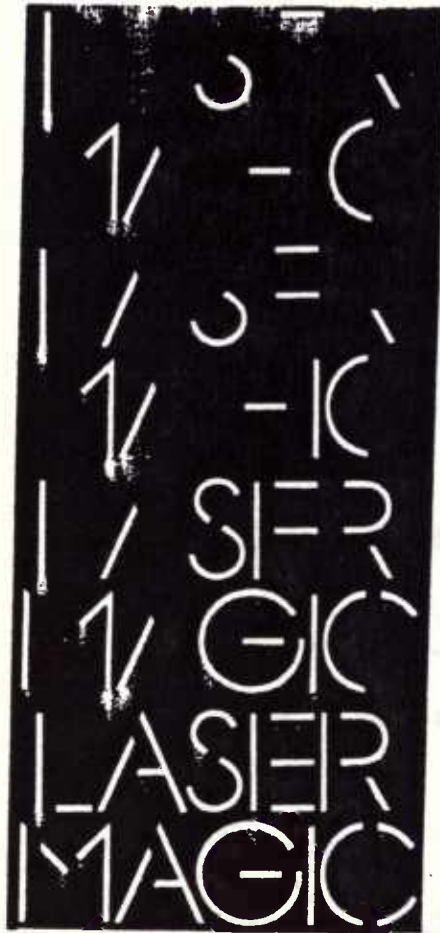
¿De dónde sacaron la idea de hacer este tipo de programas con los niños?

—Yo trabajé—explica Carlos— en un programa de este tipo en Cleveland cuando vine acá pensé que sería una buena idea, este es el primer país latinoamericano donde se va a hacer.



# STERN

...this is a participat  
 at we have been accus  
 call 'physical real  
 turns out to be largely  
 papier maché construc  
 of our imagination  
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 ion pillars of our ob  
 these observations con  
 the only reality...  
 Until we see why the u  
 is built this way, we  
 the first thing about :



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 SAT. 5:30, 7:00, 8:15, 9:30, 10:45PM  
 SUN. 5:30, 7:00, 8:15PM

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 For information call - 723-4586  
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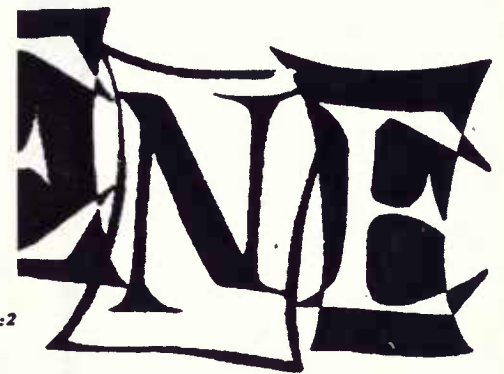
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 N STREET  
 AT 10:15  
 MSON AND  
 BE FREE

Tickets available at all TICKETRON outlets  
 For information call 723-4586

JHM

Scene Three Lovelight

There is a huge explosion  
of white light  
brighter by far  
than anything heretofore

35:25

The show then turns  
into a wheeling rainbow  
arrayed over the entire dome

35:40

Next the dome is  
filled with whirling points  
of light in four colors

35:55

Colors condense into two rings  
gold and turquoise  
which orbit one another once

From each ring  
a figure descends  
one male, one female

36:10

In gravity's attraction  
the rings approach  
becoming the infinity halo

While simultaneously  
the figures reach  
contact and embrace

36:25

Male and female conduct light  
as the couple turns

heads, lips, features  
multiply and image  
dissolve one into another  
in keeping with the lyrics and

40:00

-FINIS-



.... a sustained explosion, roar begins  
softly, swells.

Explosion crossfades into arpeggios on  
a harp....

Chorus, male and female, humming, soothing..  
.. quiet but powerful major mode chords.

As the two humans touch one another the  
strains of 'Lovelight' come up, triumphant,  
happy and unrestrained....



Lovelight

It's a phenomena, You can't turn off and on.  
The smallest glowing spark will leave you the mark  
of Lovelight, Lovelight

There's nothing you can do, when it gets thru to you  
It comes as a surprise, when it shines in your eyes  
That's Lovelight, Lovelight

Bridge

The time that we spend apart  
Always seems too long  
But when we're here together  
No one's right where we belong

An wish upon a star, as it shines from afar  
That love is really right, as morning beches the night  
with Lovelight

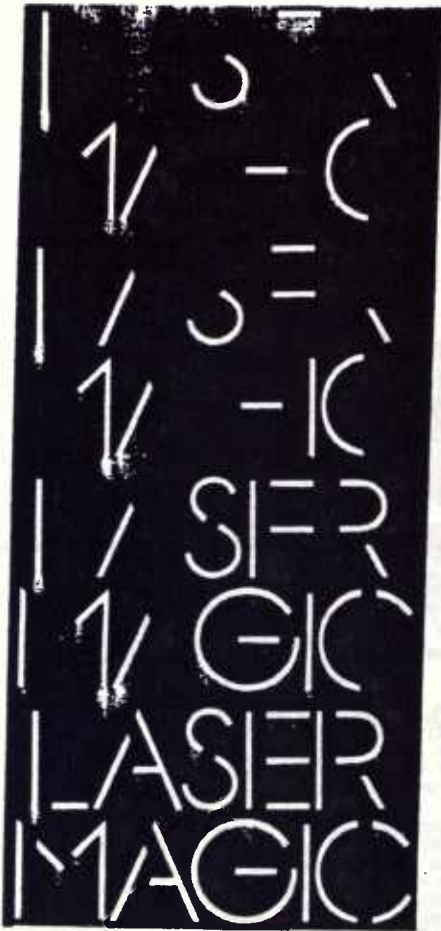
Bridge

The love that we share today  
Will never tear apart  
As long as you and I hold  
Lovelight to our hearts



'Lovelight' is a duet, accompanied by  
gospel-type clapping.... very dancey....

Fades



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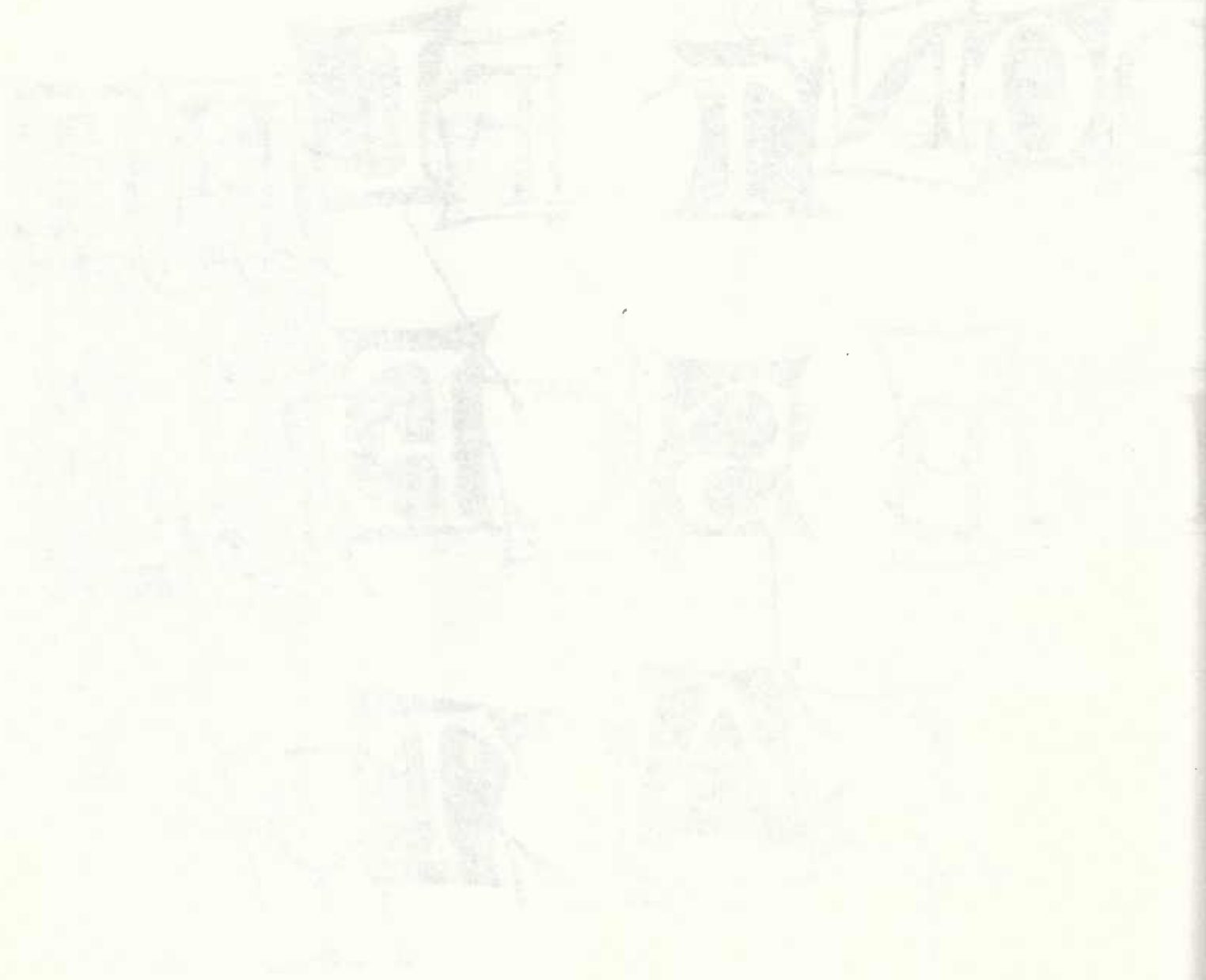
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*Department of Art*

Gerd Stern  
Maverick Road  
Woodstock, New York

Dear Mr. Stern:

September 21, 1964

Let me make a brief reply to your letter of September 9th and if you desire further information I will be pleased to write you again.

Your afternoon performance here at the University stirred up considerable resentment and trouble. Within an hour of your departure our administration had received angered protests which labeled your performance as crude, pointless and morally distasteful. I was not present for the film in the afternoon and felt no immediate reaction of those present—but realized after that most of the faculty had walked out hoping the students would do the same.

Our overall evaluation of your performance was very negative. Perhaps if you had had something to say in support of your films, etcetera, it would have had better acceptance.

We felt it important to suggest to other schools on your trip that they preview your material—simply to save them the embarrassment that we found ourselves burdened with. We have not pursued this cautioning since that time.

We do hope that you will not include our school on your list of successful performances.

No malice—simply a very unimpressed community of viewers.

Sincerely,

  
Edward D. Maryon, Head  
Department of Art

EDM/ds



UNIVERSITY OF UTAH  
SALT LAKE CITY 12

Department of Art

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University  
Salt Lake City

Department of

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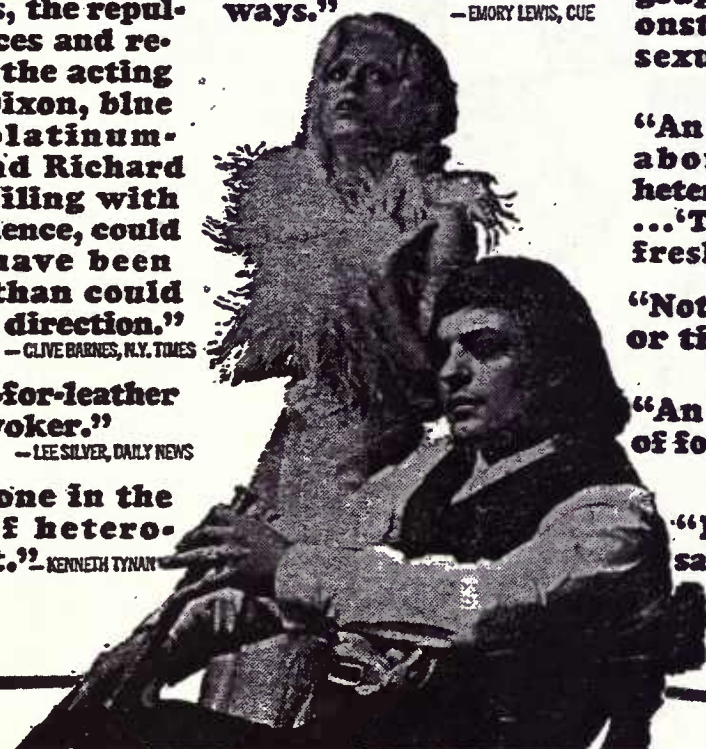
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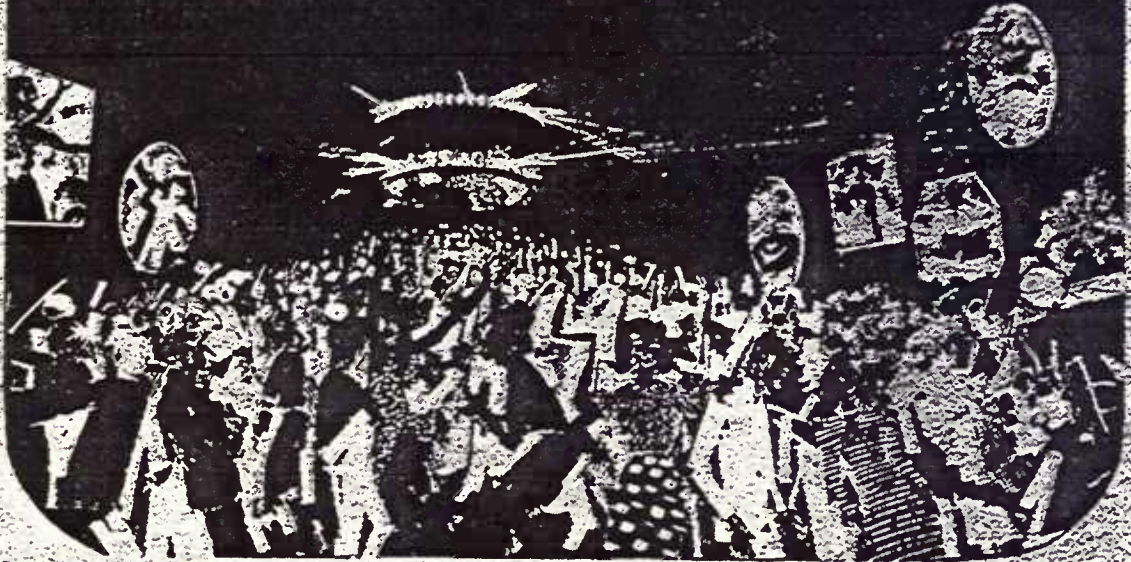
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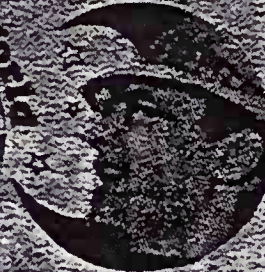




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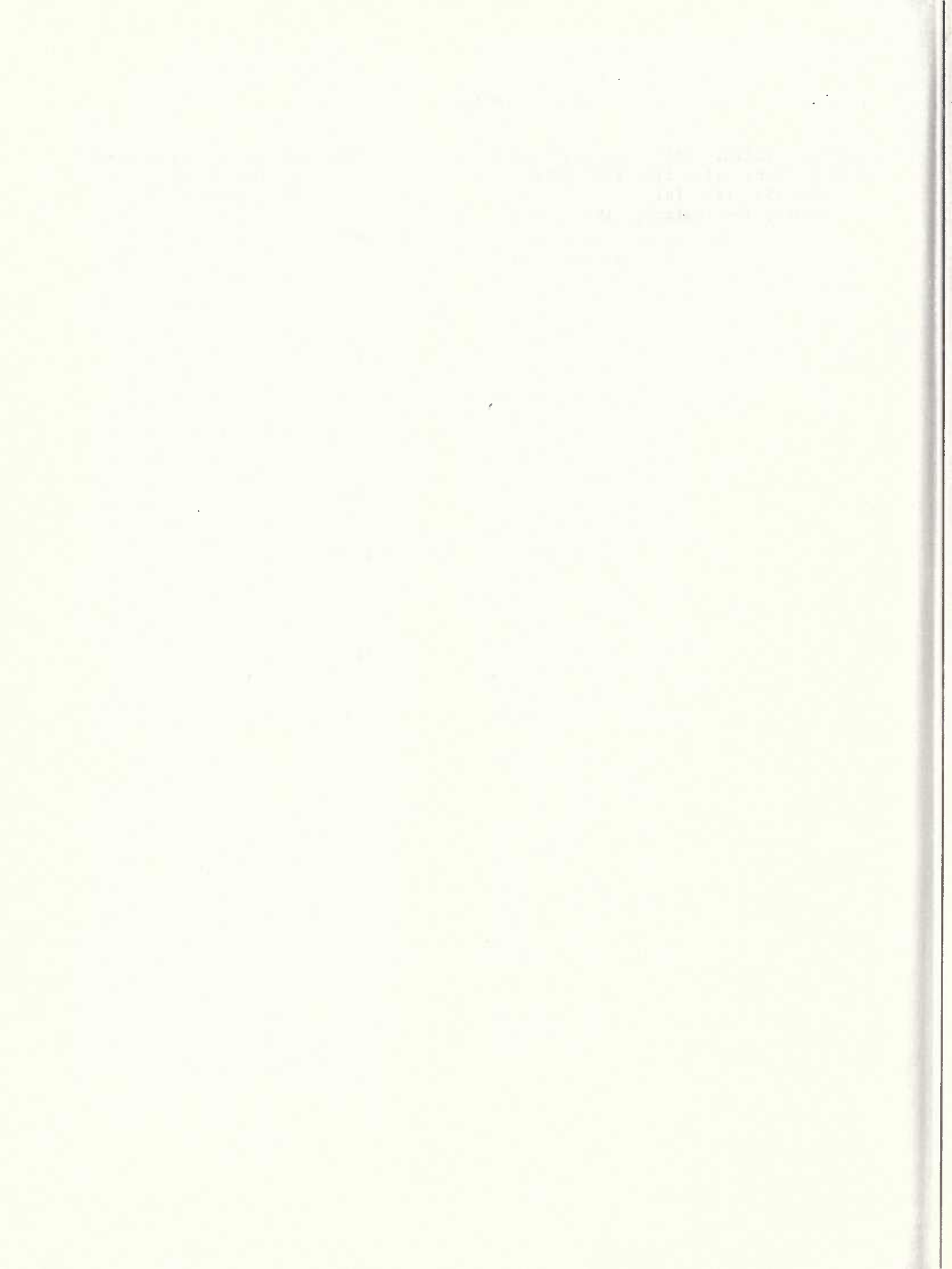
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