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Oral history interview with Dennis Oppenheim, 1995 July-Aug

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Transcript

Interview

SB: I understand that you were born in Washington -- City, Washington, 1938. How did you get from Washington to the Bay Area, where I know you grew up and spent many years?

DO: Well, I lived in Washington for less than a year, and my father was working on the Grand Cooley Dam. That was being built by Henry Keizer. So during the location there, I was born, and then shortly after we moved back to where he was originally, which was in Richmond, El Torito, near Berkeley, which is where he went to school. The town that I was born in, called Mason City, was really primarily a construction site for the construction of this extraordinary dam. And after it was built, the town really . But then it was renamed Electric City at some point afterwards, and it really is not -- it certainly is not a city. It's not even a town. It's kind of a ghost town without a town. It does not exist.

SB: You mean even today?

DO: No. It doesn't exist as anything that one would manufacture as a town. It is essentially a dam. It's quite true. There's nothing there except a dam. I don't know. I guess some people are born in between places, and they would have also the claim that the place that they were born in doesn't exist or never did exist. I mean, if they're really accurate. For instance, if you're born in a car driving between two places. But I was born in Mason City -- a hospital. So there wasn't a point in which at least they had a hospital. But this was probably primarily for the workers and the families that were on this construction project that took three or four or five years.

SB: I understand -- I think I read your father was Russian.

DO: Yes.

SB: Born in China?

DO: Yes. He was Russian. My parents were Russian. He was born in , China and educated at the University of Hong Kong, and also the University of California at Berkeley in the early thirties, where he got a Master's Degree in Engineering. My mother was a student at the University of California at the same time and she was majoring in English. So that puts the activity around 1933 or 1934.

SB: Did your mother pursue her interest in English at all? Did she write or did she read much during your childhood?

DO: Well, my father was kind of European in contrast to the general population in around Richmond El Torito, which, at that time, was largely a working class community. So they the two of them -- in that environment they stood out. First of all, because he was a strong Russian accent. My mother was somewhat -- I think -- relatively existential compared to , even though that kind of literature wasn't surfaced at the time. But she was operating as more of a sensitive creative individual. Again contrasting severely the kind of environment that we were living in. Now this would not have been true if we had lived at Berkeley, particularly around the campus. They were, I think, the only -- we were the only family in the community that had any of these characteristics. She was very much involved in the arts. She played the piano, she gave recitals. She got involved in marionettes, she wrote poetry. In other words, it was certainly a relatively good environment for somebody who was going to enter the arts.

SB: Yes.

DO: Although I wasn't aware of it at the time. And they were both relatively non-conformist. They easily voiced their negative opinions on conformist behavior. My father was very pro-Russia. That was another element that contrasted with this community of relative working class Republicans.

SB: during the Cold War.

DO: Yes. I mean, he was probably -- although he was capitalist in the way that he lived. But I think underneath that was certainly an alliance with the Russian spirit and probably camaraderie. that which would be silently approved of the county and what they were doing. But he wasn't a communist.

SB: What was your mother's ethnic background?

DO: English/Irish. Maybe a little German. Really a mixture.

SB: Which parent do you think you were closest to?

DO: Oh, I was probably closest to my mother. I mean, often children whose parents are from different ethnic groups are not any more in many of the combinations found in America. But my father was Jewish and my mother was not. Often when a person is one-half of something or potentially charged or potentially conditioned with certain characteristics as a Jewish individual, they often feel that part of them is one thing and part of them is another, which is certainly true of a mixture between a Jewish mother and an African-American father. I know some of these. They are very supportive. And I felt that some of my behavior could be easily divided between the two. I was like my father this way and like my father in this other way. And quite often the acknowledgement of the separation of brought in a feeling of the fugitive -- the potential corrosive aspect of these two relatively different origins. The fighting of going from one to the other. So I was aware of that quite early. given unnecessary sort of kind of things were that cut and dry, which may in fact . But I'm still aware, as I was early, of disability my father and different behavior of my mother. And this certainly was a way of describing the creative because my father was , and my mother was more given to the art. Although my father had to , which , and my mother had the occasion for a kind of reflective more romantic level. Analytical to poetry. So these behavioral traits were made aware to me early.

SB: What about brothers and sisters?

DO: I had a sister only. A little older. We were not terribly -- as I look back, our involvement was rather cool, and that stands out as being anything on the kind of a whatever normal sibling relationship could be. There were no strong moments of emotional displays necessarily there. There was no period of unusual sort of connection, which would make for a more lasting impression. It was relatively neutral -- the relational dynamics of the two of us were relatively neutral, compared to what they could be.

SB: What was the age difference?

DO: A year.

SB: So you were --

DO: Very close.

SB: So you went to Richmond High?

DO: Yes.

SB: You graduated right in the middle of the fifties. What did you enjoy studying at Richmond? Did you have any favorite classes?

DO: Well, Richmond High was not really a place where one would expect overwhelming academic virtuosity. I mean, it was a school built for perhaps a thousand students, and it had something like five thousand.

SB: Oh, really?

DO: Yes. It was enormously over-crowded. Very big population. Almost eighty percent of working class, and a large percentage of that were African Americans and Mexicans. This was a very tough school. The junior high school as well that serviced this school was also a detainer for this percentage of the population. Richmond was primarily a shipyard building town during the war. It also had Standard Oil. These two companies loomed and the population of their employees loomed as the largest of were related to these two companies. There were very few professionals, and many of them probably went to El Torito High School, which was substantially different. Now, I could have gone there because I lived in El Torito. But I think we lived on the borderline.

SB: So you actually lived in El Torito?

DO: Yes, I did.

SB: I know how different --

DO: El Torito High is?

SB: Yes. I mean, the different sorts of communications .

DO: Yes. Well, it would have been a different experience. Now, I don't remember exactly why. I think that it may have been something as simple as the fact that where we lived, even though it was in El Torito, fell within the Richmond High School district. But I think even though that may have been true, I'm sure there was a constituted by my parents, I probably could have gone to El Torito High School. Which may not have helped because I was already ingrained in the type school, which was again the one that would service this giant high school teaming with this working class population in Richmond.

SB: Is that a junior high?

DO: Yes. is in the flat lands of Richmond. So the prelude was already set in motion going in that direction, and not up the hill

SB: [laughs]

DO: Well, so you kind of deal with what you get. I mean, the stereotype configurations that we know because we're talking about the early mid-fifties, since I graduated in 1956, were kind of dominant then. I mean, as much as we would like to see the nuances in these stereotypes, they very much prevailed. The dependency on hotrods and cars and the kind of dress. So this was all that condition of both of these high schools, but certainly in El Torito you would have a larger percentage of what we called college material, whereas in Richmond you would have a relatively smaller degree. However, in Richmond you would have extraordinary sports talent because you had a tremendous array of athletes. So I became involved in athletics very early. I wasn't strictly good, but on occasion I was quite good.

SB: What sports?

DO: I did track and field. I did the decathlon -- many events. I also swam. I never played football. Something about football -- it was just too American. I had trouble with that.

SB: Then you were probably a pretty good size.

DO: Average size. I wasn't small, but there were people who were enormous in this school. You can imagine.

SB: How tall are you now?

DO: I'm almost six feet. I'm five-eleven.

SB: I thought you were over six feet.

DO: No. I think one of the positive things that grew out of this experience in Richmond was a real close alignment with the minority class, which I did in a natural way. Particularly the African Americans. Of course, we called them Blacks. There's a lot of natural inclination. Sort of a rapport and entity, and not out of any sense of a hierarchy and loftiness, but it just seemed that I identified with their characteristics that are attractive -- were attractive. Their music, their speech. I was drawn into that as an artist. As somebody who was gauging the effects of their persona against the effects of an individual who is relatively without any natural charm. So I identified with them and I would run for office occasionally, and I'd win maybe because I would have the support of eighty percent of the school.

SB: Oh, really?

DO: Yes. I was popular with them. Not overwhelmingly. You know, I wouldn't date -- I mean, this was early . You can imagine in the fifties it was extremely .

SB: You mean there was a lot of prejudice against inter-faith and inter-racial --?

DO: Well, yes. Lots of ignorance.

SB: Yes.

DO: Overwhelming ignorance about all that stuff. I mean, like art. Art sensibility as a student -- I mean, we didn't . I mean, existentialism was relatively unknown. We were operating by and large without any scope of understanding. I think that the few clues that came out of that time were rebel without a cause -- things that indicated this sense of eventually opened up in college as a position -- was not available to us. We were just blind and insensitive. And because of that, mediocre in terms of our grasp of the situation. But that changed quickly. But I was kind of showing signs of artistic ability early in grammar school, punctuating this population of mediocrity and of relatively low spirited imagination. I was operating with great resistance. Because being an artist was not a popular thing at all. It was ridiculed because at that time it would appear to be more of an alignment to a feminine activity.

SB: Now, do you mean ridiculed in the world or specifically in your community or in your family?

DO: Oh, no. Not in the family. No, no. Not at all. No, no, no. Our world was our school.

SB: Oh, yes.

DO: Our world was our school. So there was a lot of pressure instigated towards those things. I used to put on marionette shows and things, that really excited a lot of resistance from my pals who were all hard core juvenile delinquents.

SB: [laughs] This is pre-high school, right?

DO: Yes. This is elementary, going into -- so what I did -- I became a conformist. I seemed to be a conformist. I very much wanted to be identified as being one of the guys, but underneath this was very much this sensitive , which I probably resisted. I mean, I did not challenge this tendency I had to appear to be conformist and to uphold the attributes of the teenage stereotype. So that my activities in art were rather secret and somewhat hidden. Not announced with any great claim, although I did know that I related to it. I was certainly on occasion applauded for it when the revocation would arrive.

SB: At Richmond High were you taking art classes?

DO: Yes.

SB: So you were both taking art classes and you were a jock.

DO: Well, yes.

SB: And you were in student government.

DO: Yes, but I wasn't a jock. I was not identified with the strata of academics. There was a small percentage of individuals who probably operated scholastically in the upper percentile. There was one year that I was in that upper percentile. But I was a rebel. I identified with the rebellious spirit of the fifties, and not with the conformist. The conformist spirit in the fifties was extremely compromised. It was not an informed position at all. It was extremely limited. The points of view were narrow-minded. Sure, the academic performance was acceptable. Quite often quite extreme. So the individuals were a lot to be desired. They were not at all a role model. The role model was the non-conformist. It was the beginning of a kind of existentialism that was keeping it unbeknownst to me, simply by my sense of evaluating one's roots and the others. I did not have it in me to become a conformist because it was such a cold -- it was such a desert of behavior. It was nothing that I think would seduce anyone nowadays. It was certainly not what situation in Berkeley ten years later. Not that I was involved in that. I never enjoyed being in a difficult kind of position. I was already economically separated from the largest percentage of the school because my father was a professional. There were hardly any professionals. I was considered a rich person -- a rich kid -- which really wasn't true. But yet, that gives you an idea of the sort of mindsets of the individuals around me. But I was operating -- I was showing early signs of rebellion. Although my rebellion never constituted . I mean, I was never in grave trouble. My behavior was edgy and thorny, but yet fell within a certain group of . So it's the beginning of a split. You know, assuming one identity in a natural way, but not going so far that you fall into the sort of delinquency. I mean, I was much too careful. I had been given a very strong upbringing by my father, which indicated certain behavioral norms that I think I understood and I didn't bypass. So I was in a good position to test myself against authority and also to stand up against non-conformist.

SB: Well, I know that in your PF1 catalog that I'm using as a base of chronology, that you put in there that you were a member of the Richmond Trojans. The class.

DO: Yes.

SB: So you must have wanted to indicate to readers even then that it was a form of identification or activity with . I don't even know if they were outsiders because in a school like that I can understand -- they can be the most popular kids. Boys, right?

DO: Yes. Well, somebody wrote that for me. However, I did agree that that should be in there. Yes, that sheds light because this identification with this kind of teenage sensibility certainly builds around cars in California. You can imagine how the two things were together -- the and the hotrods.

SB: There was that movie -- I'm trying to think of the director.

DO: "American Graffiti?

SB: Yes, "American Graffiti" with Mel.

DO: Yes.

SB: I remember Mel's Drive-In. [laughs]

DO: , right?

SB: Yes, but they were still there in the sixties. [laughs]

DO: Yes, I know.

SB: Did all the fellows have their own cars? Or would you sometimes use the parents' cars?

DO: Yes, exactly.

SB: McDonald Avenue in Richmond --

DO: Do you remember that?

SB: Richmond had something El Torito didn't have, which was McDonald Avenue -- the drag. [laughs]

DO: Exactly. You're exactly right. Well, we're really describing "American Graffiti" here, and you're absolutely right. We would cruise McDonald Avenue in our car. I had my own car.

SB: So your parents tolerated that. They trusted you, I guess.

DO: Yes. There was a lot of trouble. Cars at that age there was a lot of trouble. They broke down. You get stopped, and get a ticket, you lose your license. I've always had problems with that. I still do. [laughs] . I'm a very good driver. I've never had an accident. But I've always had problems with this. And so the Trojans Hotrods Club is kind of an indicator of a sensibility that I conformed to. Although I think the people in it -- I mean, I don't think you would find academics in there. But yet, you wouldn't find drivers. It was really kind of attracted for a . It was operating . I think it was Richard Farrah that said, "The art world is very much like high school." And I think what he meant was -- and I've often remarked on how much being a good student is, the way that we can discuss the behavior , and the way they deal with their careers. There are comparisons that are found in high school, and a function of the art world afterwards, as an adult. I think there is certainly the opportunity to compare the persona of a good student -- the student who pays attention to the rules that are necessary to operate within the system, and the one that doesn't, and therefore gets thrown around by them. Well, in the art world, artists often do learn to play by the rules of the art world. And there are others that do not, and they get thrown around as a consequence. Critically and in other ways, in the way that they approach their art, and in the way they their continuity and their evolution as an artist. And it is a behavioral trait that occurs, particularly in high school.

SB: Well, in this dichotomy, then, where would you place yourself in the art world? Are you playing by the rules or not, do you think?

DO: No, I don't think so. I mean, not that I wouldn't want to.

SB: You certainly have been successful.

DO: No, no, I haven't. And this is not particularly an indication of strength. It's an indication of personality -- of psychological state. And the state as early in showing itself within the high school structure, which could be seen as a comparative structure to the art world, which would unfold until later on. It is a world of overseers and critics and sociological boundaries. Of status, of all the elements that we find in the world that we occupy as artists. It's a sort of reduced level and .

SB: Well, speaking of high school and students, I understand that another well-known artist, Walter Demoria, was your fellow student.

DO: Yes.

SB: Were you friends then? Did you know each other?

DO: Well, he was a few years older than I was, and I knew his brother. His name was Jimmy. Jimmy and I -- Jimmy Demoria -- were friends. They lived in the flat lands of Richmond, and their father was a butcher -- a grocer -- named Angelo, I believe. They owned a butcher shop, I believe. Jimmy was really a relatively good influence on me. He controlled. He was smart. He was a very good athlete. And he was very small, but he was quite extraordinary at basketball. I liked him. He had a sense of humor, but he also had tolerance, and you could see that he was not willing to go as far as I was, in terms of testing the limits of behavior. He was also very good at ping pong. He's very skilled. Very skilled. His brother was, at that time, mysterious.

SB: Mysterious?

DO: Mysterious.

SB: You mean, even at that time. You're saying that now his reputation is being mysterious.

DO: Well, you see, first of all it's saying a lot that we can even calibrate what mysterious meant. In other words, what kind of mystery, and how do we define this ? Is it a kind of persona? In other words, you would need literature to try to age in dissecting. I mean, we had so little fundamental guides in which to evaluate anything. I mean, I think whatever I had at that point in determining a person who is mysterious, who evokes mystique and somebody who is mediocre was simply my own sort of development of a language that probably my art for later on. But first of all, he was certainly not a conformist. He evoked a definite kind of fragility and sensitivity, which was almost dangerous at that point because it was a period which would allude to exciting individuals to consider his sexual preference. I mean, he wasn't a feminist, but he was delicate. He didn't play sports. He played the drums. He wasn't popular. A popular person at that time -- it was rare that a person with those idiosyncrasies could, in this deluge of conformity, arrive at any sort of powerful position. But I remember he ran for an office when I did, and we were allowed a certain period of time on stage to give a speech. And rather than give a speech, he brought his drums out and he played this rhythmic kind of chant to his name, which was really quite remarkable if you think about it because it was early Steve Riley or Phil Glass. Kind of cereal music. It was given to this sort of primitive beat, and it was quite mesmerizing. And the two times I saw him, he was definitely more mature and much more -- it was easy to see that he had developed a certain , a certain that was very unusual in that school. sense of humor was very developed, and the way he carried himself. But I didn't see him as much as his brother. But sure, he was there. We had no idea that he was an artist.

SB: Do you know if he did?

DO: Well, no. You see, my understanding of art was that I wouldn't necessarily equate that kind of behavior with what they eventually unfold into an art career. He was just a little strange.

SB: Was there any particular teacher of art in high school that meant anything to you? Inspired you, encouraged you?

DO: Well, you know, unfortunately it's so incredible. When you read James , and you read about his life as a young man and his extraordinary memory and subtlety of which he goes over episodes that occurred when he was one year old, and you yourself have to admit that not only did you not have the acuity then to even establish opinions about your surroundings, but you've lost all the ability to reconstruct them, even with the ability to articulate them that you may have now. I had teachers that I wish I had more of a kind of open memory. I wish the whole thing would have seemed more -- [end of side one, tape one]

SB: You were saying you .

[Cassette1, Side B]

DO: Yes. I was saying that the impressions that were made were, on one hand, period of time. And on the other, I just wish I had more analytical memory. Because I think there were teachers that -- you know, this is you would get for a psycho-analysis, where you would really sort of concentrate . But my art teachers were never certainly thee ones that I would call influence . I think art is to a very unimportant position. And had I had been a genius there, I probably would have . So I was disadvantaged in two ways. the ability to recognize and the ability given the aptitude at that point to differentiate the things that I remember about that period are more kind of centered around the shifting character traits, the shifting personality as you go from one age to another slowly, and the usual dynamic growth changes and things that occurred in that incredible period twelve years old and sixteen. I mean, those four years were extraordinary coverage. I think I always felt that high school was kind of a joke. That I was not being given the education I probably need. That I was the frivolous aspect of youth and ignoring the more serious questions of my future. I was certainly rather relaxed about what I was going to do. I didn't leave high school knowing that I was going to become an artist, although it was really something I considered. I was not sure. I experience a short period of questioning at that time. For a year I kind of rambled from one period to another before I went into art school. The fifties were indeed a period of the dark ages. Our latitude of of was limited. Our genetic nuances were undeveloped of perceiving things. Our sociological network was limited. Our stimulus was not conducive to the uses of the imagination. The overwhelming construct that one found themselves in conformity and extremely limited views and narrow visions. Although this is not the person was, the surroundings were so enormously influential at that time, and particularly if you're guarding your relationship with your peers, your peers necessarily alias. You find yourself forcing certain behavioral traits on yourself. These quickly -- these were shed within a tremor into college. But I was still a boy from Richmond.

SB: [laughs]

DO: And I still had a hotrod.

SB: You still had a hotrod?

DO: Yes, I still had a hotrod.

SB: How did you choose California College of Arts and Crafts to go to?

DO: Well, it was an obvious choice. San Francisco seemed extraordinarily hostile to me. It was a big city. I think it was . And it was across the bridge, and I felt that was a little bit too much for me. This was the only other place to go. I spent a semester at a junior college -- Junior College -- which was really not very satisfying. Many of my friends went to Cal.

SB: They did?

DO: Yes.

SB: Well then, this school with all the hotrodders did produce people who went on --

DO: Yes. Many of my friends were --

SB: So you had friends who were college-bound as well as going to Standard Oil to work, or whatever.

DO: Yes. Exactly.

SB: So they went to UC Berkeley.

DO: Yes. Which required a language. I simply could not get in. I didn't take French or Spanish successfully. So I went to Arts and Crafts finally. This was in 1958. So there was a year or so of really not doing much at all. Working odd jobs. A very uncomfortable period, being really quite lost. And this was very much in the fifties, so I was still under the kind of membrane of stimulus and relatively few to express any kind of emotional state. It was a rather depressive period. So going to Arts and Crafts was certainly an awakening because here one was all of a sudden thrown in with all of these people that you identified with, and never knew exactly how strong your identity would be until you saw them all together. Although there were lingering of homosexuality . I think in the fifties, it was probably impossible to be a homosexual. I mean, it was so taboo that any sign of it would -- I mean, that singular characteristic I think marked that period and qualified more than anything else. It was so restricted and so limited in its view. Not that those characteristics were being flaunted to a great degree in art school, but yet they were certainly -- one would certainly appreciate the flamboyance of that orientation in art.

SB: You mean by going to art school, a male makes himself subject to ?

DO: No. No, no, no. It's just that in art school, unlike high school, you would see these behavioral traits relax in some individuals who happen to be gay.

SB: Oh, I see.

DO: And that co-existence between the straight people, which I always identified with, and the gays -- became mellow. In other words, in high school, it was extraordinary sinister in the fifties.

SB: I see.

DO: It wasn't until the sixties that that started to change. It's like night and day now. But I grew up in a period where it was extraordinarily . And any of the characteristics that one finds almost rudimentary any kind of expression of theatrical any kind of play would be presented in high school, there was a sort of feeling -- kind of loft in place -- if the behavior hadn't steered away the suspicions. It was a crude barometer and crude patrol system on the emotional state of expression. Extraordinarily macho , and because of that extremely and extraordinarily cliche. But I, for some reason, when I started art school, I had worked that summer at the shipyard. It was my first job -- and it was not an enjoyable job at all -- as a laborer. But for some reason I had developed a strange attitude that if I went to art school, I had to finance it myself. And, of course, the tuition was only two hundred and fifty dollars at that time. But to be able to go to school you had to have some money. I think deep down I thought that I could stay. I wasn't sure that I would be able to succeed at this. I didn't even know exactly what it was I was getting into. And I didn't want to have somebody supporting me with because I felt that would be too much to bear. It would be better if I support myself, and if I fail, at least I know that I wasn't a double burden. So I continued to work at the shipyard, and this was not easy.

SB: And you were living at home?

DO: Yes, I was living at home at the time. This was not easy. This meant I had to wake up at six-thirty in the morning, and I would pack two meals. One would be lunch and one would be dinner. Then I would drive to my

art history class at seven-thirty, and then spend the whole day at school, and I would leave about three o'clock and drive about thirty miles to the shipyard. I had to be there at four o'clock, which was called swing shift. And I worked until twelve midnight. And then I came home at twelve-thirty, and then I'd do the whole thing over again. So I worked full-time. Now, activity alarmed my parents a great deal.

SB: [laughs]

DO: They thought it was unnecessary, and they felt that I'm certainly not getting the education that I could if I wasn't doing this. And they were very sort of disturbed by the whole thing. But I continued,a nd I'm not sure -- I probably had a lot of money because I was working full-time, not because of the rest of the kids.

SB: How long do you think you did this? A year?

DO: Yes, I did it a year.

SB: So you must have been exhausted.

DO: Yes, I was exhausted. I think I did it until I was laid off -- until I had to stop. And then I went on unemployment. So I still had money. A very small amount, but it was enough to live on. So it was very important for me to do this. However, that first year of art school is rather vague in my mind because I was so distracted by this terrible life of having to be packing two lunches. Certainly, needless to say, my concentration in art history inthat early morning class was not very sharp. So I was happy when it was over, and the next year I performed very, very well.

SB: Was Peter Balkus there?

DO: He was in the vicinity. He was at Cal.

SB: As a teacher?

DO: Yes.

SB: I think he went to CC&C.

DO: I think he did.

SB: And what about .

DO: Well, he was not there, but he had been a student.

SB: Oh, he had been a student. So neither of them were there when you were there.

DO: No.

SB: Were you doing any ceramics?

DO: I took a class in ceramics in my sophomore year, but not with Sam. It wasn't something that I related to.

SB: Weren't you in an exhibition in 1966?

DO: Yes.

SB: Abstract expressionist ceramics? John Caplan at UC Irvine?

DO: I don't know.

SB: You know who has this is Thomas Albright.

DO: Really?

SB: Thomas Albright in his book.

DO: I don't remember that.

SB: Well, you know, I will look this up to make sure I have this --

DO: Yes. 1966 is when I was at Stanford.

SB: Were you doing any ceramics at Stanford?

DO: I don't think I used clay. I certainly wasn't doing ceramics, but I may have used clay. I've never really done . I've used clay and I've made things.

SB: I will look this up. This is Thomas Albright's book on the Bay Area arts since 1945 or something. I'll let you know if I've confused anything.

DO: He died, right?

SB: Yes. He was the critic for years. He mentioned something else that I am delighted to hear about.

DO: He has a book out.

SB: Oh, yes. It was published . He had finished the book and then died. We're getting ahead a little bit.

DO: Yes.

SB: He talks about a show you were in in the early sixties. But I want to know what you were studying. What did you major in at ?

DO: Well, at that time it wasn't even clear if I would go into commercial art. It was very early. I was like nineteen years old.

SB: I know a lot of students start with commercial art.

DO: Yes. But within one year I knew that I was not going to be a commercial art artist. But the first year -- the freshman year -- in all of those design classes -- in rudimentary classes -- very academic. The next year it was like night and day because I wasn't working. All of a sudden I became something like an artist in the school.

SB: You did?

DO: Yes. Like overnight. I mean, those things happen. And art school is probably a little bit like a mini art world, and some of the same characteristics that determine failure and success occur within that kind of laboratory. I had a wave of extraordinary reduction and really the kind of early sort of realization of motivation and energy. So I was becoming really quite the kid on campus.

SB: Now tell me, what were you producing? What was it you were making then? Were they ?

DO: Well, you know, this sort of phenomenon in 1959, unlike how it would occur today -- because I've been in lots of high schools, like Halifax, Nova Scotia, where we've had some extraordinary -- the caliber of coming out of London now. Very, very young, but really quite good. You know, like Andy . These people are extraordinary on an international level. So there's your sort of of young kind of . This is very much within the school itself. was not necessarily. It was not very good necessarily. But it was better than many. I mean, I think I'm discovering my ability to push limits, to find solutions, to deal with more difficult problems. I was trying a vocabulary that up until that time did not expose itself. But work based on any criteria -- certainly a national criteria -- was work that I don't have anymore. It's nothing extraordinary. It wasn't based on an particular or a comprehensive drawing or academic skills. It was an energy. A tremendous amount of production, a tremendous amount of energy was coming out. Many things were made bigger than most people, more material, more grandiose, more radical. Strictly sculpture.

SB: Give me a little description literally.

DO: Well, our sculpting teacher was from New York. We had two of them. , who was a very tough New Yorker, and another one named Mr. Dole, who was a New Yorker as well. These people were definitely important to me. was very . He was sharp and he was tough. He was a New Yorker, and I'd never been around a New Yorker. Jewish and Catholic. And he was verbal, unlike many. My biggest complaint about being from the West Coast is that you are not stimulated to -- your verbal skills are not applauded. There are professors there that are simply not verbal, and they grunt and groan, and try to illustrate things through some sort of body language which never quite effected it. So these people were. They were very verbal and they were very sharp, and they were very much at the time. Unfortunately, they didn't turn out to be very good artists, or they chose not to enter the stream. But they were good teachers, and they stimulated you.

SB: Now, were they both sculpture teachers?

DO: Yes.

SB: So you were doing sculpture then?

DO: Yes.

SB: And what was it made out of?

DO: Oh, we would work in plaster and styrofoam. A little welding, but not much. I couldn't weld. I still don't weld. I was doing a lot of water colors. We had a teacher that inspired the students to paint exactly like he did, so that was interesting. Although we were all quite awestruck with his work. So we were really operating a very low informational level. The input was coming very slow, however, these things that I identified with -- these characteristics of energy and the tendency to upset and to finally compete, I think, the element of competition. We were taught that if you wanted to make a piece better, you could will yourself to do that. You know, these people said some good things. I think they were the first to express things through a language that had extremely "vibrant" sense -- interpretative sense -- that manifested itself in a realignment of . I interpreted it correctly and changed effectively because of some of the verbal I got from that point. More than, perhaps, the visual. So anyway, that all kind of evaporated. That of euphoria. As quickly as it ascended, it down and disappeared in total . And then I quit school. Then I got married.

SB: What were you feeling, do you think, when you quit school?

DO: Oh, I was pretty depressed.

SB: Because you weren't a star anymore?

DO: Well, I was not a start out of default. I left. I quit. I mean, it's something I brought upon myself

SB: Have you lost faith in art?

DO: Well, I'm twenty years old, I was experiencing, I would say, psychologically, a very clear case of , of the kind of depression that occurred in artists often -- in others -- after a certain accomplishment. And there's this period that can and often does contrast that with a time of depression. And I think that's exactly what I had, although I had nothing to contrast it because I had never had anything like that before that I was aware of, that I could easily pin down, as I could then. Because it registered not only in quitting school -- I mean, quite a was the final result of the psychological stage. It was considerably earth-shaking because not only did I quit and get married, but I moved. I moved to Hawaii. My father suggested I go out there because he was relocated. He was doing all this work for Keizer, and he said, "This is probably a chance for you to do something, and you may as well travel." It did look pretty good to me.

SB: So the whole family was moving?

DO: Yes. Everyone moved. But by that time I was living alone. I was twenty and I got married and I moved to Hawaii and I began to work there, in construction -- doing things in that field. It was very clear that I had school. I didn't know exactly what that meant, but I was very much in another situation. My wife was having a child. So all of a sudden I was thrown into this new world. The first few months of the transition was very, very difficult. But then I aligned myself with certain jobs. I kind of swore, at that moment, envisioned myself as kind of an upstart type because basically everything there was speculative. I mean, it was all about land, all about developing the land, all about making a lot of money. So all of a sudden I assumed the identity of a young entrepreneur. Within about a year of that sort of mindset, I became this kind of extraordinary young versatile entrepreneur. Certainly not in any great stature, and certainly not of any real , but in 1960 I was acquiring things that at that time it took a person many years to have. I bought a big house, I had some employees, I had my own company that was doing advertising and promotion. I was buying land and I was speculating. And art, for the moment -- it remained as a conduit in this new operational mode, but it was not necessarily at all my frame of identity. I was a kind of quasi- . I was operating within this judicious world of business, and I was developing a cunning principality because of my capabilities to distinguish between things of value and things that are a bit ahead of their time. I was building this whole pretense of this capability to operate within the real world, and not the world of abstraction that art would occupy. This reached a similar position as the period in college that sophomore year, in which I radiated extraordinarily like so much mist that burns off, leaving another desert. So this whole thing fell apart.

SB: I have to ask you -- how did you get the skills or how did you know how to do this advertising that you were doing, or all the things that you were doing? Your entrepreneurship.

DO: Well, this is in 1960. There is a general level of naivete a lot, and I had two years of art school. I was already availed of certain abilities that lots of people weren't. I had a sensibility about creativity and about what I felt my into promotion, and I would go after accounts and I had my father in a very high position, so I could lean on his influence to open up doors. I mean, I used everything I could. I wasn't afraid of anything. I was very aggressive. I would move into things and myself into positions, and do things of spec, and because of it I would get accounts. So I began to make money. Of course, money, in those days, was not much. But it was an indicator of my as an

entrepreneur. But it was also uncomfortable because it was clear that I was venturing into the unknown. I think that somebody that kind of starts off at scratch at that early age has not built up any strong identities of his or her ability. They're in a constant state of testing and discovery, and of hitting themselves against things, only to find out the reactions so that they can register that in their memory. There's so much risk. It's very high risk. You're testing your ability of social effectiveness -- of persuasion. Of consistency. How long can the camera ? How many times know before you fall apart? These things are so unknown there, that you're the roving three-hundred-and-sixty-degree guinea pig that is operating a total kind of laboratory of . So it was quite painful because you're screwing around a lot. I mean, it's really quite brutal when you're young to throw yourself in a situation that you build up the strength to open the door and walk in, that you don't have the experience and the acuity to come off with anything except a young kid. You just have the guts, and often not the substance to back it up. So it's really disappointing. And this period with remnants of art school. I mean, I kept well, I came from artistic. That is my identity. I'm doing things that may appear a bit estranged from art, but yet I can find within them areas of creativity where I can always justify using my skills. Buying land -- it doesn't seem to be creative, but it is. So I always identified with that entrepreneurial spirit as having definite artistic ramifications that are equated with how one operates as an artist. Artists have to be entrepreneurs. Especially if they do difficult art. So once again I became rather extraordinary. I made a lot of money. I had all kinds of things. But I was developing a rather poor marriage, and so my wife went back home for a little rest, as we called it. And at that point everything fell apart. Not that that was such a trauma for me -- it was just that things were beginning to unfold into what was going to be this continual state of highs and lows which was going to -- unbeknownst to me -- occur forever. And in the periods of extraordinary production would be met shortly after with extraordinary periods of recession and downplay. So with these periods of change came extraordinary changes. Divorce, going back to school. Each one came with that were an outcome of the reposition of a high to low -- total change in direction, total change. So that one came with going back to school. So once again I was back at school. And once again a hot shot. [laughs]

SB: [laughs] That's good.

[Cassette 2, Side A]

SB: back in Oakland?

DO: No, we're still in Hawaii.

SB: Okay. You're still in Hawaii?

DO: Yes.

SB: You went back to school?

DO: Yes. I went to the University of Hawaii. So here I am, still in Hawaii. Of course, I still have remnants of my period of entrepreneurial bliss. I still have my house, which I've rented out. I still have my fancy car, and I have lots of money.

SB: But you closed your business -- your public relations business.

DO: Yes. I stopped that, and I'm going to school full-time. So all of a sudden I was back, after a hiatus of two years, in a school environment, and I was about almost twenty-three years old. So I was already a little older than I would have been had I graduated right from high school. But not much. Well, the University of Hawaii in 1960 was quite something. I mean, it was a tropical environment and it captivated a lot of people from various parts of America -- many of them interesting. I think I was older with my ability to differentiate between the substance of one person and the value of another was much more acute. I felt the people were much more serious and my ability to spare it out -- the ability was much more developed. So I had some very strong relationships, friends, and a general feeling of spiritual camaraderie with this group that made up the creative department in the arts -- the art department. The teachers had varying degrees of influence there. There was one who was quite extraordinary. His name was Burt Carpenter. He's still alive. He is curator/director of Witherspoon Art Gallery in North Carolina, and he was quite influential.

SB: Do you mean he went to Witherspoon to Hawaii, or subsequently ?

DO: He went there for a few years, so he happened to be there teaching.

SB: When he was in Hawaii -- was that before or after he was at Witherspoon?

DO: Probably before. And then he went back. I think he's from there.

SB: Oh, I see.

DO: I saw him a few years ago. He taught art history. Everyone liked him. He was very good. And he taught me.

SB: He taught both studio and history?

DO: Yes. He is a painter. He took an interest in me. So this was probably 1961 or so.

SB: What was your art like when you were a student in Hawaii?

DO: Well, again, it's getting to a point here where it should have moved into some region that one could look back as informative to what would eventually become a career. But it was too early. They were still caught within a kind of lesson/plan orientation of the kind of controls that were administered in that small context, and they were highly referential to probably an action/reaction of the works of other students. However, I noticed that there are some characteristics I began to see that kind of opened up the doors a little bit. It was definitely a kind of ovation or tendency towards paradox, towards . I seem to come alive when I feel that I was breaking the boundaries -- breaking the law. It's sort of an early experiential, lasting into basically. It was kind of a testing of anti-art, of the unorthodox approaches. The things that certainly contrasted others who were after the and the picturesque. So I found feedback in myself as I would instigate acts that destabilized positions and rendered them problematic. I would get a charge-back that I identified with. So I was beginning to move into a sensibility that would more or less continue, which was to approach as a radical act, and accept all of the discomforts that would come from that.

SB: Now, see if you can recall some real descriptive material form. Here we are in Hawaii, the arts -- what were you doing in a kind of very material level?

DO: Well, some of the sculptures I made at that point were of -- I used to dig holes in the ground, and I'd throw in a lot of broke and rusty steel and pieces that were kind of randomly placed, but yet want to address a certain -- a certain physiological body component. And then I'd throw plaster in. I'd make these dirt paths and then I'd throw them out, and then I'd use -- things that were really quite , and then I'd burn them. In watching me, it looked like I was brutalizing material, but I was using a lot of agents that were quite fugitive. I mean, you can't really burn plaster, but yet there is nothing that I'd seen somebody do. these things were fragile because I wasn't really interested in longevity, and I purely was identifying, at that time, with remnants of the abstract expressionist sensibility. But I think the human form was still registering as a general constructive form around the arts. Much of this experimentation and aggressiveness and suppose radicality was directed towards -- unfortunately -- the housing of a very traditional form. My painting at that period I find now very impressed. I don't find them substantial.

SB: So you were painting, as well?

DO: Yes. I was doing everything. Painting and drawing.

SB: Were the paintings -- do you have some kind of stylistic general idea? Were they abstractions? Were they ?

DO: They were unmediated, in that I had developed this ability to use art as a didactic instrument against something else. They were pretty much what they were. Many of them were figurative. They were abstract. They were basically abstract figurations.

SB: Okay.

DO: Some of them were more abstract than others, and those were, I think, an attempt to [laughs] try to understand the feedback from taking a known image into a region of disharmony or disfunction. Lots of the drawings were kind of hypergenic. They required lapses into sort of a forced unconscious state, a desire to conjure through the administering of the unconscious. They were experimenting in approach systems . That means how does one approach the page? I mean, it was the beginning of some theoretical vocabulary. But very little. Because most of the -- the pedagogical system was extraordinarily basically visual. The language was visual. Conceptual wasn't even invented then. Idea art. I suppose if we had paid attention during the lectures on Ducharme, with an unusual informed acuity, one would have differentiated between the conceptual approach to images in that of the visual. But I was operating on an emotional level. Remnants of the late, late fifties with a relatively strong ovation of abstract expressionism. I hadn't built the critical positions that I would a few years later, in opposing that vehemently. a few years later, it became -- I became quite a different kind of artist. But the energy was there, the production was there, theoryness was there. I was feeling captured. It felt very good. You're twenty years old in 1960, you're with a bunch of beatniks.

SB: What do you mean? I thought that was before. What were they?

DO: Well, it was really after. In 1960 -- beats were really in the 1960s.

SB: Yes, but I mean -- it certainly was an advance in beatniks, wasn't it? 1960. It was more --?

DO: It was in advance. Yes. But not necessarily -- it wasn't really the 60s, you see?

SB: Yes.

DO: The 60s happened in 1963.

SB: Yes.

DO: 1960 was the 50s.

SB: Yes. That's what I mean. So it was more the beats than the beatniks.

DO: Yes. That's the start towards . Maybe some of us were reading about theory structures, but we didn't understand it.

SB: And some identification with James Dean?

DO: Oh, yes. Well, that was prior. That was about five years prior.

SB: And what about -- were you like Jack Kerowac, on the road? [laughs]

DO: Well, that was probably --

SB: That was 1957 when that came out.

DO: Yes. That was before. I was a young man, I had a daughter, I had been married, I had this other wife, I entered the business world -- this great world -- and I was back. I mean, I was like an old man. I had gone through this journey. What other twenty year old could talk about having a family and being divorced? Not a lot of them. So that gave me a little bit of a dimension.

SB: Yes. So how did you come to decide to leaving Honolulu?

DO: Well, these sort of unrelations kept occurring, so I reached these very high levels of performance, and then I would cascade down into this abyss. And in retooling for the next splurge, often the decisions were radical. And so the next one was to go back to arts and crafts in Oakland. So that was kind of a defeat, in a way, because I was about twenty-three going on twenty-four. I was going back to the school I was at when I was a kid. I was older. And for some reason, I ended up in the dormitory. I didn't stay there long. I knew that that was impossible. I was pretty unstable. You see, these episodes are quite severe. It's not as if you come out untouched. Often you're seeing doctors, you're taking medication. I mean, there's certain things that you have to do to build up again to equalize yourself, depending on what period it is. If it's in the early 60s, the information -- the knowledge about those things -- are relatively mute. In other words, they didn't know a lot about these conditions. So you're somewhat disadvantaged by your ability to turn these things around. You're kind of left on your own, which is pretty horrendous. They didn't have Prozac, they didn't have this great stuff that they have now. So if you're given to that sort of rather common movement, you're at that period. In the 60s, you quite often had to push out yourself. What it does eventually is it turns you into a rather strong person. I mean, you either survive or -- if you survive these things, you sometimes have views of things that other people don't have. Views that make you a little bit -- give you the advantage when you're operating well. You have certain experiences that dimension in the way that you function. So as a survivor of these things, one can develop certain strengths that are useful in making art. They can be in the form of allowing yourself close proximity to danger psychological states. For instance, because you tested things, you're more capable of knowing when you're on the brink. You're more capable of examining things, turning them over, looking at them in different ways that are really very difficult, very hard, that have a kind of sinister aspect to them. You can look at very dark things. You aren't afraid. Your level of fear has been compromised because you've experienced things. So this is all ammunition that you can use in art making. I mean, whether you use it well -- whether you're a good artist -- is another question. But these capabilities as an outgrowth of these conditions, I found very useful over the years. Anyway, after arts and crafts, these conditions stopped, so I didn't have those sort of severe things. I had more or less of a relatively mild upbringing into into the 60s. But those periods very much rest in that period, and then occur after Stanford, which was in 1966. But when I came back to arts and crafts, it was a bleak period because again, I'm kind of returning after this long void with not a lot to show for ut.t I mean, I had done all this stuff that I kind of ostracized about. I basically vaporized it, so it didn't linger in that I never talked about any of this stuff. I was like somebody who just sky-dropped four years later back to where he was. But I quickly became a hotshot again, and this time I was fairly -- I was motivated, I was serious and I was stable. So I got a degree in English -- a minor in English, a degree in education, and then I got a scholarship to Stanford, and I got a Master's degree in about six months.

SB: I know .

DO: Well, I just took -- I snuck in there in the summer. They were on the quarter system, so it was already accelerated because they had four quarters a year. No, no. Three. So that allowed you to take new classes each quarter. I took over-load in the summer. When September came around, I was almost half-way through the course, and I doubled-up on both the other quarters, and I was out in April.

SB: So it looks like you --

DO: I got a bunch of degrees the same year.

SB: Yes. Were they both 1965, or did you actually graduate from CCAC in 1964? Do you remember?

DO: I think I graduated from CCAC in 1964, and then Stanford in 1965.

SB: Yes, yes. That's amazing enough.

DO: Well, yes, because often those people spend a couple years in that program. I worked like a maniac.

SB: Who --?

DO: I had Nathan Olivera, who was having a mid-life crisis. I had Keith Bowles, who was a painter. I had Frank Robdelle. I took no art history. I took only studio.

SB: You mean it wasn't required?

DO: Well, we had academic sessions. We did have course work. But by and large, it was all studio. I remember distinctly that the day I arrived at Stanford and the day I left, I didn't miss one day in the studio. I mean, I worked every day for nine months, and sometimes all night. So I worked all the time. I expanded from one rom to about six rooms. I took over an entire building, work that would overflow in the courtyard. I did hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of pieces. I was reading a lot, I was developing theory. The workwas probably -- I guess you can describe it as kind of Bay Area . It was the sort of tongue-in-cheek. It was mediated. It was quite often of other art. It was . It was bad painting. It was all these subversive methods one had to attack -- a tutorial stability and tradition. So it was a real hotbed of turning in art. But unfortunately, it didn't carry with it -- most of it -- activity that fed the approach. The kind of prelude to the approach was sort of in only intellectually. It wasn't part self. And the difference would have been that if there was as much emotional and intuitive understanding of what I was doing, and less intellectual foreplay, I think the work would have been much more -- much better directive. I think that I was developing extraordinary kind of intellectual play field, which I would onto a working structure. But there was very little of me inside of it. My ability to extrapolate from one work to the next was because it was so over-burdened with intellectual prelude that to move it so it went someplace -- it went in an important direction -- was difficult. And when I moved it, I didn't move myself. I moved kind of apparatus that I was an appendage to myself. So it was a question of the difference between a real experience, going from one work to the next, that I was carrying the artist totally with it, versus a kind of intellectual journey that was often fed by a lot of reading and a lot of kind of intellectual decisions that were not matched by experiential working information. But you can go a long way on this, and lots of artists never have a full spectrum of real dimensional input from one work to the next, where your sensory system is finding itself registered in one work, and then upgrading it into a more acute position. It's not easy. But it is a description of the kind of organic growth that one -- if you had a choice of directing, one would direct itself into. Because you end up finding yourself in an intellectual plateau that could be quite remarkable, and could instigate and deliver a whole career -- twenty years of work afterward, but it could be that it's not really you. It's possible to find yourself in a position where your mind has out this cage that you can enter and maybe no one else can quite the way that you have, but yet it doesn't really belong to you, and you find that out later -- that it's just not comfortable. It does get you applause, it does get you recognition, it does suit yourself to art historical lineage well. It had to be done by somebody. But the trauma is when you, through evolution, as you try to coax it along and claim it year after year, it's something that you generated with a full body. So unbeknownst to me, you have to be careful on your early claims, although often a person does know how to enter into a claim totally, with all the senses. You wouldn't know how to make that happen. But if it does -- if that is a gift that you have -- then as you play it out, everything becomes much more conducive to a natural field of inspiration. It doesn't constantly require that sort of forced intellectual positioning of from time to time. So intuition to enter the work, which I believe to be perhaps undefined and not totally that I had at my hands, but yet the degree of it wasn't -- I think my ability to understand it and to place it and to know where it comes from was not sufficient enough to explain it and to understand the way that it was affecting me and making me grow as an artist. So I developed extraordinarily lofty intellectual positions because I was being persuaded by a real natural urge for radical upset. I was really -- at that point -- without doubt -- that I wanted to be a cutting edge artist.

SB: You did?

DO: Yes.

SB: Now I really understand what you're saying here about the intuition and the intellectual overlay. What books would this lofty intellectual position be coming out of? Do you remember something you were actually reading?

DO: Well, came out of the real sources. But often in those days, because it was so much the studio, we would devour art more.

SB: I was going to say Art Form was on the West Coast then, also?

DO: Yes. Art Form was. We were reading and we were reading and we were reading Lucille and we were reading .

SB: Michael Freed?

DO: Michael Freed. Minimalism was being deconstructive.

SB: Kraus?

DO: Kraus. Oh, yes.

SB: So you were reading Art Form regularly. Did you do the whole spectrum -- Art News? Art in America?

DO: Pretty much. Yes. I was quite eager to art magazines. I think it started in Hawaii. I think I was always looking at art in a eye.

SB: But now those instructors you mentioned at Stanford -- I know them and know of them from . They themselves don't have a particularly intellectual approach to their art.

DO: No.

SB: Were you responding at all to your instructors or your fellow students, or was it more your own ambition, or what? What was stimulating it?

DO: It was really not there. It really came from just my tendency to slowly up the ante on one piece to the next, in terms of this critical course. I felt more and more dissatisfied with -- well, we all admired Frank Waddel. He was an older guy. He was clearly an artist, there's no question about it. He wasn't terribly verbal, but he was a painter who tried and occasionally succeeded in bringing to light a nuance that one could identify with as a working mode, a certain intellectual state that manifested itself in the mood into a visual thing. There was getting and we respected him a great deal. Keith Bowles, I found, was extraordinarily unable to give much. I mean, it wasn't a good time for him. He was sinister, he was , he had a lot of trouble. Nate, who was a wonderful guy, was having a nervous breakdown.

SB: He was literally?

DO: Yes. He was having a mid-life crisis, and his work was going nowhere, which I really got a lot of information from, unfortunately. I mean, I found out a perfect time to kind of study the behavior of an artist who was really having a hard time. Little did I know that this state that he was experiencing was probably normal, and one that everyone experiences. But he was doing it so graphically, right in front of our eyes, that that short year --

SB: Do you mean about self doubts?

DO: Well, I mean like his studio was right next to mine, and and his Jaguar, and running the studio and the commotion. And then he would jump in his car and race away and . It would be a couple months on . He was not able to get . He was my advisor. He saw me once in the whole period. One afternoon for a half an hour. The the conversation I had with him. But it didn't matter. Just the ambiance of all those guys in their forties having this difficult time. It was a serious message to me.

SB: Now tell me, in this time -- you're saying you were responding against , making neo- . How much did you know tradition? How much did you know art history? Did you go the museums? The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. This is before the University of Art Museum - Berkeley. Stanford had this little museum.

DO: Right.

SB: Did you have the opportunity to actually look at any paintings by these big guys ?

DO: Yes. I would say, certainly by today's standards, that my education in art history was minimal, and my

exposure was minimal. And I think that my state was a state of mind that I harbored as a graduate student at Stanford, was one that is not unfamiliar today and found in lots of young people. The feeling was that art is what you don't know. Everything else is art history.

SB: [laughs]

DO: So one got a certain sort of satisfaction out of believing that their intellectual drafts and experience in art history was not necessary for them to become a great artist, because most great art detours from the art that came before it, and it is precipitated from a break from it. I think generally our academic knowledge of art was certainly compromised and rather limited, although I wouldn't say that I was like an anti-intellectual. I think that I am familiar with my kind of social ambiance at that time, when I would go to a gathering and somebody would ask Stanford is this extraordinary institution, and you might be in some barn painting, but you're right next to the medical school and the school of philosophy and music. So you're with extraordinary people. But the persona of being an artist was one at that time that carried with it that sort of existential notation of outside verbal -- you can't really explain it. We've perpetuated this myth that one was endowed with certain abilities that you either had or you didn't, and you couldn't articulate them. Although I thought this, but this was very much a posture that one would find themselves in in California. I frankly resented it even though I wasn't particularly articulate. I was much more inclined to try in critiques and things of that sort. But yet, when I was in a social circuit with all kinds of people from different disciplines, because I was so less articulate than they were --

SB: Than your fellow students?

DO: Well, people from the philosophy department or the English department. That I had to rest back on this sort of condition of -- I'm visual.

SB: [laughs] That's a New Yorker , you know?

[Cassette 2, Side B]

SB: Let's pick up where we left off about where you were at Stanford. Just to finish with Stanford, I'll tell you that last week when I spoke to John Gibstono about all sorts of things, I asked him what he recalled of meeting you because he gave you a show in May of 1968, I think.

DO: Yes.

SB: And he said, "Well, he was just out from Stanford and he was so articulate. He was unusually articulate, and very confident." And I said, "Would you attribute this to Stanford?" What do you think of that assessment of yourself at the time?

DO: Well, oddly enough, I think some of my descriptions at Stanford may have reflected quite the opposite. The consensus we're all having a mid-life crisis, a nervous breakdown -- many of them are a school in a kind of sort of visual approach to art, which often wouldn't require verbal reports. So Stanford was not necessarily instrumental in creating any kind of verbal capacity. But I think the time required it, and I think that it was clear that if one were to move into the atmosphere that oneself building around, that it was no longer approachable through the usual of non-verbal , but it was probably theoretical, and necessitated -- at least for some people. I think there was a general language out there that was proving that art could be talked about successfully, and some of the darker areas of it were -- it was possible to penetrate them through language. And I think that the ideas that Gibson saw exemplified in the models of things were ones that were based on theoretical structure that could be articulated.

SB: Okay. Now, you moved to New York in 1966, right?

DO: Yes.

SB: I have noted that it seems that you might have done your first -- what would be called earth work in Oakland?

DO: Yes. Oakland Wedge.

SB: Oakland Wedge from mounting. Why don't you tell us a little about this -- how did this come about?

DO: You know, to demystify this whole thing -- first of all, graduate school for some can be a time when they are able to isolate themselves in test theories. I mean, if they're pursuing a rigorous and a kind of well organized procedure in which at the end of the course they want to have as much evidence as possible that they have asked very hard questions of themselves, have determined some of the identity of their creative process, of their belief systems, of their genetic capabilities as an artist -- a psychological state which allow them entry here and not there. In other words, as much information about themselves as a vehicle as some sort of instrument that's

going to hopefully be able to generate art. So this is a period of extreme scrutiny, and it co-exists with knowing as much about the outside art world as possible. So it's a time of intense study -- intense questioning -- and hoping to come up with some sort of sense of departure -- so that way you can get out, and supposedly you'll be able to be armed well enough to make some serious work. This is pretty much the state that I was in. I took it very seriously. I wanted to think that I was occupying myself with the most radical state because I had already realized that I was capable of radical work. I had already realized that I was uncomfortable with anything less than that. So I was getting clues about my sensibility and these are one of the main things that a student wants too have open up to them -- what kind of artist can I be. I was terribly naive, although I did have this general sense of what seemed to be a natural liquidation toward irradical, which means that there was so much other stuff that I didn't want to do. So I had a series of clues. And again, I can't under-stress the focus on the exterior at prevailing art world as it was generated through the media, through test groups, information. I was silently carrying on a dialogue with other artists who I felt were not a patient of something strenuous. I was open to the possibility of some fracture of the present state. And that's kind of all you have to be. If you number one think that you have a natural inclination towards radical and difficult works that you've already proven that you aren't necessarily a commercial artist, we haven't even mentioned the fact that we think you're a good artist. But those things you don't know for a long time. But at least there is some alignment, and so I find it really quite rudimentary. I find my surfacing in New York, through and things, relatively understandable. I mean, again, being a person who is alert and sensitive and desirous, I think this could have happened to anyone. I think it happened to lots of people. But whether you're a good artist or not -- these qualities -- a direction of sensing openings -- are not necessarily part and parcel with something deeper that is only revealed after years and years and years of operation. There are some artists who are occupying radical positions that they assumed years and years ago, which may not be theirs. Meaning that the way they usurp them, and the way that they allowed their minds to possess them, and then eventually through interface with historical continuum, they were identified with a certain position. And now they're supposed to be the grandfathers of certain movement. I can be talking about a lot of people here. This possession of this original thing is still questionable. Whether it was really heartfelt, whether it was discovery, whether it matches well with its psychology, whether they are not in fact now simply a puppet from some sort of position that they can't get off being because they're identified with them. I mean, the proof of possession takes a long time to reveal. Possession meaning the person really has it, to the point where he can do something every time. That kind of possession. Quite often, some of the discoveries made by the conceptual artists were hailed and applauded, and as they continued them and repeated them over and over and over again, and we all were willing to bestow upon them a certain credit of signature -- signature style which occurred years ago, at this point of breakthrough -- their gift to art is relatively minimal. They've done a relatively minor event, frankly. So anyway, these things have always come to mind over the years, as an artist. I'm sure not only to me, but many artists, I think, occurs by the time reveries -- or reflection or suspicion, and questions about the origins of their ideas, how well these origins stick with the temperament. Because it is true. A temperament can be quite destructive to good art. I mean, if you want your work to be somewhat wedged to your temperament -- if you want to find yourself doing work that you feel you're psychologically capable of, and won't give you a psychological structure too much frustration, you are sometimes limiting your work. I mean, it's quite a diabolical process by which this stuff unfolds. But anyway, back then I was thinking about all this stuff. Not to the extent that I would eventually think about it in the 70s. I mean, it became my whole method of operation was that of a diagnostic. I was diagnosing the art structure itself. The impulse. It became the material -- my work was about how the function -- what's behind the act. It was all diagnostic.

SB: Now, let's go back to Oakland Wedge. I'm interested in if you have any recollection of where this came from. 1967 was relatively early vis-a-vis anyone doing constructions and .

DO: I think that definitely this work came through my concentration of theory that made-up the dialogue of minimal art. I think that I was working hard and thinking a lot about minimal art. I was reading a lot. I was asking myself hard questions. I was in an atmosphere that was quite antagonistic to this because California was not a hot bed of minimalism. It was, in fact, quite the opposite. It was where funk art and some of the remnants of this minimalist were fighting against, which were arbitrary juxtaposition of assemblage was going on in California. The sort of surreal data of funky, Wileyesque, Hudsonesque, the organic works of . This was Stanford more than anything else. There were no minimal artists there. But yet, this was clearly the most rigorous theory if you were reading Barbara Rhode and Frank Stella, and you were reading about painting. I mean, for an open mind like mine, this stuff was jolting. Not that my work at that point was anything like that. I was involved in some kind of real data, sort of -- as I said, I was feeling bad painting. That very gray area. So Oakland Edge came out of this stew of theoretical dialogue that I was emersed in. It was a work that I think I just wanted to test the waters with. Smithson was writing, Andre was writing. You were seeing their work. Sol LeWitt was dealing with his systematic units of and his grids, and there was already a ray of material out there that one could think about. Smithson was extremely catalytic because he was writing about the real world. His writing was enormously catalytic, I think, at that time. I found that very exciting. There was also an article by Michael Freed, talking about minimalism approach in theatricality, which seemed interesting at the time, too. There was, of course, a lot of discussion about phenomenology and Robert Morrack was writing his notes on sculpture. So as a student

at Stanford in 1966, Art Form just came out. But I was reading and I was inspired by what was happening on the East Coast.

SB: Well, I find it interesting that you went to New York. It seems like you went to New York, but then you must have been travelling back to California regularly because you did your Oakland Wedge then.

DO: Yes.

SB: Was that because you knew the terrain better?

DO: No. My parents lived there. It was nothing like that. I used to go back to these shows there.

SB: And this Wedge came out of your , right?

DO: It was actually before. It was kind of an awkward work that was simply a -- speaking about the older , I was showing in 1966 a bunch of plastic tombstones.

SB: Oh, really?

DO: Yes. They were shown in the gallery.

SB: Which gallery?

DO: Hanson Huller.

SB: Oh!

DO: And they were these plastic tombstones that -- I mean, they were not -- I don't know what I think about the work. They were plastic.

SB: Do you mean like cheap plastic or plastic?

DO: Cheap plastic. They were fabricated, and they had lights inside, and they sat -- there were about fifteen of them. It looked almost like a seretical statement on minimalism. I mean, it was very , the tombstones were slowly decreasing in size, indicating some kind of mathematical concern.

SB: Were they in any kind of geometric array?

DO: Yes. They were in a grid. They occupied kind of a cube, and they had quite a presence, and they were rather eerie. But these were things that were more remnants of my sort of continued -- I guess what you'd call it -- kind of eustachian of . I am still trying to throw up the of the West Coast park education.

SB: But still, so it's a play on minimalist cubes, but what about other associations to tombstones? Here we are in 1966. I guess you're twenty-eight. I guess you don't have any Vietnam grasp . You were too old for that, right?

DO: Yes. I didn't because I had children.

SB: And you had children as well. Okay. But still, what about the consideration of these tombstones in relation to civil rights, murder or Vietnam deaths? You know, urban city, urban riots?

DO: I think that at that early period in 196 there was already a feeling that there wasn't going to be a great suture in loading that kind of content into the work as much as there would be a future in dealing with these theoretical truisms. It seemed that it seemed to be going towards some kind of deconstruction, some kind of opening, or some kind of major statement about what constitutes an object or non-object. We were unbeknownst to ourselves losing into an area of dematerialization. And I think that this was a prelude of any value, it was a rather awkward alliance with the eventual dematerialization of the object which occurred shortly after in digging holes, in doing site markers, in doing body art. So I think that even at that early stage, this wanted to shed all of those more emotional references and social references, and wanted to -- instead of being a tableau for that, wanted to open up this sort of secret dialogue with this new conceptual landscape.

SB: Okay. I want to ask you about another project that isn't documented very much. This one in the summer of 1968 that you did up in Napa. What was that? It was some kind of environmental work, wasn't it?

DO: Yes. That was a Rene , who was an early supporter of California art. He owned a vineyard. [Tape Off/On] I composed a number of these things called ground systems. They are simply, as you can see, kind of minimal form that is stuck into the ground. They would be made in steel. A hole would be dug, and they would be put inside.

SB: Now this has, I have to say, structurally, a remarkable resemblance to -- on the one hand, a grave. The proportions -- it's a rectangle. On the other hand, it is akin to what I think Keiser was doing subsequently -- his depression.

DO: Yes.

SB: So it's related to it.

DO: Yes.

SB: Well, what was going to happen in it? Anything?

DO: Well, no. It was simply a kind of --

SB: A recession? A depression?

DO: Well, I called it 'Excavator's Work.' Later they became joined with pipes and things that would put them right on top of the ground, in some sort of indication of spreading. I quickly -- -- ecological gift with ground cover and organic things.

SB: Your gifting show seems to have been titled 'Ground Systems' in May of 1968.

DO: Yes.

SB: And I think the announcement says that Dennis Oppenheim structure is 'alive and growing.' [laughs]

DO: Yes.

SB: So you had some actual plans.

DO: Yes. Hedges. In fact, that's one up there. That's a model of what would be hedges. True. So it is true that at that time the work was still extremely indebted to minimalism. It was not wanting to necessarily take a chance in any kind of superseding of that safe zone, but yet it was beginning to test the edge of the envelope, and it quickly -- in the summer of 1968 -- it quickly moved into the actual land, and then it became quite inspired. It moved away from this immediately. So these were never built. Then I did 'Landslide,' and I did these works out in the field with the wheat features.

SB: Yes.

DO: So immediately it was opening up the dialogue for what Jack Burnham calls system art. Art that's packed into an outside .

SB: What would you say appealed to you about these large-scale theory works? I mean, you could have examined systems like would examine other sorts of systems having to do with interiors, or administrations and things. Was there an appeal -- the fact that it was organic matter?

DO: Well, again, I think that there was still a sort of trepidation about losing too quickly into this new world in which the links to past art would be severed. An example -- I'm not sure how correct this is -- it probably has many views -- but the 'Discovery of Happening,' for instance, by Allan Tabrow. There's one way to look at that activity when it began as a real breakthrough, which was not controlled -- was not carefully enough controlled. So it became out of control. And in being out of control, it suffered from its connections too the things that precipitated it, so that it seemed -- it somehow lost its potential weight because of this lack of continuity. I was afraid if I would get too idiosyncratic or too caught up in some of the external systems, where the works were being dictated by this large world, that it would lose its association to its roots as a kind of logical extension of sculptural concern. I didn't want to suffer what I felt could be similar to this thing that was happening. I wanted to keep the work -- control the work somehow. Even if it related to dichorial -- I mean, there's some way of looking at these as another wall, as paintings. I wanted to keep the line and things relatively simple, but yet I didn't want at all to pretend that they were abstract gestures. In other words, I didn't want to continue beliefs that I had since disposed of, that I was engaged in abstract gesture. All these lines had conceptual information in them. The X meant canceling, this line here was taken from a map that meant something very specific. In other words --

SB: You mean this curve?

DO: Yes, yes.

SB: We're looking at photographs of .

DO: Yes.

SB: , 1969. Okay.

DO: Yes. So it was important because it was clear that this was not studio art. This is something other than studio art, and it seems to necessitate a dialogue with the real world.

SB: Is that what it meant to you? What was important about something other than studio art?

DO: Well, at the time, yes. Studio art -- of course, it's even more enlightened at the time. We should have realized there still was good studio art going on. But most studio art I felt -- and it was felt by the conceptual artist -- was misinformed, and was simply not in possession of certain truths that were now being proven by this alternative. Studio art meant a continuation of conceptual work. It very much meant the seed of objects, and this, in fact, was quite hostile to objects. It was replacing them with the -- at this point -- with the systems work, which were not necessarily objects, but were interventions of the artist within a social structure, instigating some master plan, which was depicted through photographic residue, but very much having within it a strong concrete idea, which could be approached as a sensitive art work. So in one year there were all these radical things. All of a sudden photography was being thrown into a gallery under the guise of sculpture and conceptual art, and all of a sudden work could not be purchased because they didn't exist in any tangible form. Video tapes would be -- in other words, the dematerialization process happened very quickly. Artists were using words. It was really quite a and volatile period -- 1968.

SB: What about my question about this being organic or nature? How does that fit in? Was there any desire to be with nature?

DO: Well, no. Actually, no. Unlike perhaps some of the English artists like Richard Long and , who I think confessed then approach to the natural world. I had done this. I liked to be out uncomfortable. I've never been one to react positively to nature. I was from Brooklyn. I didn't have a studio. I just worked on a desk. I'd look at a map. No. It was not at all any kind of intoxication with the natural world. There was only theory, for the sake of art.

SB: Okay. Now, you say there's a relevance in your interview with Alana in your PS1 catalog. You say about documentation of these works, "You were always making excuses for poor documentation, saying what you were doing was advanced art, there were only a few ways to communicate it in reality, and the work was gone and there was nothing to see. That's the way I wanted it." So essentially, this was about the work being .

DO: Yes.

SB: What appeals to you about the work itself, then? I mean, the crux. They came, they went.

DO: I think there are a number of artists who are quite captivated by biological and . I'm a little bit afraid of science because I knew that -- well, I'm afraid of any different because I knew that art would come close to philosophy or to science. It quite often was set off balance from its own particular course. However, I pretended to have some sort of dialogue and allegiance to ecological systems, although I think art is a delicate thing, and even then when the doors were wide open, and people were working on semeral systems and dematerializing matter, that there is a delicacy of skills silently there, and one can become intoxicated in the way that Allan Kaplan was, by the sheer atmosphere of -- I mean, happening was such a big discovery, but in a way it was ruined by this sort of intoxicated, this sort of attempt to usurp the whole thing, and not come into it with a delicate nuance. I think that I'm responsible for this as well. This is extremely intoxicating, this period. You could see an array of openings and targets that you could just knock out of the sky just by viewing certain pieces. You say, "If I do this, I'll ." It was almost strategic. You claim territory by indicating your purity on certain things that would result in work that would and occupy positions -- make them unavailable to other artists. You have to also consider seemingly upon important things like finances. There was no money around. Some artists were successful in stimulating support , but by and large, this work had to be done -- you had to live by your wits. There was no economic feedback except occasionally somebody might consider buying a photograph, which is just unheard of. Who would buy a photograph?

SB: You mean a documentary photograph?

DO: Yes. There seems to be no market. But then there became some interest, but not much. There's never been much interest in the documents and in the residues of conceptual art. Here and there. But not anywhere near painting and traditional sculpture. So the journeys of artists are very much flavored by the individual personal idiosyncracies and abilities to stimulate momentum through financial means. I mean, you're already identifying yourself as a persona unbeknownst to you in the kind of works you do and the kind of works you don't do. You're already exposing yourself and your political savvy by the kind of shows you get into and the kind of shows you don't. So already, unbeknownst to you, you're almost like a three dimensional fingerprint, exposing probably a

good part of your teacher operational identity as an artist. There are those who behave like good school boys and girls that behave themselves -- having this uncanny sense of where the boundaries are, of how to work with the system as it's unfolding, and those who simply don't have a clue, and just make these terrible blunders that they spend the rest of their lives paying for. So already at that young age, you're slowly uncovering your identity and discovering yourself through the products you make, and the feedback in which you engage and dialogue with the critical world. So the shapes are coming from all over. The force some kind of cerebral holding pattern, and year by year you're unfolding your agenda. Your agenda is constantly being undermined and being inundated with the counter forces, and your personality is being stressed out and showing signs of , your mental state is already beginning to into the work in ways that you would like to repress. So you're being thrown around by the very function of being an artist. And this is indicating itself in the work.

[Cassette 3, Side A - First 3 minutes not transcribed -- ed.]

DO: ...and all of a sudden things began to appear, and people began to read them and use them and questioning you. So to be approached at that point and asked, "Is it true that you hate objects? Is it true you hate ?" I mean, one would be simply because they aren't really equipped to divulge their theoretical positions because quite often they were just beginning to form themselves. They would and say, "Yes, I guess so. I guess they do hate objects." I mean, you would assume this rather poetic posture of kind of being above it all. So I think so -- that the issue was not getting out of -- the issue should never have been taking the combination of events that undermine conceptual art seriously. I think the thing that alluded most people was that art -- art itself -- is some true form that exists independent of how radical you are. One was confusing high art more radical, better art would be position. In other words when you said, "Oh, I hate objects," that meant that you were enlightened, that you must be able to do better art because you know something that somebody else doesn't. All those guys who are pursuing objects -- they couldn't possibly be doing as poor work as I am. It's simply not true. As we see twenty years later, when we look at certain key people now who are objects, we can see that there was nothing wrong with objects. However, being young and wanting to attach yourself to some sort of manifesto, one would quite often admit these things saying, "Oh, I really have a need to get out of galleries," but trying to send a message to the world that any smart artist who is worth his day in court would want to get out of galleries because his continuation of that kind of art is going to go nowhere. So when you believe the stuff too much -- when they're young -- it always backfires. But yet, in other words, if you develop early, eventually you'll live to a position where you'll regret it. But who was so that they know what to be, what issues to kind of leave alone? Who could be that endowed with an overview? I mean, you're into this thing. You're intoxicated. Oh, yeah. Outdoor sculpture is the only way to go. If you talk to any of these people -- Lord or -- they all talk like that. They were all expanding on their job . Seuss was ranting, "Painting is dead, painting is dead." Little did he know ten years later, painting would come back with such a force that it put him on a vacation for about seven years. I mean, you know. It's ridiculous to expand on any of this stuff. Anyone who really has a feel for art wouldn't be that foolish.

SB: But sometimes it's interesting just that those sentiments were held then.

DO: Yes. Well, sure. Beautiful. It's all good.

SB: But then we presume -- you want to get on the go -- how would you think you'd support yourself? You'd be producing something, right?

DO: Yes, yes. That was another feather we had in our cap was that we're beyond that. This is ringing in the kind of stoic position of the art is rising above the near necessity for life. [Tape Off/On]

SB: But all the same, wasn't it easier to live in New York on very little money -- say thirty years ago -- than it is now?

DO: It was relative. No, it wasn't. It was the same. It was just relative. You made less, but rents were lower. But you made less. I mean, I look at my notes from that period and I'm looking at events in which we go to great ends of the earth to collect a hundred and fifty dollars. A lecture fee -- there would be statements like, "Boy, I'm getting two hundred and fifty dollars for a lecture." Rent was only two hundred. It was relative. No, it's the same. It's the same now, relatively.

SB: I'm interested in knowing what term you prefer in referring to the sort of work which is called earth work, earth art, environmental art and land art. Would you have a preferred term? Do you think earth work is appropriate? I mean, the Europeans use land art.

DO: I never had any strong feeling about it. I know that earth works was probably generated somewhat regarding the book report, written by Brian .

SB: I haven't read that book.

DO: Well, I think that's how.

SB: I see that you buried a portion of it in something.

DO: Yes, yes.

SB: Do you think anyone other than Smithson read that?

DO: [laughs] I think I read part of it. I don't think so.

SB: So earth work is associated with earth art, Cornell, . Do you have any recollections of him?

DO: Yes, I do.

SB: What was he like?

DO: Well, he was quite a commanding figure. He was a young, very handsome, tall, muscular German who traipsed in one winter with a full-length rabbit coat, carrying a very expensive sixty millimeter camera. He was extremely German, very regimented, very much in pursuit of a TV program sketch on earth art -- land art. And he meticulously intervened with all the artists under quite often extraordinarily difficult conditions, and shot seven or eight street venues of , including mine that was up in Maine. And then, unfortunately, he committed suicide shortly after.

SB: Yes. The same time you were doing this environmental art, you did a work called " Flat," and I was wondering -- this was on Sixth Avenue -- was that a dispersal?

DO: No.

SB: It wasn't?

DO: No, it was in a parking lot. It was done on a Saturday or a Sunday. There was nobody there. It wasn't meant to be transactional in that sense, but it was meant to be displaced. In other words, that shape was to be reproduced on the floor of the ocean with salt , and also desert. So it was radical in that what you saw there was part of a three part piece, which involved thousands of miles in between one another in different sort of conditions of their execution. So that was only one of the early sort of into the conceptual region that was part of the so-called extra studio art or non-studio art. The wide open spaces became studios. It was quite intoxicating to see all the possibilities -- things that you could do. Some artists sent postcards -- saw these post boxes, and they drew the lines. I think it was who made the conceptual line across America. And we were quite willing to interpret this art assomething tangible -- something relating to a line, and yet conceptually made up had great resident for it, as believers. They were quite ready to pretend it as a substitute for physical presence.

SB: Yes. Another project I'm interested in -- how did you get together with Peter Hutchinson for your ocean ? Were you friends?

DO: That was through John Gibson that I met Peter. Somehow between John Gibson, Kenneth McShine, Peter Hutchinson and myself, we concocted this ocean project show, which was shown in a little room at the Modern. It wasn't very good. It was a little bit . I mean, we pretended that we wanted to do an ocean project. I didn't know exactly what to do. And once I got down there, I started to sabotage my original ideas. I didn't think they were tough enough. I had the feeling that my activity on land had to carry with it some form of violence -- something akin to the real worked, which is full of traps and pitfalls. So I did a thing based on a collision. I traced a red line in the ocean and started fire. So I was being kind of a young man. We got into a little trouble in Tobago, being so rambunctious.

SB: Do you mean because of the fire on the water?

DO: Well, yes. Yes. I was using red dye and stuff.

SB: Oh, and it washed ashore?

DO: It washed ashore, and it somehow contaminated the bed sheets of the hotel.

SB: [laughs]

DO: It was very strong dye. You just took a thimble-full of this material to turn hundreds of sheets pink. Oh, it was incredible. Everything turned pink in the whole hotel.

SB: But you put the dye into the ocean, right?

DO: Yes. But it washed ashore. I was way off, but eventually it washed ashore.

SB: It washed ashore and somehow got into the water system of the hotel?

DO: It got into the beach towels.

SB: Oh.

DO: And then when they washed the beach towels in the commercial laundry, the dye came out and impregnated the sheets and pillow cases.

SB: So everything was pink?

DO: Everything was pink. Which was a better piece than what I had done. I mean, had I the sense of kind of address my work, I would have thought of that as the actual work.

SB: But that was some form of sabotage.

DO: Well, yes. I was already showing signs of that. I was recognizing in myself dissatisfaction with the behavior accorded to artists in making works from these public situations, and I was realizing that I had this capacity to upset my own friends, and to quite often engage in an element of surprise. And that I thought this was necessary. I was confronting the kind of characteristics of a conventional method of part-making. I wanted to upset that, so I would quite often find that I would have to all of a sudden engage thee rather tantrum like state, to side-step the conformity of a conventional position. So I was already working with the demons of art behavior in trying to make the art better, and not fall prey to convention. Even with the conceptual idiom. Because within a year-and-a-half, conceptual art was already burning itself out. I mean, people were doing one work after another in attempts to cover all the bases. So by 1969 there was a feeling of exhaustion. By 1970 there were art works done about exhaustion. The content of the work became the course by which one had undergone to pursue it. That's where you get in the 1970s, interrogational work, and the work that is about art making itself. So I found the whole course of journey from the beginning surfacing in 1968 onward, through the seventies, extraordinarily volatile. But I think there's those who allow themselves to be thrown around, and were thrown around. There were those who simply did not. Who followed their course, behaved very well, and were able to justify the stability of their position and not question it. They were satisfied with what they think they claimed as theirs, and continued doing it -- never changing it. I wasn't that kind of artist. I just couldn't do it. I had to always upset things and make it more difficult. Otherwise I thought I wouldn't sustain the interest.

SB: Do you mean your interest or the audience's interest?

DO: Well, both. I mean, these tendencies to upset your own work are really outgrowths of attempt to pattern by which you gain interest to over a period of years, and you come to realize that you succumb to certain states of mind that are really close to sort of terminating the interest. I mean, you have to constantly find ways to sustain the interest. To cause yourself or to inflict yet another burst of energy. Some of us get very bored with discovery. It doesn't last long. It's not enough. Some people can discover something minor and live on it the rest of their lives, , under the guise of some sort of champion. But others don't have that -- a curse with the requirement of trying to do it over and over and over again. That is very, very hard. Almost impossible. So you get into this kind of fantasy, and you get turned around by the work. You forget a lot of the necessary lessons you learned about what constitutes good art, and you steer away from things. You quite often are attracted to states of art making that are so extraordinarily uncomfortable that they're embarrassing. Because you need to have yet another platform to work on. So why not show something that you think is really terrible? In other words, you're testing the apparatus by which one can use to sustain this interest. So many people are not troubled by this, but those who are often have bodies of work that are inconsistent.

SB: So in the late sixties -- in 1969 or 1970 -- you started to evolve into what then became known as body work. Your own body.

DO: Yes.

SB: What do you think then? Was it boredom? Was working in the outdoors, large scale -- ?

DO: Well, I think that it was a feeling that this work with the body seemed -- it was very attractive. The intimate video tapes, the kind of exploratory work that one did with themselves or by themselves, the kind of routes and processes that one would go through. Discreet kind of programs that one would initiate for a certain outcome, and these outcomes were so ethereal, they get so meaningful in terms of information about art making. It just seemed to be very rich. And it also seemed to have this element of grit -- potential danger -- a potential rigor of commitment that made studio art seem -- the involvement with so less combatted. It seemed to be such a rigorous and extremely sort of engaging use of the artistic spirit. You were using yourself. The commitment was

horrendous. You were making things very difficult. You were getting the residue of this sort of difficulty as absolute tangible evidence to a film or video tape, and was reading to other people. They could see that you were conjuring and developing overtones, sounds between the notes of activities that generated an absolute -- a communicative form, an intelligible content, lifting off the object, lifting off substance in this sort of incredible domain of conceptual atmosphere. It was the most radical art form I've ever engaged. I don't think I'll ever started using my children and things of that sort.

SB: You mean to the degree of --

DO: Commitment.

SB: And challenge to yourself?

DO: Well, like the way you would wake up in the morning as an artist. You would wake up ready to engage certain exploits which would culminate in a kind of art or the of an act which would crystalize through a video tape or something that was quite extraordinary. Extraordinary in art terms. In terms of what we know art to be, and how art can be something else, in other forms. It's sheer lack of dependency on rigid manner, and it's easy use of procedure , quasi-narrative instrumentation. Emotional psychological drift. The stuff manifesting on video tape film and coming to a certain at the end was really extraordinarily exciting, and it intoxicated the practitioners with a sense of real immortality. You thought that you could face death with this kind of commitment. The work that came -- as I say -- volatile and dangerous. More dangerous -- the bigger commitment, the great the intoxication, and the better the work. There became a direct correlation it seemed. The work was taking more and more chances, and it was done delicately, and it was, in a sense, a certain nuance. It would achieve a higher level of transmission. You know, working in Pittsburgh, some of these art kids were really quite powerful. So body art, unlike land art -- although land art, too. I mean, I kind of mixed the two together. I received work involving armed guards travelling around the land and marching, and drummers marching back and forth through ditches and trenches. I've used poison, drowned and trapped. The idea of deception. I think it was all attracted to this volatility -- these subversive fugitive functions which kind of inspired a sense of things pulling apart and dysfunction, and all the is picturesque, and the use of that as a format for something that could count to the real world and all its philosophy. Because once you put , quite often it was relatively minuscule and quite unimportant, framed against the powers that exist out there in the real world. So that was always a concern. I mean, some artists met that challenge I think more rigorously than others. [Tape Off/On]

SB: You said the scale would match, so there was a different scale. Things like instead of operating on the level of scales, the body art was operating on a level of physical and emotional intensity.

DO: Yes. It kind of turned its back on some of the grandiosity that was an exponent of the land art, in which the gigantic was used to power. Earth art was truly an increase of dimensions from traditional sculpture. But it was still dwarfed by the nature around it. Body art had a different agenda.

SB: I wonder -- do you think that body art was necessarily or fertilized by the late sixties culture, which had easy accessibility to various kinds of hallucinogenic drugs and then there's light shows, where there's kind of a saturation of sensory experience. And then, of course, there's birth control. So the availability of bodily experience and forms of intimacy -- sensual -- is in culture.

DO: No. I know that one would like to bring in that kind of old energy of the sixties as a format of this art, but unfortunately as I see it, there was absolutely no interfaith. The artist who developed it had an absolutely no play -- if you would interview them, you would find they had practically nothing to do with the sixties, oddly enough. Relatively little to do with the political phenomenon itself, and they were not participants in the cultural fixations as we are -- psychological or drug use -- or any of that.

SB: Are you sure?

DO: I can't speak for all of us, but I can speak for a lot of us.

SB: You mean they didn't go to light shows, have long hair? I thought everyone did.

DO: Yes, I know. One would think that. But no. They may have had long hair. There may be a few exceptions. But by and large, none of them that I know of participated in that at all. So they were not reading -- this art -- body art -- came from extremely serious theoretical feel of an art impact, and the necessity to transverse it through this other procedure of body objects and performance as a direct lineage from sculpture as the way it was and the way it was deteriorating. It was extremely calculative, analytical, and it came from academics. Relatively astute people. Perhaps not only cerebrally astute, but certainly individuals who felt a calling to stabilize this alternative. Chris Bergen and these people were definitely on an agenda. On a definite agenda. They were very serious. They were not out . I never did. And on some counts, I was .

SB: You were probably in California in 1967 -- the summer of love.

DO: I was there in the summer of love. I was on Telegraph Avenue in the cafe almost every day, while FDS marched down . Mario Salvio and all of them. I was in school then. It never had the least attraction. It did not compete with art. Art was radiant as . Radiant. Totally convincing. If you looked at that what you saw -- if you were really clairvoyant -- was a lot of marginal degenerates who later became -- who were not academics, and who wee not really a heartfelt or any political motivation, but who were hanging into this rather odd group of people, smoking dope and all this stuff. They later became criminals, and they're all up in Washington, armed, and they're members of the radical writing.

SB: You mean Washington State?

DO: A good part of the hippies were marginal. They were attracted to the academics and to the enlightened few. And a lot of them would have found themselves probably wards of the court or in some compromised position, socially, had that not happened. They would have been more rudimentary or common criminals. They were already under -- they had no way of conjuring their own identity, so they uniformly attached to the more charismatic people of that time, who were really quite something, I admit. I mean, the music of some of the practitioners of that were extraordinary. But not the large following. You would see that. I mean, I made that determination just by being there. It was nothing that would attract a sensitive person. The political thing was attractive, but there was great camaraderie for that. But peripherally -- the manifest bulk -- the skin around the very few inspired people -- were just so compromised degenerates and were going like five directions at once. It really inspires you to track -- to go in thee opposite direction. There was no good poetry being written by those people. There was good music. There was no good art being generated. Art was fugitive to that political notion. They saw artists as degenerate sort of -- kind of . They had no interest in artists. the black panther. They had no very important. But outside the ones that we know about, the rest of them were -- I felt -- they were extremely and uninspired.

SB: You mean the hippies?

DO: Yes, the hippies.

SB: Well, what about an affiliation between intellectuals and artists, and what was generally referred to as the counter-culture? I mean, wasn't a lot of that generated by an increasingly widespread aversion to the Vietnam war?

DO: Yes. But you see, unfortunately, I didn't mix well with that. You have to kind of decide what you want to be. I mean, it's a shame. Outside of the theater -- too good art -- high art -- powerful art, with social conscience -- is very difficult. It's very doable. Very few people do it well. You can count them on one hand. Invariably the work is heavily weighted down by necessity to social and political conscience. It never survives the weight. Where you see work that isn't weighted down, that is somehow smartly structured so that the political message is transmitted sort of indirectly through the back door of the , that comes about through sort of a that doesn't hit you on the head, that kind of gets to you the day after. Now, that's the kind of work that one would want to make. That's not easy. does that. There are certain artists that can do that. That incredible nuance where the message is there -- it manifests -- it's scary, but you're going to get it. But in two weeks it's going to haunt you, you see? The posture in the sixties was first of all, they could ridicule you for being an artist because they were self-indulgent bull shit. I would say Carl Andre, who has seen to pose as a worker -- he had a very strong philosophical social sense. But in remembering my associations with the other artists -- Bruce and Vito and Chris Bergen and some of the others -- there was very little interest there which simply involved with the art making procedure, without the need to posture it with any kind of social and political . If the work would be interpreted as that way, but yet it wouldn't compromise itself to that mission, all the better, in other words. I think the best way to make a political statement is not to really think about it. Just go for the art. If the art is good, there's probably going to be some factor that is going to communicate that political message. But when you spring it up as the objective the work, it's always there. It's just like self-expression or self-revelation. It always seems .

SB: You mean it can't be primary.

DO: It can't be the focus point.

SB: It may be.

[Cassette 3, Side B]

SB: I want to explore this in a related way. I'm interested in this work not so much as being overtly political or even overtly counter-culture. But what you've been describing is a form of radical art, which is radically against its convention. Against tradition. New. And in that respect -- I mean, that is very parallel or akin to what the whole culture was experiencing in a rejection of traditional values. I mean, maybe it's just parallel or separate,

but a real re-formulation of what art was about. It was also going on a re-formulation of ideas, or of people's relationship to their government, say, vis-a-vis civil rights and Vietnam.

DO: I'm sure there are some deeper connected that would tie this in. I'm sure that the osmosis of the late sixties with all its political turmoil, was circumvented into the artist into -- the conceptual artist -- in the form of osmosis. Even though they may pretend that they were taking their clues from another source, and that they were in allegiance to principles that may not appear to come from that direct world, but I'm sure that there is a relationship. And I've often talked about it. I say, "This art grew up in the volatile sixties. It was surrounded by the Vietnam war. I think the urge and the emphasis to minimalism, which was a very relatively physically dormant, rather understated position to something as land art and body art was silently secretively persuaded through the atmosphere of the sixties. I think it didn't form it. Even again -- so we might pretend. I might pretend that I had my agenda written out for me historical clues. However, I think we fully want to escape the rigor of the times being something we digest. We like to use it to aid things, but often art too much in the service of that exterior world is not necessarily transcendental. I mean, it's not sufficiently universal. It becomes regional. It becomes limited in its reach. I never did a work about the Vietnam war. I never did a work about dope. I never did a work about . I never did a work about the time. I wanted to do radical work. It was the time to do radical work definitely, and it just seemed to coincide. It could have occurred possibly, had we not had that incredibly volatile exterior world operating in. The breach of minimalism could have occurred during a period of tranquility. I don't know if art always does coincide with the external world. I don't know. Often it does. Often it seems to have its own agenda.

SB: Okay, we'll continue this. August 2, 1995

SB: I want to ask you a couple things about Bobby , and I want to refer to a couple of articles that were interesting analysis of it. One is Max , which is November 1975. He says in here, "How do we treat the ichnography of narcissism in which these works abound?" Narcissism -- the emotional correlate of intellect -- the intellectual basis of self-reflected modern art. So being self-reflected about the self, he considers potentially narcisstic. What do you think about this?

DO:whatever can make art better -- whatever direction it can go and produce results that can be responded to by enlightened , and if these places it goes produces the result, it's not necessary for us to make these sort of high kind of dogmatic statements about situations like what that are like. There is nothing about a narcisstic state that will retard art necessarily, number one. Will make art impossible to be good, number two. Number three, art is immune often to the that indicates that when it moves into this orbit, it always fails. If it moves into that orbit -- it's a question of a different order. And art is and paradoxical and statements like that only go so far. In other words, there's been too much good art made disobeying that sensibility. That good art meaning art to many, many people have responded to and indicated that it has great presence, it has many of the qualities by which we use to define good art.

SB: You mean art deeply proceeding from the self?

DO: Yes. I mean, there's nothing necessarily in that statement that indicates that that will always produce that art -- that sensibility -- that parameter will always escape more meaningful art. I think Bruce alone would prove that to be . His art has nothing to do with the narcisstic thing that. It's just a nuance found in things that narcisstic. But I don't know if that's a precondition of all his art that was based on that . It just flirts with it and isn't afraid of it. I mean, I think there are some things that artists have to bee afraid of because when they get too close to it it does kind of ruin the work. Like when art gets really close to another discipline, like philosophy or science. Unless it's careful it becomes sort of enamored, and it becomes ingested by the other , and it becomes awkwardly a byproduct of it. Art has to be finessed very carefully when it takes on other idioms and conditions. I mean, that's part of what being an artist is all about. In fact, that's what it is about, frankly. It's about how to finesse the work, I think. Anyone can make things. But they're rarely art unless they're really carefully -- and often when they're in the most dangerous positions with other things that could make people think, "Oh, that's just poetry," or "That's just applied anthropology," or "That's just science," or "That's just architecture." It's when they kind of sort of in a sneaky way come in and kind of use those things in just the right way, and not enough where they're postured by it. But they're sort of strengthened by it. A statement like that -- I don't think anyone took it seriously then, and I don't know if I now.

SB: Okay, here's another. You referred to . So here is another perspective. What do you think of Jack Burnham's idea or his characterization of your own work in reference to the he talks about, which was in his book Great Western Salt Works in 1974?

DO: Well, Jack was, I think, assuming a kind of psychological almost clinical sort of of the artist's brain. I mean, he was interested in abnormal function. Probably things which could be considered parts of the general share created consciousness that show up often in artists in a general fashion. I mean, there's been so much written about the neurotic distortion of the creative process and all kinds of theories and studies about creativity. And

often it does, obviously, move into ranges of what they call abnormal . Well, he probably wasn't that clinical. I know when I talked to him about the and this kind of activity showing itself, he's studying this. He had a lot of material. He was looking from a very informed position in finding corollaries between my work and others, which he considered . For instance, he sponsored those flair pieces of mine from my father's last drawing and my daughter's first drawing. The fact that they were in on a large scale indicated a significant correlation with what the sensibility would bestow upon an audience. The grandizing of something like this into this mammoth scale. One thing after the other he found correlated. But his in a piece which is juxtaposing certain art examples with something else. I mean, it is often the case where they find an uncanny resemblance between certain things, and quite often it's a little farfetched. But I kind of told him that I felt a certain rapport with some of these things he was saying. But more out of a psychological position because I was aware of that time, and particularly in body art, that there was a kind of a psychological stance being taken in which the artist was risking certain calm states and exchanging them for the results of an outcome of frustration, trauma, of friction. And in other words, the art became a byproduct of a friction -- a psychological friction. Well, we know that from literature, but quite often the writing is an outcome of or psychological state. We know that some poetry is written from . We know that often it is employed by artists -- the so-called elevated and rigorous -- this enclosure -- to make art from. You don't make art while you're having dinner and watching TV. It's best to make art while you're getting a divorce and getting thrown out of your house maybe -- for some. So it's nothing new that one would indicate that good art quite often seems to be a byproduct of a difficult enclosure in which the artist is penetrating. The , the medicine man, this , this man with magical -- these are all things that artists would probably like to identify with, frankly. Unless and a minimalist, and you didn't want anything to even suggest that you were close to primitive medicine man, and your thinking is all and logical. But I felt a rapport with that writing, and I thought many of the pieces I did -- the "Prediction" piece with the trains, and someof the things I did with my children -- were bordering on states of the states of potentially violence aftermath, and using that as a hopeful element that would elevate the art to a rich position. It's not necessarily being fantasizing that the tougher your life is the more pain you endure, the more insight you will have. Therefore, the more capable you will be in making art that is richer. Not necessarily true. It depends who the artist is.

SB: You mean what the artist can bring to that experience?

DO: Well, I mean, if you take two artists and they both join the foreign and it's objected to the monstrosities of war, and then they come back -- it doesn't mean that that experience will generate all these . I mean, obviously it's silly. It depends who the artist is. How good he is. Or she.

SB: Well, what do you think say -- in regard to using the body work a lot in general? The artist's relationship to audience suggested by this position of the , that the artist is experiencing something either on behalf of or in advance of something the audience or the world would experience?

DO: Well, that's probably something that -- I certainly used to fantasize about that, mostly when I was younger. And I know many artists do. That is, they fantasize about the capability of art to be . The nature of hart has a that is diagnose and perceive things that normal people cannot. Well, there are lots of artists who have just simply given up on that.

SB: Now, why is that?

DO: Well, for various reasons. Because in the beginning one would kind of drum it into themselves. They would hammer it in -- make themselves believe -- almost like a trend. I am special, I perceive, I'm sitting in this restaurant, but I'm seeing things hat nobody else sees. That is the role of the artist. Well, it's not to be laughed at. Psychologically, the artist is capable of being more sensitive than a lot of people, simply because they are disadvantaged, like the . They are often socially awkward. They have no outlet except through the art. There is a psychological reason for them to be sensitive, and sensitivity is one thing that would make them stare at a thing longer than the normal people. I know these things. So it isn't farfetched to say that art is not an inroad into , into visionary and advanced thinking. It is the perfect discipline. But so is philosophy and so is poetry and so is many things. I mean, it is a state which isn't -- let's say it's not against that. To say that it can nourish it. You can live a life and certainly subject yourself to a role of a perceiver -- of a sensitive person, taking things in seriously and digesting them and spewing them out in an art form with great intelligibility and vision. We suppose that's true, but I think the rate in which it hammers away at you -- the rate in which you wake up in the morning and say, "I am a visionary" -- that diminishes as you get older. You wake up finally and you say -- I mean, I think what happens is you simply succumb to the sheer weight of the act day after day, year after year, of making art in this system, and you begin to drop the flag that you were waving before when you were young, of this pretense of great visionary ability. It's simply enough to get through the day.

SB: [laughs] Oh, boy.

DO: And I think the other real reason for that -- I can't speak for somebody who has dedicated his life or her life to philosophy, which is also a seeking kind of discipline. But you do fall out of sync after a certain amount of

time. Not that you want to admit that, but you finally find yourself in a world that you don't feel you understood as much as you used to.

SB: Are you out of sync with the art world or the ?

DO: I can't honestly claim to be that aware of -- I think even back in the sixties when I was young and I kind of used to -- I would have this alert while I was walking along -- let's say Telegraph Avenue. This sense of the perfect person to experience this because I can feed it into a form. I mean, this is what artists do. They ingest. I can remember the conscious realization as I was walking sync. I'll just make some judgment. I'll make some decision about what's happening out here in front of me. And I was never sure then.

SB: You have to kind of filter and condense serious, and bring it back out.

DO: Especially then when you don't now what the function of the artist is. You're just testing the waters. There's so many ways to be an artist. There's a lot of good art that is about closing off the century system. Shutting it down, and not opening it up. I mean, I would say many artists only survived because they've shut things down to a degree that they can function. They don't want all these contraptions. They can't take it all along. So when you're young, you haven't found that enclosure. You haven't found that sort of personal place, so you're letting stuff hit you. You're at high exposure. I for years about . I mean, maybe once in a while I'll say things like, "What has happened? What is happening?" [laughs] And then I might say, "Do I know what's happening?" I don't feel comfortable with that. I don't particularly feel very happy that I haven't developed a real acuity about the world, although it's not necessarily a reflection of not being a rigor enough artist. I mean, one can have their moments and they can understand their particular methods, and they require installation. They can't constantly insist that they take these things on and have this kind of method of organization of information, and deal with it carefully and be conscientious about things of larger meaning. I mean, sometimes we can just cool it and trust that there is still this rigorous ambition. You're definitely showing that you're wanting to communicate because you're spending all this time making things, and trying to solve problems so that you'll have a clearer vision. And that involves somebody else. You all want to make intelligible. So it's already there. One learns to live. have to hammer away at themselves so that they constantly feel insecure that their function as an artist is not taking on the importance. Because that becomes haunting, you know? You can bother yourself by saying, "Well, how important is this work? I mean, in what way is it?" I do that. Some artists rightfully would not drive themselves crazy. But I sometimes ask the questions. They're always .

SB: Okay. So to continue your chronology here. What do you think were some of the sources of your move from body works into machine work? How did the happen?

DO: Well, it was more about the movement to very dematerialized work, which was body art, to something that's had more structure -- more physical structure. It was almost like -- I guess you could say it was a return to structure after being involved with conceptual deconstruction. I mean, certainly the ushering in of unstable materials, of video, of film -- things that had no stability -- things that were influx. And once again finding a need to engage what oddly was somewhat retrograde -- was remnants of more visual sculpture. Armatures, steel, physicality, presence. Things above the ground. All these things that we felt so strongly about. The horizontal, below-the-ground subject object ramifications of body art, the fact that the artist was instigator and victim of the known act. All those postulations and theories were kind of evaporated. I think what happens to me is that an issue has a life span. It can be a very serious issue, but that means you can do art based on a book of beliefs and a kind of hypothesis, and you never went to art to move outside of that . You can say all sculpture should be non-object. It should be a hole in the ground. But after you do fifty holes in the ground, there will come a point when that issue no longer is relevant. Some artists stay with it the rest of their lives. It's always relevant. Art is not an object. It is a hole in the ground. Period. It can never be anything else. Well, I don't have that luck. I was not satisfied. There was a point with body art hat it was definitely more ambitious. It was a more radical position. It was glossy. It was a very, very elevated, intelligent position based on understanding and decisions made about what art can be. that was really quite endowed. But like an issue, it only has a certain life span for me. So it wasn't hard for me to go back into sculpture. I mean, my work now as like traditional art compared to their work. And body art. Relatively -- it's not as radical. But is radical ? Radical. It's like feeding a dead horse. Just by doing it over and over again it isn't going to make it more radical or more believable. It just exhausts. These mindsets occupy the whole life of an artist based on a certain parameter, and they just believe that. Sometimes we applaud those people with great vigor, and often they are indicators of a problem in art, where artists are captured by their beliefs for unnecessarily long periods of time because of outside forces, the marketplace, the critics. And often they probably unconsciously would like to get off the train. I mean, I had no choice. I was constantly thrown off the train because I can't stay with one thing. I psychologically can't do it.

SB: You mean one part of yourself .

DO: Yes. I mean, I never believed in something so strongly that I've done it -- forget five years. Five weeks. I mean, I'm exaggerating. I don't want to find that reason to focus. I want to find reason not to. I want to be calm

with feeling that I'm going to be thrown off, that I'm going to be upset, I'm going to be trapped. Because I know that's going to happen. And to me is dealing with the patience when those things do happen, that disturb my course, change my direction, make things more difficult. Without that I don't know if I could keep going. It would be too much like a job. I need the upheaval. I don't like it. Art's enough of an upheaval, but yet, I just don't know how I would find the continuum there without these outside things agitating the direction.

SB: Now tell me, what year did you start feeling the urge to make objects again? In the seventies? When was it about?

DO: Back to that question about going into the factory work. Because those were really heavy structure. I mean, they were complicated. They were above the ground. They didn't take any of those clues which were generated from what we like to pretend were more enlightened areas of art. They were architectural things. They were taking clues from industrial architecture and things like that. But the link to conceptual art was that they were metaphors. They were structural counterparts to a cerebral structure. The factories, to me, were mines. Was like a mine. The anatomy of a mine. They were attempts to make structural, therefore visible, their mysterious functions of the creative process. Now, I've said things like this before, and every time I'd say it I'd say, "That is really pretentious." And it is pretentious to think that you have privy to those kinds of decisions. But simply, it was the fact that these structures were about cerebral -- that's not pretentious, the fact they want to be about cerebral functions. Not that you have to know what cerebral function is or what it might look like. It's just that the link to conceptual art -- the link to an art that was so dematerialized that you could work two or three years and put everything into a small cardboard box -- was continuing in this other fashion. It wasn't like one was just sort of here one day and is a totally different person the next, and back to sculpture. These factories had heavy theoretical conceptual character. They were ambitious, in terms of both what they were attempting to uncover, and also in the sheer physicality. I mean, I called some final strokes -- a project for a glass factory that was very clear in the theory that the glass factory was a mine, and within this mine, functions occurred that tried to somehow reference a creative function that I'm aware of in my minimal capacity to assume a certain view of a creative function and planning that appeared over and over again. I can put this into the work. The work was about the function of the art apparatus. And I think it was well directed to that. I thought that was a deserving place for the artists to focus. Forget what art can do -- how you can apply it. Let's use art to interrogate itself. I think that is good. The work -- some good, some not as good. Some less inspired, some more inspired. But use art as a way to interrogate itself and uncover through, metaphor through, approximation through, counter-bar through, through an image -- something that rings of insight or of understanding or of fundamental truth of how this stuff happens to us is, I think, more interesting than pretending you are in possession of art, and you can use it to make a statement about the outside world.

[Cassette 4, Side A]

SB: You talked about art interrogating art, but it also seems the art you make and the discussion, you are constantly interrogating yourself. You appear to be a very introspective person. Aren't these going kind of hand-in-hand, so to speak?

DO: Well, I think you're interrogating how you feel about things. You're interrogating your beliefs and your views. You're trying to pin yourself down on who you are so that it can be art. But the art is coming outside of yourself a little bit that you want to develop. You want to internalize it.

SB: What do you mean by internalize it?

DO: You could assume a position that, "I'm an artist and the art is inside of me, and I'm going to get it out." But I don't believe that necessarily. All you can really say is that, "I'm a certain kind of person, and it is important that I try to understand as much as I can about what kind of person I am." Almost like you're a machine -- like a . And the reason I want to understand what kind of person I am is so I can challenge the way that person functions in making art by more intellectually arrived at positions. More critically arrived at positions. I'm already assuming that the art may come from me and I may be an artist, but I'm not good enough. It's not good enough. It's never going to be good enough. There's no way that your work simply will be an outcome of your unabridged total sensibility. It has to be challenged constantly by intellect. I mean, this is paradox and gibberish in a way because the intellect comes from you. But it is almost as if you separate simply from yourself because you don't want to simply be limited by what your present acquisition is, in terms of ability. You want to keep it open that you can almost ride the way -- move away objectively, and by that you, viewing what you've done, viewing what your personality is, perceive certain things that you can change and make the art better. Once the objective is to make the art better, it's not necessarily synonymous with making yourself better. It's just making the ability -- making you capable -- yourself capable of making better work. I mean, if it's simply the divulging of who you are and what your limitations are into the art, that's limited. That does not allow for something better, something more. I think it should be an intelligent, endowed, inspired attempt to make the art more than you are. I mean, I think that's the clearest way I can say it. Certainly make the art rise. Find out how to make the art better than you are. Better meaning elevated. Become bigger than .

SB: Well, then, in this process, do you think there is a feedback that as you make art you are also you might say interjecting what you say? It's coming back in and it's feeding you? Is it feeding you and then you are putting out again? I mean, is it a typical kind of process?

DO: Yes. those occurrences are there, where there is this wonderful kind of dynamic that occurs where the thoughts are being understood and grappled with and cycled back in, and that moves the next up on a higher orbit. And that's being ingested. And by God, you're experiencing the very kind of emergence of something from a very low form to a very high form. I mean, you can kind of occasionally experience that -- that kind of catalytic regurgitation of an idea, wonderfully sort of nuance. But even though the mind is out there questioning these things and overseeing it, it's a separate mind. It's a mind that is somewhat -- by the very nature of objectivity, it's kind of . It's your alternative -- sort of an alternate critic that wants to move away from any claim to yourself, and it operates like a kind of a demon outside, which allows you to understand yourself as something that can be prodded into a higher . Otherwise everything you do -- it can never be more than what you think you are. I think artists -- good ones -- should be able to understand, I should think, the capabilities of to literally leave the domain of the creator and actually break through the restrictions. I mean, almost in describing it you're kind of expanding it. It is very much a penetration of itself. A moving out of itself. You know, coupling with outside energies so that youremotions become larger, more informed, more aggressive, more hopefully insightful. I mean, if there was a choreographed view of the period process, it wouldn't be an individual burrowing into his body and kind of holding himself, bent over and sort of kind of . It would be something that would be quite , indicating a higher degree of body self-awareness. I don't believe in any of that stuff, but --

SB: You don't? [laughs]

DO: No. But in explaining this, we have to use those words.

SB: Let me ask you something on . I was wondering if this transition into more mechanically based work could be manifesting a part of yourself that you got from your father, who was an engineer.

DO: No. Well, some sort of like that occurred during that time might be interested in talking about, but not that. I mean, I don't think so. You know, I'm not very comfortable with machines. I mean, in many of the sculptures, I somehow found it necessary to take for the sake of some sense of dynamics -- how something moved. But the movements were always very unlike or . They were always kind of spinning, very powerful sort of power , often. More about power than about . things that generate.

SB: You mean there were ?

DO: Well, mechanical . To somebody who has used it in their work -- you don't see any of it around here. It's not that it's really in my life. It seemed to be necessary to experience that metaphor. The metaphor that was found in industrial architecture elements in the world because these things did things. Like electrical towers transmits. The mind transmits. . Winds, blowers, . These things have physiological associations.

SB: metaphors?

DO: Yes. But I was not employing great sensitivity about what my particular sensibility was in terms of physical images. I mean, these things were not things that I felt comfortable with. But my mind was leading me. I mean, I had to engage this because I was having them serve this purpose of indicating this cerebral architecture. These were the things that definitely could communicate.

SB: Okay. Now here's another kind of more historical pleasant kind of question here. What was your relationship to Vito Econchi during this, in terms of forming a bond or simulating each other. Let's think of you not working in isolation. And actually, the other thing is I noticed your wishing well was 1973. Do you consider that like an early machine?

DO: A little bit.

SB: In a minor way. Because by the end of the seventies then -- say, 1977 or 1978 -- there were shows again in sculpture. There was a return to object making. Okay. I want to more historicize this. How did these develop, and were you stimulated by or stimulating Econchi or other people?

DO: Well, no. Econchi and I began about the same time, and we were always quite friendly, and basically we've supported each other -- up until now. I have always liked his work. Obviously there was dialogue over the years because we , and all kinds of things. He is quite a different kind of artist. But yet we shared some of the same risk taking and some of the same inability to do the same thing over and over again. Our position in to the market is relatively relaxed. So we have characteristics that we share. And I think part of the fact that one has never really fantasized on the level -- duration -- is short, so the work is always looking for ways out . I think we share that, too, and I think that's what makes the affinity function at a more -- a higher degree of dialogue. He

and I probably are always looking at something. So there is competitive stuff there. A general urge and hope to elevate the work -- to up the ante -- to bring it into a higher region -- to make it more and make it better. I think that rather than make it better, I think that the urge was simply to , to create jolts, to trick positions. So it's been a very healthy professional relationship in that way. Being very different. Artists have a general sense of wanting to continue to bear new arms and to succeed. And I think in some ways it continues -- that general feeling. I mean, I think if you're a certain kind of artist you can be quite different in fundamental ways. But if you share this interest in upping the ante, pushing, you're going to find yourself . There's going to be something about you and those other people that will be similar. There will be areas that you're both penetrating. Simply because of the shared desire to try to find a fraction -- an opening. But at this point we seem to be operating in different areas, but often we come together and separate.

SB: Well, actually -- thinking of different areas makes me interested in -- what has your position been on public art? I know for instance that he does commissions on public art. I think you might have said something about this and I can't remember.

DO: I've been much less interested in it than he is. He is very interested in it. I'm beginning to take it on again. Just at this time. I've got the space. We're going to penetrate it. We're going to look at it once again. I have not been interested in it for quite a while because I found the cumbersome unnecessarily bureaucratic disappointing, in terms of its ability to do anything in the real world. But you know, they have gallery shows that are even more developing because first of all it's elitist. It only operates in the art world. The public never sees it really. It communicates only to artists. I'm talking about high art. So there's problems with both of them. Public art is a challenge at this point. Not much. Because there is so much bad public. There is much more bad public art than there is bad studio art. Because in the studio you can do whatever you want. In the gallery you can do whatever you want. You can do whatever you want outside if you own the land, if there's no people around, if you pay for everything, if you don't have any boards. So these people are operating as architects. They're like artists and architects. They have to deal with a bureaucratic system, and it takes a long period of time, and by that time you're totally bored with the project. By the time you get it built, they're usually on to something else. I mean, it's not the kind of dynamic you can have in the studio, where you build it, you're sleeping with it, you see them everyday, you change it, and nobody is telling you you can't work on it for a month. I mean, it doesn't have any of that. It has the sort of artificial timetable and intrusions with interruptions, firemen codes. That's why we're . Otherwise we would have been architects. And I would not want to be an architect. I mean, I find it just depressing. There are incredible restraints they have to operate under. Sculptors have a , obviously. I mean, I'm more interested in theater, frankly, than architecture. Theater can be everything. It can be architecture, it can be music. I mean, that's much more kind of --

SB: You mean working with dancers or actors?

DO: Yes. Whatever a theater can be. An evening. I mean, that to me is kind of a cornucopia of art. It's all the art. Architecture serves as a very important social function. But I am going to tackle it and see if maybe I can come up with something that --

SB: You mean you're thinking of submitting some proposals or participating in some competition? That's how it goes, right? Some municipal or whatever?

DO: I have some commissions, and I'm going to try to do something that I think is good and get attached. I'm trying to see if I can live with myself, see if they will give me a license. And yes, as much as I hate the competition --

SB: And when you think of something for the outdoors -- you say heterogeneous public -- do you think of audience? Does the audience come more into play than studio work?

DO: Yes. Sure. You have to think of the audience. I don't find that very exciting. I mean, whenever I think of the audience while I'm making the work, it fails. It seems that art does not want to figure that during its primal stages of conception. It wants to be unrestricted. Otherwise it's posture. And when it's posture, it's already nipping at the bud. You'll never know what it looks like because you intruded too soon. I've never made a piece thinking about how it will seem. I've only thought about -- I mean, if you don't want to cheat the public -- if you don't want to cheat the viewer -- the best thing the artist can do is simply concentrate on the work. That way you give them everything you can. Once you start thinking about this other stuff, it's already compromising your work. So you cheat. You give them an outdoor sculpture that you can sit on because you're worrying about them kind of relaxing. So you give them a seat, but you remove whatever little art there was in the first place. So I think if the public were really enlightened, they would simply take the artist just try as hard as they could to concentrate on the actual thing, and it will somehow, I think -- if it's really enlightened -- it will certainly take them in consideration. [Tape Off/On]

SB: Why don't you tell us something about 'Fireworks?' Did the machine work evolve into progress, or where

they simultaneous?

DO: No, they really evolved.

SB: They evolved. Okay. So what were some of the sources of ?

DO: Well, as the fantasy continues, as these sculptures, which I call armatures. I call them armatures and I call them armatures for rejection. And I made a point that the sculptures that you were looking at were simply there to have this second life. And the 'Fireworks' piece would be ignited and the second life would be the -- this kind of high energy, kind of notational scribing of lines -- forth lines -- that I thought would indicate as being basically a cerebral map. So they were kind of hallucinegetic . There were field structures that would create the flash of a structure. So it was kind of interesting. I mean, it's like so you're saying, "Okay. It can't be a pencil. It can't be a ." You see, the position I assumed always was that most art is . It loses its potency at the cools. So if you lead into a form and they have this cool sculpture, it just progressively gets more and more alienated from the source. I was trying to build a case for this high temperature period. This point of genesis. And this was all just rhetoric. I mean, I know . I just had this sense that it was better for the artist to try to articulate this point of genesis because look at the examples of art as fed through this process as it moves away from the artist, from the impulse. It gets worse; not better. It gets less . It becomes alienated, and it's not like it becomes overly crafted. It becomes awkwardly reminiscent of something. I was into that something that it came from. So the 'Fireworks' pieces were an attempt to -- for a moment -- situate this high energy -- I recall these lines in there. It's between a bullet and a pencil. A rocket is . It's not a weapon. It moves. It makes a line. It's like a pencil. But it's also transactional in that it can hit another line -- another . It was a more dynamic kind of pencil. It was more like the mind, I would say. I called them force lines. I said, "These force lines , and the way they're captured and the way they look -- they are somehow unmediated by intelligence." This was another important position. I said, "Intelligence is dangerous because as you bring it into the works it changes things.

SB: You mean consciousness?

DO: Yes.

SB: Too much self-awareness?

DO: Yes. I called it intellect. I said, "Intellect is a danger to these force lines." These force lines are making an inscription that is pure unadulterated, unmediated, not at the surface of intellects, not postured, not correct. They are real lines of force. So I made this big case. These 'Fireworks' -- unlike a pencil line, which would indicate some sort of cerebral , were capable of higher forms of expression. So when I saw 'Fireworks,' I began to use those lines in some sculpture. Because these lines did interest me because they were power. They were also dangerous. They were high velocity. It was like they were joined and wed with things like earthquakes, tidal waves, these horrendous disasters. These lines were really raw. They were not fiddled with by artistic intervention. And I liked that. And I liked the fact that they were behavioral. That they transacted. So I began to make sculpture. I did a piece in Alaska called 'Image Intervention,' which is like a house that is hit by an earthquake. And it wed -- it married the of tremor itself, so the walls were curved, and showcases became tremor lines. And then as tremor -- trauma -- tremor -- I began to get into physiology. The idea of really a literal tremor -- psychological tremor. The thing of shape became very important in stability, image jitters. There's a thing about , things being maybe two places at once. I mean, this whole sort of low definition fall-out.

SB: What year are we at?

DO: We're around 1986 or 1987. There's a period there that I stopped working. I just wanted to sort of feel stuff out. So then I got into kind of the body again -- physiology. But now functions and disfunctions. Disorder. I began to make that were dysfunctional. I had psychological traits of malfunction that were with some kind of disorder. Everything was . And that lasted for three or four years. The worst was appearing in many forms. I did a lot of work. A lot. I used silkscreen fiberglass -- I would print out a piece with static from a video screen. I would take a photograph of static lines, and I wanted the pieces to be unstable. Almost as if the images were falling apart. And I collated that with some sort of vital situation. That's when occasionally I would assume the position of making some judgment about the world. That things weredifficult to pin down. That objects were really not what they seemed. They were something else. And always referencing to my own way. I considered the sort of delicate physiological stage as sort of -- I would often talk about the sense of falling. I would talk about art as like throwing yourself off a cliff, and you either have to come up with an image before you hit the ground. You have to come up with something that's going to change your life. I always put the stuff in a real kind of serious metaphorical plain so that the work wanted to be visual remnants of real critical points of departure and points of light situations. I was trying to pump stuff back into it to make it more of a rigorous activity.

SB: But did you also feel that some in your own life, you were going through a period of fragmentation -- jitters?

DO: Sure. Sure.

SB: So it was also manifesting something immediate, as well as something social.

DO: Yes.

SB: And in making the art, did it effect that state of mind one way or the other? Did it make you more conscious of it or did it make you calm?

DO: No, I don't think the work was therapeutic?

SB: You don't think so?

DO: No. I think that it's true that those conditions may have been part of me at the time. But doing the art was not necessarily therapeutic. I think the professional stance rises above that. I think that an artist would be relatively happy and satisfied if the art was always pretty fantastic. In other words, then they could afford to have a little breakdown. A nervous breakdown. I mean, if you're art is good, you can withstand anything. It's when you don't think your art is good is when everything falls apart. I may have dealt with -- I'm sure I dealt with some of these things about physiology and tremor because I was probably experienced in them. But basically I was trying to make good art. I mean, I never lost sight of why I'm here. I mean, it's not to satisfy or indulge my psychological state of mind and use art as therapy. That's too abusive to art.

SB: But don't you think your stake in life is intimately related to what you produce?

DO: Yes. But that often produces bad art. I mean, what produces bad art often is indulged autobiographical self-exposure. I mean, it can . It depends whose hands are in it. Often you don't like a work because of that too exposed. It's not what it could be. It's lacking. It's crude. It's not in form enough. It's not delicate enough. I'm beginning to think art is the thing. I mean, I may be totally wrong. I think art is a little less about insight now, and more about how to make it incredible. How to make the thing sustain this incredible power. It's not necessary that the message has to be so awful, but the way the thing is done, is just so magic, so smart, so great.

SB: Why don't you tell me about the way that it's done. Are you talking about technical?

DO: Yes, yes, yes. But we have to bring in the artist.

SB: You mean artist as maker?

DO: Yes. But dragging your own soul into the work. You know, technical. It's out there, but putting stuff in it that nobody knows where it comes from. I like that kind of . Not just technical. Not just dexterous. Not just the main thing in terms of putting things together. But in what they leave out. In what they make small and what they make big and color. Why is it sitting that way? What made the artist do that? It is so important. Everything is so important. That kind of work. Where every . I mean, it sounds like some of the things that we used to use to talk about Greek art. It's almost a return of . But I think that art for me now is not as much about radical ideas, but outcome. You can have a radical idea, which is truly radical, but the work that exemplifies it is lousy. There's lots of examples of that. And I come from that. I come from radical ideas. That's what's going to make me wake up in the morning, is that I'm breaking through the envelope. I mean, if one talks to me about nuance, like the way I'm talking now, then -- or in the sixties -- I would have left the room. It's not about that. It's about breaking down the barriers. Let's open up the doors. But finally, after all this reflection, it's what kind of thing you finally did. You know, in the late fifties there was this sort of incredible -- the tendency to cover ground. ten people. And you wanted each one to capture territory. The idea was to ward off other artists. It's almost like taking a gold do something , do something . I mean, you just wanted to cover -- just devour -- the claim. Contaminate everything, so nobody else would have any room at all. Because you were out there and you could see it, and you were going to do it. So it wasn't about nuance. It was like, "Okay, I'm smart. I know that the hand is now the tool, and the body is now paper, and the surface. And we don't need anything extraneous. We have topography. I'm smart. So let me do this and this." You already have this theoretical structure to one piece after the other. But the art --

[Cassette 4, Side B]

The owner is not necessarily into invention. Invention is a certain discovery. It's hard to say, but I believe it is true. I wonder if Pollock, in that frenzy in which he broke through -- we always used his work as a breakthrough and developed this kind of medium swirl in which the paint just sort of landed on the canvas in a magical way. Some of them are good and some of them aren't. They aren't all good. I mean, the invention is not enough. Some of them were really probably much better than others. In other words, maybe it only happened a few times, or maybe it's the kind of thing you can't do twice. Maybe it was never meant to be applied. So discovery is not necessarily the . It's hard, but I think art for me now is finally getting down to do you have this ability or don't you? Did you ever have it? This gift to make things incredible? Did you ever really have it? Or did you just

have intellect? And intelligence. And dexterity. And some visual sense. How great are those things?

SB: What else is there that would be ?

DO: Well, I think it's the very thing that separates this.

SB: What would you --?

DO: It's an uncanny ability. Degree of knowingness and degree of sensitivity that combines intelligence with intuition and a sense of balance, a sense of scale, a sense of color, a sense of meaning. Without even knowing maybe what it is. But knowing what not to know, what not to care about. Just really a big gift. A big gift. Really just dripping. You cannot do anything wrong. That kind of thing. If you want to fantasize, that's the kind of to fantasize about. You can occasionally assume periods of working where you're really quite involved through osmosis, through condition, through desire, through cosmology, through the atmosphere. You know, you can bring it into your orbit more times than others. But the other thing that I would put on this desire list would be to do it every time. I mean, true acquisition is always great. Never great. Why not? Why not fantasize that if you can do it, which means you have it -- your possession of it -- you're totally honest. It's not a magician. It's not a trick. Then do it again. And again and again. It's , but you have one that somebody could interchange because I think it is --

SB:

DO: Because I think it is an indication of something that is in possession of people. It simply isn't there. And when it isn't there -- as often it is not -- you can try to get it. You spend all your time trying to make it better. I think that's what an artist does. A real serious potential artist. A person who is really addicted to it and driven. What they don't have they try to put in there.

SB: I've found that you are very analytical and in fact, judgmental about your own work. It sounds like you are rating it all the time.

DO: No, no. Well, I'm not very impressed. I'm not impressed. I'm not sure who is. In other words, I don't have a problem. I'm just after -- at this point, I just want to make some good work.

SB: But you have evidence that many, many people think that you have made good work. Lots of good work.

DO: Yes.

SB: I mean by the good professional and the art audience, your number of exhibitions .

DO: Well, no, I'm not really. But it doesn't make any difference anyway. The art world is so paradoxical. I'm at exhibitions that I have really felt were good are not always, and everyone hates them. And then I've done pieces that I really have to admit I'd probably like to destroy and everybody likes them. So I don't have much -- I don't expect too much from -- I take it with a grain of salt. That's not what's going to make me happy.

SB: It must give you some satisfaction that you're well regarded in your field.

DO: No, because artists are never ever satisfied.

SB: You mean they're like hungry children? They constantly need food?

DO: There are some that I think should be happy. I swear to God. There are some that, if they are not happy, I cannot believe it. Because their life has been blessed. But even that artist -- those artists -- will probably not admit it and say --

SB: To themselves or to you?

DO: To anyone. I mean, I'm guessing.

SB: A lot of people would say that about you.

DO: I don't have any of that sense of self. My sense of self is a total underdog, operating in this complete high degree of difficulty, no support, heavy critical traffic, defense, almost like --

SB: Critical defense?

DO: Well, yes. My perception is it's just a ticket of difficulty. That's my perception. My perception is that everything is just extraordinarily difficult, and there's no respect.

SB: You certainly must persevere.

DO: Yes. It's not easy. [Tape Off/On] I guess it's just a question of feeling more interesting and just having more visual dynamic acuity of -- it's just a gift. But there's levels of this. But when it's really also united with a sense of the art world, a sense of art history -- I mean, when it's really a gift joined with the ability to oversee and overview, and understand -- to be able to separate between opened areas and closed areas, I'm in a total three-hundred-and-sixty-degree which is there. It's operating very . But often an artist is developed or has great strength in certain areas and not others, and this becomes problematic. This is often the case. But when it's a very large ability -- I mean, it actually fills itself out and protects itself in a large way.

SB: What do you think of the designation of your work over the last, say, ten years as post-modern? Does that mean anything to you? I mean, what you wee describing about not valuing pure radicality and looking for nuance could also be considered a post-modern because modernism is so valued -- progressive innovation.

DO: I've never been a natural. I grew up in the sixties. I was looking at de Kooning. I was looking at Baroque American artists of that period. The tragic Baroque. I come from that. But I enjoy , and I enjoy subversion. I'm capable of subverting my sensibility for the sake of something that is stronger. I play havoc with my sensitivity level by inviting in areas of work that are truly uncomfortable for me to even execute. So there is more of a lobby on my behalf for a strenuous than the sheer melancholy of finding an art that will be tranquil and be obtainable and realistically in sync and housed within themselves over the duration. I'm ready to front and agitate that for a sake of a more position. But this is not necessarily sensitive to what I just said about these nuances. I mean, this was kind of how I behaved over the years, and my attempts to try to things. My one needs to elevate perception. To disprove something simply by seeing that it's limited or it's wrong. about art that make you angry. This has always been a very valid method for an artist to employ to become developed, was to get angry at the job that doesn't give it. To react hostily against it. To disprove it consciously by discovering another route. I mean, it seems rather artificial and not necessarily coming from the soul, but it's coming from something that's pretty good, and it's proven a very valid way of using your system just through the sheer disgust of what's being looked at and said. Portions of it . But your question was something else.

SB: It was about post-modern.

DO: Yes, right.

SB: If that means anything to you.

DO: Yes, it does.

SB: I mean, you started out by identifying yourself with the fifties -- modernism. Heroic. Do you still feel that's your period? That's still something --?

DO: If I had to choose one, yes. I mean, who would really want to choose a post-modern? It's so unnatural.

SB: What's unnatural about it?

DO: Well, it's mediated. It's so consciously mediated. You don't want to believe the conscious. And what fruit is the bearing? You've got to go back to the saying. Is that stuff as good as the other? I mean, as mediators -- I know this is splitting hairs, and it's going to be hard to say this with any kind of conviction because a lot of important art work was made in the same spirit that a post-modern sensibility would engage. Like pop art. I mean, Lichenstein. He was doing abstract expressionism one day and the next day he did Donald Duck. And now he contaminates this entire art world. But -- I mean, there's a difference between scrutinizing art and elevating it and continuing it and making it more and more likely larger and better. That belief system, and assuming this position that that is all ridiculous so let's find the nectar or the riches of degrading, of the kind of fall-out. Let's find the riches of degenerate art. I mean, some of the things I liked about it -- I liked the paradox, I liked some of the positions. But when you compare the sensibility that's behind a post-modern spirit, that is a conscious manipulation emergency -- the range of real inspired operation that occurred probably more easily in modernism. I mean, if there's a way to measure the dynamic of the energy indulgence of the artist, they somehow short circuit a little bit through posturing the post-modernism. I mean, I don't think any of those things were inventions. They weren't supposed to be. Because they were usurping everything from the past, so invention was out the window. Creativity was not in force. They didn't want to be creative, so they appropriated. But they hoped that we would believe that appropriation could substantially hold our attention as viewers. Well, some it did and some it didn't. I don't have this feeling that all that art is holding up very well. Do you? I don't think -- the museums are sort of like putting it in their basements, and they're dragging out the stuff sort of.

SB: But it's funny you describe yourself as being so conscious about what you are doing, knowledge of feeling, knowledge of position. Thinking of -- at least early on -- what you need to do to move art forward and mark out your territory. That isn't what we associate with the intuitive kind of .

DO: Yes, it probably isn't. And perhaps it's right not to, even though we know that they entertain those states of mind occasionally.

SB: Yes.

DO: Pollock and de Kooning. They always talked about the art world critics and selling and art history, and their place.

SB: They were . So you think of them as -- or you know them to be strategic, as well, in their own way.

DO: Well, I think so. I think we were less likely to think about that in those days because the art had this characteristic of this emotional link. But it didn't stop them from functioning as professionals in a very competitive way. They were savagely competitive. And I think that those are the things that make us continue to -- in this late period here -- to have to admit a similar carry-over of that kind of behavior, that kind of concern. Even if it isn't becoming. It is rather unbecoming. I mean, I wouldn't admit it. I would say that lately I'm much happier because I don't seem to be haunted as much by these things as I used to be.

SB: By what are you talking about?

DO: Oh, all this stuff we're talking about. Paranoia and fear, and this concern about your position, about how good you are, how appreciated you are, how ignored you are, are you better than ? You know, all these things .

SB: You're right.

DO: All the stuff that used to bother me a lot, bothers me less.

SB: What do you attribute it to?

DO: You wouldn't be an artist without it. I don't know.

SB: But you're saying that it bothers you less.

DO: Well, it's probably a sign of age. I guess a think can bother you only so long, and then maybe just through a natural kind of diminishing, it becomes less effective. But you're immune to it. But you're never completely immune to it. I don't think an artist would be telling the absolute truth if they didn't admit. I mean, I'd have to sit that person on a lie detector test.

SB: If they didn't admit to it?

DO: Well, if they didn't admit -- a certain quotion of the rather -- you know, this part of them that they would rather not have part of them. The sort of competitive, the sort of opposite, petty, unnecessary, caddy relationship with their peers and with the art world. The sort of sinister complaining, never satisfied, always bitter. I'm not bitter at all, but many, many people are. What would be the alternative? Satisfaction? Well, we're all taught when we first begin that it dissatisfies you day, so we aren't going to --

SB: What do you mean? Who teaches you that?

DO: Well, I would teach people that, I think. I was taught that.

SB: You mean art is a quest?

DO: Well, I don't think it was satisfaction. What would that do? First of all, that would indicate that you're doing work that you're happy with. If you convince yourself you're doing work that you're happy with, it goes without saying that you are not going to continue to muster up and to agitate and to provoke as much as you probably should be. I mean, a person that is happy with her work is almost like admitting that the world is standing still for it. And the world is going to threaten it every day you feel like that. I think you should be uncomfortable with your work. Always uncomfortable. Quite uncomfortable. I think that's healthy. You have to live with discomfort. So that's my feeling. I mean, I love to be comfortable but I rarely am with the work. I wouldn't know how to relate to that feeling.

SB: Let me ask you about a later piece that particularly appeals to me, and that is your Gibson . It appears with the . That seems to have a strategically -- a poetic residence, to be endearing, I think, to a lot of people. What can you tell me about this work? What inspired it? What's it about?

DO: Well, I just got a review back from Germany in Berlin where I had a show, and I showed these two deer. It has a picture of me in the newspaper with the two deer on both sides. Underneath it says, "Nightmare on Sesame Street."

SB: Oh, gosh! [laughs]

DO: I thought, "That's really clever!" How did those Germans -- what did they know about Sesame Street? What do they mean? And I couldn't read it. I don't read German. I thought, "I'm not sure if I should be happy with that statement." "Nightmare on Sesame Street." Do they mean that there's something very kind of harmless about these deer, but yet they have fire coming out, but yet they are basically relatively harmless critters? Is that some sort of criticism. I began to think, "What's the scheme 'Nightmare on Sesame Street?'"

SB: What is this work about -- "Deer, Fire?"

DO: Well, during my exploits into of objects, it is physiology gone amuck. I came into using as if they were quasi-industrial components that could be injected with things very unrelatable to organic process, like fire going through a digestive system, so that the deer seemed when I looked at it, a perfect specimen in which to couple -- join -- with a simple industrial process of fun and energy and . So it was a coupling function that occurred in in which they would occur a biological system, it would destroy them. I mean, I combined those two things. Everybody liked deer. Occasionally by some mistake, I made something that people liked.

SB: [laughs]

DO: For reasons that had nothing to do with the idea. So the deer were kind of popular. You know, they're cute and popular, but the art is only in that kind of idea of that sort of injecting a kind of this organic structure. This melancholy, wonderful, serene animal. I've done something with a zebra. I've used a lot of animals. Quite often my ideas just seem to look around for sort of a someplace , and there it is. A shark, a rabbit -- in. Now I let this happen. Sometimes I don't want to disturb it too much. You know, it resides in that. And even if that image doesn't have all the associations and somehow this idea still survives without being sort of thrown off by this distraction or other .

SB: Okay. I just have a couple of more broad questions. One is about what you read. I'm interested in -- if you could say -- what is your practice in, as far as reading, say, over the last thirty years, and how do you think it's changed. When we started this process you said you would and absorb our the art magazines. Do you still do that? And what about books?

DO: No, I don't read the art magazines as much.

SB: Why is that?

DO: Well, I think when I was a student they were very affordable. There were only a few of them. I think one is more likely to be engrossed in criticism and theory at that critical time when you're trying to discover your mind and how far -- the extent to which it can go -- and you're . And what I would read now would be mostly -- not that there is not interesting stuff there, but I think it would be natural for somebody like me -- at my age -- to be a little less interested in what could be interesting to a younger artist. It just -- I'd like to really admit that my mind is open and I'm still curious. And I am. But I think at a certain point there is certainly not that attention for the everyday activity of the art world along, and all the ramifications. They finally lack the necessary sort of function they play in the beginning. You're reading about things that happen. Also you know some of the artists, and you already know -- you know them -- you know their work. You don't want to read about them anymore. It's not necessary. And theoretical things -- sure. Occasionally there's essays that are interesting, that I don't know how I could ever approach them the way I did when I was younger. They are not going to have the same thrust, the same capability of exciting me. So criticism and are unlike poetry or novels, which still do have capability of exciting me. I mean, I would say definitely I am still capable of being highly influenced and moved by literature. I don't read a lot now. My eyesight is not that great. These glasses are always dirty and always falling off.

SB: Did you ever read a lot?

DO: Not a great deal. Not as much as many people. What I found is that it got me too excited. I mean, stuff that I liked -- it overly stimulated me. Like if I would read James Joyce, or if I would read or , or even poets like Charles or even people like Dylan Thomas who are odd, or even contemporary poets like Ted Hughes. And then books like -- I like this Austrian guy who made . His name is Bernhardt. Thomas Bernhardt, who was influenced by Becker. And then some of the French structural writing. French and , and some of the stuff by American writers. Yes, Beckett would drive me crazy. I can't even read him now. He's so good -- so good. It makes me .

SB: It does?

DO: Yes.

SB: Is the relationship between ?

DO: I can be influenced by writing. I like it to happen. I wish it does happen. When it happens, I'm open to it. I have no problem. It's often the structure. I'm seduced by the structure, the style, approaching the content.

SB: Does the style somehow seep into your work in some way?

DO: Yes, yes. It illustrates. It brings it to the surface. It announces the importance of style, separating the content. The form, which is so hard in art -- in sculpture. We always used to say, "Oh, content. God. You can always throw in content, through the back doors, and so on." Form is .

SB: But isn't the form actually fundamentally part of the content?

DO: Yes, yes. But there can be inspired content that lifts off the form. But inspired form is hard for me. Meaning -- you can have lots of radical meanings that lifts off in the air, but wants a housing. So are you a dancer, are you a poet? So you have to do the housing, you have to do the form. And if you're a sculptor, you might have the sense of the meaning -- meaning things -- this idea. But the form -- inspired form -- that's the trick. Form is also , but inspired. [Tape Off/On]

SB: I'm interested in knowing -- because this was brought up, I think, my Thomas McEvily in this PS1 catalog. He referred to acquitting -- discussing -- an idea of artistic development over your work.

DO: I know who it was.

SB: Yes. Okay. What do you think about this idea of growth, evolution? The way you were speaking a few minutes ago, you were saying that you are looking for different things in your art. You are the nuance and dramatic form.

DO: Yes.

SB: I mean, looking over your work, you must see an evolution. Do you?

DO: Yes. I don't think development -- well, they used to say that an artist is only allowed one breakthrough, meaning that if you're going to discover a movement, you have to be more or less satisfied with one. Well, that's sort of a silly statement. But it does address this characteristic where an artist might surface and be part of a certain movement -- an indication -- a collection that becomes important in their identity. Their signature is endowed with the sort of movements, period. The idea of making another breakthrough for an artist of that sort would indicate that they would discover yet another movement that would be collected as important. Often the artist simply plays the configuration of that discovery out to the very end. They're not often inclined to threaten. So develop it, which would mean develop the senses and the mind, to the point where you discover something that is art historically important -- enough that it is in the atmosphere, enough so that there are other people thought coinciding and coexisting -- would indicate a certain passage along this route of discovery and development. You've developed to the point where you can break through. So now let's see what the work is like. Now let's look for more development. Probably not easy. Probably what you're going to find more than development is retardation of the initial breakthrough. It's a law of physics. It's a lot of things. I mean, after you break through, there might be a short period of exulted work, but not much longer than that. The sheer way that chemistry functions -- the work is going to retard. I mean, there are exceptions. There are exceptions. There's teachers and various individuals. There have been what people want to see as development. They interpret what they see as development. Again, poly-suspect. Maybe a nuance here or there, but a development is something we are more at ease in defining in other procedures than art. But yet we are going to find it. You're going to find it in the form of greater dexterity, becoming more , more capable of rendering these things with more ease. You're going to find that kind of development.

SB: But you're an artist who follows the practice -- and not uniquely -- of having several signatures, right? Several phases of development.

DO: Yes.

SB: And you've explained that while we've been talking about your desire to and need for .

DO: You know, developing an idea I find only so interesting. I'm much more psychologically equipped to --

[Cassette 5, Side A]

SB: You mean refining it?

DO: Yes. This would be difficult for me to because always lurking in the background would be the feeling that I really find things not through that evolutionary development and slow process of continuing with this, but I discover things to through sitting in a waste land and having to come up with something because of survival. It's

too calm to develop work in that manner, and frankly, it's based on a belief that based on some belief and posture that things are highly in control and you can sort of coddle this thing onward and stretch it out and usher it and conform it and nurture it. It's all just too comfortable. Not sufficiently open to the kind of thrust that I think it really does take to make a difference. I never coddle work enough to find room in the mind. I don't want to find room in the mind. I want them to think and indicate their possessions on the , and let somebody else spin-off of the idea. I mean, by developing an idea you're driving it into the ground. Let somebody drive it into the ground. Because there's nothing like the feeling of penetrating a new area. Particularly out of despair. In other words, to find something open simply because you bang on the door so hard is really a feeling that it's totally unlike the kind of thing that you would get if you slowly developed one show to the next -- a bigger canvas, and that kind of thing. It's not the way that I would like to function as an artist. It's too conservative.

[End of Interview]