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Oral history interview with William T. Wiley, 1997 October 8-November 20

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Transcript

Interview

PAUL KARLSTROM: Smithsonian Institution, an interview with William T. Wiley, at his studio in Woodacre, California, north of San Francisco. The date is October 8, 1997. This is the first session in what I hope will be a somewhat extensive series. The interviewer for the archives is Paul Karlstrom. Okay, here we go, Bill. I've been looking forward to this interview for quite a long time, ever since we met back in, it was the mid-seventies, as a matter of fact. At that time, in fact, I visited right here in this studio. We talked about your papers and talked about sometime doing an interview, but for one reason or another, it didn't happen. Well, the advantage to that, as I mentioned earlier, is that a lot has transpired since then, which means we have a lot more to talk about. Anyway, we can't go backwards, and here we are. I wanted to start out by setting the stage for this interview. As I mentioned, Archive's [of American Art] interviews are comprehensive and tend to move along sort of biographical, chronological structure, at least it gives something to follow through. But what I would like to do first of all, just very briefly, is kind of set the stage, and by way of an observation that I would like to make, which is also, I think, a compliment. I remember one very early on, I think, it was in the mid to late seventies when I was thinking about there was a possibility of doing an interview with you, and even at one point we talked a little bit about a possible article, and it never came to pass. But it got me thinking at that time about you and how I would interview, and what I needed to try to ferret out, what I needed to discover. One of the things that struck me, and I still feel this way, is that despite the fact that in some ways your work seems to be iconoclastic, and has been described as coming out of Marcel Duchamp, and to have a sort of a Dada aroma to it, or a Dada interest and an interest in popular culture, certainly, looking even at the illustration in a comic book, and so forth, and this kind of humor. These are all observations that people have made, and it's a way of looking at your work that seems to disconnect it from a tradition, from art history. What I came to understand was that I personally didn't find it easy to understand your art, despite its, in some ways, accessibility and attractiveness. It was fun. I couldn't read it. And I think that that's an important word to introduce right off the bat, because you certainly were one of the artists who early on incorporated language, words into your imagery. It became like a fusion of words and puns and sayings with the images. I wasn't always sure I was getting it. What this made me realize is that you're a very complex person, and I think your art is very complex. This is just an observation I want to make to get us into our interview. Also, I wanted to mention this catalog for a little exhibition that was done at the [M.H.] de Young [Memorial] Museum. It was called "William T. Wiley: Nothing Lost From The Original." "William T. Wiley Looks At Art History." It was in 1996, a little over a year ago, a year and a half ago, an exhibition I saw. What was striking about it, and what I think may have surprised some people who knew something about your work, but maybe not in depth, was an obvious awareness of, and respect for, on your part, for art history, and for what we call the Old Masters, that, apparently, you saw yourself as connected to these traditions. I'd like to start out with that. Maybe you want to have something to say about that show and what it meant, and maybe about this observation that I just made--Bill Wiley and art history.

WILLIAM WILEY: Well, the first thing that comes to mind is just wanting to keep the experience, or the image, or the relationship to art, me, and life in some accessible tangible media. So, just common everyday materials, art that's been art for a long time. I wanted to work somehow and stay in that framework more so than into twentieth century televised digital framework. But as it turns out, you know, whether you enter into it or not consciously, you're already involved in it. But one connection--a little bit like Wendell Barry's essay of why he wasn't going to buy a computer. It has something to do with that, wherein he says the reason he won't buy a computer is it, first of all, would have to be an improvement on the pencil, which he doesn't think it is. But the most important reason, he would have to be able to fix it himself. So it's a kind of wanting to keep in touch with something that doesn't have anything to do with--

PK: Technology.

WW: --technology, I guess.

PK: Vulgarity in that sense. Technological vulgarity.

WW: I don't know if that's exactly. Maybe it's just wanting to stay in touch with something on some real intimate level that doesn't require any form of technology in some ways, not to lose some contact with whatever human beings find about that kind of exploration that's vital to being here from when we were first here. Charcoal and stuff, from the cave. Just wanting some kind of--there's so many things that want to be between you and that in some ways, I think, culturally and society things. So, the other part, as far the art history part, is, I guess sometimes people talk to me about it in terms of being eclectic and no one particular recognizable style evolving, which I thought for a long time should happen, and I still sometimes wish it would.

PK: You mean for you in your work.

WW: Yes. Sometimes I think of it in terms of language. It's like there are all these languages available, especially

in terms of image. Why confine yourself to only English? There's all these languages and possibilities and concepts to speak or communicate with them. So any of those that I'm interested in to be available to me, and also want it to be available and some low technical, quickly adaptable means. And in another sense, just in terms of what the work's about--I was thinking about this. Well, in some ways, I know I've used this metaphor before. I'm just a landscape painter. I look out the window and I see what's going on, and I paint it. While I'm painting it, I also write thoughts about what I see going on out there. The imagery I find from various sources sometimes just kind of filtered through me and other artists, but sometimes more directly taken from a specific source, because I feel the imagery will convey what it is. I'm being a little bit like the Afterburner show, which got me off into really literally kind of translating from [Hieronymus] Bosch and [Pieter] Bruegel] who have been inspirational for me. I've just always been attracted to those people that are in the catalog there for all the various reasons. So I also see them as a little bit like helpers that also come to you at different times when you're struggling to be an artist, make images, stay in touch with that that I'm talking about, that various artists from the past, and sometimes more in the peer group will occur or give me an idea, a bridge, something. So I think a lot of the work is about homaging those connections, since we're all kind of basically involved in the same thing, putting up a blank of some kind and letting it or filling it in when things happen at that point.

PK: It seems to me, looking through this very nice little catalog, that you are especially attracted, have been especially attracted, to Bosch and Bruegel. I'm curious to know why that's so. What is it about them, or about the images, about the compositions, maybe the stories that they're telling, that resonates for you, in which you feel somehow connected?

WW: Gee, just some of the images in there are so potent, powerful. And I think there's some part of my person that is a recycled medieval--some connection with medieval art for a long time, just when I first saw it. I think it also has to do with--well, in this particular case, I mean, using the burning village after Bosch, just to mention a few. I never thought--I mean, I've been attracted to imagery and occasionally I've drawn from it, but I never thought I'd be painting these paintings. I didn't have any desire to. I didn't want to. I didn't think there was any reason to. Although I found just the colors and the strange imagery in Bosch, just the fantastic imaginative devices, the combinations--duck creature on ice skates, and so lovingly painted in some ways and the strange, kind of partial primitive quality through Bosch, less so in Bruegel. I just found all those things--maybe it has something to do with that Francis Bacon statement--not the painter, the other guy. "There's no thing of excellent beauty," something to this effect, "which does not have within it some proportion of strangeness." I think the same thing attracted me into [Giorgio de] Chirico. It doesn't look quite professional. It looks slightly untutored. So there's a little more edge to it. It's like if it gets better than that, it becomes acceptable in some way that the mind doesn't engage.

PK: Or maybe even becomes what they called at one time "mannered." It becomes about facility and style, rather than something more basic. Already I'm getting this feeling from what you say that part of what you seek, or are attracted to, is this connection with the almost first principles of art, and certainly in materials, you're talking about that. Of course, materials and use of materials in combinations and investigations has been very much a part of your work. You've been very open to that. But what interests me, as we talk, is that that seems to be within a basic, a broader structure, or perspective, that although appearing to break with these traditions, has them very much in mind, that they're very much present.

WW: Well, the interesting part for me with the Bosch and Bruegel things was, like I say, I drew them occasionally just for imagery, or not even really sure exactly why, other than I found it attractive, and I didn't need any more reason than that. That's enough. Somebody else can figure out the reason. I don't have to. Because you can lose a whole lot of time over that one. But the thing that brought it back to me in some way was my friend, Holbrook Teeter [phonetic], going to the Chernobyl area and sending me that material of the Afterburner show did with Rena [Bransten]--all this material, people living in heavily radiated areas and eating radiated food, and their psychological and physiological responses and coping. It was just absolutely stunning, devastating material. I immediately wanted to respond to it as, like, looking at the landscape and seeing a sunset that moves you. It was some part of the landscape. It was very overwhelming in a way, and moving. I tried a drawing and contemporary imagery thought, laser-beam writing, all seemed too--

PK: Contrived?

WW: Yes, contrived and beside the point. You would just [snaps fingers] add it right in. The material that he sent me just literally knocked me out. I was sitting on this couch and I read it and I tried to do the story and I couldn't. I wanted to do something. I was just really wanting to respond to that, and it just wore me out. I just fell over on the couch and went to sleep for about twenty minutes. When I woke up, the Bosch book was laying on the floor, and I opened it to that burning village. I said, "That's the imagery. What I just read is reflected here." And it started me thinking, well, the other things got into it, in terms of Bosch and Bruegel. I started to see it in the landscape here, walked down a San Francisco street and there's Bosch and Bruegel right there in front of me, a guy looking for a handout. And suddenly the streets of 1996 on the edge of millennium look a lot like medieval times to me out there--rocket ships, you know, and guys from medieval times all totally intermingled here in

modern times.

PK: I didn't see the Afterburner show. Could you tell me just a little bit about that? Tell me again the name of your friend who put [unclear].

WW: Holbrook Teeter.

PK: What were the images, the kinds of images, that he sent that moved you?

WW: Here, let me find them. This is excerpts from Byelorussian Supplement to the Mental Health Promotion Manual: a Practical Response to the Chernobyl Tragedy, by Holbrook Teeter, November 1993. "Milk and Honey. We're in the village of Grebney [phonetic], deep in the contaminated zone. The village has 240 self-described forgotten souls. One and a half years ago, the evacuation order was received. Panic ensued and all activity stopped. The collective farm chairman said people had only one thing on their minds: the word 'radiation.' The chairman is young and energetic. He is determined, but no one knows what direction determination should take. Like the others, he left this open handsome village, but now he and his family have returned, living in the close quarters of a tiny apartment in the Mesa. 'The city was like living with garbage,' he said. Now he is back. He goes hunting in the forest. 'We will live here forever,' he says. But there is a problem in the forest. The physicist who led our group is a hunter, too. Last year he shot an elk, and he tested the meat. It exceeded the capacity of the monitor which is 9.999 units of radiation. This borders on the fantastic." Skip to another part. "A woman brings in honey to be tested, and the honey, however, was contaminated eighteen times the acceptable limit. The pregnant woman whispered to the Byelorussian psychologist on our team that she had been giving honey to her son as a cold remedy. Her family and friends had all eaten the honey. The physicist told her to get rid of it, they should not eat honey again, and they are to destroy all the hives. Quickly, and without a word, she turned and left the room." It talks about visiting a collective farm where a calf has been born with its organs on the outside. It can't stand up. It's so radioactive, nobody wants to touch it. Nobody will come and get it, because when they come through the dust, it raises all the radioactivity again. So he just describes this group of farmers standing around this dead calf, kind of silent, stricken, not knowing quite what to say. So it just goes on and goes on.

PK: I certainly get the idea.

WW: Testimony. So that's the initial drawing where I tried to draw and record some of this stuff, and then wasn't happy with that. Then got into the Bosch and Bruegel and some of those--there's Bruegel portrait in there. The title is, "We Eat the Berries and Blush." They're talking to one of the guys, one of the villagers. He says, yes, he still forages in the woods for mushrooms and berries. They said, "But don't you know the berries are heavily radiated?" He said, yes, he knew it, but he eats them anyway. When he said it, he blushed. So, some of those things surfaced in there.--

PK: Well, it seems to me that you, to a rather unusual degree, see the human story. It's premature to jump to these kinds of conclusions, but you see the human story and the march of history as very much of a piece, rather than in the old-fashioned modernist notion of progress, progress toward perfectibility, whether it's technological or social or anything like that. Because from what you said, and I think it's really interesting, you see, in the imagery that you were trying to seek out of written descriptions of Chernobyl, parallels, or connections, to imagery from the Middle Ages, the early Renaissance, that are of a kind. It appears to me that you're interested in extremes to a certain degree. Is that so? The extremity. And in this case, the consequence, the catastrophe from human, I suppose, arrogance, would be one way to put it. Then, of course, in the older times, this imagery that seemed so attractive to the surrealists, those who are interested in that kind of thing, was finally addressing religious issues, issues of sin, and consequences of sin. Am I over-interpreting this?

WW: Well, you're talking about them, I guess, not me. [Laughs]

PK: Well, no, but in your work it seems, at least to me, that this is a parallel interest, or exploration, or in your images these issues are present.

WW: Yes. Sure. Well, I think part of it is just the artist role. I think part of it is just that sensitivity and a whole lot of that which you don't see as being addressed in the world. It has to find expression somewhere, and artists often are where the shadow resides, where the thing that nobody wants to see is. It has to appear somewhere. I had a devil of a time getting that text published in that catalog. Rena didn't want to put it in there.

PK: Why?

WW: It's just too depressing.

PK: Rena said that?

WW: Yes.

PK: It seems to me it would have to be in there, because that was the impetus.

WW: You know, it's interesting in that people always want to know, where'd this work come from, or what stimulated the work, or whatever. And I said, "Here it is. I have it literally right here. This is what this work came out of, reading this text." I mean, it's part of the thing that the work, in a sense I just stated is about, is that people not wanting to look at the full picture, or deny it. It's denial of death.

PK: So you're dealing, in part, with, if I understood that, with the human capacity to not confront their world. The reality realm.

WW: Yes, if you want to present the full landscape, not some Walt Disney version of it, which is, with technology, where the world is heading ever faster into wanting the instant, always entertaining, digitalized reality there. So I think being an artist, or just being creative, or imaginative, or aware, right away, where I think everybody starts out, and by about the age of ten, that's been pretty effectively whipped out by education. All kids, when they go to school, are pretty good artists and dancers and singers and poets. Somebody pointed out recently who wrote a book called, How to Drop Out of School and Get a Life, before your training starts, to be part of whatever the culture has decided you should be, you've got all the poetry and dancing and creativity and all that stuff, and seeing the world in a really full pageant rather than that kind of chopped, schizophrenic view that eventually is moved into place. Where all that part that gets buried, basically through being educated, or brainwashed. finally doesn't have any place to come out, except at McDonald's with an occa [phonetic], and you slaughter a whole room full of kindergartners, because you're living some life that's detestable and no longer fun or creative. Doing jobs you hate.

PK: Did you feel that if humanity is to be redeemed from whatever evils we're subject to, and many of our own doing, that it's necessary to reestablish contact with, as they say, the child? The pre-educated child, one might say. Aspects of human nature that have been programmed through education. Or another way to put it is with the primitive, with the basic, with the fundamental. Does that fit at all with your thinking?

WW: I don't know. Those words are so loaded. In some sense. A little bit like Suzuki Rosche's [phonetic] Beginner's Mind, but I think, at sixty, the child part--hopefully, just when you talk about the interviews, enough time has evolved, and you're still alive on the planet, that you can still be in touch with that and bring another dimension.

PK: Continuing this first session with Bill Wiley. Sorry, Bill, you were interrupted.

WW: Just thinking about, to not have access to that aspect of consciousness really reduces the quality and the experience of just having been alive on this planet. Of course, if you don't know that, then I guess you're not missing it.

PK: Well, isn't that maybe part of the artist's job, to make sure that you do know the story, at least help you to see in a way that well.

WW: Yes, but for that to be heard or make sense, there has to be a spark inside of the onlooker as well. If that's been shunted and buried, then it's not a real transaction taking place, or at least it's not a sole transaction taking place. It's something maybe more monetary, or social, or culture, but that's not probably really feeding the spirit, or the soul's [unclear].

PK: Well, it appears that spirituality in some form, or the spirit, the soul, this kind of ember, if you will, of humanity, is a concern of yours, and something that you, no doubt, want to touch on in your art, which is not always the case with many contemporary artists. It strikes me already, although I, again, don't want to jump ahead, because we have a lot of ground to cover, but it strikes me that it's not that you're unique in this, but these kinds of concerns seem to be very important to you, and seem that perhaps it informed your world view, and therefore your art for a number of years.

WW: Yes, very true.

PK: You certainly have a relationship to nature. It's always been there. I've known this from looking at your work. I don't want to sound pompous or corny, to say that it's like a tribute, or honoring Mother Nature, but it certainly comes through that for the human experience to be a successful one, for any chance for us really to continue, we need to pay attention to our own relationship to it.

WW: Yes. We sure neglected that, I think. Yes.

PK: We were talking a little earlier, and again, this is a theme I know that we're going to touch on and return to,

so we certainly don't have to dispatch it, but lest I forget. When I first showed up here, I was looking around in the studio and glanced over at a work tacked to the wall down there, with old Mickey Mouse. We talked a little bit about Mickey, and I was telling you about my interviews that are going on right now with Llyn Foulkes [phonetic] in L.A., who has appointed Mickey Mouse, he calls him Mickey Rat, as the symbol of some of the evils that you identified, as well, but particularly corporate Disney, Disney as the evil empire, standing, of course, for an overwhelming corporate presence that seems to have imposed its own morality, if you will, its own terms on existence.

WW: Well, as Noam Chomsky--I mean, I'm kind of ignorant of lot of this stuff, but Noam Chomsky is very clear, I think, and he just pointed out real simply in some ways that corporations with all the advantages of an individual and none of the responsibilities. [Laughs]

PK: Well said. That's pretty straightforward.

WW: About as a clear as you can get it. So the whole Disney thing is really interesting, in a way, how that's so permeated life and the world and the planet. Well, the song. I love the song, it's a good song.

PK: Yes, what was that song that you mentioned earlier?

WW: Let me sing it for you.

PK: Oh, great. That would be terrific.

WW: Easiest way to remember it. This is a song that came through--started out, I was doing a painting called "Hinge," and what I thought was the total song turned out to be the chorus. It was about the time, I think, I first heard of cryogenics and that's where right at point of death the body is dropped sub-zero temperatures and entombed in a case. Anyway, I'll just sing the song. It's called Blind Mickey's Blues. In the vision I had when I was doing the painting, hearing about this, Mickey came to me older and blind and sang this little blues chorus to me. Later, about two, three years later, the rest of the song came, and the first part turned out to be the chorus. [Playing guitar] "Well, somewhere in the hills of California, deep underground, in a stainless steel container liquid nitrogen Walt Disney's buddy can be found. He's waiting for the resurrection and he hopes it's comin' soon. Meanwhile, there in the darkness, Walt, he's floating like a big balloon, and he's icy, too. [unclear] and he knows it. Took Uncle Walt's body and they froze it. Why, Mickey Mouse, didn't you know that I can see, whatever happened to Walt could have happened to you or me. Timothy Leary [unclear]. "Now, his mamma didn't know it, 'cause she was long since gone. His daddy didn't either, he'd already mingled with the lawn. Just his trusty keeper keepin' Walt real cold, keepin' that body frozen, so it will not get more old. I'm told he left a lot of money, here with me and you. Keep that body frozen now in that icy brew, they say it's true. [unclear] and he know it, yes. Took off Uncle Walt's body and they froze it. Oh, blind mouse you know that I can see, whatever happened to Walt, whew, happened to you and me. Mickey. "He wants to be revived one day. We can hardly wait. Technology will haul him back again for another dinner plate. Donald, Goofy, and Minnie, they'll be dancin' all around. Pluto, he'll be barking somewhere off in the background. What a happy day when Walt is back with us, humanizing animals and other fancy stuff. Old Walt's [unclear]. And that's enough. [unclear] and he knows it. Took Uncle Walt's body and they froze it. Bye, Mickey Mouse. You can see, what happened to Walt, whew, can happen to you and me. Baby. "How's this opera gonna end? We can only guess. If we don't keep old Walt real cold, it could be a mess. I'm glad he's gonna be here to speak right up for us about how we kept him frozen just to give him back to us, without much fuss. Sacred trust. [unclear] could we suppose it? Time came for Walt's body and unfroze him. I don't know what happened you know, 'cause I wasn't around. I wasn't rich enough to get frozen, so I just got stuck in the ground, under a little mound, without a sound. "Now, you know the story and what has come to pass. How we're using advanced technology to save Walt Disney's ass. Oh, what class. Permanent pass."

PK: [Applauds] That was great. Thank you. I love it. Boy, that sure fits.

WW: Tells the story. [Laughter]

PK: It sure does. Now I'm out of questions. Well, you see, that's what art does and music. It tells the story. I guess that's what this is all about. I'm going to, if you don't mind, play that for Llyn.

WW: Well, sure.

PK: I'm mean, he's going to absolutely love it. I swear, you guys have to get together. Anyway, it seems to me that at this stage in your career, a number of things that really matter to you have sort of surfaced, come to the core, or at least this is what I assume, because this often happens--how old are you now?

WW: I'll be sixty this month.

PK: Really.

WW: Yes.

PK: What day?

WW: Twenty-first.

PK: It's coming up. Well, happy birthday in advance. In fact, we're going to do a second session right about that time. I'll have to bring a cake. At any rate, I think the theme of our interview, as we continue it, is going to be, to a certain degree, maybe tracing some of these concerns and interests and themes that then have maintained themselves.

WW: I think pretty easy to trace in some ways. Part of it, I think, just growing up as a kid, spent a lot of time in the country, with animals. Had a horse, I guess about three different horses, through my dad, anyway, growing up. Dogs. I spent a lot of time outside playing and working, too. So I always had a strong connection. And lived, probably the longest time, in San Francisco when I was going to the Art Institute. Probably the longest city dwelling I've had. Really kind of a semi-rural or some area like that. So it's been pretty necessary to me. Not even that conscious of it, but just kind of gravitated over to Marin [County] when I could. Like access to the mountains and the beaches and all that stuff, important. But I think, as far as the concerns and regard to art, that started as a kid. Just like I said, I think most kids just like drawing and painting and wasn't discouraged, and got into drawing and comic books. As I mentioned before in interviews, Fred Harmond [phonetic], who did Red Rider, was kind of an early example of somebody who combined the life and his art work. I also was, at the time, very interested in horses. So here was kind of somebody who looked like he had worked it out. He had a ranch in Colorado and he drew this comic strip. The comic strip, I don't know about the stories, but the drawings were quite good. He was a good draftsman. He could really draw.

PK: I sure remember that. I used to read Red Rider and Little Beaver.

WW: Big frieze with lots of action and a little bit of the same quality of Will James. I don't know if he was the illustrator, but Smokey--somebody doing some very nice, kind of Frederic Remington kind of drawings in that. So, connected to those things. Then that teacher I had in high school, in Richland, Washington, McGrath [phonetic], that [Robert] Hudson and Al and I all had, kind of really focused some of the ideas in terms of art. McGrath's approach was very inclusive. There just wasn't anything ruled out as a potential art voice or poetry, dance, music. It could all--

PK: What was his name again?

WW: McGrath. James McGrath.

PK: Of course, there was also, although we'll get to him, McCracken [phonetic].

WW: McCracken was a friend of McGrath's. Yes. Phil McCracken. So that whole Northwest early experience, I think with McGrath specifically, were things like spiritual values and connection with the land, and I think a more pantheistic--not named in any kind of doctrinal sense or anything. I think those things intermingle, just because McGrath brought the environment, made me aware of the environment in some way there. The desert, which was kind of being used as--I didn't really know it at the time--a radioactive garbage dump.

PK: Oh, really. Up in Washington?

WW: Yes, Richland, Washington. It's one of the most polluted areas on the planet. It's so polluted, they don't think they can ever clean it up.

PK: Where is Richland?

WW: It's southeast corner, about thirty miles from the Oregon border, where the Yakima and the Columbia converge. It's where, along with Oak Ridge and New Mexico, where some of the first plutonium for the bomb was processed. My father was there working on construction, pouring cement. So, interesting. I mean, at the most advanced frontier of science research at that point, into that milieu comes McGrath, who, totally alive to the desert, brought native people in to lecture at the high school, and kind of brought the art world in some ways. Really an interesting man with a big range, inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness, and touched a lot of lives beyond the obvious people I've mentioned.

PK: So Bill Allen, was there, and Hudson as well? So it was the three of you, if I remember correctly, and then they actually kind of moved on as--

WW: We all three got scholarships to the Art Institute.

PK: Probably at a strong recommendation of McGrath, no doubt.

WW: Well, sure.

PK: Did he direct you there?

WW: He made us aware of the junior scholastic art competition. In that you can put together a portfolio, and on it you list your first five or six schools. I didn't have any particular direction. I mean, he had recommendations, and he thought [unclear] and the Art Institute, although it was called California School of Fine Art. Bill Allen, who I didn't really know very much in high school, I knew him through McGrath, I knew the work. I think I saw it in the art room. He had come to the Art Institute on a scholarship, and came back one Christmas, and knew Hudson and I were really interested in art and stuff, and recommended the school to us. Personal recommendation. And I said, "Yes, okay, I'll try for it." So that was first on my portfolio. I got down there on that same scholarship. Hudson came down as an alternate. He didn't hit it first off. I remember he phoned me. We were buddies. We hung out together in high school, went drawing and hiking and stuff together. So, looking forward for that to continue. He initially didn't get the first pick, but he was an alternate, and the guy dropped out, so he went on the same scholarship. So, yes, McGrath really helped that happen. Still in touch with him. He's still around.

PK: Really.

WW: Yes. He's still teaching. He teaches now. He went from there, he taught for the Army in Europe. All the American schools in Germany, Europe, he was doing that. Also taught at the Santa Fe Indian School. He's very interested in cross-cultural conversation and imagery. He teaches Arabia and he taught at Yemen. A lot of adult teaching. Children as well.

PK: Where is he now?

WW: His home base is in Santa Fe. Santa Fe, New Mexico.

PK: Gee, I wonder if I ever met him, because, you know, I go there--it's part of my territory. Lucky me. I wonder if--gee, I must. I know a lot of people there. I wonder if he knows Terry and Joe Harvey Allen?

WW: He knows of them through me, but he's been there a long time. He's often travelling. He knows some of the older people around Santa Fe, but he just knows of Terry and Joe Harvey. I don't know if they've ever met McGrath. Last time, Dorothy and I were still together, we were there, we went to see McGrath, he happened to be in town.

PK: I should look him up.

WW: Oh, yes. Really an interesting man, I think. Really creative.

PK: He sounds like it. Well, he also, obviously, played a very important role in the life and lives of three--

WW: And Dorothy, too.

PK: Really.

WW: Yes, he was Dorothy's high school art teacher. Yes.

PK: So you guys were in high school together, right?

WW: I didn't know Dorothy in high school. She was ahead of me. There's actually another McGrath student in Mill Valley, Jim Scoggins [phonetic], who's an architect. And a poet who's moved back up to Washington, William Winthrop [phonetic], a published poet. Another painter, John Houdsey [phonetic], who's in Portland now. Those are just some of the students I know that worked with him that are still--

PK: Extraordinary.

WW: Yes. He's really an extraordinary person. Just kind of hammering the basics again, he just had the belief and knew that everybody had an artist in them, and that it needed tending, that you needed to recognize that on some level. He didn't necessarily confine it to painting and drawing; it really was more a state of mind, I mean, something verging on Zen, although I don't think I ever heard the word "Zen." Maybe heard it in relation to Grades and Toby. But my first kind of run-in with that was at Paul Elders Books, which used to be on corner of Stockton and Sutter. I worked at Duncan Vail [phonetic], a little art store down mid-street. At noon, coffee breaks, I'd go up to Paul Elders and look through the art books and came across Paul Repps' Zen Flesh, Zen Bones there. That was kind of my first significant encounter with Zen.

PK: I never saw that. Zen Flesh, Zen Bones?

WW: Yes.

PK: Paul Repps?

WW: Yes. Paul Repps. He died not all that long ago, and he had a wonderful statement. Before he died, he said his one ambition while he'd been here was to try to land a human being on Earth.

PK: Well, a lot of directions to go with this. What I would like to do, if I may, is now get very much into biographical, chronological mode. I would be really interested to hear about your own background, including your family and where you came from. Grandparents, perhaps. To get more of an idea of where Bill Wiley comes from, I guess. You were born--I forget, was it in--

WW: Bedford, Indiana.

PK: Indiana. What about your family, the things that you remember, where your ancestors came from?

WW: As far as nationality, Irish is the prominent nationality in the family, but beyond that, I really don't know. I knew my grandfather on my father's side. Never knew my grandmother, don't remember her. Knew a little bit more of my grandparents on my mother's side. I see a lot of influence coming, especially artistic or creative influence, coming through on that side of the family, because my grandfather on my mother's side, named Zabel [phonetic], he was a blacksmith. He was also a little bit of a musician and could draw some.

PK: This is your maternal grandfather?

WW: Grandfather, yes. Then one of his sons, my Uncle Marshall, took over the blacksmith shop. I had some kind of relationship with him, because I had a horse, and I used to take it in to be shod. I liked the blacksmith shop a lot and that whole, what was going on around there. It was attractive to me. My father really worked pretty much in construction most of the time, road-building and cement work, laborer, foreman, occasionally superintendent, usually running a crew, laborer. For a long time in Indiana, did a little surveying and some roadwork. Laid a lot of road in Indiana. Mother worked most of the time.

PK: What did she do?

WW: Generally worked in the bank. Teller.

PK: So was this a medium-size town, Bedford?

WW: Bedford, yes. Small, medium-sized Midwest town with a square.

PK: Fifty thousand, maybe?

WW: Gosh, now probably maybe 50,000. At the time probably a little smaller. And lived briefly in town, maybe the first five years of my life. Then somewhere around first grade, moved out into the country, a little five-acre farm.

PK: So you're a farm boy.

WW: Yes, basically. Although mini farm. My dad had been raised in a kind of partial rural atmosphere, so, horses and chickens and pigs and gardens, and, you know, things like that usually. Even Washington, later on, after we'd moved from Indiana, lived in a house trailer for a number of years. We sold the farm when I was ten and moved to the state of Washington, bought a house trailer.

PK: Why was that?

WW: I had an uncle, another uncle, who was in similar business, who also shared some interest in horses. He had a little pony ring outside of Bedford. I used to go over and break his ponies in the spring for riding for kids. Anyway, he'd decided to come to Washington because of Hanford, all the construction going on, the atomic stuff. Although this was after the war, moving into Atoms For Peace kind of syndrome. So, still people came from all over the United States. A huge trailer city. So we went out kind of following him, and just stayed a year. Actually, don't quite know why that was. But took off after a year, and ended up in Texas. Traded in the house trailer on a café and filling station about fifty miles south of Dallas.

PK: This is you and your folks?

WW: Yes.

PK: Do you have any siblings?

WW: My brother, yes. Five years younger than me, my brother, Chuck.

PK: What's his name?

WW: Chuck. Charles. So, ended up there for a year. We'll say that had a probably a little bit more effect on my artistic career, because I was still drawing. Actually, my parents, during that brief stay in Texas, which I sometimes forget about, did sign me up for an art course one spring there, that a lady taught privately in a little town, Corsicana. I can remember going for a few sessions and kind of doing these standard charcoal still-life renderings.

PK: That was your first formal training?

WW: Well, I messed around with it, you know, art, but it was just art classes. But, yes, that was something a little outside the usual, and a little unusual for my folks to do something like that, although they weren't particularly discouraging. My dad, once I got older in high school, and he saw I was really hooked on art, he had a lot of trepidation about it. He didn't know. If it had gone off into architecture, or drafting, or something practical--

PK: Professional.

WW: Well, it's just he didn't have any relationship to fine arts, other than the standard cliché artist star, "They're no good," blah, blah, blah. So he was highly suspicious of that as something I was going to survive on.

PK: Well, that was interesting then that they started signing you up for--

WW: Yes. Well, my mother was basically supportive through all that, soft-pedaled the practical. "Don't worry and just go ahead and try and do what you want and try to satisfy both things, your father, and get good grades." But as it turned out, he got me in the labor union. I worked on construction all the time I was going to school in the summer.

PK: Sounds like he was pretty supportive, basically.

WW: Basically.

PK: Given the natural limitations.

WW: I knew they loved me and cared for me.

PK: That's what matters most.

WW: Yes.

PK: Continuing this first session of interview with William T. Wiley. Bill, we now have you as a youth, I guess about eleven or twelve years old, in Texas, some town--what was it, below Dallas somewhere?

WW: Yes. Really the closest town was one called Rice, which was about a mile off the highway. It lay almost in the middle between Corsicana and Ennis. Those were the two towns of any size. We had a little café and filling station and house, and, actually, a little bit of land. I had enough for a horse there. My dad bought a beautiful little filly. Bought off a truck going to a slaughterhouse. Never actually got to totally mature that horse, because we moved again.Those summers between moving to Indiana, I think another important thing in terms of my work, my imagery, my exposure to language, and some of the pun stuff, and all that thing, came from between Indiana and Washington, travelling out there, very important, just everything you kind of encounter along the way. And then from Washington to Texas, the whole summer was spent travelling. My dad really was looking for, what he ended up buying in Texas, his own business. Had things been better business-wise in Texas, we might have stayed there, but the business wasn't that good. And water was a real problem there.

PK: Was it a drought?

WW: Just low water table and not much water yearly. So we had a lot rain barrels and things which captured a lot of water that you used.

PK: Were you on a highway there?

WW: Yes, it was the main highway between Houston and Dallas, Highway 50, I think it was. Yes. When you were mentioning Spike Jones, I saw Spike Jones at the Dallas State Fair one year. Spike Jones--it's funny, you know,

the connections, the cross connections there [unclear]. My uncle, the blacksmith uncle, loved Spike Jones and I got first exposed to Spike Jones records and stuff in Indiana. A fun connection. But, yes, the summers in between Texas and Washington, and in between Texas and California, ended up spending time outside Visalia, California, in another trailer. We traveled a lot, mainly through the South, Midwest. Probably the only states we didn't get into were the New England states. But all the other states, Florida and all through--

PK: Where does this wanderlust come from?

WW: He was looking for another form of work besides construction and to, I think, be in his own business. Cafés-filling station combinations and motels, we looked at a lot along the way. Generally, moving on, but school year finally coming down and making a decision. Well, we had the trailer and here's the café, and they made a deal, and so off we went to school. But then at the end of the year, sold it and took off again. Ended up in California for a year.

PK: How long were you in Texas then, actually?

WW: A year.

PK: Just a year.

WW: Yes.

PK: So you really got moved around a bit.

WW: Yes, fifth grade in Washington, sixth grade in Texas, seventh grade in California, and then back to Washington again for the eighth grade.

PK: That was in Visalia?

WW: In California, yes. Just outside of Visalia.

PK: Then one year, and then back up to Richland?

WW: Yes, Richland. But as I say, I think important just in terms of my development, my exposure to things, those summers travelling. Actually, when you wanted to be outside playing, having spent the year inside school, summertime, have to climb in the car, and that was hard. But I think a lot of the artistic interest and reading filled in a lot of time there, and even music. Kind of taught myself to play the harmonica. So that kind of enforced period also caused other certain things to happen.

PK: So this was the way you would entertain yourself and fill your time. Did you stay at campground-type places?

WW: Yes, when we had the trailer. Yes.

PK: So it was really kind of a gypsy life, almost.

WW: Yes, a little bit.

PK: Which sounds romantic, but I guess for a kid it's not.

WW: It had both pros and cons, good and bad stuff. But I think a lot of this stuff with messing around with language and a lot of the humor in things, you run into that a lot in that on-the-road kind of [unclear].

PK: Again, a way of passing the time and entertaining.

WW: Narrative stories. You pick up a lot of that. And in the café itself, operating that for a year, you're kind of privy to a kind of theater. You're behind the counter there and these characters come and go.

PK: God, this sounds like a Sam Shepard play or something like that to me.

WW: Yes.

PK: Real middle-American blue-collar experience.

WW: Yes.

PK: Would you describe that pretty much as your background?

WW: Yes. Very much so.

PK: What did you read? I'm real interested in this. The growing interest in literature, or in stories anyway, if not literature. Do you remember?

WW: Yes. I was into reading pretty early, and some through parents and some through gifts from people. I had Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer pretty much under my belt, probably at the right ages. Being interested in animals, a whole series of books by a woman, I'm not sure of her name, but they were historical novels. A woman writer. Since I was pretty involved in horses--a series. One was called Misty of Chincoteague, and it was based on those islands off the coast of Virginia that have wild ponies. Every year they bring them across. So that one, and another wonderful book, King of the Wind, which was based on how Arabian horses and European horses interbred.

PK: I think I know that.

WW: Yes, I can't think of her name. Mary Mapes Dodge, Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates. Interesting. I think in school there, too, a couple of teachers, end of the day, if everybody had been good, would read you a story. My mother read to me as a kid, The Yearling.

PK: Oh, yes. I loved that. Marjorie Kinnon Rawlings.

WW: Yes, beautiful illustrations. Those big N.C. Wyeth kind of--I don't know if he was the illustrator or not, but they had that kind of quality to them.

PK: Maybe an edition. Certainly, though, some of the Robert Louis Stevenson. I don't know if you ever read any of those.

WW: Yes.

PK: Wyeth did wonderful illustrations for those.

WW: Right. So that's another, I think, important art and literature. I've mentioned that in other interviews, kind of looking at pictures while you listen to words, before you're able to read. So, I guess, intermittent exposures do some really good, interesting books, kind of haphazardly in some ways. Then on my own, just by sheer accident, stumbled into [J.D.] Salinger, as a junior in high school, yes. The only reason I got it was I thought it was going to be a little sexier than it was, because it was something about a young boy's underground adventures in New York. I was about to take a bus trip to see my girlfriend, who had moved to the coast in high school, and the cover had been double printed, so it had a jitter to it. Catcher In The Rye. Strange title. So I picked up that and somebody else. I was already into [John] Steinbeck. I bought Of Mice And Men. I climbed on the bus and rode over to the coast and read Catcher in the Rye on the way, and just kind of flipped out. I mean, it was a really interesting encounter with that at that point, just perfect. But there wasn't anybody to talk to about it, because nobody had read it. I didn't run into it again until I got to the Art Institute and it was assigned [unclear].

PK: Of course, that was like a generational, almost [unclear], Catcher in the Rye.

WW: Yes.

PK: I certainly remember that. Did you identify with it in anyway, beyond just enjoying the story? I mean, did it suggest--

WW: Well, the multifaceted aspects of it, and the other members of the Glass family. I found it, in some ways I probably couldn't have articulated at the time, but just the implications, the intellectual aspects of it, symbolic stuff. The language, just his entering into that kid that he created there, I suppose himself, Holden Caulfield. And it being pretty much outside of my particular field of experience at that point, but still able to connect with it. And the poetry of how he wrote it in some ways.

PK: It's interesting that you were--well, not necessarily surprising, but attentive to these kinds of qualities that the writing itself, that there were differences, which, of course, is obviously a literary notion, but that some stories simply are told better than others, and the aspect of that kind of enhancing communication. Maybe drawing the reader or the viewer in. You mention Steinbeck, and I can't help but think, although I'm not citing your situation was at all the same, but the itinerant kind of experience, the experience of moving around, searching, seeking, more better opportunity, a business as your dad was. Did you--I'm sure you read Grapes of Wrath? Did you identify in any way with that?

WW: Oh, to some degree. Yes, it wasn't totally a foreign experience to me having worked farm work in Washington. Of course, I was--well, that was about the same time doing some of that picking stuff and working in fruit-picking and so forth. So, yes, I could identify with it to some extent. Dad was a little bit at the time in science fiction. Isaac Isomov. But not very much, actually.

PK: Did you read any [Robert] Heinecken, by any chance?

WW: No.

PK: I used to like Heinecken.

WW: No, just Isaac Isomov, I. Robot, I remember I read that. Oh, I know, probably the next guy when we were still driving around, reading was important, Ray Bradbury.

PK: Yes.

WW: Very important, interesting writer there for me at my age at that point.

PK: It really is interesting to me what it is that draws us as individuals, and, to a certain extent, an age group, to certain writers or certain stories. When you're a kid, you certainly aren't concerned with the list of great books or anything like that. It's got to work.

WW: Yes, it's got to connect.

PK: It's got to connect. Have you analyzed, at all, in your own experience in that respect--you've gone down a list of books, and actually explained why, in many cases, they were appealing to you. But do you remember how they worked for you, in what way, what it was? Was it creating a world that became your world that you could enter into by opening that book?

WW: I'm not sure. Yes, I think it's voyeurism on some level. It's like experience, vicarious experience. I was thinking, just recently I read Robin Davidson's Desert Places. The first book of hers I read was one called Tracks, where she took camels from Alice Springs to Perth.

PK: Oh, yes. Yes.

WW: In this most recent book, she's travelling with some of the last nomadic tribes in India. It's one of those books like the one I read when I was in Australia, Antarctic exploring. Just one of those books, I was glad she was taking the trip and I was experiencing it through her, rather than me being there with the nomads. [Laughs] It's amazing how literature, in that sense, when you're reading something you really connect with, it becomes part of you, becomes part of your experience to some degree, and maybe in some ways even more so than your actual experiences. I heard somebody explaining that the other day. Their reason for--they said, here you live sixty, seventy, eighty years, what do you remember of it? Pretty gappy, you know. So what's the good of all those experiences, if you only remember a dozen or so when you think back? And why do you remember those over some other experience, this particular one where you can name this and this? Why really is that one, and some really insignificant are locked in? Why am I thinking that again? The time somebody stuck their head around the corner and said, "Cuckoo." Why am I plagued by that memory? Anyway, they were speculating that those things you can recall that way were when you were fully present, that Zen totality present, that all your consciousness was there in some way, and so really you can re-illuminate that, because you weren't partially there, like we are most of the time.

PK: Like most of the time. I gather the connection then with reading, with literature, with fiction, is that, in fact, if you're drawn into the story, you are entirely there. Perhaps as you suggest, more so than most of the--which is an interesting--that's a pretty interesting philosophical question, because how is your reality and memory constructed. If it's through books, to a large extent, it's through others' stories, not your own. Although, of course, you adopt them. Let me carry that idea just a little bit further in connection with you and your art, because it seems to me, to a degree, your reality, and that is the images, or your artistic expression, is constructed from--and I don't want to say appropriated, because that's the post-modernist term, and we don't need to use that necessarily--but really is drawn--if you look around you, as we all do, and then draw on these various elements, bring them together to create the world according to Bill Wiley, which, of course, is your right, but it is interesting to consider how much of that may be drawn from other people's stories, perhaps Mr. Bosch and Mr. Bruegel. Where that leads us, I don't know, but it certainly makes you question the notice of autonomy, individual autonomy.

WW: Yes. Well, some of those twin studies they've done, the guys separated at birth and end up picking the same town to vacation in. The only reason they found each other is they both chose the same barber. He said, "No, you know, I cut your hair yesterday. It can't grow that fast." They both married, I think, women with the same name. They both had dogs that were the same. They both named their dogs the same name, Toy. Not Spot or Fido. Toy. They both flushed the toilet before and after they pissed. I mean, it just went on, on, on, right down the line.

PK: That really is, of course, extraordinary. I've heard of things sort of like it, but that sounds like a pretty

extreme example.

WW: Yes, this was documented. Just really vastly similar.

PK: What about in art, though, since we're on this subject, sort of musing about it, I guess, but this idea, this phenomena we're discussing in fiction, in reading, where we, in some cases, maybe even get confused eventually about what our own experiences were, because they're so colored and conditioned. There are so many elements that we've drawn from literature.

WW: Boy, I run into a lot. I can remember certain things that happened a minute ago, but my memory since--especially things for songs, for voice, "You've got a phenomenal memory, you can remember that. When did you last sing that?" Twenty years ago. Yes. So the thing that's surprised me, among a number of friends, John Houdsey for one, who come back and tell me things that they remember, and they've remembered them wrong. Things they think they said that I said and vice versa, and if I didn't have such a keen memory for that, for some of those things, I would go along with it, but, you know, immediately know that it wasn't you who said that, I said that. But it's totally blurred, and people attributing things to me that I, "No, I didn't say that. I know that I didn't." So in some ways it doesn't matter, it all gets moved around where one wants it, in a sense.

PK: Well, now I think that's for sure. Everybody knows about selective memory, which, of course, is entirely self-serving, all of this is. We want to create a satisfactory world around us, not just the world around us, but our own history, if that's possible.

WW: Right.

PK: It's a kind of revisionism. It's why maybe we like to go back to reunions sometimes to, well, to get another chance, to project back in time and improve.

WW: Well, some psychiatrists say that you can do that if you can literally get yourself in the mood to whatever it is in the past that debilitated you. If you can get back there, you can literally relive that and relieve yourself of that anxiety. I heard her try to do it with somebody on the radio one time, who couldn't give it up. Said, "Now's your chance. We're back here in time. You can change this." They couldn't see--it was an interesting [unclear]. They couldn't let go of the thing. Which makes me think in some way real recently in Gerchef [phonetic]. He says, "People give up everything but their suffering." [Laughs] Absolutely refuse to give up the suffering.

PK: I suppose, although, let's bring it back to you, if we may. You mention that there are actually precious few things that you remember very well, and it has to do with this phenomenon of being totally present, or at least this is one explanation, and that gets imprinted. We, of course, then by a process that we certainly can't fully understand, do select. What about you? What are some of those few moments for you that really are vivid from the past?

WW: Gee, there are so many. [Laughs] Which to pick? The thing that's most prevalent in my mind now more than that, what we're talking about, is history, revisionist history, hearing Howard Zen one day on the radio, who has written a book called The People's History of the United States. He says as a young man growing up he'd always been interested in history and followed it up in college, and finally realized in college that year after year they'd publish these history books, new history books, and they all say the same thing. Not only that, they're all wrong. [Laughs]

PK: Well, he's right, it gets reinforced.

WW: So he said he decided to write a history book, instead of from the top looking down from the bottom, looking up. So he wrote The People's History of the United States.

PK: What's his name?

WW: Howard Zen. He said that a high school teacher up in Oregon now uses his history book to teach history with. He walks around his class, and he sees a girl's purse laying on her desk, and he takes it, and she says, "Hey, you took my purse". He says, "No, I discovered it". [Laughs] He says then, he, Howard Zen, gets all these crazed letters from high school students saying, "Where do you get this stuff? I never heard anything like this before." He says, "It's easy. Columbus's diary. It's there. It tells what he did to the Indians." So the whole idea of history and what one remembers, and what we think went on, and what actually went on, and what did actually go on. [Laughs]

PK: That's a collective, or sort of cultural, or rather society's collective memory, which, as we're talking about it, seems to me, not at all unlike what we've described as happening with the individual, that it gets reinforced. Information is brought back to us. Our own memories fail. We then rely on other people's accounts. But I ask again, I'm just curious, if there are certain things that really are more vivid for you from any stage of your

lifethan others. Those things that, what should we say, in some ways you carry with you then as maybe even determining moments, but at least identifiers for you at certain times.

WW: Sure, yes.

PK: Can we turn the tape over? I don't want to get you in the midst of something and have to cut you off. Okay.

WW: Sure.

PK: Continuing the interview with Bill Wiley. I prematurely turned this tape over, because I didn't want to interrupt you. I'm trying to get you to share some, what should we say, significant memories following in this line of thought about how some things that we carry, they get more impressed when we carry them.

WW: Yes. We look at our own stupidity in terms of relationship to life, to each other, to the planet. How can you know, really, that the one's you think are significant are the ones that are really the directing forces? Probably the ones that you're not paying any attention to, or that you don't know really how they're operating in your life, though it's really shaping you. The easiest thing to respond to in that sense is just, well, when I was thirty and ran into an art wall, and kind of changed my relationship with art and myself, and started doing watercolors and then narrative, and that kind of thing. That's an easy kind of epiphany, significant in my own development, you know, which happened roughly thirty years ago. That was very significant.

PK: Do you explain it to yourself in anyway, though? What is your understanding of why?

WW: Of why that took place?

PK: Yes.

WW: Oh, I think maybe--I don't really know. Could be just some inevitable point that one reaches in regard to the inner self and the outer self, all the kind of things you've accumulated up to that point. I think, probably, chronologically thirty, it's about when you're no longer the boy. Supposedly these chronologically "more the man." "I ain't a kid no more" kind of thing. In some ways you start to get that advantage of what we're talking about, starting out with, not doing the interview at thirty, more interesting to do it at sixty. Orson Welles said, "Youth only knows youth, but age knows youth and age." Of course, that's another selective, selective term. But I think it was just an inevitable point in my own personal development that I really was just trying to--and a lot of it focused on the art, the art void. What is the art to be about? What is the subject matter? What are my concerns? I think it was just reaching some point where just making art, without knowing why, or just the raw impulse, was finally in question. I didn't know why I was making it, or what for, and went through the first probably real crisis of "Maybe I'm not an artist. Maybe I'm not going to be painting and drawing for the rest of my life like I'd always imagined I was." Here I'd had a year off from [University of California-] Davis, I got a Creative Arts grant, and was real dissatisfied with my work. There was stuff there that wanted to get through, and I'd had some success with it. It wasn't that it hadn't been recognized or responded to--it had--but I wasn't happy with my relationship with it.

PK: This was around '67?

WW: '67, '68. I ended up spending that winter, I first went to Europe for the first time and spent some time travelling there. Although I'd shown in New York, I had never been there, so I decided I should go. Also made some friends at that point, knew a couple people there. So Dorothy and I and the kids spent the winter, rented a place outside of New York, actually. Had studio space. Summer rental through the winter. So in that period of just kind of a blank, okay, I gave--it's a surrender point, I think. "Okay, I'm not supposed to be an artist. I'll give up on that idea. What now?" Fortunately, the urge to work came back, and the way to work, and what the work would be about became evident and obvious in kind of simple narrative, almost comic book kind of way. That's where it just sort of came back again. As I said many times, because I've talked to people and students about it, it was just a very simple kind of straightforward relationship with art again. Not very complicated. Just doing something I loved doing. Doing it simply and not too complicated, very small scale. There again, the kind of low-tech materials was important in a way. Some non-high art aspirational, watercolors, old ladies, delicate stuff. They just didn't have any high art, like oil painting. I didn't work in oils at that point, so you know, big canvas was serious stuff.

PK: You'd just been doing a lot of sculpture before that?

WW: No. At the Art Institute, I worked a lot in oils, got out, and again built up a habitual relation, a certain way of working with oils that I kept falling into. Acrylics came out about that time, and I just kind of forced myself to work with acrylics to get rid of some of the habits that I'd built up with working with oil. Went to a small scale, actually, with the acrylics and masonite, kind of a hardwood thing, trying to just break out of certain habits and certain imagery that I was tired of, or stuck with, or whatever. Felt it was derivative, or whatever. So, just

messing around with it. Kind of fooled around with constructions off and on all the way through there, but they never were ever quite under the same focus as painting or drawing was. It was more like recreation.

PK: It's interesting though, because that, certainly for some, became a Wiley signature, some of those pieces. I'm not even sure construction--of course, that's the word. Well, I mean, God, if you look around your studio, it's all over the place. Yet I can think of--well, unfortunately, my memory is going, I can't think of names of specific works right now. But there's one that for a long time was on exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

WW: "Ship's Log."

PK: "Ship's Log." So, for many visitors to the museum, at any rate, that would be the Wiley they knew. So it's interesting to hear you say that, in a sense, this was almost a sidebar.

WW: Yes, but I also enjoyed it and wanted to keep it in that category. I wouldn't drag the same concerns from--one's serious and one's for fun. Although that was more of an intellectual thing than actual, because either could be either, and I'd also watch them change places. But a part of it is just avoiding the identification so you don't get caught in the traffic of identification. You do anyway. You get typecast to some degree.

PK: How did you know to turn to these almost, as you said, almost comic book or comic strip images, simple, you know, out of democratic, popular culture sources? How did it come? Did this just happen naturally? It's interesting that that then was your way out of this era of self-questioning, trying to reconnect with art and why you're an artist. Do you remember? Is that part of this vivid memory, part of why that watercolor, but why that kind of imagery?

WW: Well, I think, again, it relates to early exposure. Perhaps if I hadn't been read from those particular books, Red Rider, those comics hadn't been around, if I instead had had a European childhood and been taken to the Louvre, it might, as Bob Johnson says about, who was it, [Eugène] Delacroix or somebody in here, that made all the difference. His father took him and the brother to the Louvre, I think it was. The brother slid on the floor, and he looked at the pictures and that made all the difference. Who knows? I might have been the one sliding on the floor. Boy, interesting in that thing of what breaks through about art. Well, to finish up your question, there again, the materials were simple and available. I never really worked with watercolor very much. It had been oil paint. I messed with water-based paints in high school and stuff, and out of the Northwest that was a more acceptable tradition as a main voice, you know, with Graves and Toby.

PK: Also a smaller scale.

WW: Smaller scale, as well, yes. Coming to the Art Institute, if you were going to be serious, it had to be big and bold. That's pretty much out of the modernist, [unclear] view in some ways. But with the McGrath background, inclusive, not exclusive, always other voices happening in there that weren't being paid attention to, weren't being honored. So it was struggle to, what am I going to do with those? Try to edit them out? So, a whole lot of that was just acceptance, self-acceptance. I think the comic book thing, just because it was the easiest way to deal with it. It was the simplest. I could just simply compose a picture and make it about whatever was foremost on my mind at the time, and do it in the most obvious, kind of simple, straightforward way. If anything was complicated about it, I dropped that out, because I didn't want it to be that kind of angry angst sort of experience making art. Enough of that. Enough suffering over--

PK: Well, you said earlier that most of our memories, that which we keep, seem to have to do with suffering. Here's clearly a case where you didn't want that to be so. You wanted to find a way to turn your back on that. Did you then start your journals about that time?

WW: Yes, more specifically. I kept them a little bit before that, because McGrath, that was one of the graduation gifts he gave you, was a sketch book that he urged you to write and draw in. I had, kind of haphazardly over time, dabbled in that. But the writing became a real accompaniment at that point, yes.

PK: It seems to me, Bill, and I've always thought that, in looking, seeing your journals, that they were very direct, personal expression. What you've described, that makes all kind of sense for me, your interest in image and text. Although that's a fancy way to say it, but we know what we mean: pictures and words. This seems to grow out of your very early interests and experience. It sounds as if, at this moment of crisis, where you're struggling with ideas of high art, and maybe a little bit of the artificiality or the danger of becoming artificial, that what you turned to was that which was most authentically you from your own experience. You know, make it simple, get honest.

WW: Yes, remove all the--because also the art and technology was kind of a real crux. Gee, do I have to get rid of all this stuff and get vacuuming forming machines and--

PK: Oh, right, exactly.

WW: --high tech, laser, television sets, and all that stuff? I thought, I don't think so. Maybe, but I'm going to try this first. Just wanting the experience to be more first-hand and more available, and no technological excuses one way or the other in some ways.

PK: Well, it seemed to have served you well, this crisis, this epiphany that you had. It also underlines what, seems clear to me, is this personalism in your work. That's a much talked about thing now, of course. In our era, as an aspect of post-modernism, autobiography and personalism, but sometimes, frankly, this gets, at least in my judgment, it's in the hands of a skilled artist, pretty cloying. Pretty annoying, as a matter of fact. In your case, it seems to fit comfortably within some bigger ideas about what art, what you said, a responsibility of art. What I'm trying to say is, it doesn't seem to be just strictly and exclusively about you.

WW: Right.

PK: It's a way for you, yourself, and in using the tools that are familiar, and the images, to confront things that are more universal and matter more. But I shouldn't be saying that; you should be saying that. Sorry. [Laughs]

WW: That's okay. In some way it's part of the landscape, and how to fit it in in some way that I believe. I think often, occasionally, the art part gets sacrificed for the message. I can't think of some good art. It's like it worked out good, I think, with the Afterburner thing. This is mingling a number of things that I'm not too happy with at this point, but I don't know quite yet how to say it. So even if the art doesn't turn out good sometimes, I think the message matters a whole lot. I'll let it survive on that level.

PK: Well, that certainly is an assumption of much conceptual art. Frankly, I don't have very thrilling, esthetics experience in connection with much conceptual art, and you have to then just say, okay, the message, or the concept, is really what it's all about, and has some beauty, or at least significance to it.

WW: To continue to say it in that same voice over and over again with slight variations loses me. You know, one was enough. [Laughs] I'm sure people feel the same about mine. But it just gets too repetitious, too boring. Starts to enter into some stream that I can't depict it any longer or something. So, it's interesting, a lot of things that used to stop me in museums and I pondered, don't anymore.

PK: Really? Like what? What do you mean? Anything that comes specifically to mind?

WW: Yes, most of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the last time through. I wasn't very interested to begin with. There was a huge Cy Twombly retrospective going on there. The blackboard Cy Twombly, those slowed me down.

PK: I saw that show down at MOCA in L.A., I think. You like those?

WW: Yes, they still--as I went through the show, those slowed me down. They looked as good to me as they did when I first saw them. I thought it was because I liked blackboard. There, again, it relates to me. It's something that I've, imagery that I've--but most of it didn't. Not to deny whatever achievement that I have responded to his work off and on over the years. But that whole museum full of it sure was not very much to hold me back in there. I have to put a lot of things back into context before I'll stop paying attention to them, in terms of the content or whatever it was I used to respond to. If I couldn't open a history book of my mind there with it, the piece itself wouldn't hold me.

PK: Interesting.

WW: Interesting. Chirico stopped me, made me go look at it. One early Jasper Johns piece. The piece itself somehow was interesting to me. I picked three or four very early Francis Bacon, one of those just barely, drawn on canvases, [unclear] and [unclear], one of those. Then a little show--I was real dissatisfied. I was just, "Ehh. Modern art. Oh, what a waste of time." Then just as I was leaving, I saw a little room full of Ray Dunes [phonetic]. A show of Ray Dunes' lithographs.

PK: Good old symbolism.

WW: Yes, and suddenly I was in there. "Well, maybe this is why I came to the museum today." So, different things from history and time and stuff. That's been kind of happening for the last ten, fifteen years. I go to see one thing, and then something else that totally turns me around, not the thing I went to see.

PK: What you're saying has some interesting implications or possible ramifications. We were talking about some of the Old Masters. We were talking about two things. The Museum of Modern Art is, of course, the canonical history of modernism according to certain views, sort of New York, European point of view. That, frankly, can get, I think, a bit stale. It's being questioned. Certainly it's being expanded, the notions of what modernism is

and varieties of expression that didn't quite fit. But, nonetheless, this is supposed to be the art of our time, that which we naturally respond to. What you're saying, I think is very true, is being more and more readily acknowledged, that it doesn't have to be of a piece and engage our interest or attention, artist by artist, work by work. Then we were talking earlier about some of the Old Masters. I guess I would ask the question, then, if you went to the Met or to the Louvre or even to the de Young or Legion, you know, an historic collection, do you find that your interests are holding more or less with these admired figures--Bosch, Bruegel, Degas? You can see where my question is leading.

WW: Yes. Interesting, because I think when I was in school studying art, I wasn't interested in anything in the past. I was only modern. Now that I'm modern, I'm looking at a lot of stuff right here I never paid any attention to before.

PK: Sounds rather perverse on your part. [Laughs]

WW: Well, I'm pretty perverse. [Laughs] Mr. Cantankerous. Mr. [unclear]. Yes. So I think probably part of the reason is just--well, part of it's perverse. [Laughs]

PK: Maybe a need for change, too.

WW: Yes, sure, and having not looked at those things. Then the other part, too, is, what would I go look at? I mean, if I lived in Vienna it would be one thing. I don't. I looked at a lot of reproductions mostly, so I don't look at actual work. Things that inspire me most are reproductions and, of course, the overall sense of what somebody's works about or whatever. But in the Bosch and the Bruegels, it's those cropped version of the works I'm really interested in, whereas the whole work, like in "Temptation of St. Anthony" or "Garden of Delights," it might be a yawn, but getting down into--mainly that's a more modernist thing, what happens compositionally there. It starts to bring something back in that I'm interested in doing.

PK: I was going to ask if one of the reasons for the greater attraction now, some of the Old Masters, older art, as opposed to the modernist canon, might not have to do with the--well, at least with much of modern art--the rage for abstraction, for non-objectivity, and distillation, which, of course, we were beat over the head with that for quite a while. You were in school when that was happening. But Mr. Greenberg and Company, and you know, the formalist concerns. Not that all--I mean, that's not even the majority of twentieth century art. But I'm wondering if you, we, many of us, certainly you, don't find ourselves attracted to stories, even if we don't know what the story is. This is a true human experience. The comic books told stories. Bosch. I'm looking at a Goya up there. I don't have my glasses on. That's a cyclops, isn't it? I think.

WW: He's not cyclopean, but it's [unclear].

PK: Anyway, here we see these, and, of course, they're horrific in a sense, but they draw us in. I'm thinking that throughout the history of art, that which has moved us naturally has to do with a kind of illustration. I mean this in the highest sense--myth. Can be myth, legend, and maybe we are--God, this is a long question. Sorry. Maybe we are drawn then finally here at the end of the twentieth century, the post-modernist era, if you will, back to the kind of imagery which truly communicates, and where you don't need to read the progress of modernist art history to assign importance. Sorry about that long--what do you think?

WW: Well, for a while when this started to happen to me and I saw I was becoming disenfranchised from a lot of modernist work and thought, it got real simple for me, just in terms of like intuition. I'd kind of go into a room, and almost like a bee waiting to find out where the pollen really was. Not in terms of art, but in terms of what I needed to feed me. Actually, the nice part of that changeover that took place at thirty, although it's not so much in operation now, but I gave up judgment. I quit judging stuff, and I'd just go feed where the food tasted good, and I didn't bother on trying to eliminate anything else that didn't seem relevant. I'm still not quite in that frame of mind, but I can get there, and that's good. So, for a while, when I explain it to myself, it was that the art that was stopping me was art that was inspired by something. You couldn't not go ahead and say it. It wasn't just because you were making another painting, but the experience, whatever it was, had to find some other reflection out there and in those things would contain that imagery. Of course, they'd stop you, if you were a little bit awake or not already predetermined as to what you were gonna see. Anybody that walked into a room and told you something that really mattered to them, you would pay attention to some degree. It would be hard to ignore it, if it came out of something that literally was inspired. But if it wasn't, you know, you'd "uh-huh." There would be some frames of mind where somebody could be telling you something just absolutely be captivating, horrific, and you're not available for it. So that was part of the--

PK: Here we are again, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, continuing an interview with William T. Wiley. This is session two, October 30, 1997. It's been several weeks since we last met. The interviewer for the Archives is Paul Karlstrom and this is tape one, side A. Once again, in Mr. Wiley's studio in Woodacre. Last time we ended up having some what I thought were very interesting discussions about books and about memory. Certainly we weren't just doing a nice chronological story of your life and career. It seemed to me that we ended

up pretty much in the late sixties, maybe moving a bit into the early 1970s. The one thing that seemed really important in that narrative was what you described as a kind of crisis in 1967, '68, you placed it, where you were actually asking yourself, in effect, "Am I really an artist. Why am I making this stuff?" You had that kind of, I guess, a crisis maybe in confidence or direction, which we did talk about a bit, we could talk about it a little more. But one thing that occurred to me, or I noticed, was that it was a pretty important exhibition in 1967 organized by good old Peter Selz, and that was the Funk show at the University Art Museum. You were in that. In fact, I would say prominently in that, along with a number of your colleagues. It was clearly an effort by Peter, and I don't know if there were others involved in sort of dialogue or discussion, or even how much the artists were involved, but it seemed, in retrospect, like an effort by Peter to identify and describe and group different activities and artists, but within this rubric "funk." I would love to hear what you remember about the events leading up to the show, the show itself, and what kind of significance it really had in terms of a grouping and in terms of that word "funk." What does "funk" mean to you? Was that Peter's invention?

WW: Well, no. No, it wasn't his invention. I know I've recounted this before, because people are always asking. Now and again, it comes up, somebody asks about funk. My first encounter with the word was in a catalog and it was a painting by Debra Remmington [phonetic], called Phunky. I remember it being spelt P-H-U-N-K-Y.

PK: Really.

WW: Yes, and I could be wrong about that, but I'm right about the title and who did it, I think. I remember asking [unclear], my first year at the Art Institute, 1956, I think. I was eighteen. I said, "What's this word mean, phunky?" I thought it was an interesting word. He said, "I think it's a jazz term. I think it has to do with music." So that made sense to me, although I can't say why. I wasn't a jazz listener, although at eighteen I didn't know anything about it. But then the next time I remember hearing it was just around the school, it being used in relationship to something homemade-looking. "Oh, that's funky." Then somewhere I remember hearing it's "down home." It means really down home. No bullshit. A lot of heart. Then probably when Selz did the show, I heard that other term related to New Orleans, jazz funky, that kind of, I think Peter said, it gives you that sad/happy feeling. So kind of a mixture of blues and rock or something. I don't know. But it kind of moved over. I mean, I didn't think of it in terms of music beyond knowing that as kind of where the roots of the word came from, but it got to be more a funky, no-frills, like this piece of sculpture here is kind of funky.

PK: Yes, I think you could say that. [Laughs] Sort of vaguely roughhewn a little bit, kind of scruffy, kind of thrown together, maybe.

WW: Yes, nothing too high-tech or specialized. The thing kind of manifested out of nothing, in a way. I associated the term and the work initially less so with my stuff, with Manuel Neri [phonetic].

PK: Really.

WW: Yes, his very funky approach to the plaster, working with plaster and paint, and sometimes fairly abstract. That seemed funky, not only kind of almost ready to fall apart, but a very, I don't know, down-home, deep--

PK: So the opposite would be--

WW: High-tech.

PK: Yes, or maybe even high art.

WW: Yes. Yes. Yes. Right. Yes, in terms of what we were talking about before the interview, much more female-based. Earth, mother gendered, rather than male, high, rarified.

PK: Sort of refined or controlled, constructed or something. It seems to me--it doesn't matter what I think about funk, but--

WW: A real engagement--excuse me--with materials, an intermingling, kind of, of materials, so that you're not outside it in some way. More engaged and less theoretical. All that stuff always appealed--that kind of art has always appealed to me. So I did things that were funky because I liked that voice and have continued to work in that. But I don't think as naturally--I don't know. That's probably not true. But anyway, I know when the show finally came about, initially I kind of resented it. I thought it was like after the fact and that some things were included that I didn't feel, yes, they were funky, they weren't made very well or whatever, but they didn't seem that authenticate in feeling. More you could see the attitude represented without the soul in it.

PK: More calculated.

WW: Yes, not even calculated.

PK: Self-conscious?

WW: Self-conscious, or just not understanding. Ignorant. Just ignorant, I think, in a way. But because it looks easy, because materials are found, there's still a beauty and a balance to it that's no different than high art. It's like Francis Bacon's statement, "There's no thing of excellent beauty that does not have within itself some proportion of strangeness." So, you know, high and low meet at that point where authenticate expression emerges, I think, and some inspired expression emerges, whether it's with a razor blade or an old sock, it's whatever that particular thing. So you could have something there that, the most recent post-modern term is, "Looks like art, so it must be art." So I think at the time of the show there were things in there, maybe calculated, but I don't know. Some seem authentically funky, and others just didn't. But that's like that story about Picasso, two guys that fell to arguing over the Picasso painting, and to resolve it, the one guy saying, "You know Picasso. Go ask him." They showed it to him, and he looks at it for a little bit and he says, "It's a fake." The guy, "But I know you painted it." He said, "I paint real paintings and I paint fakes. It's a fake." [Laughs]

PK: How helpful. I take your meaning,though, and it's interesting. This concept of funk has been discussed back and forth in terms of Bay Area art ever since, at least since Peter's show. I, of course, have talked with a few other artists about it, Wally Hedrick [phonetic] being one of them. He's a neighbor of yours, isn't he?

WW: Yes.

PK: He knows a lot about music and he's a jazz aficionado. So I understand that. But I said, "Well, can you describe?" It's an elusive concept in a sense. I said, "Can you describe something that's funky to me?" He thinks a minute and he says, "Yes, it's the way Jaye used to keep her underwear in the refrigerator." [Laughs] That's pretty good.

WW: I'll show you actually [unclear]. I think [unclear]. Nobody's ever going to know about this piece or probably understand the brilliance of it. Where's the book on Wally Hedrick? He's a really amazing artist.

PK: Oh, yes.

WW: And Jay.

PK: Jay's getting a book worked on for her now.

WW: Good. And Bruce Conner [phonetic], I mean, various people, I think they're incredible artists in the area that have been chronicled. Anyway, back in New York one time down in SoHo somewhere, I'm walking along and I find this ruler. It's white with the numbers and stuff on it. So Wally was living in San Geronimo at the time, so I picked it up and brought it back. One day I was going down to see him about something, and Mr. Fix-It used to fix things for us.

PK: I remember.

WW: So I took it to him and I said, "Here, Wally, it's a broken ruler from the streets of New York." And one day he gave it back to me like this.

PK: "W.H. Golden rule fixed." It says, "Broken. Broken. White rule. Adjusted to the golden rule. Fixed." I like it. Is this funky to you?

WW: Yes, it's pretty funky. I think it's just brilliant.

PK: I wish we had the catalog. It's pretty rare now, by the way. But what were some of your works? How many works did you have in and can you recall what they were?

WW: Interesting. Offhand I don't. Yes, I don't. At the time, you know, thought it wasn't interesting in some ways. You have some real things in there, some not so real. I thought Peter, you know, it's just something he's doing. Later on, I appreciated it more, though. It was important. I know others, who will remain nameless, hate the term.

PK: Yes.

WW: Because it's like you're typecast as a bad guy. I see it continually in reference to me and people fix on that, "Ah! Bad guy." Or you always played a hero or the villain or something. You get that thing just keeps coming and nobody knows yet what it means exactly.

PK: Not exactly.

WW: Jay's pants in the refrigerator. I mean, that's why it's interesting. [Laughs] You know, if you have to ask them, you know, it's like the blues and stuff like that. But that's all so true, because, I mean, the things that haven't been--it's like art, it's not interested in your definition of it.

PK: Well, you've got that right. Of course, Peter had a job, and we all do, art historians, museum people, those who write about it.

WW: The other part I was going to say, in some ways I think the only thing that made sense was that it was like most of things, it's happening many places at the same time. It met with an authentic response in Italy. Europe was doing art povera [phonetic] or however you say. I think it was because it was getting conceptual and so high-tech that it was leaving the planet, and so exclusive, that people were reaching back into something. Performance art which became--and a lot of music. That elusive thing that happens with music. You hear it and it's gone, unless it's recorded. In this day and age where everything is like this, what we're doing is recorded, and whatever, nothing--it's like where's mystery left? The Rupert Shelldrake [phonetic], the hundredth monkey syndrome. That theory, that when something--

PK: Oh, the great work of art will--

WW: No, just when something gains enough momentum, it suddenly--it stops doing chronological steps. You reach a certain point and it's everywhere. It's happening.

PK: A critical mass idea or something.

WW: Critical mass idea, yes. But I think that that was true, there were echoes happening in Europe and stuff. It's just coming out of the general cultural need and appetite for an alternative.

PK: I suppose. It's interesting that, of course, Peter Selz was here and for some reason--I've actually interviewed him and I'd have to go back and look, because I know we must have talked about this show. Shows how great my memory is. But what's so interesting about it is that there's this rage, or this need of curators and art historians to name things. In this case, Peter must have, and maybe in talking with artists, having these kinds of discussions, looking at art, sensed that he saw something, that there was this quality which was, if not uniquely in the Bay Area, which you suggest is not the case, at least very strongly and identifiable here among a certain number of artists. Now, I've heard some other artists say, who were even in the show, that they didn't think that there was anything funky about their work. That's what makes it seem a little bit, I wouldn't say to this Peter, and I don't know that I mean it, but you suspect that at a certain point it's a bit contrived. Yet I gather that you came to feel kind of comfortable with it, that you saw that word somehow as appropriate for some of your work and maybe some others.

WW: I think it just appropriately, you know, the term just surfaced out of this area, again, and I think it did define an attitude and part of it initially, I think, even then it was discussed that funky attitude grew out of neglect to some degree, feeling that, gee, there's nothing much. The local population doesn't value the art here very much and we're going to take a much different attitude about making it and the whole thing. I remember at the time some people said they didn't care what the show was called, it was just nice that somebody was doing a show and there would be a catalog and they wanted to be in it. [Laughs] You know, it didn't matter what they called it.

PK: Hey, I'm funky, too.

WW: Hard-edged funk reverse. Yes, I don't care what you call it, just give me a boost. [Laughs] That's a funky attitude, I guess. Just give me a chance.

PK: Just let me in. Let me be seen.

WW: Artists, gee, you like me, you want my work? Oh, God, here take it free, whatever.

PK: Call it whatever you want.

WW: Yes.

PK: Well, you know, there's certain, like Joan Brown and Manuel, some of those things they were doing even earlier, well, you know, like her famous rat, that, as far as I'm concerned is flat-out funky.

WW: Yes, right.

PK: There's some things like that, you know, it really becomes evident.

WW: The little rat bird, like the Egyptian mummy. I know he was also looking at that stuff. Yes.

PK: It's really inventive, too.

WW: It's just like this. I mean, that's a more sophisticated--I mean, Wally had more conceptual irony in his stuff, I think, than Joan or Manuel. More stuff. But it still, you can see that right--bam!

PK: I don't want to overpursue this particular topic, but since I have you here, who else, in the show, did you feel really matched or the work really matched this term?

WW: Do you have who was in the show?

PK: I wish I had that catalog with me. I looked for it. I've got a copy. It's very rare.

WW: Yes.

PK: Well, I think Bruce was in there. Bruce Conner.

WW: Bruce Conner, I would say, yes. Yes, very much so.

PK: I should know this. Actually, it was a good number. Was Harold Paris [phonetic] in that?

WW: I don't know if he was or not.

PK: He doesn't seem too funky to me.

WW: No, I wouldn't say so.

PK: Well, I guess I guess I shouldn't sit here and speculate, but more to the point was, I was just wondering if there were any of the other artists in particular who you felt--was Hudson in it?

WW: Well, yes, I think he was. Yes. Yes.

PK: Do you think that's appropriate for him or not?

WW: Boy, I think Hudson--not in the work. I think he's funky in feeling. That's all he is, is feeling, in a way. I mean, his intellect is feeling in some way. I mean, he's really a heart-based person, I think. It's funny, because the work on one level is funky, but on another level it's very high-tech in some ways. I think he's really interesting, too. He's one, I know, that doesn't like the term.

PK: Yes. I don't think Bruce Conner did either. I'm not positive about that. But then he doesn't like to be categorized at all.

WW: Right. Well, that's what artists love, is mystery.

PK: Unique.

WW: Or just love to be categorized, pigeon-holed, put in their place. [Laughs]

PK: Well, you know, hey, we've got to control you guys somehow. [Laughs]

WW: Right.

PK: You know who does, just, again, I'm sure they were both in the show, Arneson [phonetic] and Bob was in there. Also, I'll bet you Pete Voulkos [phonetic] was there.

WW: Yes, probably. Yes.

PK: Yes, some of those plates and ceramics that seems pretty--

WW: Oh, Pete, I think, is very funky. Arneson, too, less so. You're getting more into intellect again. And Meltric [phonetic] the same way, I think. Was Meltric in the--

PK: Yes, I think he was.

WW: Yes. But there's a funky sensibility there, but it's more rarified in a way.

PK: It's interesting you drawing this distinction, in fact, if I'm hearing you right, between an idea-based or laden kind of funkiness, as in Wally. That's how you described him. Then on the other hand, I get the impression that there is kind of just felt funkiness.

WW: Yes, I'm making that distinction.

PK: So that is a real interesting distinction, because the one goes much more clearly into conceptual art, and the other is more gut, sort of intuitive or emotional or something. And icky. What about icky? Is that a good word for

funk?

WW: Sure can be, yes. [Laughs] But interesting recognition of what icky is, I think, is in the idea of getting a lot of your own saliva, building up a big ball of it, putting it into a glass, and then taking it back in again.

PK: That's icky. [Laughs]

WW: Yes. Why? When only moments before it was okay in your mouth?

PK: I don't know. Maybe if you let some things out into the world, they become corrupted.

WW: It's interesting that that's a real interesting way to check out what you call icky, something can be in why, because moments before it was fine in your mouth and suddenly once it's slightly been, even in a totally clean glass, you don't want to put it back in there again. It's really interesting. You have the Redd Foxx thing, that he heard about those mouthwashes that kill the germs and he didn't use that stuff, because he didn't like the idea of dead things in his mouth. [Laughs]

PK: That's funky.

WW: Yes, that's pretty funky. Well, he'd say, "Not me, because I don't use that mouthwash. A lot of people think I'm funky, they use that mouthwash to kill all the dead things, leave them in their mouth."

PK: Well, maybe all of this has a little bit to do--I'm sitting here looking at your sculpture here, which, does it have a name?

WW: Boy. Not really. Not yet.

PK: It doesn't have a name yet. Well, anyway, it looks to me like a big branch.

WW: Yes, it's a plum branch.

PK: With kind of--well, "V." It's inverted and then the smaller branch form like a "V."

WW: That's a tripod.

PK: Tripod, yes, I see that.

WW: It came from right outside there, that plum tree that goes over the walk. It came up badly pruned and this gained too much weight and broke off. So I was getting ready to cut it up and I saw, well, maybe there's a piece of sculpture here. So I brought it in and stood it up on itself and then had to add some support, because it buckled, because it was still green and everything. Then one day hung the string and got into it.

PK: With a rock.

WW: With the rock and the little baton on it with this brass bowl I had for a long time. It's a Tibetan bowl. Then just hooking it up that way to see if it worked, that eccentric kind of the rock with the string hanging off to the side, it adds some kind of funny motion to it. I can adjust the stick so I can get a wood sound, as well as just the ball sound. Then the whole branch, if you give it a real swing, rocks and moves a little bit.

PK: I should point out that I'm practically touching the sculpture here rather than the string, it's right in the studio. I'm not going to try to describe it too carefully. One would, I think, recognize it has incorporating a widely aesthetic, I don't think there'd be much trouble with that. And that's of real interest. What you've just described is something that I do associate with you, but not just with you, and that is this creative, this transformation of found material and objects and then combining in a way that's--well, what about the process? How does that work? You said you were getting ready to cut up the branch.

WW: Yes.

PK: You saw potential in it.

WW: Yes.

PK: Yet my guess is, you didn't envision straight-off this.

WW: No.

PK: That it must have sat around here and--

WW: Yes, well, actually, all these branch pieces, they partially construct themselves. It's like, I suppose, in fairy tale terms, it's "Woodman spare" me. You know, Pinocchio kind of things. That's got an interesting shape. Sculpture's always been a space for me to play in more, where in painting I got bogged down more in the history or the flatness of the piece or all the technical history. Or that I probably, early on, define myself more as a painter than a sculptor. So it's like sculpture I can play in more. I don't have to wear quite a serious hat, although I get serious about the pieces, regardless. I mean, that's the interesting part. Once you set up the thing, you find yourself being silly about serious pieces and serious about silly pieces. But I think sculpture's a much more playful, intuitive kind of approach. I wouldn't say that's true at all in terms of intuitive because it's all intuitive. But it's kind of letting them construct themselves to some degree, kind of, of the piece, for whatever it is attracts me, I bring it here and sometimes it goes right to where it's supposed to go. It's like it's been waiting. Other times I don't know why I brought the piece here and I've been on the verge of throwing it out several times, and then one day it will go right exactly where it's supposed to be and I see the reason for it. So this piece was just kind of constructing itself as it went along.

PK: When did you start it?

WW: Oh, gee, last--it's been in there quite a while. Must have been from last winter. Yes, late last winter, February. Actually, the stripped-down one, this one down here, which is also a sound piece, this one, it's off the same tree and it's the first one that kind of intrigued me, because of just all the complexity of the limbs and the suckers on it coming back and forth. So I brought it in and stripped it down. Initially, these weren't together. They were two separate pieces and one was just, I thought it was a record-holder.

PK: Bill Wiley, session two, tape one, side B.

WW: So these two pieces mushed around here is separate sculpture. Then one day this piece here, which is something I made for the boat to hold the motor up, to support the motor up here while in the water, it wasn't working and with this I could wedge that in there. We got that fixed, so I didn't need this anymore. I brought it down and I wondered, what could I use this for? The peculiarness, it looked like it was made for something, but what? And I found that it fit on here and so it was up there for a while, and then these things appeared. These holes were already in. So this piece came together. It's a little bit like that piece. It's a sound piece. Interactive. A number of the sculptural pieces I've done, even the ones I did at Lippincott, which are much different material--have you seen any of those? The ones out of steel and chrome and some of that stuff.

PK: I think I've seen a few, but not much.

WW: Yes, I mean, it's funky and it's in a different, very different way, certainly. But also interactive. In fact, this piece is at Rene's and you can play that.

PK: It's called Harp?

WW: Yes. There's a baton there that you can play that, and the other piece, the gong had a log on the other side that you could swing. In fact, most of those pieces that show was kind of arranged around are music and art mingling.

PK: I was going to comment on that. It seems to me, further, like with these moving or sound, the sound wooden pieces.

WW: Which are fairly unsound, some of them. [Laughs]

PK: It seems that you're interested in different ways of the works interacting with the viewer, let's say, and the world and the environment. You apparently like to see these different senses brought into play, and in some cases here, at least, as a work is reproduced in this catalog, like for instance, Gong, there seems to be some Wiley writing underneath. So you never really seem to let go of that either, that you bring in the text or words quite a bit.

WW: Yes.

PK: Let me make a suggestion regarding these pieces. As we're talking, I get the notion that perhaps for you, you say that there's a playfulness, playing with the sculpture, all the pieces, more so in that case than with the paintings.

WW: Yes. That's true and not true, I think. But in the sense that I think the sculpture, just in terms of construction and materials, falls much more outside of academia than the painting does in that sense. The paintings can be just as playful, I think, in terms of execution or word or whatever. Like the ocean painting next to the Van Gogh chair, or whatever that other landmine piece is, one fairly academic-looking, the other one much more playful and sketched and drawn on.

PK: What I was wondering, is there an aspect of this with these found object, sculptural pieces, of kind of a basic impulse that many of us may have to arrange things in our world? You can touch them. Kids do this all the time, they combine. For that matter, of course, if you give them crayons and paper or pencils, kids will draw. So I'm not saying that's not natural. But it seems to me we're always sort of puttering around in our worlds picking up things and arranging them. We do it even, I think, unconsciously. We also doodle unconsciously. But you see my drift on this? This is perhaps even a more--

WW: [unclear] I do it consciously? [Laughs]

PK: Yes. Yes. But is it possible that the--you know, you encounter something in your world, all you do is encounter, I think, a canvas or a piece of paper when you start with this. But you're actually encountering something like a branch, or a plum tree, right, that's fallen off. You find that and it speaks to you in a way, you maybe trip over it, you got to do something with it. That's a matter of choice, is what do you do with it and at some point you say, well, this has possibilities. Form has the possibility as art or just as something that you want to play with.

WW: Well, both. [Laughs] It kind of doesn't matter, as long as it intrigues me, I find it intriguing. As I told somebody recently in a painting I recycle, actually using Goya's "Children of the [unclear]," I said, "I've been pulling out some older paintings that had been in storage for a while, and to my amazement all the art had drained out of them." [Laughs]

PK: What do you mean by that? What do you mean?

WW: They didn't seem authentic to me anymore.

PK: These were your old ones?

WW: Yes.

PK: What do you mean by authentic?

WW: I thought they were art at the time, but, you know, in hindsight, nah, it doesn't look like art anymore. And some things I thought weren't art turned out to be art. That's also happened, too. Something I was about ready to destroy I suddenly saw this really interesting piece and I'd never seen it before. It kind of corroborates a statement somebody made to me at some point not all that long ago, it's happened before we were looking at a painting, oh, it was a Arizona ocean painting I did. They said, "I wish I could have done that painting." I said to them, "I wish I could have, too." [Laughs]

PK: It seems there's some sort of almost mystery or mysterious force at work that you don't take particular credit for. I'm not saying that you're just a receptacle.

WW: I'm a channel.

PK: Or a channel.

WW: I'm just a channel. I'm just a fuckin' channel. [Laughs]

PK: I mean, obviously that's not true.

WW: Why obviously is it not true? I mean, all those things are only obviously not true because we think they're not.

PK: Well, okay.

WW: Once you shift your perception a little bit, it could be very true.

PK: But do you think that's possible then, that artists are finally fundamentally channels through which some existing, I don't want to say just forces, but ways of perceiving, ways of organizing or manifesting?

WW: Yes. Yes. Everybody, I think, basically is a channeler of one kind or another. We're all in some sense, as we have, not that we're tabula rasas, because I think, like [unclear], we are born with a whole lot of baggage to begin with. One of the biggest is intelligence, the mind that's there from baby on up. They know now scientifically that at eight months you're breaking down words and you're decoding. So, full intelligence and everything is there, it's just we get shunted off into these Skinnerian versions where, "No, you're not feeling that." [Laughs] "No, you didn't have that dream." "No, it doesn't mean anything." "You can't draw or sing." Until you finally, as Noam Chomsky says, you get trained to be on time. Work. [Laughs]

PK: What were the notions of the attention, what was the term, the attention--

WW: The attentional system.

PK: Yes, attentional system. That's a Sufi [phonetic] notion?

WW: That's my understanding, yes.

PK: I know we said we wouldn't get into it, but at least the words come up now and then. There seem to be some interesting philosophical notions there. I gather at base this comes from a kind of thinking that there really are certain, what you would say, basic types and that somebody wisely has examined human beings and human behavior or maybe even cultures, I don't know, and identified these. From that, then, variations emerge. I'm just, from what you've said, that's what I'm saying. I wondering, and I may as well ask you if this fits in some meaningful way with your work or your approach to your work. I'm not going to ask you about your approach to your life or anything at this point. That can come later. But to the work, is this a useful way, do you find a useful way to think about yourself as an artist in relationship to the work and perhaps then the work to others?

WW: Well, I think, any of the things we're attracted to, or find attractive or resonate, some resonance there, then, yes. Then that intermingles with the work and with the mind and with--yes. Yes, sure.

PK: Well, does this fit then with your own self-conception? I mean, do you see yourself in a broader sense somehow in these terms and maybe even interaction with other people, not just the work? Is this too early to ask you that? I mean, in the interview, not in the day. [Laughs]

WW: Maybe. I was just thinking of what we were talking about in terms of channeling or whatever statement I heard, I think, attributed to Guston [phonetic]. He said, on good days in the studio, first of all--I forget all the different ways he identified them. The critic leaves and the teacher leaves, and so on. He says, "When I'm really lucky, I leave." [Laughs] I think that's where art and consciousness maybe in the Eastern sense of getting you out of the way and in some sense self-consciousness, which tends to make us inauthentic, rather than authentic. So I think art's a place for that. Anyplace you are is a place to practice that, but art is some kind of self-conscious attempt to engage in that in some way. It's one of the few places where utilitarian things don't have to be considered. So it's a kind of really interesting full and empty space to work in whereby you can empty it of all previous rules or you can have all those at your disposal, which I think is interesting in terms of Eastern thought of the nature of the universe being both full and empty consciousness and self being both full and empty at the same time.

PK: Do you know the work, at all, of John McLaughlin [phonetic]? He used to work out in Dana Point down in Southern California.

WW: Oh, yes.

PK: Geometric abstracts.

WW: Yes. Yes, I do.

PK: I mention him for a couple of reasons. I knew him and interviewed him. But what you're describing just now, what you have been saying, reminds me so much of the way he expressed his relationship to his work and his concept of the void and erasure of self. He wanted very much this to be case, and so he sought ways to, well, to at least hide the self, if not eliminate the hand. Which seems a little bit actually paradoxical because surfaces tended to be very hand-done and a little bit scruffy. Which is the opposite in a sense and it's quite wonderful.

WW: I little bit in the same way that [Piet] Mondrian's things for as smooth as they were, you could still--which kind of makes them human in some ways that what followed that, it became digital after that in some ways. This is still somebody painting [unclear].

PK: Well, of course, that's exactly where the evidence of the humanity and the warmth, the life, comes into it.

WW: Right.

PK: But I think that's interesting, because McLaughlin was very influenced by Japanese. He spoke Japanese. He was in the service as a translator, Second World War and, I think, studied Zen ideas quite a bit. He also was a great golfer, but those two things aren't at all contradictory. Have you always been interested--I gather you're interested in Eastern ideas and, I don't know about religion, but certainly thought?

WW: Well, always. I mean, I just ran into it when I came here.

PK: I see. How was that?

WW: Boy, interesting. It was all around. Asian Academy of Studies was under way, and Alan Watts was around, but my initial involvement was very simple. I had heard the word coming from the north, around Seattle, with Graves and Toby, anesticism and Zen. I'd heard those terms. I had no idea what they meant or anything. Working downtown at Duncan Vail Art Supply Store on Sutter and Stockton, at that time on the corner was Paul Elders bookstore. I'd walk up there on my lunch break and look at art books and stuff. One day in there I picked up a little book by Paul Repps, called Zen Flesh, Zen Bones. That was kind of my introduction to Zen thought. As I read through it, I immediately resonated the many different things in there and I thought, "Ah!" I, in fact, bought the book.

PK: Now, you mentioned that before. His last name is R-E--

WW: R-E-P, either two Ps or just R-E-P-S. It's a double P or--

PK: So that engaged your interest.

WW: Yes, on Zen.

PK: Was there a point at which you saw that this is more than just an interesting way of thinking about the world and that it in some way could affect your art? Did you ever make that conscious connection?

WW: I think initially I thought of it just more in terms of what those little stories and poems could do your consciousness. Once that's changed, then everything's changed, in a sense. So that one statement before enlightenment, mountains are mountains, rivers are rivers, trees are trees, and during enlightenment they aren't, and now that they've attained enlightenment, mountains are mountains, rivers are rivers. Somehow intellectually, maybe even emotionally, when I read that, I knew that was true. But there was no way I could authenticate it or say that, yes, I'm a Zen master. That resonated as really insightful as to the nature of things. Although I couldn't have told you that at the time, but I can sure feel that there was some authentic understanding in that. As I was talking to a friend, the guy I went fishing with, Dick Fishman [phonetic], who has recently survived a liver transplant, and also has studied some Eastern thought, we just were both kind of marveling at Eastern thought to give you beginner's mind. If you resonate with it at all, how it's such a matrix for dealing with consciousness in some way.

PK: Did you ever in any kind of structured way study Zen?

WW: No.

PK: You didn't, say, join any groups where there was a discussion?

WW: He did. He went and sat. Although I knew a number of people that did. I had close ties with some students, and still do, with people involved in Zen. No, I told Fishman, I said, "One of the things that immediately attracted me beyond the little Paul Repps thing, I didn't even connect at all initially. I just put Zen under Zen and I didn't make distinctions between other Eastern thoughts and Zen thought, Tibetan thought and Tibetan Zen. Buddhism was Buddhism. I thought it was all Zen, which it's like Alan Watts said to T.D. Suzuki [phonetic], supposedly, "But really Dr. Suzuki, aren't all religions the same at the base?" He says, "Yes, it's just that Zen is more so." [Laughs]

PK: What do you say to that?

WW: But I said, I felt right away one of the interesting things about it was that you didn't have to go anywhere or do anything. You could if you wanted to, but you were immediately released from that, which most other religions or philosophical thoughts weren't that open. They didn't say things like, if you see Buddha coming down the street, kill him, because that's not him. Right away I thought that was very interesting. Then in terms of religious figures that you look at, here's Christ and how he's generally portrayed, end result, and Buddha. I suppose they could show you that Buddha [unclear]. [Laughs] There were a whole lot of positive things there. But it was basically in some of those Zen poems that Paul Repps translated, I just thought what incredible, penetrating thought, wisdom, there was there. To find out later, like through the E-chain [phonetic] and stuff that, geez, it's been around for a long time. So the timelessness of it in some ways starts to make sense to you in some way.

PK: How were you raised? Was religion a presence in your family, in terms of your background when you were child? Did you go to church or anything like that?

WW: Arbitrarily and occasionally sent often, my brother and I. "It's Sunday. You guys go to church" So, a kind of haphazard relationship. So, no particular Christian orthodoxy. Just whatever was nearby, I was often sent to. I think within the household nothing too orthodox, other than just basic common sense. You know, do right, don't lie. Rough about hypocrisy. You could see alongside of that. You know, a pretty basic way. So in some ways, grew up very ignorant in terms of what separated Christian religions, denominations. Still I'm foggy about it.

PK: Would you describe yourself maybe as a Protestant, at least, rather than a Roman Catholic?

WW: No.

PK: Not even?

WW: I wouldn't have. I would have been even careful about saying "Christian."

PK: Really.

WW: Well, there wasn't enough--I hadn't been pressed into any of it enough. My mother had been raised Catholic, but left the church to marry my father, who was divorced. I think her engagement with it had only been because that's what she was born into. I don't think there was any deep connection. I'm not saying that quite right. Not that she didn't have a deep religious connection, but I don't think it was necessarily within catholicism, although I'm sure for most Catholics once you've had that, you carry a heavy brand a long time. You don't get rid of it easy.

PK: So, religion really wasn't a factor very much in forming your world view.

WW: No.

PK: So it's interesting that in some ways, I guess, you're quite open to the--I don't want to say "epiphany" at this point. That's a little bit strong. But to the attraction of a certain way of thinking that seemed to match, perhaps, I don't know, what you'd experienced or the way you saw things.

WW: It seemed to match more life experience and common sense and true engagement with things, rather than a hierarchical and a predetermined thing. It seemed like a more real engagement with actual, with what was actually going on.

PK: The stuff of the world, maybe. You know, it occurs to me, Bill, that there's a certain humbleness or humility in much of your work, I think, not just you, but certainly with you, and I'm looking right at these pieces that are pretty damn humble. Certainly that is viewed as, not a tenet exactly, but perhaps a virtue of at least what I understand to be Zen attitudes towards creation. There is also a resistance, I believe, to assigning relative values to things in that respect. Again, you said that you weren't all that interested in things that had a hierarchy imposed. It would seem to me--and you can respond to this--that this attitude then, on your part, is brought to your work. What you do is, as they say now, "privilege" objects that many people pay no attention to. They wouldn't see them as having potential as becoming part of something that might be called art and actually even exhibit it. Some of your work very much like this has been exhibited, for instance, in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and many other places.

WW: Shipped to Amsterdam.

PK: But doesn't this strike as interesting how these works then--I won't say they get out of your control, but they move on, they take on a life of their own, which actually and finally, much to your surprise, I suppose, becomes to a degree described or included in this notion of fine art.

WW: Yes.

PK: Fine art. Something precious.

WW: Yes, it's just amazing. Yes.

PK: Yet that clearly wasn't, as I understand it, your intention when first encountering some of these branches and other things.

WW: Well, the interesting part, I think, about art, like music more so, because it kind of, as somebody said, it leaps right into the heart. You can't guard against it in some way. It jumps the boundaries. Whereas art, you can hold it out a little bit more. In regard to what you're saying, I'm thinking about that piece that was in the de Young show, "Gays In The Military," which had a little wire and rubber construction and string. That very funky piece, I think, is a funky piece and that cardboard picture. But displayed behind the plastic display case there, it became like a saint's finger or something. You know, some crumbling thing that was suddenly precious. But the fact that you see that it was made out of things. If its voice carries to you, if its soul is authentic enough, it suspends your disbelief, then it leaps that boundary, even if you can't touch it. I guess there's one aspect of humble materials or whatever is in the technology. You know, if you set a TV set in a room and turn it on, it's just got to be interesting. It's hard to keep your eyes off of it. So in terms of art's voice and being available to people, but if it's a pencil drawing on paper that brings you to your knees, or you want to weep in front of it, or you just see the achievement and only technology alone when another human being's there with a pencil and a

piece of paper, which is available to just almost anyone on the planet, or at least a substitute, then it keeps it so--it's like Zen, it keeps it so right there. So you can't have any excuses for, "I can't afford it," or, "I don't understand it," or whatever, because it's just so there. Which is why I think Zen is interesting. You don't have to sit in meditation or cut your hair or wear robes. You can if you want to and that may help, but it may get in the way. Suzuki Rosche said, "Don't be too hurried to be enlightened, because you might not like it." [Laughs]

PK: How do you know if you don't find out? Do you feel any affinity or some sort of relationship to some of the other art--

PK: Continuing the second session with William T. Wiley. We were cut off as you were beginning to say a few words in response to my question about some of the other artists who some people would say seem to have affinities to you and your work, or perhaps even a kind of shared sensibility. George Herms [phonetic] certainly, at least in some ways, seems to be one of them. Is that right? Do you feel this?

WW: Yes. When I saw his work, I thought it was very interesting. There again, a sensibility that knew how to put trash together, turn it into art. Bruce Conner, the same.

PK: Bruce, exactly.

WW: Earlier examples, I guess, would be [Kurt] Schwitters, maybe the earliest, preceding [Robert] Rauschenberg and Duchamp, were also another, you know, the found object thing. It seems like people--well, anyway--

PK: It seems like they what?

WW: Misconstrued or misused that thing in some way. Not so much artists, but just perception of that. I mean, just seeing beauty, it's a statement. The I Ching, actually, my friend Michael Hannon [phonetic] used it in one of his books, opening the book, it's from I Ching and it's, "No need to present false appearances to God. Even with slender means the true sentiments of the heart can be made known." Something. So, discarded or discarded people, discarded objects. In fact, I heard a woman the other day, just caught the tail end of it on KPFA, had written a book called Beyond Recycling. It's "reuse." Which is, I think, a kind of idea out of the Depression in a way, where things were reused and refashioned and remade and re-tooled so that this whole throwaway, use it up once, and go buying another one, which I think we're finally starting to see some of the foolishness in that. So I think that idea in art--

PK: Well, that certainly, although again it's not limited to California, certainly there has been--

WW: Sp____ and Sperry [phonetic].

PK: Yes.

WW: And Picassos. Funky.

PK: True.

WW: The found object pieces. That comes from childhood, I think, you know, seeing the creature's face in the tree.

PK: But there certainly has been, and art historians and critics increasingly point to this as having a strong presence in California and maybe in the sense of a willingness to use really lowly materials and objects and include them. Elevate them, if you will. Certainly, Herms' whole ideas about really these objects having lives, these materials have their own lives, and he just is like a facilitator. Then they continue to live as they change, perhaps, with weather and so forth. So there is in many books now and in sort of the art historical look at the century, particularly this second part, this notion of assemblage, the assemblage movement, in California is really given a lot of attention. There are an increasing number of really interesting people. For instance, Noah Purifoy, the black artist who was the founder of the Watts Towers Art Workshop down there. Then, of course, Rodia [phonetic] himself with Watts Towers. Not that all of these things are the same, but it does seem to count for a kind of movement, at least in this respect, and that is that some of the younger artists who are now distinguishing themselves, people like Michael McMillan [phonetic] down in Santa Monica, describe themselves or their work in terms of this profound influence of the California assemblage movement. Are you comfortable with that term applied to you, or at least to some of your work?

WW: Yes, definitely. I mean, technically it fits. I think of Kienholz.

PK: Yes.

WW: A powerful [unclear].

PK: Were you interested in his work? It was fairly early on.

WW: Oh, yes.

PK: Did you see it?

WW: Yes. I didn't see a lot, but occasionally, yes, saw stuff from--yes. It was pretty interesting.

PK: Did you ever meet him?

WW: Yes. Yes, in fact, I had an interesting interaction with him. I didn't know him, but there was a woman had a gallery for a while in Los Angeles, Eugenia Butler [phonetic]. In fact, she showed this black ball here, yes, tape ball, when it was much smaller, along with some drawings, some black and white drawings. She was interested in the work. After that, she came up one time and she said, "You know, Kienholz is having a show down there. You should come down and see it." Or maybe she phoned me. She says, "It has something about you in it." I said, "Really? I didn't even know he knew who I was." She said, "Oh, yes." She says, "So you should come down and see it. It's interesting." So I just decided, yes, I would. That's when you could fly to L.A. round-trip for twenty-four bucks. [Laughs]

PK: I remember that.

WW: So on the way down there, I was very moved that he'd do something involving me. And I had a little watercolor block with me. I was doing those kind of overall pen, black-and-white pen drawings that come automatic sort of things. So I just did one of those on the way down, and when I got there the show was--I don't know if you saw that phase of his work. He took watercolor paper, all the same size, and would put a wash of one color down the middle and with big rubber stamps, stamp what he wanted for the watercolor in the middle, like two good mountain horses, or a McCullough [phonetic] chain saw, or '48 Caddy [phonetic]. Then if you brought him that, you'd get the drawing or the watercolor that said that. He had one for a dollar and one for $20,000. Seeing that one sold, you know, it was going to alter the moment. One of them said, "For a work from William T. Wiley." And I said, "Boy, far out. I didn't even know any of that, but I did this drawing when I came down. So, here."

PK: Did he trade it?

WW: Well, he wasn't there. I showed it to Eugenia and I said, "Here." She said, "He'll say it's too small." She says, "People have drug things in here and he comes and looks and he says, 'I don't want that one. It's another McCullough chain saw I want.'"

PK: Too small.

WW: Yes. I said, "Ah, that's okay. He can have it anyway. I don't care." So I thought, well, maybe somebody will give him a piece of mine and maybe I'll have the watercolor. So sometime after that, Eugenia Butler phoned me and said, "Ed was in the other day and I showed him the drawing." I said, "What'd he say?" She says, "Just what I said he'd say. Too small." I said, "Did you give it to him anyway?" She said, "Yes. I told him, 'You can have it.'" So a year or two later at some opening, I ran into him. I don't know if that was the first time I met him or not. I think maybe it was. But anyway, he came up to me. He said, "Did Eugenia ever send you that watercolor I did?" I said, "No, you said the drawing that I left for you was too small." "Yes, it was too small." He said, "Well, I'll have her send it to you." I said, "Okay." So he sent it to me. [Laughs]

PK: Even though it was too small?

WW: Yes. So I ended up with it anyway, which shows that under that gruff exterior was a big heart of gold.

PK: Yes, he was quite an interesting guy. I spent a very interesting two nights--I think it was two nights--up at his place at Hope. I had just started this job. That was way back when I first met you, I think. I went up there and he agreed to let me come up and tape some interviews and so forth. They were just building this wonderful compound, new studio, master [unclear]. Still living in a small house, he and Nancy. Very, very interesting experience. I certainly got the impression that he was thinking circles around me, that there were other things always on his mind that I really wasn't privy to. I would go straight ahead pretty straightforward manner, and I got the impression he was always thinking in terms of deals.

WW: How he could deal you. [Laughs]

PK: Yes. Too small. Interview too short. [Laughs] So you really were attracted or interested in his sensibility as much as anything else, is that right?

WW: Yes.

PK: What about, using him as an example, the moral power of the work?

WW: Yes.

PK: Sometimes pretty much in your face, I guess, would you say.

WW: Yep, that, too.

PK: You responded to that?

WW: Yes.

PK: Do you see your own work as some of it as having connections to that?

WW: Oh, yes, very much. Occasionally, yes. Yes, some pieces very much in your face. Political and environmental things, yes.

PK: Was that always so, or was that more recent?

WW: Oh, I think--well, all of it got identified in some way in that particular period that we're talking about, '67, '68. I think prior to that, it's in there more haphazardly. But from that period on much more obviously identified as so, yes.

PK: Did Ed or anybody like that ever come actually to your studio?

WW: No. Not Ed.

PK: Where were you living at that time?

WW: Well, in that period, '67, '68?

PK: Yes.

WW: I've been pretty much in Marin County, some part of it, since '58, '59.

PK: Oh, I didn't realize it was quite that long.

WW: Mill Valley, Muir Beach, and moved here in '68. Prior to that it would be either Mill Valley or Muir Beach. I moved here in the fall of '68.

PK: Not too many people would schlep out necessarily to visit San Francisco like Kienholz did on occasion.

WW: No.

PK: Did you seek that out, by the way? Not isolation per se, but a little bit of a remove, so you didn't--for any reason?

WW: Oh, more just being in semi-rural or country or country-available. Easy to get into. This is where I mostly grew up. I think I like that more than city or too suburban, although enjoyed the time in San Francisco and my initial, where I lived, Al and I shared an apartment up on Bay Street. You could, even without a car, walk across the Golden Gate and get down onto the ocean and fish. I thought that was really incredible. You could have a city that--in fact, I read a line in a book I brought about that time by Cyril Connelly, the Unquiet Grave. In there was a quote, I can't remember who it was, that said, "No city should be too large for a man to walk out of in the morning." I thought, "Yes, that's probably true." If that were true, we'd be happier here on the planet.

PK: That's right.

WW: And the planet would be happier with us. [Laughs]

PK: So you've lived in pretty rural environments, then, most of your life.

WW: Yes. Yes, I really have. Very little time in towns, cities.

PK: Which is certainly reflected in much of your imagery and much of the work at least that I'm familiar with.

WW: Sure.

PK: There was camping, campfires. I'm thinking partly of, for instance, the journal illustrations which are so

wonderfully autobiographical, it seems to me. You acknowledge constantly, well, this kind of rural, woodsy world in which you live.

WW: Yes.

PK: It suits you.

WW: It suits me, yes. Yes. Mary and I were talking the other day about living in the city, and I saw that winter back in New York, that I spent back in there a bit. Just being in New York all the time, painting, without some other life form intermingling, wouldn't seem real to me. It just wouldn't seem like life somehow. To do all [unclear], it just seems too removed in some way. Even San Francisco now would seem not quite right, if that's the only thing. If I can go salmon fishing or deal with tree limbs or something. The other part's too [unclear].

PK: You're describing a kind of value system, or a set of preferences, that I think infuse your work. I think there's absolutely no question about it. It occurs to me there's a very direct, it's not always evident, let's say, but it occurs to me that there's a very direct connection between your sense of your place in the world and the works of art. It strikes me that way, anyway. Would you agree with that, this linkage?

WW: I don't know exactly just what you mean by that.

PK: Maybe I'll try it again. That your work is an extension or an expression or, in a way, an articulation of how you conduct your life, your preferred environment, values and so forth, which is not always the case. Certainly, it was not the case at that time with most of the foremost artists or minimalists. That seems to me quite different. I always thought so. I always thought, you know, Wiley has staken out his territory and he's sticking to it.

WW: [Laughs] See, I always wanted to stake out a territory, but I could never find any, so I worked them in.

PK: Yes, but they're related.

WW: Yes, they're all very related. I mean, that's what you finally see is that it's all the same stuff and some way regardless of how scattered or unrelated it seems at times. But, yes, I mean, I think the work reflects me from day to day and that it's world-responsive in some way. That it's not only involved in itself. In fact, hearing about a freighter leaking badly off of Malaysia or something was--

PK: Was that the story behind this?

WW: That's, yes, pretty much where it came from.

PK: That's an anvil, though, that's floating along.

WW: Right.

PK: Good job. That's almost like Christ walking on water. [Laughs]

WW: Yes, right.

PK: Well, do you think that--are you going to add--well, you're already starting to add--

WW: I'm messing with titles up there trying to figure out what I want to call it.

PK: Are you going to put words on this one?

WW: Probably not. I have some words on it. They're hard to see. No. No, this will just possibly have the title of the anvil that's leaking in the ocean as royal, or anvil in the ocean near shore and [unclear]. Actually, I'm not happy with any of the titles.

PK: Is anybody going to know what this refers to unless you tell them?

WW: Not in an obvious way. But I did a series of drawings, and, actually [unclear], during the Valdez spill. So I've addressed that pointedly and specifically occasionally in some work. Actually, I've got a song about it, too. But in both these works, both the anvil and the ocean thing, occasionally, for whatever reason, although generally the titles are elaborate and sometimes specific, I'm hesitant to do that on these, because I like more what they conjure without getting too specific. Since a lot of the stuff is specific, like the one right next door to the anvil is a lot about landmines, and it doesn't take very much reading to see that that's what the piece is about, and our recent reluctance to join the landmine treaty, for God's sakes.

PK: Hard to figure.

WW: Well, yes, on one hand and immediately, no, it's not, because we're the arms merchants to the world. That's our main product. We sell more than any other country.

PK: Isn't that something to be proud of.

WW: Yes. So it makes perfect sense why we didn't want to give up the landmines, even though every year 26,000 people are maimed, a quarter million. As the doctor I heard talking about it said, "And with landmines it's the victim that pulls the trigger." Heard a doctor talking about, he says, "Most field operations take at least two operations. With landmines, four or five, six, are common." He says, "Because so much debris has blown into the wounds. Even other parts of the body blown into the wounds that it just takes--infection, you're just fighting infection all the way." He says, "It's also a device that's not made to kill, it's made to injure. It's made to maim." So they bring really a lot of suffering.

PK: Well, in works like that where the political content, or the message, is something that you want to be unequivocal about, I guess you just adjust accordingly.

WW: Occasionally I have to. I can't bear to--I sacrifice the art. Hopefully, I get them both together occasionally.

PK: But do you think that that is a challenge to be too clear or almost polemical?

WW: Sure. Yes, that usually turns people off, so they shut it down rather than open it up. But sometimes I think it's okay. Art's the place to release it, and how effective it is, is shown by how they want to kill NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] budget. Just can't bear to have Robert "Mapledork" out there.

PK: Mapledork. [Laughs]

WW: I mean, the fact that it's so attackable is another thing. But that its power is such that it upsets people that much, because you can do in an obvious way. Mapplethorpe or [unclear].

PK: Yes.

WW: But you see more of the work and you see, gee, there's an authentic voice there and it just happens to, you know, wherever it goes, it gets potent. But you often are counterproductive, I think, when you get too in somebody's face.

PK: Well, it does seem to be a bit of a problem, because it becomes a tract, you know, which has its place. But much more than art. I'm not sure what the perfect balance is.

WW: Well, I think when it becomes chronic it's not always moved by authentic feelings. It becomes chronic and then you become insensitive to how you're presenting it, and it becomes counterproductive. So I think demands should be conscious. How a lot of art can keep appearing without occasionally specifically voicing itself that way is amazing to me.

PK: Well, of course, nowadays, I don't know, not necessarily more than ever, but certainly very much in recent years, identity politics have come to the fore in art. In fact, in certain communities or groups that's pretty much it. In fact, if the artists stray from that, they become suspect. Like in the Latino community. It's interesting how much it swung in that direction where responsible art is supposed to have not just a message, but a political message. How do you feel about that? Have you paid attention to some of these developments in contemporary art?

WW: Well, no, not as such. Oh, I'm aware of it. Knowing few people in those communities, it's interesting to me, at least two artists I know probably fit those communities. One very responsive, I think, maybe even gaining identity through that, and the other one holding it at bay and keeping--

PK: Who are they?

WW: Mike Henderson and Carlos Villa [phonetic].

PK: Carlos. I interviewed him. He's a friend. Carlos, no doubt, would be the one who's finding, sort of retrieving identity. Yes, he's very much about that.

WW: And community. You know, dialogue and support system.

PK: Henderson more of--

WW: Holding the line on that.

PK: Do you know Rupert Garcia?

WW: A little bit, yes.

PK: Rupert's gone, it seems, the full gamut, I mean, from being an extreme activist--

WW: Well, Mike did, too, early.

PK: Did he?

WW: He was with the [Black] Panthers and this stuff.

PK: Oh, I didn't know that.

WW: You know, maybe not officially, but delivered breakfasts in Oakland. All that stuff. But, I mean, I think it's a good example for somebody who happens to be black but is also just an artist and won't cop to that as the way he's being involved or just a person. Holds on to that, too, keeps it clear in that way. Very powerful.

PK: Well, you have obviously a political consciousness, a sense of responsibility to the Earth and to other people, I guess a sort of social conscious or sense of responsibility. From what you've been saying and what I know about your work, this does come out, it comes to the fore, it's something that you never fully abandon. It's in there. And yet it seems to me there is that issue, at least for a lot of artists, and I wonder if you feel this at all, the artist as the individual dealing with art issues, or what it is to make things. You know, what is this all about. Then on the other hand, being part of a community or the family of man, if you want, the family of man/woman. Have you felt that conflict at all for you, on the one hand an independent position, the individual struggling to make things, but on the other hand no man is an island?

WW: Something I'm conscious of and sometimes it's a conflict and sometimes I have guilt about, "Geez, I should be more involved." But mostly I've tried to be responsive when the alarm gets loud enough in some way community-wise. I've been over to the Civic Center for various meetings when bodies were needed. Some activists within the community here know that I can be counted on to show up if they have to have me. But also I think they've been sensitive to not overdo that, too. So feel like, you know, in this area you live in a lot of consciousness, I think, which is one of the reasons why I stayed here. I'm kind of making the whole Bay Area matrix for that, just a real consciousness about individuals, male, female, sexual orientation, race orientation. I think there's just a lot of extra consciousness about that around here. So, maybe a better balance of it community-wise in some ways.

WW: It seems to me the area's is really rich in that way.

PK: Continuing the interview with Bill Wiley. This is tape two, side B.

WW: I've got to take off here.

PK: What time do you have to leave?

WW: I think we want to get out of here at 4:30.

PK: Well, why don't you just then finish up.

WW: Be finished by 4:30.

PK: We'll go a few more minutes, fifteen minutes. I think we lost part of your response as I was changing it.

WW: Well, just conflicted about the artist stuff and the ivory tower, whatever, and maybe sometimes that's, yes, I am in here painting, but I'm addressing some of the issues that I think we're facing in the world. So I guess [unclear] wasn't doing enough. So I'm not totally conflicted, since I feel I've addressed some of those things in the work and I've done the other stuff, too. I vote.

PK: Well, you're engaged in the community. I was going to ask you sort of out of curiosity, how you're perceived. Of course, there are all kinds of creative people out in this area, other artists and so forth. But are you pretty much just one of the neighbors?

WW: I think so, yes. Yes.

PK: Do you think some of them really know what you do?

WW: What I do? No. Although when the show was at the de Young, I was surprised at people that I'd seen at

different times going in and out of the post office, who I didn't know they knew my identity, they said, "Oh, I saw your show at the de Young and I liked it." So, a number of people I found did know who I was, who hadn't indicated prior to that that they knew. But for the most part, nobody pays me any mind. [Laughs]

PK: Let's move back, and I'll watch our clock here. Believe it or not, we've been hovering around, taking little forays, but hovering around this 1966, '67, '68 time, talked about the funk show and going back to then, presumably the funk show came at just about the same time you had this crisis, an art crisis, in terms of your own work. Was there any kind of energy around being included in that exhibition and the--what should we say--a sense of involvement that the work was interesting, everybody's work is interesting in a certain way, that was helpful to you at that time, or did that really have no effect? I remember you said you went off then to New York and Europe.

WW: Yes. I can't say that it did. I mean, I'm not conscious of it, if it did. I think I was too perplexed by my own dilemma at the time to think very much about it. I can't say that it did.

PK: So it just was something that happened and that was nice, but it didn't have a great impact on you in terms of your career or thinking about what you were doing?

WW: Not that I was conscious of or aware of, although it might have. I think Frumkin was already aware of my work. Because it was just about that time that I started showing with him and Wanda.

PK: You still are associated with Wanda, aren't you?

WW: Yes.

PK: She's great.

WW: Yes.

PK: I have to be in touch with her. This, of course, is a whole other subject we'll get into it another time. But obviously she will figure in this narrative. But I'm interested to hear that it was that early that you had your first, I guess, association with Wanda.

WW: Yes.

PK: '68 or something?

WW: '67.

PK: All at the same time.

WW: Yes. Yes, I was just taking off. I got the Creative Arts grant from the university. I had never been to Europe, so I was going to go there, maybe stay in Europe. I kind of didn't know. I just knew it was time for a change. I'd been teaching about five years. I sublet the studio. I had a nice studio in Mill Valley on Church. Bruce Nauman just graduated from the art institute--I mean from Davis. So I sublet it to Bruce, and Wanda showed up interested in the work at the time, and Allen did, and so it kind of solved it. They both took enough paintings that it got the studio emptied out. I was very, very pleased that that all worked out. I took off for Europe and then ended up spending the winter on the East Coast. Allen, when he saw the work I did back there that winter, invited me to join him at the gallery. Prior to that, he was just having my work in a group show. But he got some response and I think he had sold a piece or two, came out to New Jersey where I was and saw the watercolors and gave me the show, and then I joined his gallery.

PK: You had been teaching. Let me make sure I have this right. You had already been teaching at Davis?

WW: Yes.

PK: For how many years?

WW: About five years.

PK: Oh, boy. So you must have started in--

WW: '62. '61, '62, something like that.

PK: That must have been something of a drag to schlepp out there. How long does it take?

WW: Oh, well, from Mill Valley it took about an hour and a half. Between an hour and a half to two hours.

PK: So what would you do, would you go out and like spend--would you come back every day?

WW: Initially I stayed over. I taught Mondays and Wednesdays. Davis was really tiny and stuff when I first started there. There's a little cheap hotel downtown, Bank Hotel. So we were given a little studio space there, faculty space, and I tried staying over and working a little bit, but I could never get anything done. It seemed too broken off from here. So I started driving back and forth. So I'd just drive up on Monday and come back Monday evening.

PK: So that's about almost four hours.

WW: Four hours, yes.

PK: That's worse than my commute to Southern California. Of course, I go just once week.

WW: I did it twice a week, and Wednesday evening it was over till Monday, so that was great. A good long chunk of time in there. When I was there, I was there, and when I was gone, I was gone.

PK: Who were some of your colleagues there?

WW: Arneson, [Wayne] Thiebaud, [unclear], Roy De Forest.

PK: All at the same time?

WW: Yes. T.O. J_____. Ralph Johnson. Roland Peterson [phonetic]. The head of the department at the time initially was Richard Nelson. Wonderful department head.

PK: Who's responsible for bringing that group together? That's really extraordinary.

WW: Well, Nelson, I think, was the guiding-light principal. Davis, prior to that, had been--I don't know how long art and theater had been added, but I think prior to that it was just all agriculture. Just, you know, really tiny. So Nelson was just expanding the art department.

PK: What's his name?

WW: Richard Nelson. In fact, the Davis Gallery, the Richard L. Nelson Gallery, is named after him. He was a rare person, I think, in university situations. He just said, "Your job here is to teach and do your work." He shied me away from academia as such. He said, "Watch out for [unclear]." [unclear] committee meetings and stuff. So that's kind of the line he pushed.

PK: So it sounds like it was a pretty sympathetic environment for you. Pretty good environment.

WW: It was. It was just starting and it didn't really have an art department. It was kind of taught in odd buildings and inadequate circumstances. So it was good, and everybody kind of came at the same time. So, no hierarchy, again, no "old boy" stuff. And an interesting range of people, independent, but all pretty much serious and hard-working artists, and also dedicated to teaching. And enough interesting personalities and approaches to work involved in there, between Wayne and Roy and Bob and Manuel.

PK: Did you know all of them before? You knew some, of course, but what about Wayne, for instance?

WW: No, I just met him at Davis.

PK: No women on the faculty?

WW: Ruth Braunstein. Ruth Braunstein and Jane Garretson [phonetic], although Jane was more in design. Ruth Braunstein was sculpture, a sculpture teacher there.

PK: I'm going to want to pursue this when we get together next time, but I'd sort of like to leave it here, or just raise it very briefly. One of the things that distinguishes you is an influence that you had on many students, way beyond Davis--I mean, if not you directly, the work itself, the style. Was that something that you were really aware of? I mean, you used to be described as one of the most influential, your work, the most influential on art students in the country. Didn't that strike you as--well, did you notice that, or is there any way that you would notice that?

WW: Well, when Brenda [Richardson] did the show, Berkeley Museum, in '71, '72, somewhere along there, and that showed traveled around, there was a big response to that show and I became aware of it. That was kind of a period when I think a lot of the visiting-artist stuff really came into full swing, and I was often invited to be a visiting artist at places and I happily went to any place pretty much for a number of years there. Then I finally

said, enough. I was aware of it, yes, to some extent anyway.

PK: Just real briefly, because we have just a couple more minutes and I want to free you up so you can get going, but briefly, what do you attribute that to? Have you thought about this at all, what would make your work style so susceptible to--I don't want to say imitation, I don't mean that--but so influential on the students. Imitation maybe is a good word.

WW: Yes. Yes, in fact, I experience some of the things. I think I heard Jasper Johns say once, he saw people doing Jasper Johns better than he could. [Laughs] I had a couple of instances that I'd see students pushing a lot further than I did in some ways. I'm sorry. I kind of wandered off. What was your question?

PK: Well, I was just wondering if you gave--

WW: Why I thought that it was successful?

PK: What was it about your work in particular that seemed to get this kind of response from the students?

WW: Well, some of it, I think, is what we've talked about. Just the low-tech being offered up instead of high-tech, and the work being friendly, and offering conversation and stuff, rather than being remote. I started to see--I don't know if I identified it at that time, but my teacher that I had in high school, McGrath, that I think really the founding father, or the identifying founding father of some of the sensibilities, was a person who was inclusive, not exclusive. So I think it had something to do with that and that getting back in touch with the narrative thing that kind of emerged at that point. So people could see the art was based on something real and you didn't have to have an art background necessarily to understand it. One thing that I think probably in some ways, probably in the high-art sets gives problems, but almost from that time on, anytime I've been around some exhibit of my work, somewhere along the line somebody says, "My kids love your work."

PK: Well, what's wrong with that?

WW: No, that's--absolutely, I mean, because you can't fool them. And the fact that a really little kid could come in and be connected, could find something in there to identify or enjoy or be fascinated with is, I find a great honor in that, actually.

PK: Well, certainly the style would be--I mean, it's deceptively simple and familiar.

WW: And humor.

PK: Yes. Anybody who enjoys Sunday comics is going to then be drawn into something that actually gets much more, of course, beyond that.

WW: Right. My oldest son, Ethan, one time we were talking, you know, when I finally started getting some attention, he was aware that I was somebody, he became a fan of Pogo, and he says, "Did Kelly influence you?" I said, "Oh, yes." I would never have thought of that, but yes.

PK: [unclear].

WW: Yes. Really interesting artist.

PK: Some of these people, we can talk about this if we want to on another occasion, but some of these artists really are, in a sense, unappreciated. I think that their day is coming more and more as these somewhat artificial notions are removed. It's not to say that they're the same as [Roy] Lichtenstein or something. But within their area, there's a great deal of more than craft art, I think. What's interesting, and what we can talk about more later, is how these notions, these ideas, have been shifting very much during your time, the sixties, and then on up to the present. Anyway, thank you, I don't want to take any more of your time. We've got a good second session.

WW: Yes. Good.

PK: ... to jump into it, but one of the things that I hope we can do today is trace further the biographical development, those events, significant events, in your life and career. I mean, life, as well as art career, always understanding that, of course, they're closely linked and can't always be separated. One of things that occurred to me driving out today with--we're in the midst of some rainstorms right now. There's a beautiful sun. The clouds are embracing. They're real low, embracing the mountains. You have these beautiful wooded hills out of here. It's very rural. Some people might say paradisically. You've got a little creek running right down in this gully, or whatever it is, next to your home. There's something very rustic about your environment, about your world. It occurred to me, as I'm driving out here, that what I know of your art, I really can't imagine it being created by anybody else or in a different situation. I realize, at least for me, there seems to be this seamless

union between your imagery, perhaps the ideas, but the environment in which you live. I think of some of your wonderful watercolors and images in the journals, especially from the early days, and I always thought of Wiley as being interested in camping out--fishing, camping out, you know, sitting around a campfire. This is just an observation on my point, but how do you respond to my reading this or describing it in this way?

WW: Well, I think, yes, I think we all probably, to some extent, occupy environments, layers of environment. There's been an interesting book, in fact, a number of interesting books, by a man named Lyle Watson, Gifts Of Unknown Things. He did Romeo Era, Super Nature, and Heaven's Breath: A Natural History of the Wind. He's talked about the wind in terms of all the different layers of wind, and the different creatures that lived and traveled in these different layers. It made air, it says like dirt, only it's different layers with creatures. So I think I following on kind of all the same thing. Having spent probably, other than the first couple of years of school, well, no, just the half semester of school, first grade, five, six, somewhere along there, those years in the city. just the neighborhood, Indiana, then moved out in the country and have lived in some kind of rural, semi-rural, you know, on the edge of cities or towns, pretty ever since then, just where my family ended up, and what kind of space I ended up occupying. So I lived in the city briefly in San Francisco, when I was going to school there. Then at the earliest opportunity, I guess after I married to Dorothy, moved to Mill Valley in '58. I think it was '58, somewhere around there. I have been in various locations ever since then. Muir Beach, and the rest of the time in Mill Valley, and then here in the San Geronimo Valley in '68. A lot of it, also looking for a kind of rural area, something close to a city, where I can get in to get materials. Then I had the job in Davis someplace, and even considered moving up to Davis. Went up and looked around, and decided not to, because, first of all, I was just a temporary replacement there for somebody on sabbatical. The first two years, I was a sabbatical replacement, so didn't know if I would be located up there. By that time, I'd kind of got used to the drive, and I liked the break from being up there, having to stay in Marin. So the valley here, '68, to this place in the fall of '68, with the family, Dorothy and two kids.

PK: You have two children?

WW: Yes, two boys.

PK: How old are they now?

WW: How old are they now. I think Ethan's thirty-six, thirty-seven. Zane's about thirty-two, something like that. They're about five years apart.

PK: You mean they're just about as old as we are?

WW: Yes. Yes, gaining on us. [Laughs]

PK: What are they doing?

WW: Ethan's living in upstate New York right now, although prior to that, he was in Los Angeles. He's in filmmaking. He kind of got interested in theater and filmmaking in high school and followed that up. Then married a lady, Kate Dobson, who works for Scientific American. She works in Manhattan. So he's in filmmaking. My younger son, Zane, is in child education, child sports. He teaches kids at school in Marin. There's a program, initially he designed, for after-school sports, kids between school and parents.

PK: Near here in Marin, you say?

WW: Yes, it's in Dixie Lee School over in Lucas Valley. He lives in Fairfax.

PK: I'd like to pursue this line a little bit. That is, the domestic side of it. Again, I'm operating from a belief, certainly, in your case, I think also with many other artists, that there is this close link between one's life experience and the images, at least on one level, that they create. One of the things that struck me at our last interview, towards the beginning, we were talking about the Funk show. You said something that I really should have followed up on, and I didn't, but I can do it now. You, in trying to describe some essential quality of funkiness, funk art, you described it as feminine, as opposed to masculine. You did. What you said, I have my notes here. You described it in terms of at least some of the connotations of having to do with the earth female, as opposed to male high art. I don't know if you meant by that a preciousness, artifice. I wanted to make sure that I understood, or that we understand what you mean by that, because I think it connects to an interest you have in, I don't want to say gender issues, but in the nature of being man, being woman. We were talking about that last session, before we taped. Could you clarify that a little bit?

WW: Well, it just makes me think of what the initial question was, the space one occupies, literally the space. I think, you know, living more in a natural or--"natural," funny word--living more in the country than the city, I remain in a--you're just more conscious of nature and the interface with nature and animals and things that, you know, we're interdependent on. The more removed youare from that, I think, the less conscious you just are of

the environment and the impact we have on each other, how they nurture and support and the necessity of some kind of conscious interface there. I don't know if we spoke about it last time or not, but I read a book recently by Ken Wilbert [phonetic] called The Brief History of Everything. Wonderful book. Good title. It just kind of explained in there, or at least gave me some map to view what we're talking about. I think my consciousness about it, part of it is because I somehow early on identified myself as an artist. Therefore, even if you're not, in some particular way, you're defining yourself in some field. It's a little bit set apart from what's considered usual or normal. At least you're adopting that label to some extent, and that also allows, at least in my fairly early interpretation of it, although it wasn't anything that sophisticated, a more liberal definition of what is and what isn't, in terms of life, female, male, the whole thing. It's a more spacious area to occupy. I think Eastern thoughts, same kind of thing. It's just understanding natural systems, or what consciousness or intelligence there might possibly be. It's taking a penetrating, open-minded view of what that's about. That natural interface, I think, too, also keeps you close to that form of consciousness, whereas the more you move into totally man-made environment, the less conscious one becomes of that. So I think that's it.

PK: When we were talking, before taping last time, you had been talking with Mary, the woman with whom you live now. How long have you been together?

WW: About three years, something like that.

PK: Anyway, you said that just that morning you had been talking with her about some of these related issues.

WW: Well, I know I kind of got off into--I wanted to finish up with the Ken Wilbert--

PK: Please, go ahead.

WW: He said in there, prior to agriculture, basically, all the deities were feminine or matriarchal, and with agriculture it became impossible for pregnant women to become part of the food planning and gathering sources, because, I think, even at that point, there was no grain or food storage, and we were in a kind of nomadic relationship with nature, although I think some probably really primitive forms of agriculture were taking place. But it was agriculture that a pregnant woman could do. When it moved into plows, that took an ox to pull it, and women could no longer participate in that part of it, the deities shifted to patriarchy at that point. It was the first time, we, as a people, were released from continual nomad harvest, grain storage. And out of that came religion and language and the control of those things basically by the patriarchy. The spiritual got alienated and designated to works of Satan and witches and that whole thing. Religion was taken over basically by patriarchy at that point. The natural world that translated into verifiable scientific units, and therefore, saleable. That's what we're suffering at this point is that everything of real value has been turned into something that can be marketed.

PK: Commodity.

WW: Yes. He said, also in there, men were hardwired to fuck it or kill it, and women are hardwired to relate to it. I recommended this book to a young woman artist, and she wanted to know the premises of it. I told her about those premises, and she said, "How about fuck it and kill it?"

PK: Oh, that's pretty dark.

WW: It's probably a little closer to our way of dealing with things.

PK: Do you see a basic relationship between men and women as antagonistic, or do you think that that's something that, if you pay attention to it and want an alternative, something that can be moved beyond?

WW: Oh, yes, I think so. I think any time you, regardless of your gender, sincerely want an alternative, it will occur, regardless.

PK: How has it worked in your life? On the one hand, we all have a perspective, a kind of world view and the way we want things to be. But then, of course, we're all, to a certain degree, subject to our own hardwiring. How has this worked out in your own life? You were married for many years, and I guess, what about four, three years ago, four years ago, got divorced, is that right?

WW: We're just separated, intending divorce.

PK: Well, I presumed there. But in other words, you had occasion to separate. I'm not interested in probing into your private life in that respect, but to the extent that you can comment on maybe the difficulty of--well, where there's an ideal, which I think many of us share, the difficulty of, over time, achieving that.

WW: Yes, sure, ideals. Married for thirty-seven years, you know. A highly important relationship. Just unbelievably beneficial, I think, to me as a human being, as an artist. Dorothy and I both shared the same

teacher, Jim Brown, really highly important to both of us, and a kind of family out of that of other artists and people with similar beliefs. There again, that kind of a pantheistic relationship, too, between human nature and the nature of humans and consciousness about that, I think very much planet and reinforced by McGrath, because I think that's the edge he occupies. So, why that changes? Boy, flat mystery to me. [Laughs]

PK: And I think for most of us.

WW: Not in any way, without being personal, justifiable on my part, or whatever. Just basically on some level, it's the way I've led my life. I've come to certain points and it's changed. I know it's me making the choice on one hand, and on another hand it's like the painting. I just witness it on some level. I think my particular attentional system and the [unclear] system, I'm just always selfish and I do what I want. You know, fuck the outcome. I feel bad and stand around and sometimes wish I could repair it, and try, you know. So I think it's a pattern that I suffer, deal with, but I'm conscious of it.

PK: Well, you're certainly not alone.

WW: Oh, yes. [Laughs]

PK: Human beings have a tendency to be that way. Do you feel, then, that that aspect or mode of conducting your life also explains, or describes, the way you approach your art? You said, "Well, you know, fuck it, I'm going ahead. This is what I'm going to do, the consequences be damned."

WW: It's counterphobic, I think, you know, running into what you're scared of rather than running away from it.

PK: So you anticipate the consequences. What is it, like daring almost?

WW: Sure. Yes, there's that aspect to it.

PK: Because you've certainly gone your own way with your art, and it seems to me--let's see, how can I say this without doing another cliché? It's one of the problems in talking about these things. But it seems to me that along the way you could have made choices to pursue a specific very successful expression, style, if you will, theme, and sometimes you do, sometimes you don't. But I think that as a result, it seems to me you've made art on your own terms and the critical reception, market reception, hasn't always remained the same.

WW: No, definitely. Yes, there's a certain consistency being looked for in there, a certain stylistic logo. If that doesn't become apparent, then people are confused by that. Yes, I think, we're right back out on, you know, what we're suffering from to some extent, is that it's not connected to heart or to soul, it's connected to verifiable units that can be sold, commodities, and recognized. That voice that I think really is the driving forces in nature, and our relationship to it, is kind of basically edited out of that to some degree, and becomes a certain dead thing on some people that doesn't in any way threaten you or deter you or make you conscious. It sounds pretty vindictive and devoid of stuff. So, you see, it's what I feel, or that's what I don't feel sometimes and wish I did.

PK: One of the things that interests me, as I say, there are so many things that I'd like to follow up on, that I get pretty soon almost like an overload in my mind trying to trace, ask the right questions, follow the right theme. There are a number of things right now that occur to me. But I guess one question to follow on this would be, are you pleased, despite the consequences, do you feel that there is a certain integrity or order to the decisions that you've made and have talked both about life and art? Maybe not in inevitability, but at least a consistency?

WW: Well, yes, and I think the art, pretty much since '67, '68, chronicles that, is pretty reflective of almost everything we've talked about in some way. Sometimes I'm accused of making obscure, but I don't think I'm really ever that obscure. You get the drift and the scent of what the thing's about. Sometimes it gets real specific and shrill, and probably not very attractive, but that's okay. I think that's probably less effective that way, but sometimes that has to be heard, too. There has to be human voice. I mean, that's why I think art's such an incredible concept, because it is the one place you can vent all of your feelings and thoughts. It's a very, I think, incredible form of communication in our species, communication, and through the word image and different forms evolve out of it, and in some way that isn't immediately threatening. Powerful and potent, but in some way that one can experience it without having to go into fight-or-flee mode. Although it obviously pushes those buttons in certain people. Senators back East are deeply threatened by black and white stains on paper that happen to be the wrong kind. So really, what a gift [unclear].

PK: Let's talk a little more about your community. I don't mean literally this Woodacre area, but a circle of friends, contacts, which seems to have remained, again, pretty constant over time. You still hang out. You still hang, as the kids say, a bit with Bill Allen and with Hudson. It seems to me like an extended family. As a matter of fact, you've been described by--who was it--I guess, very early on, by Peter Plagens in Sunshine as, your art, at least, as a sort of mature hippie art with all the connotations. This is something, actually, I want to explore a

bit in a moment. But there is that sense of tribe, of community. Yet in some respects, or maybe because of this, I don't want to answer my own question, but you seem not antisocial, but not extremely social in terms of needing to be out there all the time. Is this a fair characterization, that you've really kept pretty to home and hearth, and with a smaller group of friends, or am I perceiving it wrong?

WW: Oh, I think so. Yes, to some degree. I think part of it is just the family, the domestic aspect of one's life developed. In my case, married at twenty-one and a child immediately. Dorothy was pregnant within a month or so after we were married. About five years and another child. Just suddenly. And in teaching. So a lot of that time just used up. But still, again, just the amount of energy between twenty and thirty to participate in art events locally. There were a bunch of mutual shows that all of us participated in, the [unclear] show and some happenings at the Hudson. I worked with Ronnie Davis, the Mean Troupe [phonetic]. Some interesting linkages there with various people. Filmmaker Robert Wilson. Musician Steve Reich, who showed me the East Coast. Steve and I did some performances together.

PK: Oh, I didn't know that.

WW: Yes.

PK: Tell me about that. That's too interesting to pass up.

WW: It's just a period of time, I think. You know, on the East Coast, at that point, some of the happenings, or whatever they were called there. Deying [phonetic], I think was doing some of that. Hudson and I, interested in the same thing out here, and Ronnie Davis, Bob at times, and Judy Davis, that became Judy Raphael [phonetic], Judy North. Just another friendship. So Bob and I did a piece with Ronnie at the theater in downtown San Francisco. It was called "The Event", I think. Mainly visual things, all in black and white. Then Ronnie invited me to do cast sets and costumes for Ubu [phonetic], King Ubu, Jarrys Ubu. So kind of became familiar with Jarrys through that. Steve Reich was around at the time. Oh, we also did some filmmaking. Bob Nelson and Hudson and Ronnie Davis and I did a film called Plastic Haircut. Steve did a soundtrack for that. Then we all kind of collaborated in various aspects on doing Alfred Jarry's Ubu. That was performed at a theater on Capp Street that the Mean Troupe was using at the time. That linked up into the--I wasn't involved in that, but my brother was, the minstrel show. Bill Graham got involved at that point.

PK: I didn't know about this. When you say Ron Davis, Ronnie Davis, that's not the same Ron that--

WW: R.G. Davis. Yes, different from the painter.

PK: Ron Davis was up here at one time, but not connected to--

WW: Yes, he was going to the Art Institute. Yes.

PK: Sorry, I interrupted.

WW: It was just an interesting group. A lot of cross-buyers of ideas and images, and I think-- ... presenting a piece at the School of Visual Arts called Violin Face. Blood Death was beautiful, interesting experience. But, I, at the same time I had ideas for a visual accompaniment. There was just the violinist. So it turned out Steve was going to be in the West that summer, and I'd taken a job at the University of Colorado in Boulder, so we both met there. I had a studio space there. I was teaching some graduate students. Actually, that turned out to be an interesting group of people, too, as I think about it. But anyway, he and I worked together there and worked out a performance piece that we did in Boulder, and then brought to the west coast and did it, Hanson Fuller [phonetic], two to three times. Also at Sac State [Sacramento State University] once, I think. Then I ended up doing a record cover for Steve's, a record of his Violin Face and Brother Walker [phonetic]. I got it stuck in the back there.

PK: Well, we can look at it maybe.

WW: No, I think I took it down. I had it there for a while. I think it's packed away.

PK: Was Reich then visiting at the university?

WW: At Boulder, you mean?

PK: Yes.

WW: Yes. No, he just came and stayed there. No, he wasn't doing anything there. He had a son in the area he was visiting. Michael.

PK: Did you keep up with him?

WW: Yes, we have a little bit. I saw him when he was out not too long ago. Kind of gappy, but I still see him. I met an interesting group of people in Boulder that summer. It was an interesting time--the hippie stuff you were talking about earlier. You know, that was the love summer and all that stuff.

PK: Was that '65, '66? When was that?

WW: No, for me it was the summer of '68.

PK: Was that the summer of love in San Francisco?

WW: '67, '68, somewhere. It was '67 was the Be-In at Golden Gate Park. That was the real peak of that, I guess. Then I spent that next winter back on the East Coast in '68, and got that teaching job at the University of Boulder that summer. So Roland Reiss was there.

PK: Roland was there at the same time?

WW: Joan Moment [phonetic], who teaches up at Sac State. Interesting group of students. People who became friends. Jim and Joe Hawken Hall [phonetic]. Actually they performed. They helped Steve and I in that performance we did there. Then we ended up doing a performance there. There's a poster for it there, called Parachutes, Dumbbells, and Me; The Space Opera. So, a whole lot of things.

PK: Oh, yes, The Space Opera.

WW: A whole lot of the artists that were there in the art department, we all got together and we got a stage and did a performance piece down at the local high school there. It was nice.

PK: So that has an image by you, a Wiley drawing.

WW: Yes.

PK: That's a document.

WW: Yes. Well, everybody said, "Well, what should we do?" One night I was sitting around thinking, and so I suddenly got--as I was doing kind of [unclear], the second time on stage, handheld fruit. The human teeter-totter. See the naked light bulb direct to oblivion. The battle of the spaceship. Trained potato puppets. [unclear] movements.

PK: And only fifty cents admission. Boy, what a bargain.

WW: Yes. Well, it was a great show. We just had a really--it was visually [unclear].

PK: Was Roland involved in--

WW: Oh, yes.

PK: Well, you know, this is interesting. I think I told you that I'm simultaneously, not quite, but concurrently, I guess, interviewing Roland, doing an Archives interview with him. I recall when he was talking about those years, he mentioned that you were among the people there, and that he actually brought in a number of guests, I think. I think he was chairing.

WW: Yes, he was. He was department chair at the time.

PK: It sounded like a very exciting time there, that people were coming through. Judging from what you say, that was certainly the case. Let me ask this, then. It would appear that at that moment, you became more interested in such expanding ideas of what art activity could be, and you were becoming interested, I gather, in some performance in process, or this kind of thing. Crossover, I guess, is the way it could be described. Do you feel that the experience there, at that particular time, was critical in a way for you taking another step?

WW: Not entirely. I'm thinking about the origins of that. I think, again, go right back to McGrath and high school and his non-distinction between expressions and forms of expression in art. Although I wasn't involved in any performance pieces in high school or anything, I remember McGrath talking about things he put on. Hudson and I did do decorations for school dances and things. So, objects and movement and stuff were in there. In that stuff with Ronnie in the event, that must have been early sixties somewhere. So, kind of messed with that stuff off and on a little bit. Although I didn't get into actual performance, I guess, myself maybe until--was it prior to that? I think so, maybe a little bit at Davis. I don't think so. Then that led into doing more at Davis. [unclear] got to be kind of an annual event. Then I think performance art, you know, the form, kind of emerged about that time, too.

PK: Right. Did you feel, first of all, a connection to that new form?

WW: Yes, I didn't have any problem.

PK: Felt comfortable?

WW: Oh, yes.

PK: You liked it?

WW: Oh, sure, yes. I was in support of it. Yes, there was some--it wasn't openly accepted at Davis. There were people who--Bob Arneson was very resistant to performances art.

PK: Really.

WW: Yes.

PK: I didn't know that. Gee.

WW: Yes.

PK: That's kind of surprising, because he was certainly pushing the boundaries of acceptable art in his work.

WW: All his were just frozen performances, that's all. He just didn't like it when they moved around. [Laughs] Too scary I guess. I don't know. But, yes, we were often on very opposite sides of the table there.

PK: Really.

WW: Yes. In Davis, at different times, we had strong performance artists who used that as a major form of expression. It doesn't have to be static on the wall. It either is convincing or not. I wanted to be moved or convinced by whatever it was, a drawing, a little dance, whatever. If I wasn't, I wasn't. It didn't matter what the medium was very much. Probably at that time, encouraging anything other than traditional.

PK: You, yourself, as a teacher?

WW: Yes, sure, because it was already established. It's got its place and its reason and stuff. I think the differences, and maybe, again, it's back to that feminine or open view, there's inclusive and exclusive, and I like inclusive.

PK: It's interesting that you mention that, at least on this issue of performance, you and Arneson were on opposite sides of the table, because in Tom Albright's [phonetic] opus here, Art in the San Francisco Bay Area, was it 1945 to, what was it, '85?

WW: '80.

PK: '80, yes, the book came out. Anyway, I want to talk about some of what Tom wrote about you and its implications a little later. But I think he's talking about you as a teacher at Davis, and some student, I forget who it was, remembering--well, this didn't happen to the student, but he heard the story, so this gets to be anecdotal in the extreme. But where you went to critique--well, not to critique, to a younger artist's studio, he was struggling, and the work wasn't going well, and he was hoping you could give him some direction. According to this I hope not apocryphal story that Albright recounts, you noticed a spider web in the corner, I guess, and your comment, your remark, was that that was the most interesting thing going on in the studio. Now, that, of course, sounds a little bit harsh. But the way the story is told, it was suggesting that in a way he had been participating, or aware of something that could be seen as part--the awareness of it, the allowing it to happen. Is that a true story? Do you remember that at all?

WW: Oh, boy.

PK: I'm pretty sure it's an Albright story.

WW: Yes. It kind of mingles with other stories, you know. I'm not certain. Did I occasionally say harsh things to students? Yes, I did. [Laughs]

PK: I don't think that was quite as much as--

WW: I would say that. I'm thinking about a kid who, when I was a visiting artist back East, that I think maybe was doing work with a spider.

PK: Well, here's what it says, since I mention it. I'm going to read it real quickly. I'm not trying to call into question the story, but trying to get at what it may tell about your approach to teaching, as for the subject. It was Jock Reynolds who told this story. He was a student in the late sixties. He says, "While he had visited this artist's studio, he was having trouble with his work," the student, not the artist. "It wasn't coming through the way he wanted, and finally he showed Wiley a spider web. He'd left this spider alone for months and it had spun the whole corner of his studio. Wiley pointed out that that was the most interesting thing there, and it was significant that he had been letting it happen." So this isn't so much a negative comment on the way you interact with the student. But my interpretation of this--and I'd like you to comment on it in more general terms--is that you're helping the students see in a different way perhaps.

WW: Well, yes, it makes me think of McGrath again.

PK: Really.

WW: Yes. That openness to seeing. Again, too, in a way shifting the focus out of something critical. It makes me think of my approach to teaching, which I think started out pretty critical in some ways, not in others, but pretty critical, and it evolved to pretty uncritical, maybe not so much so for graduate students, exerting different kind of pressures there, but for undergraduates, seeing that, boy, art just needs support and help, mainly. If it gets it, then it flourishes, and if it doesn't, it doesn't do too well. But, yes, I think that period, again, just opened up that possibility of people and process. Well, Bruce, I think, Bruce Nauman, had a significant feed into that as a student in Davis.

PK: Was he a student of yours?

WW: Yes. Graduate student. He came here as a graduate student.

PK: Tell me what you remember about Nauman as a student.

WW: Just right away interesting approach to image-making. I think he came in with some paintings. I can remember him as sort of an abstract expressionist, symbolic, marked gestures. Reminded me a little of [unclear] or [unclear]. That's my sketchy memory of him. Bruce himself, physically, very unopposing. Didn't look like a hippie, or bearded. He had hair cut close and very ordinary clothes. Not, you know, at the time--

PK: Not Bohemian.

WW: --sixties. No. Quite the opposite, real unobtrusive. I had a course for me, you could take along with seminars, special study courses. Davis, at the time, didn't have the art department. It was still in those scattered buildings. It had an art department, but they were in this building and that building. There was no art building. That came later. So we agreed to meet on some corner there in Davis, and he was going to show me what he had been doing. He had this little chipboard folio, as I recall, and in it were eyes that he had cut out of a magazine and lips that he had cut out of magazines. He laid them out, as I recall, on one side of the chipboard, these eyes, these various--I don't know if they were all women's eyes or men's eyes. Eyes on the one side and lips on the other. These were some things he had been doing, gathering. Right away I liked that. It tickled me. I thought it was interesting.

PK: You didn't say, "You call that art?"

WW: No, I didn't. I don't think, anyway. I think I just liked it. I thought it was interesting. He continued to produce things kind of in that vein, just another view that was happening. Kind of a funky version of what was going on. Kind of a low-tech version sometimes, a minimalism. But interesting, strange materials, and real obvious things, like boarding up under a chair in the studio, just boarding up the sides and casting a bowl of cement and breaking the chair away, and it was the space under a chair made solid. It was brilliant. So, real low-tech. But really sharp. And pushing the edge all the time. Also very adept, a skilled draftsman, as well. I saw some beautiful drawings he had done of studies of a blanket on the floor. It was in charcoal, and just very tasty, very nice. So, very mentally and technically adept, and intellectually, I think, very sharp and curious about the world and art and human activity in the interface. Merged right into what this area, I think, is significant more in terms of his art and nature and mental interfacing. You know, all the [unclear] and [unclear] mental stimuli that takes places.

PK: So you felt that Nauman was pretty cerebral about his art.

WW: Oh, yes.

PK: Did you feel a kind of affinity? Because I think, in many ways, you two could be seen as--certainly, if you divide the creative art room, so you've got a room, into corners, it would seem that you guys would be at least near one another in one of the corners.

WW: I think so, yes. Yes.

PK: But did he seek you out, or did he just get assigned? Here you were and he signed up for your class or something?

WW: You'd have to ask him, really, but my recollection is that he studied briefly with Italo Scanga and that Italo suggested that he check out Davis, that Italo was aware of my work and Wayne's [Thiebaud] work, and thought Bruce might find it simpatico or interesting.

PK: Isn't that interesting that you would think of Wiley and Thiebaud and recommend, "Now I'm going to go to the place where they both teach," as if each had something to offer that Nauman could benefit from that particular teaching environment. That seems like a bit of a stretch in some ways, or maybe it isn't. I was thinking of your work and Wayne's work, esthetics. Most people, I would say, quite different. What do you think?

WW: About? There's a number of questions there. [Laughs]

PK: Pick your question.

WW: Well, I don't see it so far-fetched, because I think Davis, everybody agrees, had a really interesting accumulation of artists there at the time. That also is just only my recollection, which maybe not true at all. So I think the main thing that made Davis interesting was the commitment of all the teachers there towards teaching, as well as their work, which was really fostered by Richard Nelson, the man who started the department, another exceptional person in terms of Davis, and the impact and the kind of attitude that was strong there, and one that wasn't bogged down in academia, but that was maximized in terms of creativity in teaching and the freedom to do that, support for doing that. So I think it was just a good, lively place for Italo, whatever was aware of good people.

PK: Serious people.

WW: Yes. Bruce was also a latecomer there. He studied math and music, I think, prior to getting to art. Anyway, for me, I think Bruce was important for me, as many students were at different times, in terms of who gives who what and who gains by that. I think teaching, you know, that's just hard to know. I think it's always 50-50 mutual in some ways, if there's a resonance, if there's a connection.

PK: It's like a collaboration, almost.

WW: Yes, it really is. But I think Bruce's approach at that time clarified things for me in my own work, about some things that I hadn't been able to resolve, just the way he approached doing things, and minimalism and not a biographical information being reinforced again in another form. Also, I think an important show at that time was Lucy Lippard did anti-form. That's probably immediately to all that stuff getting rigid and hard, things suddenly going soft and antiheroic and humble and back to low-tech again, looking more like projects that failed, rather than ones that succeeded.

PK: From which you can often learn more. I think that's for sure.

WW: Right.

WW: The real antiheroic, the anti-hero or looking for the heroic in a different form, not the same hierarchical form. One God, one only.

PK: You went to the Art Institute. I can't remember, did you teach there briefly?

WW: I did, yes. Like a summer session or something like that. I also did a few graduate students at the time. I remember one named James Reineke [phonetic] studied with me. They signed me up so graduate students could take a study course, and we he worked out, you know, visiting the studio. Also Berkeley at the same time had the same policy, and some students from Berkeley came up and took courses, graduate courses, from me. Mary H_____, Jim Pomeroy [phonetic] and various people. Brenda Richardson from the museum. Hudson was teaching there. So that was another nice interaction, too. I think [Jim] Melchert [phonetic] and a lot collaborative, Slant Step show [phonetic], all that stuff.

PK: What year was that? That's a very famous show. Now, wait a minute, I bet it's in--no.

WW: Somewhere I got a--I had for a while [unclear]. I took it down.

PK: It's probably actually listed in here. I didn't mean to interrupt.

WW: It must have been about '65, '66, something like that. It was at the Berkeley Gallery, which was in San

Francisco.

PK: Well, anyway, that's easy for people to find. I'm just, again, just trying to keep things placed in time. I wanted to ask you about teaching, your observations on, perhaps, the different approaches to teaching are at the Art Institute, which became finally pretty free-form as far as--at least that's the impression I get. I gather that Davis was really a different situation, or is that not so?

WW: It was, yes.

PK: I get the impression that there was a lot of interaction and engagement with the students at Davis, perhaps in a good sense, a more structured situation than the Art Institute, is that right?

WW: For that parallel of time, you mean?

PK: Yes, about.

WW: Yes, but then I think the whole area was kind of cracking up at that point, too. So, everything shifting, and the age difference. When I was at the Art Institute, I was pretty young, and in a group of very young people, and mostly there were older students there, veterans from Korea. Davis, I think, at least my age, I wasn't all that much older than the students. I was twenty-four or something like that, so much closer in age. And the whole Flower Power Child generation and music and all that stuff was very potent, revolutionary kind of time culturally. Bob Dell went to Stanford [University], the whole Art institute kind of regime that was in [unclear] when I was a student there. But also that particular group of people significant. The students that were there, Hudson, Joan Brown, Manuel, all those people. You know, another strong body of students and teachers.

PK: That's for sure.

WW: Powerful images. So just, I think, a really fertile period of time. I don't know where we were going with that.

PK: This is almost over. I think I'm going to turn the tape, if I may, and we'll pick up on--

PK: Continuing this third session with Bill Wiley on November 17, 1997. Bill, we were mainly talking about your teaching experience, some of your teaching experiences, at Davis, and trying to get an idea of what the department was like at that time. I asked you if there were some differences, in your view, between the programs, if you want to call them that, at that same time at the Art Institute and at Davis. Perhaps, I guess, what many people would suspect is that the Art Institute had gone almost into free-form, and that Davis perhaps represented, in some respects, a more structured approach, perhaps with a little more respect for some of the traditional methods, life drawing and all. How do you see it? How do you remember the two places? Or did you even think about it?

WW: I didn't think about it too much. I think I was just involved in what was going on at Davis and wasn't real aware of the Art Institute. So the thing I was always happy about Davis, because there were a variety of students there, not just art students, liberal arts students, but regardless of who was there and the graduate, in fact, the MFA program was just coming into existence as I started there. They had just did an MA before that and they were just adding MFA. So in some ways, after being at the Art Institute, I initially thought, Davis, gee, it's so square up here, the students. [Laughs] But I eventually liked the balance and found it a little more interesting in some ways, and because I think the MFA program developed well and attracted interesting students, and some of the homegrown students, too. Steve Kaltenbach and Dave Gilhooley [phonetic] and people [unclear].

PK: Gilhooley was your student also?

WW: Yes. He was a marine biology student initially that changed to art major. Anyway, the thing that made me happy there, I think, as a teacher, was the variety of people teaching there--Wayne teaching a very academic viewpoint. So there was such a gamut and range of sensibilities from, I think, academic to very open, very liberal, that it was like a well-stocked grocery. Students could get what they needed, and in kind of the time or space they needed it. So if you thought that's what you needed, it was available, I think, in attitude and approach. If you needed something more open and experimental, I would allow that, at least initially. If you needed something more structured and goal-oriented, Wayne was offering that. So I think we were polarities, and then all the viewpoints in between that kind of echoed both in different ways, Roy and Manuel.

PK: That's right, Roy was teaching. Roy DeForest [phonetic] was there at that time. What an incredible faculty.

WW: Yes. I think, faculty meetings, it was like, sometimes I felt maybe--there was a woman on the faculty initially, Ruth Hornstein [phonetic]. I mean, that part of it was probably out of balance. But when affirmative action became apparent there, fortunately, at least in my view, Mike Henderson graduated from the Art Institute, and we were looking for somebody of ethnic persuasion, or view, or color, or background, or whatever,

and also somebody who could teach filmmaking as well as painting. Mike had been refused MFA status at the Art Institute in painting. Bob Nelson saw his paintings, and Nelson who had been a painter before he became a filmmaker, said he really liked the paintings, and if he wanted to get in a graduate program, why didn't he enter as a filmmaker. So Mike said, "Yeah? What do I gotta do?" He said, "You get a camera and some film." So he said the next time he saw him, he had a 16-mm camera and a big stack of film. He says, "Now what do I do?" [Laughs] So I met Mike right then. He was showing Nelson his first film, The Last Supper. I thought it was just a knockout. Anyway, it just blew me away, and was happy to have run into him. I thought "Davis, we're looking for you." So he came out and taught there. So I just felt that added another whole dimension to Davis, a filmmaker, blues musician, ethnic viewpoint, just an incredible person, artist, mind. So, Davis, I think, just really volatile, interesting range of people. The faculty meetings and things are really well balanced and everybody got to have their viewpoint expressed, at least, during that period, I think.

PK: When did you retire?

WW: Well, I took a leave of absence around '72, '73. Then they just were just insisting that I come back to teach more than before I was ready. I'd been off. I think I was starting the third-year leave of absence. I just wasn't ready to go back, so I didn't.

PK: So you really were only teaching there for how long?

WW: About a ten-year space. During a couple of those years, one year I had a sabbatical and one year I had grant. I did teach, guest teach those years, visual arts.

PK: So you've been gainfully unemployed, I guess, retired, ever since '73?

WW: Yes.

PK: I didn't realize that. Now it occurs to me, though, that when I first met you was probably just about that time, and you maybe were just--well, you probably had just finished up with Davis.

WW: Yes.

PK: People still, for a long time, I think, associated you with the place, though.

WW: Yes, yes.

PK: Did you find that students actually came to Davis specifically to study with you, in hopes of, I don't know, picking up some of whatever it was that seemed to be so successful out there in the art world?

WW: Oh, I think so.

PK: Stylistically or whatever.

WW: Yes. Yes, I think so. That winter I was back East, Art News had done that "Metaphysical Funk Monk," as I worked my way back out West. But people were aware of that.

PK: Is that what they called you?

WW: No, it was the title of the article.

PK: "Metaphysical Funk Monk."

WW: Yes, [unclear].

PK: That referred to you?

WW: Yes.

PK: I've got to see that. Do you have a copy of that?

WW: Yes. It's in the house.

PK: I'd love to see that. Presumably that will be with the papers, you see.

WW: But, you know, I'd also realized with that show that I had with Brenda that spring that there was a definite response to the work. I could feel it from the people there, which initially really surprised me. I wasn't necessarily expecting that. But I, myself, was very happy, very pleased with the work.

PK: I'd like to, following up on this, introduce a new and perhaps pretty big subject, one that we can explore a bit now, if it seems productive, and then maybe even return to. It has to do with the critical view of Wiley over the years. We certainly can't dispatch that all at once. But we've alluded to it earlier, sort of the ups and downs, the extraordinary success at one point, imitators and everything else, the collections, all the museums picking you up. Then over time, now it sort of dips. It's a story that, of course, isn't over yet. As Mary said to me the other day, she was happy that we're doing these interviews and she feels that you still haven't been accorded a kind of position that your career and your work call for. I think that's probably true, and I think it's also true of a lot of artists. Your stories aren't over. But what interests me, and this again is looking back, it's not looking at more recent writings on you, where you're included, but back to an earlier period. I've already referred to one of the main, one of the really important texts on Bay Area art, and that's Tom Albright's book of 1985, Art In The San Francisco Bay Area, 1945 to '80, one of the most important books written on California art, no question. Not that there are very many. Another one where you appear, of course, it's pretty encyclopedic, and I don't know that you get any disproportionate notice, that's Painting And Sculpture In California: The Modern Era. Remember that big show at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art? The national collection of fine arts. That was 1977. Henry Hopkins, Walter Hopps, and all these people put it together. These are two of the a bit earlier sources. Both, especially Albright's book, both accord you a prominent and influential position in California, especially in the Bay Area. Albright was especially attentive. I think there were, I counted, four pages, really, mostly on you, and four illustrations, at least. I think you actually appear in another section, as well. So you're like a touchstone, especially at that time, talking about the seventies, sixties and seventies. I mentioned Peter Plagents' book. In each, you're aligned with a Dada, or a neo-Dada, esthetics and funk. But what I want to mention is that there's an obvious, again, especially in Albright, acknowledgement of your achievement and of your position, but there's also a slightly dismissive quality. This isn't directed exclusively at you. In Albright's case, its directed at the whole phenomenon in Bay Area art. It's a whole other subject. I actually reviewed that book after it came out and read it very, very carefully in this respect. But in Albright's treatment, there's this invocation of Hilton Kramer's [phonetic] review of the 1971 show at Hansen Fuller, where he uses the word--and I don't think it was intended to be too complimentary--"dude ranch Dada." I'd like you, if you would, to sort of reflect on maybe your feelings about this kind of critical look, which seems to, I won't say invalidate the work, but remove a kind of seriousness from it that you, I'm sure, feel is there. Again, it touches on this idea of Plangent says, you know, hippie, mature hippie art, country Dada. This is something, I'm sure, that you've thought about a bit over the years, is that right? Your thoughts.

WW: Boy.

PK: Did that bother you?

WW: Being dismissed or--

PK: Well, I wouldn't say you were being dismissed, but there was that sort of undercurrent.

WW: Well, sure, yes. I mean, a whole room of people saying yes, and one with his back to you saying no. I don't like that. [Laughs]

PK: Unfortunately, the one who says no is the one who goes into print, which raises a whole other interesting question. Who's in charge? [Laughs] Whose voice is heard?

WW: Right.

PK: Well, it's the words that are read.

WW: Right. Well, I mean, any number of ways for me to read that or field it, or what. Part of it disappointing in some ways, to think that you're typecast or used in that way. I know some people that hate that word "funk." Or probably didn't before the Funk show, but feel that that typecast and you're filed there. So in that sense, yes, I think. But in Albright's sense, I think just relationship to me, some great disappointment in him when Abstract Expressionism ended. That approach to it somehow just--

PK: That that was it, there was nothing more.

WW: Yes, not a post-modern man, I don't think. Anyway, as far as me, at that time I think my attitude about art was about opening, and also thinking that no matter what anybody said, it was the truth. It was at least their truth. I could always see a reflection of that in whatever anybody said in regard to my art. The places that failed, the places that are weak, whatever. So anytime somebody says something against your work or yourself personally, I think it hurts. So in that sense, yes. But in the other sense, I could see it as the truth. But this is the way the work is and this is the way it's going, so, kind of undefensible in some way. This is regardless.

PK: That's what it is.

WW: This is what it is. This is how I feel about it. Eventually on some level, you do it long enough, and it doesn't matter what anybody else thinks about it; it's what you think about that matters. Sometimes I'm pleased with it and sometimes I'm not. It doesn't have a whole lot to do with what somebody else is feeling about it. So in that sense, yes, those things. I think the whole area has been dismissed, or you know, treated critically in a very light-handed way, because I think a lot of what we're about is threatening to a more established art form, corporate-looking art that--geez, all those terms are so cliché in some ways.

PK: Oh, well, at least we understand them.

WW: That's what I think has happened. That was my feeling in '67, '68, when it was all going down some very narrow road that didn't allow for very many people to accompany it. I didn't think it was healthy for art or those on the road. So, wanted to, at least for myself, have a different connection with art, and being here, and what it reflected about. There again, I think important voices in this area. Fred Martin, a very potent and important voice in relationship to that. Others in other ways. But poets and that whole literary connection that's in this region from writers, the connection with nature again, and being less so about-- You know, at one point, I suppose in the mid-sixties, I had some fantasy about getting a loft in New York and maybe staying there and doing that, but at some point that didn't--that doesn't--now I can't imagine. It doesn't seem like enough to exist on in some way. Where would the art come from? [Laughs] Although I like art that's about art, if it's only about that, it's not enough in some way, my existence. So, that whole thing about serious and humor, and humor used as a way to denigrate something, making light of it. Serious is somehow more important or better doesn't [unclear]. So I think, you know, thinking about other local artists again, I think really interesting artists who don't have a book on them or a voice that should be recognized, especially for this area and feeding artists for this area, Bruce Conner, Wally Hedrick, two really interesting non--at least logo working in a multimedia approach, inclusive rather than exclusive.

PK: I mean, it does seem that Tom Albright--rest in peace--had a certain axe to grind, and I think that most observers of this scene here would agree that everything, from his perspective, was downhill after Clyfford Still [phonetic]. Downhill after Still. That's simply is a way he--that was the standard, and a rather narrow one, as a matter of fact, that he applied. There always seemed to me--well, there's several interesting things about it. Here was an observer right at the center of things in many ways, Tom Albright, as jazz music critic and all that, sort of himself an old beatnik, perfectly positioned to be open and understanding, but for some reason, quite, I think, rigid, and I use the term "dismissive," because I think he dismissed basically the scene. But the fact of the matter is, you were certainly one of the leading, most prominent figures, and so a dismissal of the scene ends up being focused on you. It's just interesting. I wonder if you feel--well, I think you've already said it, in this case it was a local observer. But in effect, his view was reflecting very much an Eastern perspective or mainstream high art. Is that right? Do you agree with that?

WW: Well, I think so, yes. I mean, you're defending the territory you have, and anything that threatens it or raises a possibility or an alternative against it, it's better to keep that out than invite it in. If it's in, it should be homegrown in some way that you can adopt to and make sense out of.

PK: It seems to me, Bill, that one of things that's missing, in at least in some of the things I've read about you at different times, is an appreciation of what I now would call a kind of a feminine aspect to your work, or, to use another term, a gentleness, which hasn't always been viewed as a virtue in making what they used to call tough art. New York art's tough. Remember when people used to say that?

WW: Yes. Sure.

PK: They don't say that so much anymore, but they said it all the time, and a lot of artists bought into that. They would use the same term, "Man, that New York stuff's edgy. It's tough." Well, myself, I don't think that's so interesting. But it does seem to me, and more so as we talk, that you bring to the making of art and, I think, to your life, a kind of gentleness which then actually produces or creates, represents a slightly different relationship between the artist and a work of art and an audience. I just made that up, but that's my thinking. Does that seem right?

WW: Well, yes, again, I think, inclusive and exclusive. It's more offering an art that says, "Welcome aboard," rather than, "You're not good enough." [Laughs] "You don't know enough to get on board this ship. In fact, you don't have enough money to buy your ass onto it." I mean, that's just too narrow. It's available for anybody. Gee, I mean, it seems so sad, and so simple in some ways. I mean, we've just such a low value for it. I mean, art in some ways just got co-opted right into industrialization, just like everything else in some ways. A panel discussion last spring in San Francisco with art and art education, I just mentioned, when you stop to think about children when they arrive at school at the age of five or six--and we may have already covered this in here, I don't know, it just goes through my mind--it's such a simple statement about where art is within our culture, society. When they arrive at school, almost every one of them is a poet, a musician, a dancer, a singer, draws, paints, and somewhere roughly in the fifth or sixth grade, that's pretty effectively wiped out as a form of

expression.

PK: Well, would you say that one of your goals, as an artist, is to try to redeem or retrieve some of that more youthful sense of adventure or discovery?

WW: Yes.

PK: Wherever you may find it?

WW: Yes. Yes, exactly. Just keeping it in some form that remains available, too. I think we talked about it before. When something done with a pencil on a piece a paper just astounds you, just stuns you with its whatever it is, its skill or its inside or its exclamation, it's just such a valuable ingredient, I think, for consciousness. And it's so easily obscured. I think that other matrix that Wilbert talks about, where it's all divided and turned into a commodity or something you have to have a lot of money in order to possess, or own, or have.

PK: This leads to a couple of things. I don't want to dwell on Tom Albright or any particular critic. I guess, in a bigger way what I'm trying to get at is your kind of relationship to changing criticism and reception of your work. In a moment, when we flip this tape over, maybe we can continue to bring that more closer up to date. When we do our next session, I'm going to be more up to speed on some of the more recent writings about you, and maybe changing ways in which your work is seen, although one thing I think becomes clear from this interview, and I certainly believe it, is that as far as you're concerned, the work isn't done in response to criticism or to outside reception, because there is this consistency, almost a kind of an inevitability for you and the way you just continue to do the next thing. Is that a fair appraisal?

WW: Well, I think the consistency is that it continually reflects my concern in the content, not in the style.

PK: So that's what Wiley's work is about?

WW: Yes. Right. I think often people are looking for style, not particularly interested in the content, what the work evokes. But I also like it to be in fairly traditional forms, or at least I want to keep the voice operable in that. Or at least so far I've wanted to.

PK: You're allowed to change your mind, of course.

WW: Sure. But it's like having--

PK: Continuing this third session with Bill Wiley. Bill, you were talking about languages, and you were making a point when we were cut off. For you, art obviously is your most articulate--that is your language. You would say that is your first language, right?

WW: Yes. Probably yes. Well, probably, saying I don't speak any other language. I studied briefly in the sixth grade Spanish while I was in Texas. So I've got about six words in Spanish left from that. I spent a summer in Italy, working in Italy, and I got about a dozen words in Italian. But in art I have all these languages I can work with: my actual poor English language, and the visual language, and then whatever particular form of expression my art language wants to take, from abstract to representational to imitational to whatever the voice or the heart, or the mind, or soul wants to say, then letting whatever language seems the best conveyer of that thought from word to image is what I try to let happen, or watch occur. So it's in a kind of partnership, I think, with materials and art images from the past, the present.

PK: This leads me perfectly to a question I had. Actually, I devised this one maybe last evening. I was looking at these catalogs of yours. One was the Afterburner. Catalog for that show at Rena Bransten's. That was in '94, but then more to the point here, was the year before, '93, was a show at Rena's, March of '93. Didn't have a name, it just says "William T. Wiley." I was looking through this, and there's not a lot of text, or at least I didn't pay much attention to that. It was mainly just the nice reproductions. All of these are works from '92. What struck me, as an art historian, about these images, these works, and just now we were talking about the material, the means, the style, as part of the language, it's like a vocabulary, what struck me most of all is that there seems to be this interesting juxtaposition of, in art historical Renaissance terms, Florence and Venice--in other words, the linear Florentine style--this is what we're taught in art history--and the Venetian, the rich, the sensuous, the painterly, the coloristic, line and form in paint. These exist in the same works. It's a rather unusual juxtaposition. You're also including motifs, usually in the non-painterly part, the drawn part of images, like Eastman Johnson [phonetic] and Homer, etc., Bruegel, Bosch. Just by way of example, I noted "Modern Alchemy" was a work that does that pretty well, "The Poor Copies, Part II." Even this incredible work, "Hinge," and that's got that poor old blind Mickey in there. I guess the questions that come to my mind, is this, on your part, a conscious reference to the two great traditions in Western art history that then developed in the late eighteenth, nineteenth century into the neoclassical and the romantic? But again, Ingres and David on one hand and Delacroix on the other. You know, the linear, the more classical, and then the painterly, the more romantic and baroque. Do these terms

mean anything to you in the way you develop these interesting paintings?

WW: No, I don't think conscious as such. It makes me think again of that Ken Wilbert book, The Brief History of Everything. In there I read a kind of explanation, I think, of what I feel I've been doing or attempting to do. He says the universe is made up of holons.

PK: Holons?

WW: Holons. H-O-L-O-N. He also traces it, I think, out of Greek words, I think, he gives it its root in. He said basically that's what everything is. What holons do are transcend and include.

PK: Transcend and include. Embrace. I still don't understand what holons are.

WW: Well, you'll have to read the book, A Brief History of Everything. Well, it's kind of you're transisting that which you are, but at the same time you're including it and honoring it.

PK: Do you see my point, though, about these two traditions? It's real, real simple and basic, of course. It is very striking in the work. I think anybody who's at all knowledgeable about art tradition and art history, I would think would bring that to your work or take that away from your work. So I had to ask you. But you answered, and this is not something--this is a little puzzling, though. Despite your acknowledged interest and, indeed, the images in many of the works, that hark back to the Old Masters and to tradition.

WW: Well, that's always a curiosity. Like the book, how can I include everything? [Laughs] How can it all be there? I mean it all is anyway, but is there some way to also show that it's there and nothing's missing? So it's like all the aspects of art I love, from representational to the abstract, I'm going to deal with, are conceptual to, you know, whatever else there is. I mean, it's all conceptual in some sense. So looking for some way to give voice to all of that, rather than just one small aspect of it. Then also what you're thinking and feeling at the same time that could also be present. Interesting enough, at different times, when works are shown, the writing's often excluded.

PK: Oh, really.

WW: Yes. Or a crucial part of the writing where that's dismissed.

PK: You mean when a work is reproduced, a detail that ends up missing the point of the work?

WW: Yes. Often what I've written on there is changed back to the way they think it should be. [Laughs]

PK: What do you mean? How can they do that? You mean in a caption or something?

WW: No, just have it corrected. Like I manufactured an alternative, a couple of alternative personalities and voices, and one of them is Lout Sue, kind of a pun on Lao-tse.

PK: Lout Sue?

WW: Yes, Lout Sue, L-O-U-T S-U-E, sort of back into the feminine, "A Boy Named Sue." And I've seen that often turned back into the Chinese philosopher Louts [phonetic], poor guy. [Laughs]

PK: This is, I think, an important point in connection with your work, and we were touching on it earlier, and that is a refusal to acknowledge the seriousness of wit and the sense of humor and paradox and irony that your work, to me, seems to be largely about, and that somehow it's--I don't know if it's view as irreverent or trivial. Again, talking about criticism, and criticism is only worth what it is, I'm not saying that that's the truth of it. But it suggests an inability to go along with you on your journey. I guess that's the best way I can put it.

WW: Well, it's something that pokes fun at itself. I think it hovers in the territory of "The Emperor's New Clothes" fable. My art may not be the best example of that. I can't do anything about that, but I sure think it's necessary to have some voice occupying that position, because we're so blind to ourselves and our excesses and our stupidities and whatever that something that isn't going along with the program. It's like the Canetti thing that, quote, "The only hopeful thing about any system is what's been left out." I mean, part of the mind that wants to pin it all down in some way, thinks that there is such a thing. José Ortega [unclear], Revolt Of The Masses, is a beautiful quote about that, about how people born into this chaos and they can't stand it then, and what they do is they pull a window down over the chaos, where everything is clear, and it doesn't matter that it in no way reflects that around them. They use it as a scarecrow to frighten reality away.

PK: Scarecrow? You like scarecrows. Do your scarecrows have something to do with that?

WW: Well, it's fudging with the shade, I think. [Laughs] Or that window of clarity that we like to hide behind,

pretending it's not opaque. Our favorite.

PK: You're sounding more and more like a post-modernist, you know. Not that we, of course, accept these terms. But the simplest terms, of course, the modernism, or high modernism, being thought of as an essentialism, that there is some universal core truth, if you will, and it's singular, and everything is a progress towards that. Well, we sort of gave up on that idea. I don't know when we did, but we have, and it opened up the world. It made the world, of course, much more confusing and maybe scary. But fit in with what you just described, being born into chaos, and then finally, well, maybe some--perhaps you're one of them--acknowledging that this is the case, and then you would develop strategies to coat it and at the same time acknowledge.

WW: Well, you don't want to be overcome by the technical amnesia that continues to tend to overwhelm us. [Laughs]

PK: Well, would you consider yourself, if you'll allow using the term, a post-modernist? If you had to stick yourself, even if you had to write your own--what if you had to write the Dictionary of Arts entry for Bill Wiley, and this would be set in stone? That means this would be the official description into the future for posterity. Would you use the term post-modernism, to the extent we understand it, for ourself? Or how would you write your own little blurb?

WW: Oh, geez, I have no idea. I kept using the term "modern." I can remember when it occurred to me. I think I'm too far behind the times in some ways. There was a show I had in Los Angeles with Peter G_____ and Terry. Allen was down there at the time, and he was in there looking at my show and he says, "What do you think?" I says, "It doesn't look very modern." [Laughs] So I called myself "Mr. Unmodern" for a while there, because I thought, geez, everyone is going forward, but me, I'm going backwards. And I said, "Hmm. With the way things are, the only way to go forward is to go backwards." I thought of a time I read Robert Monroe's Out Of The Body Experiences book that I came across a number of years ago, and a really interesting, strange book about a man who started having these out-of-the-body experiences, and he would write about them. One of the things that impressed me in there was when he'd have these out-of-the-body experiences, he'd often run into some scary situations. He would be frightened and wanted to get back to his body, and he'd always successfully been able to do it. One time he was going back to his body, and he suddenly came up against a totally impenetrable barrier. No matter how high he went or how low he went or how much to the side, either way, it was there. He couldn't get around it. He was just in total panic, until he suddenly knew what to do. He just turned around and went back the way he had been coming, and went right back into his body. So I think I would say, "Go the other way." [Laughs]

PK: Going the other way is one way to actually describe post-modernism. It's appropriation of grazing through the past, which you certainly do.

WW: Yes.

PK: The post-modernist--we don't want to get into this, believe me, too much--but the post-modernist presumably has given up the notion that there is this going forward. You just yourself just said it. You just described yourself as Mr. Unmodern, everybody else is going forward, you're going backwards. Well?

WW: It's all fantasy that you're going anywhere. [Laughs]

PK: Really?

WW: Yes, I think so, in some ways. I mean, it both is and it isn't. Now we're in the realm of the indefinable, undefinable, I think, where Buddhism dwells so beautifully and [unclear], in the realm of the undefinable, as I saw in--was it Michael [unclear]', little book, Time And Tales. [unclear], that's the zone we're entering in. He says, "If I could wake completely, I would say without speaking why I'm ashamed of using words." So, post-modern, modern, I keep wanting to turn to Suzuki Rosche's Beginner's Mind as the term I'd like to locate near, if I had to have anything carved on a stone about me, "Looking for beginner's mind. Hoping to find beginner's mind."

PK: Here we are. We're doing a tape that's going be used by art historians and biographers, and so forth, and poor us, you know, we're somewhat lacking in imagination, so we end up relying on all these terms. You might want to think about writing your own entry. I'm not sure I could do it. Actually, we're asked to do this when we're on a panel, I mean, professionals, art historians, and others, cultural historians, if we're going to give a talk, they say, "Please give us one short paragraph describing yourself." So you can think about that, if you want. I do think we have to deal with certain terms, without you asking for it, brought to bear on you and your work. One of them for sure, and it is the way you are placed, or is where you have been placed, is Dada or neo-Dada.

WW: Well, Dada seems very post-modern, in some sense. It's questioning the authority of a given line, of a given whatever is. I think that our tendency to mass hysteria, it's what Kennety made his thirty-year work, Crowds And

Power about, people becoming part of a mob, and the mob itself an organism that people get caught in and trapped in, and don't even know that it happens, that they're aware of it. But it came out of an experience that he had as a young man, of becoming part of a mob and then later realizing something had happened to him that he didn't understand.

PK: Does this have something to do with the notion of anarchy, chaos and anarchy?

WW: I think so, yes.

PK: Which is, of course, one of the things, and I'm not sure that I understand all this myself. We tend to use terms, we sort of just receive them and accept them, and they become periods in art history. But "Dada," to me, has an element of anarchy about it and nihilism, which I do not see at all as part of many of the neo-Dadaists' works. Certainly, not you, because I see your work as quite the opposite, quite affirmative.

WW: Yes, the affirmative of humor.

PK: Maybe some of the forms, the means are associated with Dada or neo-Dada, but I don't think the intention. Well, how do you feel about that, thinking again of your own work being embraced by this term neo-Dada?

WW: Well, I think there again it's summative. You want give the whole picture, rather than just a one-sided view, so it's inclusive, again, rather than exclusive. I think what it basically about is about is the whole Eastern-Western crux of how we view the universe. For whatever reason, Western viewpoint has it located in moral terms in some way.

PK: In moral terms?

WW: Yes. Yes, the universe. We tend to assess it in moral terms, I think. Where, I think, an Eastern viewpoint sees it more in terms of fields of energy and assess it less harshly than we do in terms of morality, and see it more as positive, negative energy fields, therefore, I think, having a wiser understanding of the play of energy of the thing, and probably a less punitive, less damaging psyche emerging from that.

PK: You don't really think of your art strictly in art terms or in terms of art history. It seems to me, in responding to questions, or as we're discussing different aspects of your practice, of your work, how it's perceived, that you try to somehow retreat--no, that's not the right word--redirect the thinking, sort of lift us in the discussion into other realms. You mention these, very often, Eastern ways of looking at life, not looking at art. It's looking at life and existence. So you answer questions about art in terms of systems and perceptions of looking at nature in existence.

WW: Well, yes, I think that's what art is for. At least mine is. That was the window that I wanted to reflect or view from, or whatever.

PK: Well, this seems to be clear. It's becoming more and more clear as we talk. Well, what about your own ancestors, if we're going to allow that there may be some? If we want to look at, certainly, Western art as having certain dominant strains that go through, you've pretty much disavowed the connection that I made with Florence and Siena, those traditions, or at least in terms of your conscious approach in your work. But again, I'm going back to the way people have written about you, and Tom Albright is certainly no exception. But to group you within this Dada, neo-Dada strain that's run especially through the second half of our century, and especially in California, goes back to Marcel Duchamp, now, do you see that as helpful in terms of looking at your work? Is this something that you accept, or do you perhaps object to that connection?

WW: No, I mean, you know, the truth-- [Laughs] I mean, Duchamp definitely, and I mentioned it somewhere. I know in my own writings that was a model of mobility that one, you know, could express one's self in many forms, and, I feel, really a valuable explorer in the same sense geographically exploring--Jarry, Raymond Roussel. I mean, any of those people that I have rubbed up against. Duchamp, definitely, interesting. There again, I think it's the consciousness that emerges, that becomes interesting, and he happens to be in the art field. But you know, Kennety think is another incredible, valuable explorer of just human consciousness, and again, Eastern thought. I mean, that's what we've got to work with, really, our consciousness. So things that are aiding and assisting in that, I think, it's the form of consciousness, in whatever way it emerges, that offers up possibilities and potentials, I think, rather than diminishing them, where we get stuff we need to survive.

PK: So I gather you resist the overuse of categories.

WW: Yes.

PK: Sort of snuggling into a comfortable category and letting that be.

WW: Yes, sure. Yes. Categories. To resist them is kind of futile, because people are going to put them there

anyway. I mean, Wanda has owned a piece of mine for a long time that she always titled "It Remains to be Seen." I always told her that there was no "it." It took her a long time to understand.

PK: To get "it."

WW: To get "it." [Laughs] Which there isn't any of. She says at one point, "Oh, that changes the whole meaning." I said, "Yes." Suffering. Suffering, being awake. I mean, suffering being asleep. [Laughs] Suffering from both. Suffering from suffering.

PK: Well, this may be a good place to stop. Of course, I have about ten questions, but I'm just going to have to write them down and remember them. But I guess finally, on this note, I would ask do you, yourself, feel a connection, some sort of a fraternal connection, if you will, with artists like Johns and Rauschenberg, you know, naming the most prominent, the most famous of that particular, so-called direction?

WW: Oh, yes, I remember, absolutely, specifically, when the Art News with Jasper Johns' "Target" appeared. I was immediately conscious. I didn't know what it meant or anything, but it was very interesting. It sort of flew in the face of some of the things that I digested at the Art Institute, and I definitely drew strength and possibilities from that. Kind of led more back to, I think, McGrath again, and inclusiveness, and opening up to the process and substance, rather than this defined goal that we were striving for. My circumstances, too, I think with Hanford up there, the atomic thing, and seeing some of results of that, and gaining consciousness just about the lethalness of the plutonium, just first-hand experience with that in some way, in seeing how we're still making the stuff and there's no solution for it. I think Jeremy Rifkin pointed out an analogy, "What would you do if you knew you could make the most potent poison on Earth? What would be the first thing you'd do?"

PK: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, a fourth and, unfortunately, at least for the time being, final session with William T. Wiley at his studio in Woodacre, California, November 20, 1997. The interviewer for the Archives is Paul Karlstrom. This is tape one, side A. Bill there are about eight questions, I guess, that I put together, several things that I'd like to touch on in this wrap-up session. I'm hoping that some of them will be provocative in a way that can get us discussing areas that need to be included here. I wish we had taped our luncheon conversation. We just came from lunch at Tony's. Is that what you call it?

WW: Two Bird Cafe, it's called.

PK: And had a wonderful conversation--discourse, I guess they call it--over food with Mary. You two went several weeks ago to Washington. We didn't get a chance to talk about in our last session, but you seemed to find some special interest, a couple of the exhibitions, maybe three, that you mentioned, and I think it was the Stanley Spencer Show at Hirshhorn. I believe you mentioned Charles Burchfield at the National Museum of American Art. Then I think it's Arthur Dove [phonetic] at the Phillips.

WW: Yes.

PK: Without dwelling on it, necessarily, I would be interested to know why you found it particularly interesting and maybe what draws you to these artists and to some of the works that were on display. Are there any special affinities that you feel, something special for you, in those artists or their works?

WW: Burchfield initially, probably, the most relevant artist out of that group, and, I think, just because I was aware of his work in high school. I saw some of those landscapes that were kind of turning towards abstraction or abstract elements where weather became visible, sunshine and heat. I didn't know so much about him, just visually I can remember seeing some of those pieces that eventually I saw in this exhibit. And occasionally just some feeling in my work that there was a Burchfield influence for whatever reason, possibly my Midwest origins coming from Indiana, something related there. But it was more in terms of just a few touches, rather than an extensive knowledge of his work. In fact, the retrospective surprised me. I was amazed at how much work he'd done. The scale of some of the watercolor works was really large.

PK: Are you especially attracted to the watercolors?

WW: Well, not necessarily initially, although my introduction into painting had more to do with watercolor or water-based paints than it did oils, because the teacher I had in high school, McGrath, although we worked in many media, I think in school we didn't do much with oils. Some did, but I messed mostly with tempura and water-based paints. Also I think the Northwest artists, artists that I became aware of still in high school, Tobian Gray [phonetic], all worked in water-based paint. Oil paint was a new experience for me at the Art Institute. So I don't think it had so much to do with material; I think it had to do with the imagery. I think, also, Burchfield moving from representational to symbolic abstraction, just an easy bridge for someone not terribly sophisticated or whatever. You can see his interpretation of things taking on an abstract form. So I think it was instructive in that way.

PK: So in some ways did you feel you were revisiting one of your own sources?

WW: Yes.

PK: That's interesting.

WW: Yes. In fact, in that catalog you just returned, the forest catalog, one painting in particular in there reminds me very much of a Burchfield painting.

PK: Which one is that?

WW: I forget what it's called.

PK: I think we left that probably in the house.

WW: I think I've got one more out here. It's called "Time Entering the Forest," I think.

PK: I certainly can see some connections there.

WW: It's "Running Out Of The Forest."

PK: Where do you feel the connections are? Is it really the idea of it? This is quite abstract actually, this work.

WW: But I just feel trees are identified and they're identified somewhat symbolically, somewhat literally, and somewhat in the same way--if you can't see the connection, I can't show it to you. [Laughs]

PK: I understand that.

WW: When I finished this, I thought, this has echoes of Burchfield in it for me. I feel it. I see it. There it is in front of you, and if you can't see it, then I can't show it to you. But that painting in particular has Burchfield in it for me.

PK: Is it his pantheism, is it the sense of all of nature being imbued with some force, some life?

WW: Yes, I think so.

PK: Because in this particular work, which, of course, people can look up, "Running Out Of The Forest," 1993, there's actually a deer. There's a drawing, a monochromatic linear or drawing up in the upper left quadrant. It's not quite that, it's maybe about an eighth of the space. With the deer running off the canvas to the left, interestingly enough. In a sense, one could say--I don't want to suggest the deer is escaping the forest at all, but it's just the rest of the painting is this quite abstract depiction of trees, trunks of trees. I think it's very interesting that you single out this particular work to show a connection to Burchfield. What do you think about the houses? One of the things about Burchfield that always attracted me for years--I actually wrote, I think, the entry for Burchfield in, I think it's called The Dictionary of Contemporary Art or something like that. I did it a few years ago. Always very interested in Burchfield. Of course, you know, there's a homeliness to much of the work that is maybe part of its appeal. But it's this visionary, a quality of understanding nature, not just nature, but the world around the built environment, as well, as having life. You look at those buildings, some of them anyway, that are, I guess, in Buffalo, and they're almost spooky. In fact, they're haunted. It doesn't have to be a bad thing, but that they have a life. We don't want our houses, necessarily, to have that. Do you feel that way about the work? Do you identify with it and see it that way a bit yourself?

WW: Oh, sure, yes. I think it's the presence of soul in everything that he senses and reflects. It appeals to me on some level.

PK: I hope you got the catalog.

WW: I have a book I bought on him sometime ago.

PK: Oh, yes, there's a good one.

WW: A big, thick book that was on sale.

PK: What about the other artists? Again, you mentioned Spencer and Dove, as well. What was your response? How did you find them? What in those shows was of interest?

WW: In the Dove show, I have seen a fair number of Dove's paintings, and at one point in my own development I looked a lot at Dove and in some way attempted to imitate things I thought were going on in his work. So I went to that show expecting to see what I saw, but probably the most interesting aspect were little watercolors, very

tiny, very small little watercolors, a whole lot of those that I'd never seen before. In some ways those were more interesting to me than the paintings. Some were studies for the paintings, but seeing the watercolors, it was like the first-impression feeling you get where the painting got a little bit more cumbersome and decided, and then the watercolor just like the first impulse recorded there and, so, less presented, something much more small and intimate and less self-conscious in a way. So those were really nice to see. The Spencer show, I wasn't very aware of him. I have a book on English painting, [unclear] book, and Jim Dimetrion, whom I know somewhat, had mentioned him. I looked him up and he is in this book that I have, very small black-and-white reproductions, not really reproductions. So I just went to take a look because I knew Dimetrion and interesting art, [unclear], and to see this guy. So I wasn't familiar with the work, but found the show really interesting and intriguing. Just saw the source, I think we mentioned at lunch, for some English painters that actually Dimetrion had some of those people gathered at the end of the Spencer exhibit. The ones that came to mind as I went through were Bacon and Lucian Freud, [David] Hockney, and a Scottish artist, Campbell [phonetic] was his name. They just kind of floated to mind as I looked at Spencer's work, without necessarily literally linking them up. So I thought, well, he must have been the source for all these artists in some sense. So, interesting, strange, strange works, a really intriguing show, kind of my first exposure to the work. So I don't know what I thought beyond just that it was interesting to find those sources in there and that he had a great technical mastery of light and dark and that strange quality of English countrysides and English neighborhoods that I love very much, captured in the works. But a kind of surreal aspect to them and religious.

PK: That was an interesting component there, the Christian [unclear], the crucifixion and so forth.

WW: Right. I guess in all the artists we've mentioned there's a kind of spiritual aspect. Didn't know much about Burchfield, but in reading some of the blurbs that went around there, I mean, he had trouble being in the Midwest, dealing with Christianity, orthodox religion, and his interface with nature between man and nature and neighborhood and nature. You could see that echoed in, I think, Dove and Spencer in different ways.

PK: It's interesting that you describe what you feel is a kind of connection between these different artists, and it certainly seems legitimate to me. What's also interesting, speaking of the British artists, is that they're now enjoying a great deal of attention and admiration, whereas, I don't know, with the exception of Bacon, I suppose, they were pretty much set aside, British art in general, during the sort of heyday of high modernism and abstract expressionism and so forth, because they were almost, including Hockney, looking in a realist mode, which was also a little bit of your story, as well. Because although you had your early abstract expressionist period, as you know, that you chose a different route, which you've pretty much adhered to.

WW: Well, yes, so I think, you know, you find people working outside mainstream movements or in more marginal regions that there's some sense of hope in that or encouragement that you can do something interesting outside of whatever the perceived hotbed of cutting-edge thought or art or whatever. Yes, I think people that fit into that category, we mentioned Westermann.

PK: Yes. Why don't we pause a moment. Somehow we missed him. It ain't going to be the only thing, or individual, we miss in this interview. But apparently he really was quite influential on your thinking and your work.

WW: Yes.

PK: Did you actually meet him?

WW: Yes. Yes, met and corresponded some. He seemed like pretty much anyone he met up with who had any kind of relationship or sincere interest in him or his work could be included in his correspondence or whatever.

PK: You said, or maybe Mary said at lunch, that Westermann was an important presence, had a real impact on the region, on a number of Bay Area artists. Do you agree with that?

WW: I think so, yes. In fact, when you read the catalog you'll have that substantiated by a number of testaments in there by various people. Yes, I think so.

PK: What were the circumstances of your meeting Westermann? Do you recall how that kind of thing came about here in the Bay Area?

WW: I tell a very detailed story in the catalog.

PK: Oh, so it's already set down.

WW: It's all written in there just as clear as I can possibly remember it. All I'll be doing is just going over that again, because that's--

PK: Then you don't need to. But I guess the important thing is just reiterating that it meant something to you.

WW: Oh, sure, yes. Yes. Again, I think it's just somebody doing interesting, really interesting art and doing it in his own particular manner. The work never seemed to me unaware of what was going on in art, and occasionally made use of it, but I can't say that was conscious, or whether what he was doing just crossed over into occasionally what seemed like was also happening in parallel situations like in New York, although he didn't seem particularly involved in art issues very much. Using art to make statements, rather than statements to make art in some way was how I initially characterized it. The content sometimes was about art, or in honor of art, but other times it was about nature or craftsmanship or anti-war sentiment. Like a pre-Vietnam vet in some way. His war experiences turned him very much against war and what we were doing. So that entered into his work, I think, as comment. He was really expressing strong beliefs and thoughts and feelings through the work that had more to do than just with art thought or theories or comments on society.

PK: We should mention at this point, I think, the catalog in question. It was for a show at the Richmond Art Center, recent, just closed, unfortunately. I missed it. So it would be, I think, is it just called "Westermann"? Well, here's the--"H.C. Westermann West." Nice publication, with reflections by artists and friends and various essays. It's edited by David King and Melanie McKim King, 1997. You know, it isn't very difficult to see some connections to Bill Wiley when you look at these images.

WW: Comic books and various sources, and also when he got out of the war, I don't know why, but he went to Chicago. It might even say in there why. So I think there's cross-fertilization there in Chicago. Chicago collectors also has a big anchor in surrealist art and Dadaist art. So I think some of those things, like Sheldrakes, they're just synchronistic magnetisms. [unclear] says he can remember Westermann and some early meetings they had in Chicago. He was still in the Chicago at the time, a little older than the other young artists were. I first saw his work up there. I'm telling the whole thing here. Jeremy Anderson [phonetic] had a catalog with the Art Institute and showed it to Bob Hudson and I, and I just instantly liked what I saw. A little tiny catalog. Just immediately liked the imagery and what it seemed to be about, and materials and all. Then saw probably my first Westermann show at Newman's Dilexi Gallery.

PK: That was what, around '59 or something like that?

WW: Somewhere around there. Maybe a little later, early sixties.

PK: I don't want to go into things that are covered in that catalog, because it's a waste of our taping time, but I am just curious, for my own information, what was Westermann like? What was the nature of the social interaction? Was there a social dimension to this? Usually in the Bay Area or in California among artists there is also a social aspect.

WW: Well, with Cliff, I met him at different times, a little more formal.

PK: A little more formal?

WW: Yes, but not hanging out and running around doing things together. Like I tell in the catalog, I met Peter Selz. It would be easier for me just to read the catalog than to try and reconstruct it, because I wrote one short succinct piece in there and David wrote back and said, "I know you can do better than this." And I wrote down everything I could possibly think of so I wouldn't have to be asked the same--

PK: Gotcha. Gotcha. Let's let it stand that way.

WW: So I think it's really in there, and I just keep running back to that, because whether that's the truth or not, that's the way I wrote it down and that's as close as I can be.

PK: That's good. Because people can go take a look at that. It also brings up the next question here that has to do with a certain spirit, or what I imagine to be a spirit, here in the Bay Area, which is a spirit of actually sharing, of collaboration, of, what should we say, generosity with ideas and themes and images. I don't want to make too much of this or try to set it up as an opposition to a more competitive East Coast situation, but in talking with artists in California, and certainly in the Bay Area, there is a sense of this generosity of participating together in an endeavor. Is this how you remember it? Do you agree with that? I'm thinking also particularly of you with Hudson and the joint show at Brandeis in 1991 that Carl Belz [phonetic] did, where it even reproduces a dialogue between the two of you. How important has that been for you and what form has it taken?

WW: Well, collaboration, I think, around here has happened with Hudson and I, and we talked about last time with Ron Davis and the [unclear]. I think just because we've both been interested in things other than just stationary two-dimensional, or stationary three-dimensional art, the interest has been in performance and in other aspects of art and relationship to it. So that goes back, I think, to even high school, and part of it having to do just because we'd known each other for a long time, so, I think, familiar in that sense and collaboration's a

little easier just because you know somebody and feel comfortable with that. I think it is characteristic of the Bay Area in many ways. The shows, the Slant Step show or the Repair show, somebody would suggest a theme among a group of people. The Slant Step caught hold of a lot of different people for different reasons. The timing, I think, sometimes is probably important. This being generous and, I mean, the philosophical underpinnings of that, whether out here we're generous and back East they're less so, I think that's just more a situation of circumstances in some way. Because I think probably in early '80 days there was a greater sense of collaboration. I know when Hudson and I were doing some of the stuff with Ron Davis, that Dine and Oldenburg were doing the store and happenings and Kaprow and that kind of thing. So I think before art became commodity and legitimized, there was just more of a general camaraderie, because the critical attention and the financial support weren't as established or as prevalent. So I think just, in general, there was probably more cooperation and mutual interest. It seemed to me, when I was back East in the sixties, mid-sixties, '67, '68, where, through abstract expressionists, the commodity aspect of art has been more established, that back East there was more to lose if you cooperated, and out here less so, because there was some financial remunerations starting to happen and recognition here for local artists, but nothing to the extent that it was happening on the East Coast. So I think getting together for fun was still viable and reasonable, and there wasn't anything, I think, to lose, really, and no great positions gained or lost or whatever. Less to be protected in some ways. That's how it seemed to me.

PK: What about the issue, in this respect, of ego and of individuality, having the unique special voice, which very often artists, we think they try to achieve? How you separate yourself from the pack. It sounds to me as if that was far less an issue. It was even, as some observers have pointed out, in some cases sometimes it was almost difficult to distinguish between the works of maybe you, Hudson, maybe some Fred Martin, I don't know. And this didn't seem to bother you. You didn't feel that you had to be instantly recognizable: "This is Wiley." Is that so?

WW: Well, probably if I could have come up with something that would have satisfied people. [Laughs] I often yearn for something that would be simple and recognizable, like Ad Reinhardt's five-by-five black paintings. I thought, geez, if I could just do that and be satisfied, wouldn't that be wonderful? Of course, that's all fantasy. I mean, that stuff is never easy for the person doing it, or generally, it's not. If it's very interesting, it's not easy. So that's fantasy. But, yes, I thought I should do that, and I tried for a long while to get rid of my variety of interests and my eclecticism for this or for that, and it didn't work. It made me unhappy, so I surrendered to it rather than tried to get away from it. Counterphobic. I decided to go into it and divulge influences and not try to pretend like they weren't there or deny them, whatever. So again that word came up the first couple of times, decided more on the inclusive, rather than exclusive, because I just think that's more my nature.

PK: As I was saying when I was cut off here, we are talking about individuality, originality, and sort of a signature. The observation I was going to make, whether it matters too much to you, then or now, that, in fact, there developed, certainly in the seventies, what amounts to a signature Wiley. I think it had most to do, frankly, with the watercolors, as much as anything, which are really quite wonderful, and whatever else you've done, certainly you staked out your own kind of territory with that. But I get a sense, in what you've been saying, of a kind of almost communal endeavor. I don't know if this could be associated with some of the "hippie attitudes," summer of love, this kind of tribalism that developed certainly for a while here. But I do think of you in connection with these group shows that you do. I think of that poster that came from--I can't remember the source for that, if it was Ruth Braunstein. But there's a poster of you guys dressed up like the Old Masters, not just guys, by the way. But there's Richard Shaw, you, Henderson, Hudson.

WW: Bill Allen, Marcus Shaw, Jamie Allen, and Alice Shaw.

PK: To me that's very telling, very revealing. What its implications are I don't entirely know, but you do definitely get a sense of almost a familial thing, a shared endeavor, not down to the details. Is that a fair way to describe it?

WW: Yes. Well, that's Richard Shaw staging photographs based on famous paintings has been a theme he's carried through.

PK: So that's what that was.

WW: Yes.

PK: Was it a Rembrandt, maybe.

WW: Yes, it wasn't Rembrandt, but it was one of that ilk.

PK: Frans Hals, maybe?

WW: It wasn't Hals, either. I can't remember the name, but it was based on his painting. Prior to that Richard

Shaw poster, that I liked a lot, based on Custer's Last Stand, with B_____, I think as Custer. A lot of people with stakes on their head, looks like they'd been scalped. Ruthie Braunstein as an Indian lady on a horse. Richard's done a lot of those. Yes, I think that kind of group, "let's throw in together and do something camaraderie" stuff has happened over the years in some interesting ways.

PK: I don't want to romanticize this too much, but there seems to be a certain lack of competitive envy. At least, there's the appearance of that. This isn't to say that people aren't aware of how they're perceived in their position, how they're doing in the galleries, who's having the shows and all that. But there seems to be here less of that than I imagined to be the case, especially in New York, where there's such a driving force to success.

WW: Well, as I said, I don't think the rewards are here, at least the financial and the kind of star reflection that it has, the power thing in the East. I don't think that's here, although I've been told just the opposite by the East Coast. Out here you can be a big fish in a little puddle, but back there the puddle's too big, so everybody's a little fish. In some ways, that winter I spent back East, I met people who worked back there, who contradicted my cliched version of East Coast people. Just like you meet people out here who seem very ambitious and probably hang around the art scene a lot more. I just think my generation of artists and art friends, a lot of them were teachers. They taught in situations and shared teaching situations. I don't know how to follow-up on that.

PK: I'm interested in, and I think this follows to a certain extent, the idea of, on the one hand, community and the notion of originality and individuality and work, which I think then connects to the notion of self, a sense of self, a sense of self-image. We were talking at lunch a little bit about that, the question, search for the self, whatever else is going on. One of the images that is associated with you, something I'd like to talk about a little while now in different ways, is the idea of Wiley the trickster. It brings to mind, I mean, even your name, Wiley Coyote. You certainly know about that wonderful cartoon, and the Road Runner. It also then extends or expands in the form of the idea of the magician, the alchemist. We were talking about alchemy and you, in one way or another, casting yourself literally in your art in that guise and then sometimes in a less direct way. Of course, the trickster is a very important idea in certain cultures, I think of close to home, Latino culture, Latin America, and even throughout the Southwest. The coyote, once again, gets to play that role. My question is, is this a persona that in some ways you've, for one reason or another, assumed for your own ends, whatever they may be? Is this something that you consciously assumed or invoked to make a certain kind of aesthetic or philosophical statement?

WW: Well, I think most of those things initially come on as just a practical solution. I think the most developed alter ego, or the one that's most defined, is Mr. Unnatural. That was just a character. How that came about was when I was at Davis I became friends with a man in the drama department, Dan Snyder [phonetic], and we both had mutual interests in art and theater, so now I'm mixing them. At that time, seventies, performance art was also becoming known about. So Dan and I collaborated, just the two of us, on an event we did one time in the basement of the art building, just a kind of improv thing that we did with some props, a Jonathan Winters sort of thing. Then started collaborating with art students and drama students who wanted to do something other than just straight drama or straight art. So we procured various theaters on the UC-Davis campus and gave presentations, performances. They attracted more students from both drama and art and it kept getting larger and more elaborate and got quite large and quite elaborate. I had left Davis at one point, a leave of absence, and wasn't there. I don't know if that was after I quit or not. But anyway, the interest to do another performance, which at one point we titled "Out Our Way," based on an old cartoon that I used to see when I was a kid in the newspapers under the same title, "Out Our Way," and it was kind of generally one-frame cartoon of a situation in a factory or a home in the thirties and forties. I don't know who drew it.

PK: It was in the newspapers?

WW: Yes at least in the Midwest. Nice drawings, fairly elaborate drawings, something along the quality of George Harriman, a little bit more social conscious work. Anyway, "Out Our Way," it was called. That's what we started calling these events. So generally when they came about, I was there and part of the process, and so whatever evolved, evolved out of the process. But here Dan was coming up with it, but asking me to come back and join it, sort of not in progress, but at the beginning. So coming in from the outside, rather than having it evolve from inside as it had up to that point, I thought I needed some kind of character or costume in order to get back into it. Mr. Unnatural was--I was sitting around sketching one afternoon--was the figure that evolved. Thinking, as people point up, probably about Crumb's, Art Crumb's Mr. Natural. Well, Mr. Unnatural. And that would kind of cover my character in the "Out Our Way" performance. The costume that evolved was roughly what I conceived on that and got the dunce hat and a slate, that he would not speak, but write on. So it was a practical solution. I had to come back into Davis and do this thing. I don't know, since I didn't start it, like I said, since usually before it all evolved from being there, I was coming back in from the outside, so it was like I need some kind of a cover. This occurred as the cover. Then after those performances, whatever took place during them would often be the strongest thing in my mind as imagery, that's when I came back to the studio, those often--the drawings and comments about what I'd just been involved in, would kind of occur here.

PK: Who was your collaborator on that, Dan?

WW: Dan Snyder.

PK: He was in the department?

WW: Yes, he taught stage design. He painted. Basically an artist background. He didn't have much background in theater, but he picked it up somewhere along the line. He was in Europe and did some designing there. Then he got hired at Davis to teach stage and set design. Similar sensibility, kind of wacky sensibility.

PK: Did you ever meet Crumb?

WW: No.

PK: I never thought of this. It's pretty lacking insight on my part. But I would think that you must have really been interested in the underground comics of those days, certainly many of them based right here in the Bay Area.

WW: Yes, somewhat, although it all seemed just parallel activity at the time. Yes, Wilson and Vic Moscoso [phonetic] I went to school with. He was a graduate student when I was an undergraduate at the Art Institute. But I knew Vic a little bit when he was out here in the valley. Crumb--actually, at a show I had at Hansen Fuller [unclear], a notebook occasionally [unclear] the San Francisco Museum, a ship's log where you [unclear] was another piece. I think there's one at the Oakland Museum. Anyway, there was a notebook there that people could write in or comment. At the end of the show I looked through it and had a nice drawing by Crumb with a guy saying, "I don't get it." [Laughs] It tickled me. I think it was him.

PK: Did you see the documentary on Crumb?

WW: Never saw it.

PK: It was very disturbing, of course, because he had a horribly dysfunctional family. But there are a number of sequences where he actually is drawing and actually completes fairly elaborate drawings. I'll tell you, I was absolutely fascinated by that facility, an incredible [unclear].

WW: Yes, right.

PK: Just amazing.

WW: Yes. A lot of that look is that comic I mentioned, "Out Our Way." A lot of Crumb's drawing has very much that same quality, yes, from the thirties' and forties' cartooning. Interesting kind of thing we were talking about the other day, Wilbert's holon kind of transcending and honoring, going forwards and backwards at the same time. That kind of appeal.

PK: Back to the idea of the trickster, though. This is not a concept, I gather, that you paid any particular attention to in a sort of anthropological sense, in other cultures what that might mean, that you might be in some ways connected to that role.

WW: Yes. Yes, I see it.

PK: Were you aware?

WW: Well, I've become aware. Like most of the stuff in the work, I don't think a lot of it starts out conscious. But through whatever your soul and heart is telling you and wherever it's taking you, those things become synchronized with them. So become aware of them and sometimes you take it on more formally, look into it a little bit more. But I think I tended to put more in the intuitive. Somebody will mention it, thinking that, "Oh, you must have studied that." No, I didn't. I just picked it up through osmosis. It gets explained to me as I go along in some ways, which I find more interesting in some ways. That shows there's something operating outside the conscious mind, which I think often prevents a deeper understanding. If it's all done consciously, plotted, you see a connection, you exploit it, you follow that up into the next one. I think you lose sometimes what it was that was actually happening there through trying to specify it and trying to pin it down. If I did this well, not knowing, or not being that conscious, then maybe I should continue in that vein until that becomes less interesting or something. So, that's what always interested me, is finding those parallel things. It's a surprise and kind of a delight in a way. It'd be a little less interesting to me, probably, if I was that conscious of it out front.

PK: There's an element, I think a very strong element, of self-portraiture in your work. We've talked about this a little bit, a presence of the self in your work and it takes different forms, Mr. Unnatural being one of them. You're constantly appearing, as far as I'm concerned, as I look through these catalogs and so forth. What strikes me as

interesting about this, and I don't think it's any kind of contradiction, you have, on the one hand, an interest in Eastern thinking and Zen, I do believe. I'm certainly not an authority on that, but one of the aspects of Zen that I suspect is operative is a sense of erasure of self, ofsubsuming the self in something, other something greater, a sort of modesty. But in your work, despite, I believe, an interest in those kinds of ideas, in your work there is a strong sense, I think, of the individual. I would describe this individual as kind of rugged, even, kind of Western and a pioneer, sort of frontiersmen. Which all leads me to think of a kind of existential Wiley. I guess the question here is, is the trickster, the magician, your way of ordering this chaos? Ortega [unclear] chaos that we talked about earlier.

WW: Well, yes, I think, all the different selves we manufacture and produce are ways to deal with the chaos, yes. The profusion of forms and potentials that we find in here, ourselves, our souls. Yes, sure. Yes, I think all those things are. I think everybody has those selves, too, some in more obvious and some in less obvious degrees, but it's pretty much beared out in that we are hardly the same with different people. Almost every people we meet at least in some--if it's in solo we become a different person, too, in regard to whoever, or whatever, or however they are. I mean, I guess that's one of the main tenets of Zen, is that there is no self. It's an imagined thing. Steven Lavine's book, Who Dies, trying to locate the one that dies by asking those kinds of questions.

PK: You seem to have created a kind of coexistence--I don't know what term actually to use. Kind of a balance between these ideas, that they don't have to be mutually exclusive, that you can bring the Western sense of individuality and self, presence of self, to the work, while acknowledging this other idea of an immersion, subsuming individuality, and yet you can hold on to both.

WW: Well, I think the other part, the rugged individual, that's like the early American ideal that I was raised on. Especially for a male, that was the kind of persona you had to develop in order to be an American, alive, a human being. You had to be this John Wayne kind of undaunted regardless of the situation. So I think both those things coexist in me. I think probably without the Eastern one I'd be dead. [Laughs] Gets you off the hook. And it's a more generous and lenient interpretation of what one's life might possibly be about, I think especially in relationship to a more linear goal-oriented version that most of us have been raised on. Nobody remembers who's second. You have to be at the top.

PK: What about your identification--we touched on it earlier--at the University of Colorado at Boulder? You talked about the summer of love and an awareness of, in a sense, connection to what was going on during the sixties, the whole so-called hippie sensibility and all that entails, which I, myself, tend to view as almost a subset contemporary bohemianism, if you will. Looking back, how do you see yourself as functioning within that kind of role, in a bigger sense the whole idea of conducting your life with a bohemian ideal?

WW: That whole era looked to me like the rest of society was joining m_____, finally. [Laughs] Everybody had awakened. Gee, you know, we can all dance and sing and write poetry and share things, and to hell with war and all that goal-oriented stuff. Gee, look, our life is passing by here as we try to apprehend those things. So it was like finally, maybe in some G_____ sense, everybody woke up briefly. Then when we went back to sleep on some other version. But basically, I think it was a kind of conscious awakening of, you know, the connectiveness of everything, a lot of it brought about through, I think, acid and Leary and peyote and things that removed a lot of the superficial barriers and conventional barriers. It gave people access to information that had been pretty much wiped out through formal education. I think unless you were an artist, probably a horrific thing to withstand if you weren't already there to some degree, which I think artists were already dealing with a lot of the things that erupted during that time. So, less of a cultural physical [unclear] people who were already bohemian, at least in their thinking and their lifestyles. It was like suddenly briefly for a couple of years there, the ranks swelled and all kinds of people were in that region, and then pretty quickly that shrank back to a different set of circumstances. But it had powerful social effects that we're still feeling. Somebody said things move in kind of thirty-year cycles. An idea like that will appear in the sixties and it will start to resurface again thirty years later.

PK: Which is now.

WW: That you can see. Yes. But you can see aspects of that in ways, as environmentalism and those things become more relevant topics and are harder to keep out people's concern. I think that was just an early eruption of a form of consciousness that has to reemerge, I think, in some ways, not shorten our tenure here.

PK: There was a certain Utopianism that I remember in connection with the sixties, also a kind of innocence, I think, unawareness of some of the darker consequences of behavior. But from your own experience and within the Art Institute crowd, or the group you're part of here, how aware were you all of that, the notion of conducting your lives in a different way, in a liberating way, that finally set you aside, but, more than that, held some kind of promise for an improved world and society? Was that something that you were actively thinking about?

WW: Oh, yes, sure. It seemed like in some ways everybody's finally awakened to the potential of a life of art and love and sharing. I thought, well, once you see this, you know, why would you do anything else? It seems pretty

nice. But it's a very shortsighted, naive viewpoint. But it all seemed very possible at that point in some ways. It didn't take long to exploit it pretty quickly.

PK: Isn't that the sad part?

WW: Yes. Yes.

PK: Let me flip the tape over, because we're getting towards the end and I don't want to interrupt us. We're going to not flip it, but get a new tape in here. Tape 8, side A [session 4, tape 8; 30-minute tape sides]

PK: Continuing this session four with Bill Wiley. This is tape two, side A. We're talking a little bit about those good old days, the sixties, where they maybe didn't fulfil the dreams that somehow, especially younger people, but in some other ways things have never been the same.

WW: And a brief hallucination of what it might be like with a lot of those barriers removed. I mean, ageism was certainly out the window. You had people of all ages grooving at the Fillmore. It was like a real celebration. A lot of [unclear] came out of probably the forties and fifties, repressive things and whatever. But we've never been too good about the dark side here in terms of understanding that or integrating that. It's always been pretty much relegated to one must be ousted, suppressed, or executed. I feared we were philosophically set up to suffer that fall that came about all that just because of our life and understanding. But other countries with supposedly a more sound grounding in those light-dark, yin-yang principles are just as screwed up, if not worse. So, we of the world. [Laughs]

PK: One of the things that's always puzzled me, and maybe it's almost a moralistic stance that I, myself, take but society has taken, as well, in looking at bohemia, looking at those who choose to live what, interesting enough, is often described as a selfish existence, basically a way to do what you want and then put it in the framework of a community. One of the things that always struck me as interesting is that artists--being an artist is a hard job. It takes a lot of work to make art. That's real simple. These notions that it can come out of a fever dream or an opium dream, like C_____, for instance, these romantic notions, for the most part, I think you'd agreed, simply doesn't hold up. You can't be on an acid trip all the time and make good art. How much of a role, though, did drugs play? After all you're not going to run for President anyway, so you can respond any way you want. But within, well, let's say your own creative life at that time, but then within your group. We certainly know that the Beats had their ways of using drugs and conscious or mind-altering substances with an idea, I suppose, they're going to provide insight and all that. How true was that? How much was that sort of an instrument during the sixties for the artists that you knew?

WW: I think haphazard. I mean, some people used drugs, other people were used by the drugs. I don't think it was across the board. I don't think there's any single answer to that. There were some people that used drugs who you'd say, yes, and other people who didn't who you would say, yes, they were probably out of their gourd on drugs. Definitely it had its effect, I think, on at least some people who used them, but I know people who didn't, who also changed or were affected. So I think it just depends on the person and what their life circumstances had been up to that point, whether it mattered or not in their life. I know for some people it totally changed them forever, opened them up to things they'd never experienced before. That wasn't the case for me, although I thought they were interesting, but I was already involved in art and faced with whatever art's about. So, like getting drunk or anything, you can eventually see the [unclear] of it, what it can and can't do. I think what [Carlos] Casteneda wrote in one of the Don Juan books about just drugs in general at a particular time for a particular person, it might be helpful. But all that stuff, I think, it's real hard to make general statements about it.

PK: Well, I think that's true.

WW: Yes. So many misinformed statements have been made in regard to them that I think it's--I don't know how to add to them other than confusion. Like Leary, they stayed important to him all the way through in some way.

PK: We all have friends like that, that seemed not to have changed since the sixties.

WW: But also for native church people, peyote is a ritual that apparently they perform every so often as a way of communion. So I think we need ways. Essalen is another way for some people. I think almost all of us need some way, meditation, time in the wilderness, time alone, time away from TV, fishing, going out on the ocean. Actually, when you ask things that entered my life in the last few years, been important, since that particular change that happened to me '67, '68, which was gone over and gone over in catalogs and stuff. I've talked about that as clearly and as simply as possible, what happened during that period. The only other probably significant thing in my life is the ocean. About twelve years ago I started going out in the ocean in that little Boston whaler, chasing salmon. But I think being on the ocean is probably the most important part of that. That was like adding another whole dimension.

PK: That was about ten, twelve years ago?

WW: Yes.

PK: What led you to do that? Because this sounds like--it indeed is very important. It must have been perhaps a series of events, or maybe just accidents.

WW: Yes, series of kind of circumstances, boats and ship's log, boats and nautical themes and terms and stuff had been in my life for a long time. But very haphazard connection with it, just a boat here and there. But about the time that I started going out in the ocean, a year or two before that I acquired a boat, a wooden boat, which I fixed up and learned to sail on Tomales Bay. Then got into the motor boat for going out on the ocean. So it looks like that's where, if you look back down the path of the work and stuff, it looks like that's where I was headed anyway, but I didn't know it. I didn't know I would fall in love with the ocean the way I did and it would get its hooks in me the way that it did. For the first five or six years, that's kind of all I wanted to do, is get in the boat and go out on the ocean. [Laughs] Other than art, that's kind of one of the most captivating things that's happened to me in the last few years. That's eased off a little bit now.

PK: Do you think of yourself--this is really a reach, real literary, but in some small sense, because we're talking about salmon and not whales, participating in this kind of early American idea of a quest for--I'm thinking of Moby Dick, of course, and these kinds of symbols. Obviously, the sea has been such an important part of this American story. I don't want to overanalyze something that you found important to you. But I believe my observation in connection with you is that much of what you've done, and certainly the art has served this function, is an investigation of self or search for a deeper you, always exploring further. It sounds as if this discovery of going out in the ocean has played an important part in that. Finding oneself, is that putting it too fancily?

WW: Well, I think something about [unclear], just consciousness, interested in what consciousness is and what it is that occupies us here, or we occupy. What relationship that has to the ocean, the mind, I think, is like the ocean in some ways, all that stuff hidden in there. What else? Yes, to know what there is to know.

PK: So it is a kind of, without necessarily having to put a lingo on it, a continuing quest for knowledge or self-knowledge.

WW: Yes, I think so. And just what is consciousness. There's a book by a guy called Dimoli [phonetic], Anthony Dimoli, it's called Looking Into Mind. He just says in there--I didn't read the whole book, I just read it haphazardly. It's, again, a kind of Zen or Eastern approach as to question and consciousness and what is it and ways to examine it. He just said in there at one point--I thought it was really an interesting statement--he says that the thing is, he said, "Real thinking is much more difficult than anybody actually imagines." He says, "And, in truth, very little of it goes on." I think that's pretty much true. [Laughs]

PK: When you go out on the ocean, you've got to pay attention, of course, to where you are and what's going on out there. You've got a big outboard motor on that whaler, Boston whaler, I suppose. I mean, you've got to work at it. You've got to pay attention. But on the other hand, do you find this provides an opportunity for you, as you're out there looking for your salmon, to do this kind of thinking that you say Mr. Dimoli claims doesn't really happen that much?

WW: Well, yes, I think so. Yes, the ocean, that's putting yourself in some extreme position, in a way. There's a couple of statements that I've read different places. One of them is, "You can't bullshit the ocean, because it's not listening. You can't be alone in the ocean, because it's too lonely." So actually something that's that close that you can just go out there and it doesn't care how much you know or how big your boat is, I mean, it's just not impressed by any aspect of you. [Laughs] There's something wonderful about that, where things are really reduced to very, very simple.

PK: Do you find that comforting in a way, that it reminds you of your own place within the grander scheme?

WW: Yes. Yes, I think so. It's real.

PK: Because this seems to be something, kind of a motif in your work, as a matter of fact. I suspect that your work provides some of the same kind of experience.

WW: Yes, very much so. Yes, I think the work is always humbling in some sense. And it's funny, because if you're successful at it, then you get lauded for it, which kind of builds the ego, but then the work soon takes care of that. [Laughs] So it keeps you in a kind of a balance, I guess. I've been fortunate in that way, a lot of what I've done has been received and recognized and lauded and applauded. It doesn't help much on some level, which is interesting to know, but then it probably does, too, in other ways.

PK: Let's talk a moment about Wiley's iconography, the images that keep reappearing in your work. If you look over, if you look back, oh, practically to the beginning, and then look at how the work changes and develops over the years, there are certain images that reappear over and over again. I was looking through your catalogs, for instance, the L.A. Louver [phonetic] catalog, and made a kind of list of Wiley's iconography represented there. In work like "Autumn Chimes" and "Ann Hill Watercolor" of '86, or "Was it Ever Any Different Than Now?" another Watercolor '87, of course, it's a title, which is very interesting in light of what we had discussed earlier. The idea of things, in many respects they may seem to change. But here are some of the motifs that came up with. Oh, dear, let's see. We've got, well, the anvil itself; maps; drafting tools; tools in general; cones; funnels; dunce caps; knives; trowels; pallets and easels; compasses; things that sometimes look like eyeballs; plumb lines; pencils, etc.; skulls; and then hides. It occurs to me that you, more than most artists, have developed this incredibly complex iconographical tool kit, or more, as they say, you can turn to. I don't where the question is in this so much as just really more of an observation, but what does that bring to mind for you? Here are all these Wiley elements. Is it possible for you--it's not your job;, I suppose it's our job--to make sense of this in a way? You obviously choose things for reasons and continue, if you find them useful, you continue to put them in your work. What are those reasons?

WW: Well, some of the obvious things, skulls and skeletons, is because we are, that's what we are. [Laughs] Powerful. Just a powerful image in itself. I think it's another thing out of Zen in my life, to be constantly reminded of one's own demise.

PK: Mortality.

WW: Mortality, yes. So I think most of those things have come along as a device initially, or often just a visual element that I like, that initially I take it just for that reason. At least that's why I assume I take it, but often it evolves into something else and becomes generally symbolic of more than one thing. Like the F-shape out of the musical instrument, that just represents, where at one point I used the infinity symbol a lot, use that less so now. They were just visual reminders of what those elements stood for, at least as much we knew. Sometimes just a visual device in place of--I needed something, so that F-hole, if you use that as a matrix, just working paint off of it as a beginning. It's like throwing a rock in a pond, it starts concentric circles and that causes something to happen. So it's like looking for a way into engagement or involvement. Then some of them--I think all of them are embedded somehow psychologically in me from childhood, from various sources. My father doing some surveying. A lot of them have been written about, people always want to say, see the black-and-white checker in there. What does that mean? Then I locate, as much as I can, where that came from and how it came about, but I usually don't have it categorized so that I say, here it is on page twelve, it means--I'm more interested in the multiplicity of meanings and the associations it has for me, which in one case will be one kind of association and in other case will be another one. Like I say, some of the things I started out, like with Mr. Unnatural, I bring him in and then it's like I can't get rid of him. He stays for as long as he wants. Or the checkers at one point, I was happy to use kind of that checkered square, which I kind of picked up in Holland, seeing a blue-and-white plaque on a wall in Holland and asking my friend, "Why is that there?" He says, "It shows that it's part of a historical landmark and if you're following the mission guide and you see those blue-and-white plaques, you know that wall or that church or that building has historical significance." That wasn't what interested me. What interested me was what I saw visually, that clear designated image on this kind of crumbling wall. I'm not looking at it; I'm just remembering. So it wasn't the fact that it was connected with a mission guide or historical image, it was just the visual aspect that you looked up and suddenly, with no explanation, this blue-and-white plaque was there. Once I got the explanation, I lost interest in it to some degree, but I already had it as a visual circumstance that I organized a lot of paintings and drawings around for a while. Some people say, "Well, is that a Western version of the yang-yin?" Then I say, "Yes, that sounds good." So I think a lot of those things kind of swim out of that region and start out as one thing and turn into something else.

PK: Your work, I think, could fairly be described as visually and verbally complex. It certainly isn't reductionist, minimalist, in any sense of the word. It goes really much in the other direction, as does a lot of Bay Area art, I think.

WW: Maximal rather than minimal.

PK: Very characteristic of your work is the use of narrative and puns. This is not difficult to notice or to point out. But I wonder if for just a few moments we could perhaps explore a little the purpose of the narrative and especially the puns, the playing with words beyond the obvious reference to both the language and perhaps the slipperiness of language itself. This would be one of my guesses, but I'd like to know your thoughts on this. Do you see, to a certain extent, these strategies of yours as a kind of rejection of a fixed or singular meaning?

WW: To some degree, yes. Yes, I was just rereading a statement, going through the catalogs, by Graham Beal about my work, which was good and succinct. It just said that where an entity is on the verge of becoming something else, was my domain.

PK: You agree with that?

WW: Yes. Yes, because everything is in that--I think that's a truer state of how things are. Mary and I were talking about it this morning, I don't know how it came up exactly, said, well, you remember some comment about a show and said, for me, truly God was into details. My thought was, "What is not a detail?" Show me something that isn't a detail. [Laughs] Depending on how wide the mind or the vision is. So I mean, we're kind of stuck with details, unless somebody knows something beyond that. But I knew basically, I think, what she was saying.

PK: Pretty soon I'm going to wind up here. I feel a certain sadness about it, because I feel in some ways like we're just beginning to plumb. But who knows, there may be other opportunities to check in on this again. But I want to do what I threatened to do earlier, and that's go back to offer you a second time this opportunity to write your own blurb in what we call posterity's Dictionary of Art. Imagine that there's this big publication and under "W" there's Wiley, William T. Wiley. You're lucky, I guess, because you have the opportunity to, in a few sentences, place yourself, not so much in life, but as an individual who makes art. Acknowledging that there are categories, there are--sure we're all individuals, but we tend to gravitate towards something shared by others, art style, art ideas. I asked you maybe to think about it a little bit. Can you do that at all? If you had to write yourself into this dictionary, what would be important to you to have in there? What would be important, so that people could perhaps apprehend you and your work a little better, place it?

WW: Well, I feel like I've left a lot of that in the work. So I don't have to do it; it's in the work verbally, visually, and as many ways as I could possibly get it in there. So if I haven't left it there, then trying to sum it up in another paragraph isn't going to help any either. I don't know. You asked me that before, and I don't have any idea. Nothing comes to mind as to what--

PK: Well, a part of it then, I see you operating an awful lot on the edge of mystery. Believe me, I don't think that it's your responsibility to explain that, or, for that matter, your work, to anybody. But once again, I'll try one more time, if you had to, if you were forced up against the wall, and you had to say, "This is where I am, by my nature and the choices I have made as a creative person, this is the territory I occupy," would it be in the realm of the visionary, rather than the concrete artist, what we sometimes call poets of the imagination? There are these categories, they're somewhat useful, but would you feel comfortable in that terrain, in that area, the visionary?

WW: Visionary.

PK: The visionary, the symbolist, the poet of the imagination. The realm of mystery.

WW: Sure, that's good enough.

PK: I'm sorry, I had to say it. [Laughs] In a sense, is that how you see yourself, as opposed to, say, a constructivist who's operating with measurement and formulas and that kind of thing?

WW: Well--

PK: I'm trying awfully hard here to pin you down, and you don't have to let yourself be pinned down, that's for sure. [Laughs]

WW: Yes. Well, when you said "mystery," I just thought of this piece up here that's called "Return Of The Batenoids" [phonetic] and it says in there, "So the mysterious is no longer mysterious, which is very mysterious." [Laughs]

PK: Which in itself is somewhat enigmatic.

WW: Yes. Well, things that are enigmatic seem clearer to me than that which is supposed to be clear. I mean, I think we have some idea of clarity, which is only an idea. When we hesitate towards any kind of category because of its continued inaccuracy and continued exploitation--

PK: We're coming towards the end, and I can't add anything to that. So I want to thank you. I've enjoyed it. I hope we have a chance to revisit this at some point.

[End of interview]