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Oral history interview with Brian O'Doherty, 2009 Nov. 16-17

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Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview with Brian O'Doherty on 2009 November 16 and 17. The interview took place at O'Doherty's home in New York, NY, and was conducted by James W. McManus for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for this interview was provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

James W. McManus has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JAMES W. MCMANUS: This is James W. McManus interviewing Brian O'Doherty at his home in New York City on November 16, 2009 [for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution]. This is disc number one.

Well, Brian, let's try this again.

BRIAN O'DOHERTY: Let's not do it all over again. Let's pick up from there. Coming to New York in, as it were, in a luxury ride because I was—had two shows—series—on NBC at that time. One was a show, *Invitation to Art*, that was done at GBH Boston—was then broadcast nationally on what was then National Educational Television. Now it's PBS. And the other was a show called *Dialogue*, in which I interviewed the—[inaudible]. Woody Allen and—Woody Allen and what's—her—name, the actress—the one who was in *Gone with the Wind*.

MR. MCMANUS: Mia Farrow?

MR. O'DOHERTY: No, not Mia Farrow. Never did Mia Farrow. Oh, a variety of people. Had Duchamp on that show, actually, with James Thrall Soby. And I had Floyd Patterson; I had Muhammad Ali; I had a couple of baseball types—players. I had Cus D'Amato, the manager. I was obviously a big boxing person in those days.

I have been knocked out, by the way. It's not a good feeling. You wake up and you say, what happened? You've missed something; yes, indeed you have. But I had actors, actresses, everybody and Rauschenberg. Rauschenberg was interestingly incoherent. And I had the geodesic dome fellow, Buckminster Fuller.

MR. MCMANUS: Buckminster Fuller.

MR. O'DOHERTY: All I had to do was ask him one question and then 28 minutes and 30 seconds later, you say, "Thank you, Mr. Fuller." I thought he was a crashing bore. Anyway, there were a great variety of rich and—in terms of personality and interest on that program.

At the same time, I'd actually gotten a letter, when I was doing this exhibition or this series in Boston, from*The New York Times*. One of the people there had seen me on television and said, come write for us. And I arrived, as I was telling you, at an interesting cockpit because at that time, I was coming into a situation that I had no idea I was landing in. And that was John Canaday, the senior critic, was a devoted antagonist to abstract expressionism en masse—no discrimination within—and the next colleague, the other critic—there were three of us in the art department—was Preston—Stuart Preston—who was like Proust without the book. He was very sensitive, thoughtful and charming man. Not a great deal of intellectual energy in his work—I don't think he wished for conflict at all.

But John certainly was in the midst of a variety—John Canaday—in the midst of a variety of conflicts. What I didn't know was that he had fired Dore Ashton, a critic of substance and a great promoter of abstract expressionism, which she had done in the pages of *The New York Times* and I thought that was wonderful. From what I have learned of it since, she was a devoted proponent of abstract expressionism and this was John's bête noir in life.

And so he tried to—he certainly did not tolerate that and felt that the requisite objectivity, which he did not practice himself, God bless him, should certainly apply to Dore Ashton. So one way or another—there must have been a long series of conflicts I knew nothing about—but Dore was gone and I was in the midst of this. And I would review things and John would say, "Oh, you're a pushover."

But I think the diversity of that time—they're just three years because I didn't want to end my days—excuse me —to end my days at the *Times*— from '61 to '64: It was an exciting time. There was a certain power outside the *Times*, signified perhaps best by Leo Castelli, who was his own establishment. Leo had a very Machiavellian, devious upon devious, charming character, whom I got to know later. But Leo had immense power.

The *Times* was very stiff—necked in those days. They had this attitude that was taken very strongly by Hilton Kramer later that "you must pass through me; I am the arbiter and you must satisfy my standards." That's a pretty old—fashioned view of criticism, I guess, because who are you and what are your standards and what are they based on and how does what is new test your standards and how do you adjust them if your standards are not applicable? Blah, blah, blah; et cetera, et cetera.

So the *Times* had that stiff neck in those days and Max Frankel was the guy who loosened up the Times. He was the editor of the Times later on, after I left—long after I left. He lives upstairs now with Joyce Purnick, who has just written a book on our mayor, Bloomberg—excellent book.

But the *Times*, as I say—[inaudible]—fellow—spirited, may I presumptuously say, some of our liveliness was going to lease over on the reporters' section. I remember we all lived in our little glass cubicles and I remember him coming over a gate and he's coming over and saying, "You guys live so good over here," he said. [Laughs.] They were in the bullpen.

But I remember on one occasion too that the fellow who wrote *The Two Cultures*, C. P. Snow—and he wrote a fine novel, *The Masters*, but he was a conservative and I ran into this English gentleman in the corridor. And he said, "I'm looking for John Canaday and I want to"—what he wanted to do was congratulate him on his opposition to abstract expressionism. So I brought him over to "St. George's" glassy cell and left him there and presumably they got on very well.

But John was a man of great personal courtesy and some erudition and he had come up from Philadelphia, where he was in the Department of Education at the Philadelphia Museum. John and I got on very well but I thought he was extremely harsh, unnecessarily harsh. I remember when I came first—he said, "I'm writing about Robert Motherwell; would you like to look at it?" I said, "Sure, yeah, let's look at it." So I looked at it and I sort of shivered and said, "Jesus, that's rough." And I said, "John, would you like to rethink this sentence or two?" He said, "No," and he never showed me anything again. But it hurt Motherwell considerably, I remember. But anyway, there we go. These are the *Times* days. I did not want to spend, end my days at the *Times* and I had other things to do.

So it was at the *Times* that I started making, surreptitiously and quietly, some of my best work. One of them being a piece on James Joyce called *In the Wake of*, based on *Finnegan's Wake*. Then I did something called *The Body and its Discontents*, which I brought my medical knowledge to bear on, and I also did something called *The Critic's Boots*,—all of these shown much later because in my first show, in '66, two years after I left the *Times*, I didn't want to be tagged as an Irishman—Joyce. I wanted to be a New York artist. I didn't want to be tagged as a critic so I didn't show *The Critic's Boots*. And *The Body and its Discontents* was too medical for me to show, as it were, although now they're in various happy places.

The *Times* years were instructive for me. I conducted my education in public, as I had on television for three years previously. And I should go back and talk about those television days at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. And we can rehearse those days when we get this thing [digital recorder] in good working order.

MR. MCMANUS: I believe we have.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I had a very wonderful sort of a graduate school, as it were, at the Museum of Fine Arts because I was the television lecturer, succeeding Barbara Novak, who became my wife.

I had a curious nature, obviously, in every sense, and I had Cornelius Vermeule to instruct me in classical matters, classical art. There was Perry Rathbone, who was very good in contemporary art, in particularly on the Beckmann, Max Beckmann. I had Dows Dunham, an Egyptian scholar; I had Tomita [Kôjirô]—I've forgotten his first name—in Asian art, who instructed me. I would go around, you see, and I'd ask them things. There was someone called Gertrude somebody and Dos Kethalowin [ph] in fabrics and—that isn't quite the name of the department. Then I had another chap on drawings—Peter somebody. I've forgotten all their names now because it's 40, 50 years later. But they were all very—people of substance, worthy folk. Particularly Cornelius Vermeule was a very lively soul and his wife, Emily—both classicists.

So there I was and all I had to do to find out something was to go and talk to them. And of course, I read Kumaraswamy; I read this; I read that, I read everybody. And I looked up each of the—you know the file that each painting has? And there's a wonderful collection up there. And so for three years, I had a ball.

MR. MCMANUS: In her introduction to the catalogue for your retrospective, "Beyond the White Cube", Barbara Dawson, speaking of the early 1960s, offered this observation. She said, "O'Doherty, in his work, has expressed an allegiance to the grid system adopted from the ancient Irish language, Ogham."

MR. O'DOHERTY: Ogham.

MR. MCMANUS: "Ogham," sorry.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Ogham—like ahem.

MR. MCMANUS: "It has been the basis for much of his work. O'Doherty does not fit easily into the canons of contemporary art."

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, Ogham is not a grid system. That's the first thing. It's a serial system that has a distant cousinship to serial music. The grid was something else. I first came across the grid—and this will amuse you—I came across the grid when I was testing blood. When you're a medical student and you're an intern in your hospital—at the Mater Hospital in Dublin, where my boss was a very fine surgeon, Andrew Butler, who devastated my profile, that later did something that never should have been done.

Anyway, he—I was—he was a man of honor and principles and conscience, which is not always the case among medical folk. Anyway, he was good—had a good training, but I was his house surgeon. As a medical student, I was a student of Henry Barneval [ph], another legendary name in Dublin medicine. And you start off, of course, in the lab, just testing piss and doing blood counts.

So the blood count—you do a blood count on a grid and you look through the microscope. And there is this transparent grid. And on it are all the red cells, right? And you count the number of red cells—

MR. MCMANUS: Platelets.

MR. O'DOHERTY: —in each cell of the grid. And that, then, gives you—I forgot now; all this long—gone—but it gives you the count. And so looking through the microscope, there is this transparent grid. Now, the grid came back into my work, obviously, this Ogham is disposed in a grid and the Ogham was about language. But Rosalind Krauss says that in his devotion to his grid, he was a typical New York artist, speaking of my work early on. And I found the grid enormously useful. In fact, in this *Recorder*, there is Liam Kelly, the curator from Belfast.

MR. MCMANUS: The journal *Recorder*.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, the journal *Recorder*. Liam Kelly, the curator from Belfast, has several things to say about the grid, or is it the other woman—Mia Lerm Hayes, the German woman also from Belfast? But the grid, anyway, was central to a great deal of my work, as it was for many artists then. We were all gridders, and I was a mainline gridder. [McManus laughs.]

MR. MCMANUS: I was curious about that last part of Dawson's remark: "O'Doherty does not fit easily into the canons of contemporary art."

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, what contemporary art is she talking about? I presume she is talking about Irish art. And I certainly don't fit into Irish art—contemporary Irish art very well.

MR. MCMANUS: I read her comments as really talking on a broader basis than Irish.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I wonder. I wonder. Her main person is Bacon and she has that wonderful Bacon studio reproduced in her museum, which is a great achievement on her part. And she did a wonderful retrospective for me in the new galleries there, terrific new galleries. And that's the one that came over here to New York—not the galleries, the show. But I don't know what she means by that. She doesn't elaborate on it. I don't know what she means.

MR. MCMANUS: Well, I wondered if it is because your work does not seem to flow out of a single and identifiable set of problems in which is there a continued and evolving set of solutions that are—

MR. O'DOHERTY: A decipherable career.

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, well, I hope I don't have a decipherable career because I've done—I should add, Jim, and this is very important to me—that anything I say in these interviews and in this very friendly discussion, I feel entirely free to contradict at any time– because I am a great disbeliever in any kind of stable self—identity or utterance whereby others—which is then taken to form the intersecting vectors in which this quivering creature —yourself—like some cinematograph image, trembles—

MR. MCMANUS: Well, I think you've made that pretty evident in the portrait that you've done of the self—the collection of photographs—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Of selves. Yes, right.

MR. MCMANUS: —over an extended period of time, and the transition, the gains and the losses that are there, the movement from one physical representation into another.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Absolutely true because I don't want to be pinned down in any way. And so therefore—you know, Pirandello says that, you know, "Don't take what I say now as gospel because tomorrow, I may be something else"—not say something else; I may be something else.

We all are serial replacements—you know, in terms of the Jim McManus when he was 20 and the Jim McManus when he was 40 and 60—and they are different people and it's different, I'm quite sure. [McManus laughs] I didn't know you then, but I'm quite sure that they are replacements with traces of the former selves. I'm very aware of that because I think that there is a sort of ocean, a vast ocean in each mind.

MR. MCMANUS: My wife and daughter and I were having a conversation the other night and it got down to the cellular level where the hypothetical proposition that every cell in our body is changed over a course of seven years.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes, it is. Yeah, it is. Oh, it is.

MR. MCMANUS: So I jokingly said to my wife that she's been married to five—[O'Doherty laughs]—of me.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I like that. I like that very much. But don't you think it's true that, you know, I always find a test for this, if you can call it a test, in the way the United States kills its murderers. They leave them on death row for varying lengths of time so that it may be five, 10, 15, 20 years later—

MR. MCMANUS: And it may not even be the same person.

MR. O'DOHERTY: It's not the same person. So I find that very peculiar. And if there is justice, it should be rapid and quick and just. But in the same way, I feel entirely free to—because sometimes I come across things that I've said or supposed to have said in a certain context, which is different from the context in which they're being used, at which time the meaning is not the one that you may have said in an interview that you gave or that I have said in an interview that I gave that is not what the meaning, at the time, was.

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah, that is a care that is needed and not often exercised.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I agree completely. So these things are always provisional. And we all—some of us just enjoy talking. I know I do. And so sometimes various fantasies and excursions that perhaps shouldn't be paid attention to take off and then they are shown this cross like a werewolf and you rear back in horror. [McManus laughs.] Did I say that? Does that cross me?

MR. MCMANUS: I guess ultimately we'll find out how careful I have been or not been regarding a work of yours that's attracted a lot of my attention—the first part of it shown in 1966 in the Byron Gallery here in New York. And am I correct that was one of your first major exhibitions?

MR. O'DOHERTY: That was my first exhibition. I never had had an exhibition before that. And you know what, I was thinking of that the other day. I was born in '28. For many years I pretended I was born in '32, '34. Once I —

MR. MCMANUS: I've read '34 as an age—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes. That's right.

MR. MCMANUS: Wikipedia has you down as born in 1934. [laughs.]

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. That's good because I felt a sort of vague resentment that anybody would want to pin down my date of birth. So sometimes I said 1916. [They laugh.] I remember I was out on the West Coast and I was at a show at LACMA and a very nice guy came along and interviewed me and he said to Tuchman, who was the curator, he said, "You know, that fellow looks really good for his age." [They laugh.] I had given him the wrong age.

So that elusiveness is not just play. I think it's a deep desire not to be pinned down, which can work against you as well as work for you because I have a great reluctance to be pinned down to anything. And it was something I recognized in de Kooning. De Kooning was very elusive in that fashion and I feel that my mode of escape from set molds was far more amiable than Bill de Kooning's.

MR. MCMANUS: Well, I think that's a real problem for artists, because those of us who work as art historians

want a very knowable commodity with which to work. Often, we're quite satisfied to have a definable Brian O'Doherty or a definable de Kooning or whomever.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Betty Parsons had that problem because—Betty was a wonderful woman. She couldn't [sell] toffee, but she was a terrific woman. I'm the better for knowing Betty. But I remember a show of mine—I forget which one—at Betty's, I developed this idea that I didn't want to be at my opening, that I was superfluous furniture and that an artist at his opening is in the way. So I didn't go. She was very upset; as well she should be because she's in business. She's trying to sell things. But she also had the problem that she knew somebody, Brian O'Doherty, and then she's selling somebody called "Patrick Ireland." And Brian O'Doherty was fairly—moderately—modestly well—known, and then she has somebody who is unknown. So this compromised her task. But more complicated—but anyway, this business with this, I don't want to emphasize it, but I do feel that I am free to contradict anything I have said.

MR. MCMANUS: Let's go back to that '66 show at the Byron Gallery because it contained some rather significant works and ideas that were, in some cases, in their nascence.

MR. O'DOHERTY: It was very generative for me.

MR. MCMANUS: The Chessseries.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, very generative.

MR. MCMANUS: The Five Centsseries. And of course the beginning of the Duchamp heart portrait.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Right, right. That was something—who was the set I was running around with at that time? There was a young English artist, 1970—'65, Peter Hutchinson. Peter's up there now in Rhode Island—not Rhode Island—in the—Cape Cod. What's the town in Cape Cod? He's up there, anyway. And we still see each other from time to time. But he introduced me to Sol Lewitt, Eva Hesse and Smithson and Bochner and all those guys. And we hung out for several years together.

And I remember in that show—and I was—as I said, Duchamp was very important to me. I thought that—you see, remember this business Duchamp used to say "dumb as a painter"—that—the thing in Paris. And I think that was very, very true. Now everybody is so smart and so bright and so slippery and so sophisticated in terms of media and so manipulative in terms of response—manipulating response—blah, blah, blah. I think it's a time of considerable decadence. But then we're always in a great decadence, one way or another.

And you think something can't get worse and then it gets worse. It's a form of inverse creation that is fascinating. So anyway, I was fascinated with Duchamp—with Duchamp's intelligence. I admired certain people. Joyce was very, very bright. He was a brilliant man, for a writer. [laughs.] No. There's a thing where artists are kind of stupid. And there's a lot of artists and writers who are not that bright. Joyce was piercingly brilliant. And so was Duchamp. And I was very taken with Duchamp.

MR. MCMANUS: You'd first met him while you were still in Boston when you'd come to New York?

MR. O'DOHERTY: I came down specially to meet him. And I called him up. He didn't want to be interviewed. And that's what I came down for, to try and persuade him to come up to Boston and let me interview him for this invitation to our program at the MFA [Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]. And I remember, I forget where he was then—was it somewhere in the Twenties? I don't know where it was.

But I remember ringing the bell and coming in and seeing him peering over the banister several floors up with his—you know, no collar—you know, that sort of thing with stripes that your daddy used to wear in Europe long ago. And I went up. And we had this marvelous conversation. Of course, he wouldn't give an inch. And I made a note of that and I must send it to you because I discovered it when it swam up from the sea of papers around that Barbara and I live in the midst of. I'll have to send you that because there wonderful things in it.

But one of the things he said about—he didn't—he said– you know, everything is unknowable essentially. And he said, "You can't tell the bather from the bathwater, and that we're in the bathwater." And I thought that was a marvelous, vulgarian parallel to Yeats', "How can we tell the dancer from the dance," in one of his poems. So, how can we tell ourselves from the bathwater? I thought that was great.

So we got on very well actually. I didn't realize then that it was the beginning of a friendship. Because he wanted to be interviewed, as I remember at one time, and he'd seen me being interviewed by—I was interviewed for a half an hour on Channel 13 here—I don't even know the date. But he saw that and when he—somebody was looking for somebody to interview him and he asked for me. And that was the beginning, I think, of our friendship.

And so he knew—you know, people know who know you. And I knew Duchamp, in a way. There's a kind of recognition thing that you know people who know you. And so he was very amiably disposed. And I said, may I take your portrait? Without hesitation, he said, "Yes." So I said, "Would you come to dinner?" So Teeny [Alexina Duchamp] and he came to dinner. Is this the story you're thinking of?

MR. MCMANUS: Oh, yes.

MR. O'DOHERTY: And so it was the fourth of April, 1966. It was the fourth, I think it was. And before dinner—Barbara insists it's before dinner—I invited him to come into the bedroom and he did. Barbara was making, as you well know, from her Julia Child, some toxic brew—[they laugh]—with which she would try to kill poor Duchamp, and while the voluptuous Teeny looked on. I also think there was another couple there.

MR. MCMANUS: Oh, Dick Feigan was there too.

MR. O'DOHERTY: And I think it was Dick Feigan. And—

MR. MCMANUS: I've talked to him about it.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. Does he remember it at all?

MR. MCMANUS: Somewhat.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. But anyway, he was there. And I don't know why Dick Feigan was there. I have no idea. And there was a guy called David Herbert who was a wonderful guy. I used to be in his gallery. But the friendship with—

MR. MCMANUS: Weren't the Hamiltons there?

MR. O'DOHERTY: No. No. The English guy—no, he wasn't there.

MR. MCMANUS: No, I mean George Heard.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Oh, George Heard Hamilton. No—yeah, he was a great supporter of Duchamp. I don't think so. I'll ask Barbara. But anyway, he came into the bedroom. And I said, take off your—"would you lie on the bed?" Of course, he did. "Would you take off your shoes?" "Would you take off your shirt?" Blah, blah, blah. Now, I think that if you ask somebody to come into your bedroom and asked to disrobe to that degree, you might have a question.

I had hired an electric cardiographic machine and it was there beside the bed. He did it all without—very cool, very cool, admirably cool. Didn't turn a hair. So I attached those things—the leads to his wrists and to his ankles. In those days, there were metal things that you had to put some goo underneath. And I said, asked him to lie still, which he did, benign as can be. And I turn on the machine saying, "Christ, I hope this works."

And so I turned it on, lead one. Okay, it's coming out. Lead two, lead three—aVL, aVR, aVF. Now, the other thing you could do was take six heart leads, in which you would put an extra lead—six positions around the heart. I said, "The hell with that. I'm not going to do that. I said, I got enough. I got his heartbeat." And so as I have said many, many times—and you and I have discussed this—he got up, put on his shirt, put on his shoes, and said, "How am I?" Now, that really surprised me. It shouldn't, but it really surprised me.

Now, reading EKGs, as you know, is a tricky business. And I hadn't—I had lost that literacy obviously. And I wasn't going to speculate in any way. All I knew that is an inverted T—wave is really bad news and there didn't—there was no inverted T—wave. But years later, your daughter has read that cardiogram and discovered low take—off on the PQRST [Palliative/Provoking, Quality, Radiation, Severity, Timing— chest pain evaluation] area—

MR. MCMANUS: "ST".

MR. O'DOHERTY: —signifying an infarction, a cardiac infarction probably in the posterior region of the apex, if I remember her correctly. So there was some pathology there. And of course, he'd been having problems at some point. But he said, "Well," he said, "Thank you from the bottom of my heart." And then he suggested when he realized what was going on that this was his portrait, he suggested that I sign it Brian O'Doherty, M.D.

MR. MCMANUS: I think that's crafty. [Laughs.]

MR. O'DOHERTY: That was so crafty. But I was up for him. [They laugh.] I wasn't going to let him share in his own—he had given me my readymade. His heart had made a readymade. There it was for all time—Duchamp's heartbeat. And so, as you well know, then I embarked on a long procedure. Because I could exhibit the record—okay, this is Duchamp's heartbeat. And people might say, "Yeah, that's not bad." But that wasn't good enough.

I wanted him live. I wanted him alive, because I wanted to refute his idea—one of his ideas—that the artwork had a limited life and then once it went into the museum, it diminished by half—lives into an artifact of total irrelevance to anything, and just remained like a relic on the wall with its spirit—whatever—gone. And so I wanted to refute him by having his live heartbeat on the wall of the museum. So that's a long story about how I undertook to do that.

MR. MCMANUS: But at the personal level, that also concerned you about, why am I making my own art? What's the fate of my own art?

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, I figured that this one could be pretty immortal because it—in the context of art history and in the context of the relationship to one of the giants, as I consider him to be—one of the key figures of the past hundred years—that—

MR. MCMANUS: Well, in 1965, for *ARTnews*, you had already written—

MR. O'DOHERTY: For Art—*Newsweek*—for *Newsweek*.

MR. MCMANUS: For *Newsweek*—excuse me, yes—that he would be one of the—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Giants of—yeah, yeah.

MR. MCMANUS: —major figures by the end of the century.

MR. O'DOHERTY: That's right. That's right.

MR. MCMANUS: How perceptive.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, it wasn't too difficult, was it? I think that—see, there was a great anti—Duchamp thing in New York among the abstract expressionists. And that's why that piece at *Newsweek* was turned down because the editor was married to an abstract expressionist painter. Her name was Fay Lansner. His name was Kermit Lansner. He's long gone—Kermit.

Jack Kroll was the poor man in the middle. Jack was a wonderful guy. Jack was the back—of—the—book editor. And at one time—that was one of the reasons I left the *Times*, because Jack had a vision about how those of us in the various arts communities could influence the popular culture and the opinions—affect taste among the audience, the masses, the half—million or whoever read *Newsweek*.

So he assembled, I remember, a terrific team—one of them was Peter [Benchley] or somebody—who wrote the book on which the movie was made about the fish, the shark. What do you call that movie? Famous movie.

MR. MCMANUS: *Jaws*?

MR. O'DOHERTY: *Jaws*, yeah. Peter—what's his name?

MR. MCMANUS: It doesn't come to me right now.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. And there was a sophisticated guy in theater. I would have to remember all these names. He was an excellent thinker and writer in theater. Then there's a guy in dance—Huey somebody. He assembled a terrific group of people who were going to advance the culture in America. And he had a vision, old Jack, but I left after that. I resigned over that business of not publishing the Duchamp piece.

MR. MCMANUS: The Duchamp portrait, as you developed it, in all 16 of its parts, over, what, about a year—and—a—half, because it was finished in 1967, is a clear example of your bringing together two important parts of who you are: Brian O'Doherty the physician and Brian O'Doherty the artist. Are there other works that you have done over the years where—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, *The Body and Its Discontents* has got a very medical base. I can't think of any others. But that was a happy convergence of my past with the present task of getting Duchamp—making Duchamp immortal against his will, as it were.

MR. MCMANUS: Well, there's another interesting convergence that emerges in that show also. And it's the beginning of your Chess series. You told me once that you had grown up playing chess as a child and a young man.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, we grew up playing chess in our house. Yeah.

MR. MCMANUS: And chess seems to me to be an important agent in then helping to create the Labyrinth series

and the *Labyrinth* performance works that you're going to be doing later.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. I said that I first came across the grid when I was doing blood counts as a medical student. I also came across the grid even earlier.

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah, with chess.

MR. O'DOHERTY: With the chess. And it was the movements of the figures—the pieces on the grid—that were very important to me. And that was the basis for my performances—the performances, *Vowel Grid* and the structural plays. So it was—in part, the chess was the inspiration for that rather than the New York grid as such.

MR. MCMANUS: Paraphrasing, if I remember this correctly from something that you had written, that the chess imposes order over chaos. And there is this fascinating interplay because while you have the set of rules that define the particular movements of each chess piece, the order in which each piece is moved or the plays are developed cannot be predetermined.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Absolutely true. I've read a lot about chess and I've read a lot about the theory of chess and about some of the great chess players like Morphy—M—O—R—P—H—Y—and I used to be quite erudite in the area and the history of chess at one point. Morphy was very interesting in that at one point at the height of his powers, he gave up chess. Now, Duchamp at the height of his powers gave up art, so called.

MR. MCMANUS: That's room for another long discussion. [Laughs.]

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah.

MR. MCMANUS: It's art as it had been presumed, but I think he reinvents art.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, he gave the impression and illusion that he was not making art.

MR. MCMANUS: Right.

MR. O'DOHERTY: While he was making art in another—

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah, he gives it a completely new iteration.
MR. O'DOHERTY: —in another studio. And he was doing the *étant donnés* right?
MR. MCMANUS: Mm—hmm [Affirmative].

MR. O'DOHERTY: So I liked that. That was a nice thing. It takes a lot of pressure off you and while you're posing as somebody lying in state when in fact—

MR. MCMANUS: A respirateur—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes, yes.

MR. MCMANUS: —as he referred to himself. Yes.

MR. O'DOHERTY: But I think that he must have known Morphy's work and he was a great chess devotee. Harold Schonberg, the music critic at the Times in my day, played with him. And I said, "Harold, how is he? Is he great?" And he said, "He's good, not great." How good Harold was is another question.

But Harold was a brilliant guy. And he was one of those people—Harold was gifted with clarity. And to my great resentment, he would sit down and write out his column—no amendments, no changes—hand it in and it's perfect. That's outrageous. [They laugh.] "Harold, you've got to suffer." [They laugh.]

MR. MCMANUS: No subtext [ph] there in the—[laughs] —

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, yeah. So I went through—

MR. MCMANUS: Beauregard [ph] would have had trouble with him.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. As we have mentioned many times together, and we've just—and I know that you have a particular, unique appreciation of this work—how it was affected and how I got to be able to actually, without using a medical oscilloscope, which was beyond, in terms of cost, I was able to produce a simulacrum of the bouncing dot of the heartbeat, which was a nice bit of ingenuity. And it worked out very well. There were three of the three—ring, three—circle, three—leads pieces done. One was bought by a fellow called Dietrich Keller [ph] in Stuttgart, I believe.

MR. MCMANUS: Oh, he was from Germany, yes.

MR. O'DOHERTY: And he died and I don't know what's happened to it—probably nothing. But you told me once that Duchamp and Teeny went to see it at one point.

MR. MCMANUS: John Cage and Teeny went to see it.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Oh really. Not Duchamp?

MR. MCMANUS: This was after Duchamp had died.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Oh, after his death? Oh, I didn't know that.

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah, Teeny had told me about going to see it.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I hope it was working. Probably not. Keller—then I have the other two. I have the other two. You showed one—

MR. MCMANUS: —in Washington D.C.

MR. O'DOHERTY: —in the Washington show. Yeah.

MR. MCMANUS: The oscilloscopes that you've made, for me, [are] really where the wonderful mind of the artist takes over, because you had the problem then of, how do I get this image of the pulsing heart, the beating heart—

MR. O'DOHERTY: It was a tough one.

MR. MCMANUS: —to do what [you] wanted.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, it was a tough one that—and I remember there was a beer ad or a something like that—

MR. MCMANUS: A beer sign ad.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. I wish I knew which one it was. But you used to see it in those days in the window of taverns. And a dot would make a big arc, jump slowly—the dot would jump slowly. And how they were doing it was, there was a rotating cylinder with a slit in it inside an outer cylinder. And the inner cylinder, with the bulb behind it illuminated, of course. The vertical slit would pass the sine wave of the beer ad and the dot would appear to jump and slowly bounce.

MR. MCMANUS: So you must have taken the opportunity to very carefully examine the mechanism of one of these beer signs.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Oh yeah. I said—I went in and I looked at that thing and I said, "How does that work?" And of course, that makes you a little odd at a beer—[laughs]—at a saloon. "What's the guy doing over there fiddling around with the sign?" [They laugh.] "Order a beer for God's sake!" [They laugh.] So that was how it worked. And so trial and error, Jim, trial and error. I got it right, etched the lead one, two and three on the tiny little circles of a—what do you call those things that—

MR. MCMANUS: It was a spirit level.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Spirit level. Yeah.

MR. MCMANUS: I think your choice of a spirit level is whimsical, engages the double entendre here in, you know—

MR. O'DOHERTY: So I cleared out the little bubbles out of each window and put in—etched the leads one, two and three connected by a long, single line. And then I had a motor with a vertical—a sleeve circulating around the motor—a black sleeve with a vertical slit letting the light through. And that passed in front of these windows as you have been interested in going from right to left rather than left to right which is normal. So I had him going back.

MR. MCMANUS: And you were adding heartbeats to his—

MR. O'DOHERTY: I was having him going back to his origin. At the same time as I was preserving him for infinity. So there's a nice double movement there.

MR. MCMANUS: So you'd taken charge of Duchamp's life.

MR. O'DOHERTY: And his life was in my hands. And—

MR. MCMANUS: And still is.

MR. O'DOHERTY: And still is, God bless us. Of course, I don't know to what degree Barbara with her cholesterol—laden food and her—from Julia Child—and her—oh, what was the dessert? She had a very luxurious dessert—an English dessert. I don't know how responsible she is for his passing some months later. We've never charged Barbara with—

MR. MCMANUS: It was two—and—a—half years later.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Was it two—and—a—half years? '66 and he died in sixty—

MR. MCMANUS: In October of '68, October the second.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Sixty—eight, okay.

MR. MCMANUS: So he had a good time to digest that dinner. [They laugh.]

MR. O'DOHERTY: He did.

MR. MCMANUS: In all of its meanings. [They laugh.]

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MCMANUS: At about the same time that you were working on the portrait of Duchamp and you were doing your *Chess* series, you were also undertaking another very fascinating project and that is the *Aspen 5+6*.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Ah, yes, yes. That was an interesting—there was a chap who's just written a book on Jim Rosenquist. I just saw it reviewed in the Times. He ghostwrote a book for David Dalton is his name. Now, in the '60s, David Dalton was a hip, young chap with lovely sort of blond hair—a good—looking young kid and with a blond girlfriend, you know, who didn't say anything. You know, sort of typical kind of love child of the era. And so David was a delightful guy. Now, David became very important later on as a historian of rock. And he wrote biographies of Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix of the two key figures, which Mary Josephson also wrote about.

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah, we want to talk about Mary and some other people in a while here.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. But he approached me and he said, I'd like you to meet this woman because she publishes this magazine in a box. And her name is Phyllis Johnson. And there is tremendous interest in that box, by the way. It keeps going on and on and on for some reason. People in Paris, people in London—they're always writing to me, what does this mean, what does that mean? So anyway, David said, so I met the lady and looked at what they've done. There was a Warhol piece, which was—a Warhol box—it was all right, it wasn't wonderful.

MR. MCMANUS: The one that came just before.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Was it? I think, yeah, it was sort of like that. And there was one by the designer whose name I've forgotten who lived down the block for a while, a famous designer. I think he did the—was it Chermayev [ph] I think? But anyway, I saw a great opportunity here because a box I had back in the—my *Times* days—around '64 I think—I was watching art from here to yonder. I saw an immense amount of art. Sometimes I saw 17 galleries a day.

And then I began to think about history and I began to think about the books on art that I knew, like an Englishman—who did that book? I think an English—German scholar and his book was the standard text for years. I'm trying to remember his name. It will come back to me.

This is one of the problems of aging, I'm afraid, that names fly in and fly out of your mind with great facility and one reaches and grabs them in the air, tries to get them back and—

MR. MCMANUS: Are you talking about the great art history—

[Cross talk.]

MR. O'DOHERTY: Gombrich. Gombrich.

MR. MCMANUS: Oh. Yeah, Ernst Gombrich.

MR. O'DOHERTY: See, it does come back—Gombrich. And I began to think of textbooks. And I said, I'll do my own textbook. I don't think I've ever told you this. So I got a tin box.

MR. MCMANUS: Oh, this is the *Art Since '45*.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. I got a tin box. And it wasn't *Art Since 1945* at this point. I said I wanted to do a book on art history in one serious tome. And so I did some designs for the cover in which I used cutouts of illustrations and stuff—of reproductions.

And then I wanted to do a tape inside. I wanted to have a tape in which I had recorded all kinds of absurdities from various textbooks about the nature of art and the—this, that and the other. And I couldn't find a tape recorder that would fit in the box. And of course, that's in the '60s. It was about '64 I would think. So of course, then, look what we're dealing with today. You can fit this thing in your back pocket.

MR. MCMANUS: And this one's big.

MR. O'DOHERTY: And this one can go on—your whole life can be rolled up in that little chip there. But so then I abandoned it. But I did get an opportunity to do a textbook of sorts—*Art Since 1945*, which of course, was made of wood. And is now in the Hirshhorn Museum. But that's another story. But how do we get in—what were we talking about? We were talking about—

MR. MCMANUS: We were talking about the *Aspen 5+6*.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Oh, the *Aspen*. Yeah. So I used to see a lot of modern film and as I just gave you a thing I wrote on them just hot off the griddle. And Morty and I saw each other every day with Barbara—the three of us—and we would go to a burger joint on Third Avenue and everyday we'd have lunch. And we had a great old time.

But Morty had this idea that if you come to a center where your life is going to be lived—your professional life is going to be lived in this center in New York—then you have to pass through New York's history. You have to pass through its antecedent history so that you know who and where you are, so that you position yourself in a literate fashion in the matrix of New York. And then, you know, taking the cues from what's around you, you respond according to your reading of whatever that particular situation might be—a sort of game theory idea in a way. And so I said, ah, interesting. So at the same time, I was pondering this box. And I had no hesitation whatever in what I wanted in the box. It's peculiar: The best things I've done I've had no hesitation at all. I know exactly what I want to do. Are we still alive?

MR. MCMANUS: We're still alive.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I had no hesitation at all. I knew exactly what I wanted—I wanted certain people that I saw as ancestors. I wanted certain texts that I was interested in. I wanted the French New Wave people in there—the French Robbe—Grillet, Barthes and company.

I wanted the *Nova Express*—the crazy writer—this is the name business again. I wanted him in there. And I wanted certain manifestos from modernism. I had this grand idea of creating two pillars that were the points of entry to this white box made up of two modules, which could be placed in numerous different positions and the—

MR. MCMANUS: Let's take a break here. We're about to run into the end of this.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Okay.

MR. MCMANUS: And we'll start this with the two pillars on the second [day]–

MR. O'DOHERTY: *Nova Express*—what's—

[END SD1.]

MR. MCMANUS: This is James W. McManus interviewing Brian O'Doherty at his home in New York City. The date is November 16, 2009 and we're beginning disc two.

We're continuing the conversation about the production of*Aspen 5+6*. And at the end of that last disc, Brian, you were beginning to talk about—

MR. O'DOHERTY: The design of this piece, yeah. Well, I had two pillars within—between which the enterprising, reader/user/looker would enter. And that was excess and reduction. So that was just the beginning to give a spine to the whole thing. Then once you're inside, then you have the possibility and the invitation to design all kinds of historical structures within the work itself because what I did was very presumptuous. I took all these great names and from the Gabo and Duchamp and the *Nova Express*,—the guy who wrote *Nova Express*, Cage, Feldman—

MR. MCMANUS: Cunningham.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Cunningham, Moholy—Nagy, Hans Richter, Barthes. I took all of these guys and three of my own colleagues, Don Graham, Sol Lewitt, and Mel Bochner as my immediate colleagues and my—

MR. MCMANUS: Tony Smith, too.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Tony Smith, yeah. He was a great supporter of mine, actually, Tony. And I designed all kinds of possibilities within this box because as I said, there are three themes: time—what the hell are they?

MR. MCMANUS: Silence?

MR. O'DOHERTY: Time, silence and something else. Oh, shit. I can't remember. I had something like six things I call "movements," in quotes. I called Dada the tradition of paradoxical thinking and there were objects and there was structuralism. Then, there was—that's about four of them. And then the sixth category was between categories. Time, something and silence—what's the third theme? So you know, these themes, you know these movements, so therefore, you had—in a box—a kind of—

MR. MCMANUS: Silence is represented by Susan Sontag. Time is represented by Kubler's essay. And the other one—Roland Barthes' essay has to do with the role of the author.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. I'm trying to remember the three themes. When is that? Sixty—seven. That's 40—42 years ago. Anyway, it was—I took a year to do it and I called it my exhibition for the year. And so you had Rauschenberg, of course, and opposite Rauschenberg, I had Robert Morris—Robert Morris' wonderful minimal performance. Then I had Moholy—Nagy and I had *Rhythmus 21*.

MR. MCMANUS: These are in the little film clips that are part of the—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, these are the four films. So you get the idea of excess and reduction, excess and reduction. And silence being Susan—as you said, Susan Sontag. She wrote a brilliant piece. I read it, still, with great pleasure. And it took—I would explain to people who are participating what I was after. I called Beckett. There are lots of stories connected with this. So I called Beckett and asked him for a—to write something. I said, "No matter how small, just—I want something, if you would be so kind, and I want you to read it." And he said "no, I haven't a scrap," he said, which sounds very Irish—[laughs]—ah, I haven't the scrap. But I know he published just shortly before that time, texts for nothing.

And so I had text ready that I wanted his permission to use—I asked him to read that. He said, "No." And actually, "I don't read." And I said, "Well, I'd like to have it read." He said—there's a wonderful Beckett actor called Jack MacGowan—who died prematurely. And so I got Jack to read it in Dublin and I'm on the phone back and forth and I'm working with Phyllis—publisher of the magazine—she was being very helpful, except with the cash. Cash isn't flowing. And so I'm trying to get money for this and money for that. And so I sent some money to Robbe—Grillet. He wouldn't do anything unless he got the money first. I sent some money to Jack MacGowan to read the Beckett and I got the tape back—I think I've told you this. And so the tapes are wonderful. Jack was a wonderful reader, and it stops. And I call Jack and I say, "Why, Jack, it's wonderful, but it stops." He said, "Well that's as far as the money took me." So we had to send him more money—[laughs]—and so.

MR. MCMANUS: This sounds like one of the great Clement Greenberg stories—Greenberg who would go out and lecture and he would stop his lecture in the middle of a lecture if he felt he had delivered relative to the amount of money given.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I never knew that.

MR. MCMANUS: Just tell the audience—

MR. O'DOHERTY: That's it?

MR. MCMANUS: That's it.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Really?

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MR. O'DOHERTY: Not too nice.

MR. MCMANUS: Pretty brazen.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, not too nice.

MR. MCMANUS: One of the things enjoyable for me about the *Aspen 5+6* is the variety of media that you brought together in this publication. It really goes beyond being a book and it also—I think of it as an exhibition outside the gallery walls–

MR. O'DOHERTY: That's what it was–

MR. MCMANUS: Outside the museum–

MR. O'DOHERTY: That's what it was–

MR. MCMANUS: That you could create your own space.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Absolutely. And it's never really been written about with the kind of brilliance that I think it should be written about. And it's—you know, there's—there are various writers and some are doing their Ph.D. in this and then the other in Paris and sometimes, they use all the Aspen and some of them are awful. They should—[inaudible]—with them. The two good ones—one that was Dan—Dan Graham was immediately rushed in and got his own Aspen to follow mine. I said I remember. And I was very happy about that because Dan was a great print person. And he did a—he had an exhibition recently at the Whitney and I went to see it and there was his Aspen and my Aspen or at least one of his pieces from my Aspen. And it was a—most definitely an exhibition in which a printed manner had sound– I had film. I had even a sculpture that could be built and—

MR. MCMANUS: That's the Tony Smith piece.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, the Tony Smith. And I also had—and I thought pretty good invention—the table of contents with the three themes. The six—quasi, quote, unquote, "movements." The media, the one book, four records, four films, blah, blah, blah and I had added up then the theory of sets. I went to a mathematician and I said, "make up a theory of sets, would you please?" And there's a "u" that is and in set theory. And so he made this up and it turned out to be LUFURUBUD and the bud, of course, was my rosebud, you know? Like the "Citizen Kane," the key to—

MR. MCMANUS: Right. [Laughs.]

MR. O'DOHERTY: The so—called keys. And so this was my key—my LUFURUBUD—B—U—D. So I know the kinds of things in it and I had terrific quotes that at one time, I wanted to include on the lip of the box—as the white paper turned over the lip of the boxes. That means there were four lips.

MR. MCMANUS: You do have inscriptions on the inside of the lips of the box now?

MR. O'DOHERTY: No, I had—I had a wonderful quote from Mesopotamia. I had a variety of quotes. I had some terrific stuff about changes in category which I used later. But it was too difficult to print them all on the lip and then curl it over. There was great adventures in that box.

The *Nova Express* segment—I think it was the *Nova Express*; yes it was—where he cut and spliced and replaced various segments so that you read this thing and you saw it bumped into the seams but didn't notice them. I had—the people who were doing it—it was full of fucks and all sorts of stuff and it's—as you know, strong stuff and the guys who are printing in the record refused to print it.

I said we cannot do this kind of disgusting stuff. I had gotten this man—his name will come back to me in a minute from a woman, Kate Freaugee [ph], in Paris who had made this recording. And I'd track that one down. I'd track down the manifesto—Gabo's suprematist manifesto and track down this—that and the other—he was living out in Connecticut, would you believe? I got to—then I took my little tape recorder, a lot like this one, and I went around and got—everybody I can find, I did Cage, I did Merce. I did—

MR. MCMANUS: Duchamp.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I did Duchamp, of course. I asked him to read *L'Infinitif*. I asked him to read certain things. And he did with great gusto.

MR. MCMANUS: The creative act, I think—

MR. O'DOHERTY: The creative act, yeah, the one—

MR. MCMANUS: Having that recorded in Duchamp's voice.

MR. O'DOHERTY: That was great.

MR. MCMANUS: Is—it brings it to life in a way that moves it beyond the text on the page. And the spacing

between his words, which is so Mallarmean—and Mallarmé is very important, if you're thinking in the—

MR. O'DOHERTY: The box was dedicated to Mallarmé. That was Dan Graham's idea and I jumped at it. Yeah. I was very thrilled with Duchamp. He was such a decent guy. He was so unlike most artists, you know, who are egomaniacal people. He had a broader view of things. And he was relaxed, laid back. But I was on to something there about my—going around with my tape recorder.

MR. MCMANUS: Recording the different people —

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, I went and I found Huelsenbeck.

MR. MCMANUS: Oh.

MR. O'DOHERTY: And I was interested in vowels and I was doing these voweled poems myself. And so from his "Phantastische Gebete" there were vowel poems. And so that's what I wanted from him. So I discovered him and he was a shrink called Dr. Huelbeck. And I forget—I tracked him down, I got him and I went to visit Mr. Huelsenbeck—Dr. blah, blah, blah. I'd like you to record this and what I'd like you to record are your vowel poems.

Oh, yeah. So he did his vowel poems, ah, ah, oh, oh, ah, ah, oh, oh. [They laugh.] So I said, "Great, so thank you, doctor, thank you, that's wonderful, blah, blah." And then you know, being somewhat young at this point, still, I said, "What are you doing this summer," making conversation with this rather dark, silent, frugal—with—his—words chap. And he said, "I fly to Europe in the iron coffin" [said in a German-esque accent. -*Ed*.]—[they laugh]—which certainly gave me an idea of—[inaudible].

But he was nice; he was good; he was helpful; he was cooperative. And that was, to my mind, one of the best things I've done. There are these certain stations within my work where I think there are a lot of—a lot work like the Duchamp poetry. A lot of work—a lot of work like that Aspen. A lot of work like the—what else has there been—like the Cassidy painting—

MR. MCMANUS: And the rope—the Rope Drawing [series].

MR. O'DOHERTY: And the endless rope—

MR. MCMANUS: Which we'll talk about tomorrow.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, but it was a great time for me. And I was out in Berkeley and summer of '67. And I was doing something called structuralist film at—it was made up of brushstrokes. And you may have seen it in one of my shows that there was the scenario for the film—an interesting drawing and then backlit, there's these transparent pages, each bearing a brushstroke which you can turn over and by the time you've turned over all the brushstrokes on these transparent, plastic pages, you've got a square and then you turn them back and you don't have a square. So it's sort of a handmade movie.

MR. MCMANUS: Animation?

MR. O'DOHERTY: And that's what I was doing out there, then. And that was the time—and there's something of that in the Morton Feldman piece I just gave you—reminiscence of that time in Berkeley in '67. And that was when Peter Selz invited us out and Mark Rothko was there as well, and that became a really good friendship.

The crazy time out in Berkeley—and students, of course, they were all very nice, but they had not a notion of doing any work. To ask them to do so would be rather rude. And the brightest of them, perhaps, was a rather plump young lady who made her living by dancing naked in a glass box over at North Beach.

But she wasn't naked because she was painted in the American flag. And I remember she came in one time and I said, "What are you smiling at?" And she said, "Well, I'm very happy because this Hell's Angels debt [ph] has been killed, and he got his momma to beat the hell out of me once and I'm so happy." That's the girl that I remember. She'd cross her—these big boots of hers—you know, these Army—these Air Force kind of boots with all the warm—lamb or something inside and she'd psyche me like this as I was on the podium. And I'd look around, I'd look at her and suddenly, I said I'm losing it because her scarf is moving. It was a python—a snake or something—that she wore.

So they'd bring their dogs into class and it was very inimical. I think, this—Morton Feldman came out to visit. And he said "You know, the artists here—I have a feeling they think would make art with jam." [Laughs.] So this is certainly New York view– of that punky time. But Rothko—wasn't good for Rothko.

Wasn't a good time because the kids were not responsive to his extremely serious aims and his transcendent ache and desire. So it wasn't good for him that time. He was a very sensitive guy. I remember this young artist

was his driver—I've forgotten his name. Nice kid, absolutely nothing wrong with him. Wayne Campbell—that was his name—lovely kid. And he was very '60s, you know, with the Indian kind of jacket or the—

MR. MCMANUS: Jacket with the fringes on it?

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, the fringe, all that stuff and the lovely—the mustache like the Sundance Kid, you know, that sort of stuff. And he and I were on the beach and Rothko and his family were on the beach and Barbara and a couple of others. And I said, "Hey, Wayne, let's get up on these sand hills up here. They look interesting."

Because I remember them from my youth in Ireland, just running up and down the sand hills. So William and I take off and we come back—two young guys panting away happily—and Rothko said, "I was so timid for you." He was scared. "I was so timid for you." I said—marvelous word to use.

MR. MCMANUS: Yes, it's an interesting choice of words.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Oh yeah. "I was so timid." He was worried; he was upset. He was very easily upset—inaudible. Very fond of him, but he was a difficult friend—but the best. That was a big moment for me that nobody understood it. I introduced it—I had a text to introduce the whole thing and tie it all together by Sigmund Bode. And it was called "Placement is Language"—and it made no sense.

MR. MCMANUS: Let's end this afternoon's conversation introducing those persona. You just mentioned Sigmund Bode.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, Sigmund Bode was born—

MR. MCMANUS: What's the sequence of the entry—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Sigmund Bode is the oldest persona that I adopted as a young man in Ireland—as a very young man in Ireland. Why? Well, I was not happy with the artists on Ireland and Dublin. It's perfectly fine art—there's nothing wrong with it. There's some very find artists there.

The giant, of course, was Jack Yeats, who was an artist of the first magnitude against whom I tried to learn my trade as a writer, as a critic. And it was great to have a major artist that you could interpret as it shows every two years at Victor Waddington's gallery. And Waddington did an awful lot for Irish art and showed the first significant Irish stable—

MR. MCMANUS: He had a—did he have a gallery in London?

MR. O'DOHERTY: That's the son. That's the son, yeah. And so I—it was very helpful to me to have a major artist around that I could write about and discuss and blah, blah, blah because the only thing I've learned—I'm qualified in, really, is medicine. That's the only formal education I've had. I have no education, whatever, in writing. I have no education, whatever, in art.

[END TR1, SD2.]

MR. MCMANUS: We're talking about the development of the persona of Sigmund Bode.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, Sigmund Bode was the first, when I was a kid in Ireland, and I wasn't happy with the art I saw around me. Some of it was very good art. There's significant artists in Ireland. One was Louis le Brocquy; another was Patrick Scott; another was Gerard Dillon; another was Colin Middleton. They're all good artists. But they weren't for me. I was oriented to Moscow for some reason rather than Paris. And in one of my earliest notebooks, there is a comment: "Moscow yes, Paris no." And this was mostly inaudible in Paris—influenced art.

So I invented a German thinker, artist, philosopher, man of all philosophical and artistic traits called Sigmund Bode who would make art for me and do some thinking for me. It is a rejection of my ethos of my mise en scène. I was uncomfortable in Ireland. I did not feel I quite belonged there. Of course I do, but I don't, you know? A part of it is the natural rebellion anyone has against his origins and against his religion. I rejected Mother, mother country and mother religion—the three mothers. So one by one, they bit the dust. This was one of the things that attracted Duchamp—the fact that I quoted with pleasure, the fact that Joyce refused to kneel or to pray at his mother's dying bed. So anyway—

MR. MCMANUS: Duchamp also had problems with his mother.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Really?

MR. MCMANUS: Yes.

MR. O'DOHERTY: And I with mine.

MR. MCMANUS: He was very close to his father, but—

[Cross talk.]

MR. MCMANUS: —with his mother, not.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Me too. My mother was a very attractive, seductive, imaginative, and to my mind, difficult lady. But I don't want to malign her posthumously. My father, I was extremely fond of. I thought he was—still do—one of the finest people I've known. But anyway, that's something else.

So Sigmund, anyway, made appearances now and then. I used him—I made some drawings. Nobody paid any attention to them. They were sort of clay—like. I found one years ago—I don't know where they are now. Probably best that they're all gone.

You've mentioned—*Piero in Ireland*, that poem I wrote in '56, the year before I came to America. It was published in '57 in a magazine called *University Review*. The epigraph on top of that is, "by Sigmund Bode," which is, I think, something like the poses in some Victorian photographs reminiscent of figures of Piero de Francesca.

MR. MCMANUS: Francesca.

MR. O'DOHERTY: And so that was Sigmund. But Sigmund came—he wrote a few reviews, actually, here and there for obscure journals. And it was—it's always useful to write in another persona. It opens up the field in a different way before you discover the limitations that are pressing on you.

MR. MCMANUS: Was he ever the signatory of any of your—of the drawings that you just mentioned?

MR. O'DOHERTY: No. Well, he was of the original ones that I did in Ireland. Yeah, they were signed Sigmund Bode—"S. Bode," actually. Now, he also was called into—when I'd done this great—what I think it was certainly an usual compendium for *Aspen 5+6*, I had—I said, "How the hell do I tie this together," because I have to give people some clue.

And so I called on Sigmund, who had written this fictitious book in 1928, which was the year of my birth, called *Language is Placement*. And so it is a linguistic riddle, really. You can make sense of it if you're extremely serious. [They laugh.] And if you're more commonsense, you may say this doesn't make sense. But it was written in a way with enough provocative insights and formulations that you would take it seriously, especially when there was the introduction to something that was very serious. And I signed it Sigmund Bode.

Where did Sigmund Bode's name come from? Well, I never was fond of Freud because I thought Freud had this presumptuous idea that he could tell us who we were and with his repression, his ego, his id, his superego, his this, that and the other, and I didn't like Freud. My oldest brother was a shrink so I grew up with Freud and I grew up with Rudolf Allers' *The Successful Error*. I grew up a little bit with the other fellow—what's his name—the other—

MR. MCMANUS: Jung?

MR. O'DOHERTY: Jung, exactly—as Joyce said, "A man who was Jung and Freudened." And so I grew up with that. And so I didn't like him. So I took the name Sigmund as a sort of acknowledgment and rejection. And then I was very fond of that Italian connoisseur—the doctor who was a patriot and who fought in the war of Italian independence, who—what the hell's his name? He took a name that was based on the letters of his own name: Ivan Lermolieff.

And he was a—I'll remember his original name. He's very well—known. And he was one of the pioneers of connoisseurship. You know, the guy connected the eyes and did all the eyes, and then he did the lips and they could tell Piero's lips from Signorelli's lips—all this sort of stuff—that sort of anthropological, medical view of how you make attributions, which I found very interesting. His real name will come back to me the moment we stop this.

But anyway, I was very interested in the fact that he had these massive fights with Bode—Bode, who was the first curator of the Berlin museum. I've forgotten Bode's first name. So anyway, I called myself Sigmund Bode. Sigmund Bode.

And that gets us back a little to where we may talk—naturally leads us back to how I formulated out of whatever I could find—my whatever education I delivered to myself as a kid and as a medical student in Ireland which is another place to start, I guess.

MR. MCMANUS: And the second persona to appear, is it Mary Josephson? Or William Maginn?

MR. O'DOHERTY: William Maginn was also Irish—was also the early days in Ireland because William Maginn was —do you want to do each one of these now?

MR. MCMANUS: Well, let's take ourselves through the first couple.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, there was William Maginn. He was—

MR. MCMANUS: We'll save Patrick for tomorrow because he has a—

MR. O'DOHERTY: He was back there. Mary Josephson began in 1971.

MR. MCMANUS: When you were with *Art in America* magazine?

MR. O'DOHERTY: When I was with *Art in America* and I'd always wanted to write as a woman in this. I had my own magazine for three years so I gave Mary every opportunity to write. And so Mary Josephson obviously is related to the Catholic childhood which I so roundly rejected. I was born Brian Mary. And you're allowed to take —were you born a Catholic, Jim?

MR. MCMANUS: Mm—hmm [Affirmative].

MR. O'DOHERTY: So were you confirmed?

MR. MCMANUS: Mm—hmm [Affirmative].

MR. O'DOHERTY: And what was your confirmation name?

MR. MCMANUS: Michael.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Mine is Joseph. I said, I'm at this early age—I forget what age you are when you're confirmed —10?

MR. MCMANUS: Ten or 11.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I hated the Mary.

MR. MCMANUS: I can understand.

MR. O'DOHERTY: And so as a sort of reprisal against my mother, I called myself Joseph Mary Joseph because I said—even then, having second thoughts about my religion [laughs], I said, "That makes me Jesus Brian Mary Joseph." So when I was looking for a name for my female persona, I said "Mary—Joseph—son—the holy family." So that's how Mary Josephson started.

MR. MCMANUS: [Laughs.] Oh, that's a great pun. She became a very significant voice for you.

MR. O'DOHERTY: She was for me and I'd like to go into that tomorrow because the business of using personas and dividing yourself in this way is not just taken lightly, may I say. It's a serious matter. And it explores sectors of yourself—that infinitely mutable and oceanic self that we all possess—and brings to the fore different aspects, just as in the *Aspen*, different formulations and structures can be made by combining and separating its components et cetera, et cetera. So I'd prefer to go into that tomorrow because I wouldn't like to dismiss them.

I wouldn't like to dismiss them because—again, this is a—here we are. We're in an art context, really. We're in a context that usually there's—the whole archive of the American art is about paintings and sculptures. And the kind of multiple, devious sophistication that has implied for better or worse in the ways in which I've approached making art which created as much obstacles to myself as facilitated requires a lot of thinking.

MR. MCMANUS: This takes us back to the quote from Barbara Dawson that I raised earlier in that "that fit," as she said, "easily into the canons of contemporary art," because the limitations that could have been imposed upon you—being a painter, being a sculptor—you reject.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Absolutely.

MR. MCMANUS: And you expand in a variety of directions so that the casual reader of Brian O'Doherty sees a multifaceted and maybe easily misread—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Oh, that's for sure.

MR. MCMANUS: —disconnected collection of persona of activities—

MR. O'DOHERTY: That's true.

MR. MCMANUS: —when in fact that is simply not true.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Whitney Rugg, lady—I think I have it in here—this is her application. She wants to go to the Getty and write her thesis. And she is—this is—we've passed it through the machine and—[inaudible]—I'm sure she wouldn't mind if I shared this with you.

MR. MCMANUS: I'm sure Whitney wouldn't, either.

MR. O'DOHERTY: This is her thesis that she's going to tie together, because what you're saying, I think, is entirely true, because if you take it from one perspective, you miss all the others. And so you know, who are the people I admire? Well, Nabokov and Flann O'Brien, which you may not be as conversant with this stuff—the Irish comic writer.

MR. MCMANUS: That's who Brenda [Moore—McCann] focused on, right?

MR. O'DOHERTY: I don't know.

MR. MCMANUS: Brenda.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I haven't read her thing. But god knows—I don't know. I'm sort of frightened to read it, but we'll see. [Laughs.]

MR. MCMANUS: Well, I know in the interviews that she did with you—you sent me a copy of the interview text—she talks about Flann O'Brien.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I don't remember.

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah, and the comedy there.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, but he is—these are people I admire enormously—Nabokov was dazzlingly bright and scornfully so. He was really a jerk the way he looked down on people. But the variety of his attack and the—oh, he's an extraordinary—when he's at his best. At his worst, he's done a lot of bad stuff too. But there is a kind of mind there that's extremely playful and very rich and very serious at the same time.

Joyce is extremely playful too. And there is a book that I must get for you called *Joyce in Art* . I have it out there. And I just recommended—the woman who wrote—who did that extraordinary exhibition recommended her for her—she's a German woman, Mia—you know Mia—Mia Lerm Hayes.

MR. MCMANUS: Mm—name doesn't ring a bell—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, she was at the symposium down in—

MR. MCMANUS: In the—located at Pace University, New York City.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. And I recommended her for a promotion she got and she said, look, if you'd like another copy of this, I'll get it for you of the *Joyce in Art*. It's a lovely book. It's a lovely book.

MR. MCMANUS: One of the things that, in talking with you over the years and reading what you've written and looking at your art, that seems to me to be a powerful binding agent is language.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Most definitely. Absolutely accurate.

MR. MCMANUS: You are incredibly skillful as a wordsmith and with ease—there's an ease—

MR. O'DOHERTY: It's hard—won.

MR. MCMANUS: —with which you write and a great ease—

MR. O'DOHERTY: It's hard won.

MR. MCMANUS: Well, it's hard won, but it certainly raises a—

MR. O'DOHERTY: You have to get better than that to get it right. That's why I was resentful of Harold Schonberg. John Russell is another like that, you know. John Russell is like that.

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah, I'm sure. It's kind of the Mozart of writing.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. Oh, it's offensive.

MR. MCMANUS: And I'm one of those that has to—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Oh, I have to work at it, Jim.

MR. MCMANUS: —has to literally beat pages to death to get a page out of—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Me too. Anyway, language is—

MR. MCMANUS: But I see language just as that glue, that air—

MR. O'DOHERTY: No doubt.

MR. MCMANUS: —that runs through all of your work.

MR. O'DOHERTY: That's very true. Very true. Even the paintings are just based on the word—based on language.

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah. And it's kind of—or maybe that's the dead giveaway in those.
Well, we're going to stop right now—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Okay.

MR. MCMANUS: Everything has been kind of wonderful, after we got the machine going in the right way. And this was my mistake.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Not to worry.

MR. MCMANUS: And tomorrow we'll pick this up again.

MR. O'DOHERTY: What time would you like to start? You tell me.

MR. MCMANUS: Well, ten—thirty.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Ten—thirty is perfect.

MR. MCMANUS: Ten—thirty in the morning. Does that work for you tomorrow?

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, perfect.

MR. MCMANUS: Okay, very good. Well, thanks Brian.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, thank you, Jim.

[END TR2, SD2.]

MR. MCMANUS: Okay. This is James W. McManus interviewing Brian O'Doherty in his home in New York City. The date today is November 17, 2009.

When we ended yesterday, we were beginning to talk about the various persona that Brian has created and that have been important to him.

Brian, I want to just take a little comment from a piece that was just published about you and persona by Whitney Rugg and the essay is entitled, "Brian O'Doherty: The Artist As Perfect Medium" and it appears in the spring/fall 2009 issue of The *Recorder*. And Whitney comments here that you create your series of five identities, which ultimately evolves into an installation piece around 1998.

And in her mind, that five identities piece was the opportunity for the revelation of the secret that you had carefully preserved throughout much of your career, that each of these identities, in fact, was a part of you, with the—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Exactly, with the exception of Patrick Ireland.

MR. MCMANUS: —with the exception of Patrick Ireland. Well, we talked a bit about Sigmund Bode yesterday and were beginning to talk about another very important figure, and that is Mary Josephson.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Before we forget it, Jim, we must—you know, what happens to these tapes and what restrictions are on them and all that sort of thing and how protected they are. I think that's something to talk about at the end of day.

MR. MCMANUS: Okay, very good.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Because I don't know the practice of the archive and, you know, we'll talk about that a little bit.

Now, Mary—yeah, Mary as I said yesterday was composed of my names, my own names. And as somebody who is not too in love with the Catholic Church in which I was raised—especially the Irish version, which is repressive, restrictive and joyless—it was a pleasure for me to incorporate in the name of Mary—[laughs]—in the holy name of Mary, the holy family—Mary Joseph—son, which included two of my names. And then the son, of course, being the Son, which in my full name, Brian Mary Joseph O'Doherty, makes me Brian. I am the holy infant. I am Jesus.

And so there is lots of gaming there with respect to what was this childhood, when the sunny side of the street with football and what have you, the dark side of the street which was the Catholicism that I found very repressive—despite the fact that some wonderful priests helped me on my way, particularly a marvelous man called Burke Savage—Roland Burke Savage, with a nice name, who was the editor of the magazine called *Studies*. He took my beginning writings, particularly on Ruwo [ph] and Patrick Collins, an Irish artist who died some years ago, and just coached me and helped me and was very kind to me and indeed, at one point said, "if you're short of money, let me know." Not many people say that in your life. So he was a fine chap.

So there were good people, but the darkness over that island, I have to say, is generated in part by the joyless effusion arising out of the entire Irish interpretation of Catholicism, which, of course, I abandoned very early in my career.

MR. MCMANUS: Mary wrote for *Art in America*.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I was editor and I had always wanted—

MR. MCMANUS: You hired her, right?

MR. O'DOHERTY: I hired Mary. And she didn't get paid. And anyway—she was a feminist and a strong—willed person and she wrote about several people. She did lots of reviews and things. And then she wrote a short story—one of many she wrote—for *Artforum* about a rather obscure French animalier called Vui le Foie [ph], who I discovered one of his works in a thrift shop downtown, bought it and gave it to my brother—in—law and it's a rather nice pastel.

And so the story that Mary wrote was about the elimination of Vui le Foie from history—how to remove him entirely from history—it has been described as a terrorist act and Whitney Rugg, whom you mentioned earlier, called it somewhat pathological. But it was, how do you remove a person totally from history? Just change the attribution of his work in provincial French museums, buy and destroy whatever you could—generally, a terrorist, in a way I suppose you could say, occupation, but to my mind, had a certain blank grace, because you're producing a kind of regression to a tabula rasa.

And it is also a comment, I think, in my view anyway, about the temporary nature of reputation, fame and the perishability of art in general, and the reversals of reputations and the harsh ways in which reputations are codified and others are destroyed. And the election into the history books is, to my mind, an extremely flawed and curious bit of bartering between various interests over which money presides.

So that was, I suppose, in one sense a comment on what I feel is—I have a cynical view of our pride as it is socialized. I have a cynical view of that. And I think that's a reasonable view to have. It is random. It is controlled by powers. It is the complex—much closer than literature. It's a very closed circle, isn't it?

MR. MCMANUS: Mm—hmm [Affirmative].

MR. O'DOHERTY: You have the magazine, the artist, the critic, the apologist, the museum, the curator and the auctioneer. Money is the common denominator to all. I think the conceptual era pointed that out most sharply, which was part of the plan. Keep it out of the discourse. Keep the art out of the discourse. Essentially it's just a few sheets of paper, generally worthless.

MR. MCMANUS: As we'll come to discuss a little bit later in this interview, this becomes a major theme for you—the construction of what I would call the art network and its operation.

MR. O'DOHERTY: To make that transparent, yes.

MR. MCMANUS: And your feelings about it coming out in things like *The White Cube* and the *Studio and the Cube* as you've written more recently and some of the work that you've done really doing some good investigative inquiry about the nature of the structure. So Mary begins to play an important role in helping you articulate those. She works with you now—[inaudible]—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. Mary was—it's interesting how a persona—if you're serious about it; and most people are not—how a persona can accrete to itself, if it is entertained over a long term, its own set of personality inflections and its curious crystallization of some sort of identity or what passes for it, out of which generates whatever work, whether it's writing or making art, that persona does. And I have taken those very seriously because to maintain these personas is work. Now—

[END TR3, SD2.]

MR. MCMANUS: Okay, let's try again. Go again.

MR. O'DOHERTY: So anyway, maintaining a persona over several years and keeping it secret as I did with Mary and Sigmund and William Maginn, it takes a little bit of energy, especially if you're going to service the poor buggers. So Mary was one of my favorite people because she wrote probably the most of anybody. And they all had relationships—nobody has ever gone into this, but I suppose they will find it interesting—if I'm, postmortem, interesting, I suppose people will tackle it.

But the relationship between them is interesting. You know, you have a very lighthearted but serious William Maginn, who was a real person born, I think, around the last years of the 18th century and died in the '40s—1840s—and a remarkable chap—very brilliant—from Cork [Ireland] originally. And a great favorite of some folk.

He went over to Edinburgh [Scotland] to write a biography of Byron. That didn't work out. Then he edited this conservative magazine in London and people who wrote for him were—what's—Carlyle wrote for him and there's another chap, very well—known, who wrote a lot of those—an English novelist—famous. And I have a list of them somewhere.

But anyway, he was a very interesting guy and died young and in his 40s, I believe. And he was a chap who was respected by W. B. Yeats, who only mentioned two of his predecessors. He wrote a lot of poetry—some of it doggerel, some of it interesting. And when he would write about somebody, he would often, under another pseudonym, write something antagonistic to that.

MR. MCMANUS: And one of them is O'Doherty, right?

MR. O'DOHERTY: One of his aliases was Morgan O'Doherty. And he wrote "The O'Doherty Papers," which put me onto him. Because he's very interesting and he has not really received his due, but for me he was a shadow that I felt I should incorporate. Or this business of one soul passing into another—I said, "Well, he's welcome; he's invited in." And he was—I used him in various ways. And I think we discussed one of them yesterday.

But he was a brilliant guy, a bit of a joker, lighthearted. And Mary was a serious woman—serious feminist, not to be messed with. And the philosopher come linguist come thinker in general, William Maginn [ph]—you have an interesting trinity there. And their relationship—who would get on with who, and what would Mary think of Maginn? Maginn would not like Mary. And he would not like Sigmund. And Sigmund, who would probably be anti—not a—how shall I put it? Somebody who doesn't like women. What do you call that?

MR. MCMANUS: A misogynist?

MR. O'DOHERTY: Misogynist. He would probably—a bit of a misogynist and he was very German.

MR. MCMANUS: So he and Mary would have tangled wonderfully.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes, I would think so. Yeah. So you have—and he would have dismissed Maginn as a trivialist and somebody who was not serious, although he was serious in other ways. There was no humor in Sigmund Bode, et cetera, et cetera.

MR. MCMANUS: Each of these three persona reads to me as having their important moment where they're more visible than at other times in their existence. Mary Josephson during the period when you are editor of *Art in America* magazine, Sigmund Bode quite early and then Maginn—you appropriate his name again in *The Deposition of Father McGreevy*.

MR. O'DOHERTY: That's right. He was the sort of editor and footnoter in *The Deposition of Father McGreevy*, which was another exorcism of Ireland for me. Ireland can leave a hell of a mark on you, especially in my day. And of course, all the people who left—it was a signature move for decades and decades.

And Joyce's "silence exile and cunning" was imitated or rehearsed by many by the time I left—and left very gladly, let me tell you. I just wanted to get away from Ireland. By that time, that move is a bit of a cliché already. So it was to a degree a fossilized rehearsal of emigration. So as I was well—aware of at the time, but I had to get away, and I had to get away from the darkness of postwar Ireland and its oppressiveness.

And economically, I never had anything to complain about. My family was sufficiently well off to treat me very well and send me through medical school, which my poor mother often regretted. She said, "Oh, your father worked so hard to put you through medical school and you've thrown it out. God bless and save us." Isn't that a shame? What would he have thought, the poor man, if he were alive now? You know. Well, you're not going to make me guilty mother—[laughs]—which is the Irish mother's greatest weapon.

MR. MCMANUS: Of course. [Laughs.]

MR. O'DOHERTY: The greatest weapon. That added to the—

MR. MCMANUS: Yes. I think Irish mothers have a skill that I think is on a par with Jewish mothers.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Absolutely right, absolutely right. They are guilt machines.

MR. MCMANUS: Having grown up under the aegis of one.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Oh, you did? Yeah, well, then you know what I'm talking about. And it's interesting when you meet former Catholic quasi—Irish folk because the Irish church was reproduced here in America and to my great regret and sadness, during that ghastly period of exposure of pedophile after pedophile, all but one of the names that I came across were all Irish.

So you have these poor, ignorant lads from the country—you know, farmers' sons and that. His mother's greatest wish is that they become priests. So these poor lads go to these dioceses and colleges, where, first of all, they get the hell beaten out of them and, second of all, they have no sophistication in terms of women or sexuality or anything like that.

So these poor young men grow up and then every responsibility is thrust on them and so where they're supposed to have a great deal of wisdom with respect to social problems and problems that they encounter with their parishioners in the confessional, et cetera. So it does not surprise me that their aims and dreams become, you know, sometimes sadly focused on little children.

Anyway, that's another large subject. But I was greatly relieved when one of the pedophiles turned out to be Mexican. [Laughs.] It was a sad time. And it was a very sad time in Ireland because that signified the end of the church in Ireland because I remember going back once and in the front page of one of the national newspapers, there were three priests in civvies being led out in handcuffs and that did the church in. So the power of the church decreased mightily and it now exists only in rural places. So it's very sad.

MR. MCMANUS: The three persona that we've talked about so far—again, each of them having their moment of highest visibility—if I follow Whitney's argument and what you've been talking about so far—although each of them is set back into the shadows, they continue to be a part of the whole that is you.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Oh, they—without making a hokey thing of it—they're always with me in terms—these names I've put a lot of thought into. And the responsibility of preserving them as functional entities took a bit of work—took a bit of work.

MR. MCMANUS: Now, the fourth and the last of the persona you've created—the best—known, Patrick Ireland, died [last year], back on May 20, [2008].

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes, he did. Yes. Yes, he did on May 20th, 2008, in Dublin at the—

MR. MCMANUS: And he was born in 1972, correct?

MR. O'DOHERTY: Correct, after the Derry massacre in Northern Ireland. And so I took that name. Nothing I could. As I said before, my family was involved in the Revolution, and at one point, they captured a British general. Did you know that?

MR. MCMANUS: Yes, you've mentioned that to me once.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. And he was kept in my grandfather's house. And the Black and Tans, if you've heard of them—Britain was at war. The Irish had, what the British thought, stabbed them in the back with this revolution of theirs. So they had cleared out the jails and gave them some training and sent them over to Ireland and put them in this black and tan uniform. And so they committed a lot of atrocities. And we won't go into them, but a

lot of atrocities. And they collaborated with the Royal Irish—you don't need to know all this, Jim—with the Royal Irish Constabulary, which were the police, which were, of course, royal and loyal to Britain—loyalists. And one of them would come around—

[END TR4, SD2.]

MR. MCMANUS: This is James W. McManus interviewing Brian O'Doherty at his home in New York City, November 17, 2009. This is the beginning of disc three.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I'm not too sure how much we want to go into that revolutionary period, but Patrick Ireland was born out of it and born out of the Derry Massacre, in which 13—and eventually it was 14 people who were shot down by—peace marchers were shot down by British paratroopers. And oh, my God. Like any imperial power, you know, the British deny this, deny that. They had fired on the troopers. There were various investigations under distinguished judges, bewigged and formally powerful—how shall I say it—pillars of the British establishment. And there were several of these inquiries, which were unsympathetic to the victims. Eventually, Tony Blair apologized and what a revolution that was. It was the greatest—that massacre, small, in terms of the world at large—but it was the greatest recruiting tool the IRA ever had.

I had no—I'm not violent, obviously. My job was to preserve life, anyway, for many years. So what could I do? So I said, well, the last the thing the British, over the last few hundred years, have wanted to hear about is Ireland. It's like their bad conscience. So Ireland is a name. And I will take that name. How should I—well, what's the first name to be?

Well, when these young country lads and some of these city boys go over to London or to British Liverpool or British Manchester, towns or cities, they're called Paddies. "Hi, Paddy." "How are you, Paddy?" So that's a semi—affectionate kind of term. It's not as bad as Sambo, or stuff like that, but it is indulgent and ultimately prejudicial. So I said I would take the name Patrick Ireland and hopefully would make some kind of a dignified name out of it. And I cast it, with a little discreet energy, in the direction of the oppressors in Northern Ireland.

And so I took that name in a performance in Dublin, assisted by two artists who are still alive: Robert Bell and Brian King, whose work I admired—young lads, then. And I remember that was an interesting time because the bombs were going off in Dublin. And it was, I remember, walking along the street and looking at cars and wondering if I was going to explode. And you know, they did kill a few people. And then I said to myself, this is how much of the world lives. How horrible it must be in the Mideast, in various terrorist situations where people are grievously unsettled and they never know when it's going to happen.

But that was disquieting in another way because there was an IRA man who was drunk, with his leggings, you know, his boots and stuff, wondering around. I did this at a place called—what was the name of the gallery—at a performance space in Dublin. I'll remember it in a minute. But he was walking around, this IRA guy, lifting up the curtain and saying, "Where did I put the bomb, now?" And we didn't go near the bugger because you never know. So clearly, he left and some of the people made sure there was nothing there.

But I had 30 witnesses that I invited and a notary who had signed my name—change from Brian O'Doherty to Patrick Ireland. And my statement was read aloud 30 times, for each of the 30 witnesses, that I will sign my name Patrick Ireland until such time as the British military presence is removed from Northern Ireland and all citizens are granted their civil rights. And that took place and people came up and signed, two witnesses and the notary, and I signed it Brian O'Doherty, crossed it out and wrote Patrick Ireland.

And so that was a political act that seems to have caught the imagination, as well as the anger, of many, many people. And it gives me the thought about how protest works. Because art that protests isn't very effective. You're preaching to the choir and you can't do another *Third of May* or another *Guernica*. That was the project gallery, actually. This was in the project gallery. Still, there—and this refers to the other persona because the change—there is a change that takes place.

The power of naming is very subtle and it goes deep and quite pervasive. So something I said before came very true. That is, the sense of identity of a persona becomes very substantial and gathers to itself its own nature, as it were. So there was a displacement and birth of another entity, another executive entity, that made the art. And I made art under that name for 36 years, until we buried him last year.

MR. MCMANUS: In the performance itself, aided by your two colleagues, you were dressed completely in white.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes.

MR. MCMANUS: With a hood over your head.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes, because when I—

MR. MCMANUS: And you laid on a trestle table.

MR. O'DOHERTY: That was the first one. That was the name change, back in '72.

MR. MCMANUS: Yes.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes, because I wanted to blank out my face so that new identity could be inscribed on it.

MR. MCMANUS: So it was a symbol of the blank canvas.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes.

MR. MCMANUS: And then they painted you.

MR. O'DOHERTY: They painted me from foot, top to bottom. Green, white—or, green and orange. Now, the Irish flag is green, white and orange, or gold. And so they started green at one end and orange at the other, so at a certain point—

MR. MCMANUS: Symbolic of the two sides.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes. Symbolic of the two sides, which were then crossed over and continued to paint green on orange, orange on green, which produced a sort of frightful mess.

MR. MCMANUS: A muddy brown.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes, a muddy brown. It looked like dried blood, or something, which referred, of course, to the various murders and atrocities up north. So that was received according to the nature of each person who came across it later. It was thought by some to be a very provincial, nationalistic, retrograde move by some in Ireland. Others thought it was progressive.

I got a letter from some fellow in the North saying, essentially, come up and help us bomb, all this kind of carry—on. So it had a far more profound effect on people's minds than any artwork I could make. And that was very instructive to me because I had changed my nature as an artist. I had changed how I was perceived and how the work I made was perceived.

MR. MCMANUS: And a lot during that time, from 1972 to [2008], you were known simultaneously as Brian O'Doherty and Patrick Ireland?

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes. It was 2008, wasn't it? Wasn't it last year we did this?

MR. MCMANUS: Well, maybe it was 2008. Because it was May 20.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Because he was 36 when he died, suddenly.

But you were saying.

MR. MCMANUS: So the two of you exist as two parts of a whole for that 36 years.

MR. O'DOHERTY: But very separate, each with its own—because I continued to write as Brian O'Doherty. And Patrick was his own thing and people would, you know, on the road, doing installations, it was always Patrick. "Hello, Patrick,"—all this sort of thing. People accepted that very nicely in America, except on one or two occasions when they were very hostile.

But it was an interesting problem that presented Mrs. Ireland. And some of them called her Mrs. Ireland. And occasionally I would meet somebody who didn't know that I was Brian O'Doherty. And they would—I remember on one occasion, somebody said to me, "Has anybody ever told you you're the dead image of Brian O'Doherty," when I was being Patrick Ireland. So I said, "No, I know him well, but we're not."

MR. MCMANUS: [Laughs.] That's a great story.

MR. O'DOHERTY: There was also an occasion, you know, when there was a show down in Charles Cowles downtown there. And there was a magazine, a video magazine that was being done by Holly Solomon's husband. What was his first name? I can't remember. And he got critics—an interesting idea—he got critics, every month—distinguished, well—known critics—and they would review a show on the air. They'd bring the cameras to the exhibition and they'd slot in shots of the work as the critic was talking about it.

So they came to Cowles. And this is several years ago. They came to Cowles and said, "We want to review the Patrick Ireland exhibition. And who would you suggest?" So he told me this and I said, "You should get Brian

O'Doherty to review it." That is on tape actually. And so I went on and they said, "Fine, this is great. Very happy to do that." And then as time went on, they became a little suspicious. [McManus laughs.] So they called me up and said, "How well do you know Patrick Ireland." And I said, "Oh, we're very close." [They laugh.] So eventually they caught on, but it took quite a bit of time. And to their credit, they left the review intact.

MR. MCMANUS: Oh, good.

MR. O'DOHERTY: And it's on the record. There's a woman, Terry Demisch [ph], in Paris who is endlessly making this film about all the personas and what have you. And I sent her that tape, which I think is amusing. I did criticize Patrick Ireland's work to a degree. I did make some jokes about him. And you must see it sometime, Jim. You'd enjoy it.

MR. MCMANUS: So in the spirit of the dialogues that you shared with Mary Josephson, you were now then the observer of another of your personas, Patrick Ireland.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Of another persona, yeah. I think this whole business of—we all have—there is no mystery in the fact that we all have a variety of personas and roles. And that these roles are executive, like, getting across the street or going out and doing the shopping and sending—going out to the post as I did earlier this morning and send off various things of this book to the writers of this *Recorder* business.

But there is no doubt in my mind that literalizing some of these is an interesting thing because I think it gives—there is business that one identity, one role—this may be a little American actually because where I come from, there's great lability—labile views of what constitutes a professional person.

For instance, Flann O'Brien, whom you've heard me mention several times, who was one of the great comic writers in Irish literature. His real name was Brian O'Nolan and he was a bureaucrat, as I was for a while. And he was also a columnist—a brilliant columnist, which is now legendary, for the *Irish Times*, which is a pretty good paper. And his name was Myles nag Copaleen, which can be translated as "Myles of the little horses."

So there's Myles nag Copaleen, Flann O'Brien, the novelist, and the bureaucrat, Brian O'Nolan—all distinct identities. Unfortunately, Brian O'Nolan, the possessor of the other two, was an inveterate drunk and sadly so. But like many great comic writers, he was depressive, I guess.

MR. MCMANUS: When Patrick Ireland appeared in 1972, that appearance was accompanied by I guess you might say a kind of pre—destiny because you declared at that time that he would continue to exist until the British army left Northern Ireland.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Correct. And they got their civil rights, which they did, which is amazing to me.

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah, that was the—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Criterion.

MR. MCMANUS: That was the criterion then for what happened with his death, burial in May of last year. Now, let's talk a bit about that wonderful event that took place.

MR. O'DOHERTY: You were there.

MR. MCMANUS: I was. And it was my great pleasure to be there.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, I wanted this to not be a parochial event because I think there was a profound lesson in it. If this can happen, where enmities and hatreds are so deep between loyalists and nationalists, Protestants and Catholics, haves and have—nots in the cockpit of Northern Ireland, then, you know, there is a very slim ray of hope that may be cast in other directions. I very much wanted this to be an event that was witnessed by a wider audience.

I designed this funeral where Charlie Simonds did the death mask—my friend Charlie Simonds was a wonderful artist who did the death mask. I was assisted by the body—of Fergus [ph], my friend Fergus—oh, what's his name?—he provided the body which was cast. And then another fine chap made a beautiful coffin—et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

And so I wanted the coffin carried by the two men who had originally participated in the name change in '72. Only one of them was available. And then there were six people carrying the coffin and five of them were young Irish artists all dressed in black—the six of them in black. Then I, as you know, had Barbara on one side and the curator, a very wonderful lady, Christina Kennedy of the museum on the other side—all three of us dressed in white.

And then there were five poems read by five friends. One was Tony Cronin, and his wife read the poem; he was not well. And then there was a poem in Irish by an excellent Irish Sean O'Riordain—O'Riordain, I guess—an excellent—and then I picked a poem by Mallarmé, which I had a wonderful French lady read. She is a professor of art at Bonn University—no, at—yes, at Bonn University. And then there was a fifth. It was read in German by a young German art historian who had done a Ph.D. on my work. And he read a poem written especially for Patrick Ireland by Hans Belting. So I think that's about the five there. And then there was something I will never forget and I suspect you will never forget—

MR. MCMANUS: The keening.

MR. O'DOHERTY: There was a young Irish—was young when I knew her—Irish artist called Alannah O'Kelly. She is a very gifted artist. And she had researched the Irish business of lament—of keening, which takes place at funerals. And god knows, we've seen enough on television of women wailing in Iraq, et cetera, et cetera. They are heart—rending sounds of despair and loss.

So she had researched this and I called her—she's now a woman with children and I had known her some 20 or 30 years ago. And I called her out of the blue and I said, "Alannah, this is what I'm doing and if you could see your way to keening at this"—and she hadn't done it for a while—"I would be greatly, greatly in your debt." So she did. And Michael Kimmelman from the *Times* was there and he's a music person. He found it totally riveting. And it sent chills down my spine.

MR. MCMANUS: [Lani, my wife,] still talks about it today as one of the most stirring things that she has experienced in years.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Me too. That does not leave my ears.

MR. MCMANUS: It comes back to me in powerful echoes as well.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. And it was volleyed through that museum grounds out down the avenue and into the street outside.

MR. MCMANUS: You could hear it bouncing off building walls—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Exactly.

MR. MCMANUS: —and those were at some distance from where we were all standing.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Exactly. And a fellow outside drove up—

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah, oh, that's right.

MR. O'DOHERTY: —and said somebody was being—in pain or being killed or something. So then I took the clay of the open grave and tossed the clay in the grave. And then I took off the mask—the stocking mask and tossed that in the grave and that was—said, "Thank you for peace"—and that was that.

And then there were five musicians that I had hired. And they were to play—burst out in joyous song. They did nothing of the kind. They just quietly did a little music, which was not my aim or desire. So they had to—respectful music came in—instead of a joyous burst.

So that had a very wide—we limited the audience to a couple of hundred. And the invitations did not go out widely. I didn't want it smothered in people. And the BBC was there. The curator from the Tate was there. People from Germany, France, Italy—and of course, from over here, like yourself. And it was picked up everywhere, Jim. It was picked up all over the place in Canadian radio, BBC, what have you.

MR. MCMANUS: Well, Michael Kimmelman wrote a pretty good piece for *The New York Times.*

MR. O'DOHERTY: He wrote an excellent piece. He wrote an excellent piece. Yeah. So that was the end of Patrick. And it was a peculiar feeling for me because it had become so identified—I had become so identified in my mind with this person—not just a persona at this point—that I found a sense of loss and a degree of confusion because I had lost something very intimate to my self.

And then I started—obviously, now the next artwork was going to be mine, was going to be Brian O'Doherty—signed. And so I did it and I sent it to Brenda McCann. I said, you were the person to do the first study of my work and the first doctorate, so here is this as—you're welcome to this drawing as it was.

That was a cycle of 36 years, which I think is telling because if Patrick Ireland was a talented young man, he should have died at 37 because all talented young men die at 37—[they laugh]—from Dylan Thomas to—

MR. MCMANUS: Just at the age when they should be ready to marry. [McManus laughs.]

MR. O'DOHERTY: So there you are, Jim. That was that event. But I think we've done the personas, but the relationship between them remains, I think, to be thought about by people who care about these things. There was an unusual thing because usually there are some, I think, who dress up and role play. That was not it all because I didn't do any images until the end. I didn't do any images of who they were until I did that show, Derry [Ireland].

MR. MCMANUS: The 1998—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, the show in Derry.

MR. MCMANUS: —five identities.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. And then I—that was the first time they were outed. Patrick, of course, was always outed. No mystery there.

MR. MCMANUS: I need to go back to Mary Josephson for just a moment. And something—a point that you raised when you were speaking at the Richardson Symposium earlier this year in Washington, D.C. And that is confusion that people have regarding her and trying to connect her with you in a way that Rose Sélavy is connected with Marcel Duchamp. And you were very clear about that in your—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, most of my work has nothing to do with anything conceivably related to Duchamp. Everyone is an ironist in any wit at all or a parodist, a ironist to all that repertory that one brings into play in whatever one is doing if on wishes. But the confusion is very understandable because I grew up with chess, made a chess set, did some works on chess. It generated the performances, the structural plays, *Vowel Grid*—generated that, the grid of the chess board.

And Mary—I had a female persona, which I always wanted. I never had a sister by the way. And Mary was, in a way, my sister. And there are other relationships, I think, that could be made between Duchamp and myself. And when that nice Ingmar Lahnemann—remember Ingmar? The German who did the Ph.D. for Anne—Marie Bonnet?

MR. MCMANUS: Mm—hmm [Affirmative].

MR. O'DOHERTY: He was doing a whole section of Duchamp and me. And I said, "Ingmar, I think this may be a little misapplied"—because if you take the body of my work—very little to do with Duchamp. Even people have said, oh, the Rope Drawings are influenced by the *Mile of String*, you know, which is totally absurd and never was in my mind even remotely as a solution to the problems I was dealing with when I initiated the string pieces.

MR. MCMANUS: The *Mile of String*, just for people's reference here that are reading this, is the installation Duchamp did for the 1942 surrealism exhibit here in New York City.

MR. O'DOHERTY: So there is, of course, a thing about your trade, if I may say so, Jim, and that is some historians—I'm not in any way saying this is you—but some historians wish at all times to connect something to something and matters of precedence must—chains of connection must be ruthlessly established so that the mystery of whatever it may be is leeched from the work, which now is embedded comfortably in its precedent or its quasi—precedent. Therefore the work itself—

MR. MCMANUS: That's well put.

MR. O'DOHERTY: —is no longer luminous with its own radiation and its inner light. So I understand the relationship with Duchamp and the affection I have for Duchamp is certainly as strong as it ever was—I was very fond of Duchamp because he was a remarkable guy and he was very nice to me.

MR. MCMANUS: Well, you've said to me on a number of occasions, you regarded his work highly, you liked him very much and had the greatest respect for him.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Absolutely. I admired his mind, Jim. I mean, the mind is so rich.

MR. MCMANUS: But that you also needed to establish a distance between you and he. You needed to create a measure of space between who he was and who you are and one of the things that you have repeated a number of times is that you did not want to be a Duchamp—ette.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Very true.

MR. MCMANUS: That you wanted to maintain this identity or as you put it not lose your queen to Duchamp.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. Exactly. There are hosts of people who are influenced by Duchamp, and very obviously so, and I think very destructive for them. Lots of Neo—Dadaist stuff at one point, some of it quite interesting. There was one chap called Robert Watts; that was the name I was trying to remember yesterday who was one of the Fluxus types. And he was a nice fellow and a good artist and did some original things. But there were lots of —

MR. MCMANUS: He was also categorized under vox pop, which is a California version of pop art.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Oh, really? I thought he was from here. But anyway, he was a nice chap and a good artist. But there is another area where a connection is also made. And we neglected to mention—I neglected to mention—and that is the Aspen box we discussed yesterday. That people said, oh, it's the—

MR. MCMANUS: The White Box. [*A L'Infinitif*, 1967]

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, the White Box—it's like Duchamp's.

MR. MCMANUS: Well, they came out at the same time—– and they're both white.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. So there's this, that and the other. Always these things.

MR. MCMANUS: But then Maciunas and the Fluxus people were producing boxes also at that same time. And I think there was a great interest in boxes as Lucas Samaras was doing boxes at the same time.

MR. O'DOHERTY: So was Copley. Copley did *The Letter Edged in Black Press*.

MR. MCMANUS: Yes.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Not quite a box, but certainly with records and interesting stuff. I tried to get all of them from Claire Copley, who had a gallery on the West Coast and who is married to Barbara's cousin. But she apparently gave them all away. But the Duchamp—ette business—yeah, I felt that Duchamp is red—hot and if you touch him, you get burned. So white—hot, perhaps, is better.

MR. MCMANUS: I think you said in Washington, D.C.—a phrase I really love—that he is still radioactive.

[MR. MCMANUS: Here, O'Doherty begins a description of his 1966/67 portrait of Marcel Duchamp.]

MR. O'DOHERTY: He is. He's radioactive. He is radioactive. And so you can get burned. So I, being aware of that, when I evolved this piece that you're so eloquently interested in—the Duchamp portrait—that was a serious commitment that took the best part of two years I think. And it was very important for me that it not be seen as a tribute, which some did. And I did not disabuse people early on.

My attitude in taking his heartbeat was I wanted his readymade. I wanted a Duchamp readymade and I got it. And that the artifact of his heartbeat then I could play with and make immortal and refute that idea of the death of art, et cetera, et cetera. And he—I must say, his cooperation was wonderful.

There are some cooperations like that. I think that when Bill de Kooning gave Bob Rauschenberg a drawing to erase, that was a very generous thing for Bill to do. And Bill had enough of a paradoxical and original mind that he didn't take offense at this and Rauschenberg, of course, as a wonderful gesture on his point.

MR. MCMANUS: As I have heard the story surrounding that, when Rauschenberg screwed up the courage to ask for the drawing—and he had admired de Kooning very greatly—de Kooning laid a real challenge before him in two levels. He laid out—I guess he laid out a group of drawings—good drawings—

MR. O'DOHERTY: It had to be good. Yeah, it had to be a good drawing.

MR. MCMANUS: —not a junk drawing—something that Rauschenberg was going to have to really think about destroying. And also the drawing that was made with a lot of oil—based Conté in it so that erasing the image—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Was tough. [Laughs.]

MR. MCMANUS: —would be tough. And so at both the mental and the physical level, de Kooning really laid the gauntlet for Rauschenberg to do this piece. If in fact that is all true, it's, I think, a wonderful and an important part of this story because he did not allow him the ease of entry to the exercise.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, he was wonderfully cooperative and very benign. And I was with him—and I think we have discussed this, Jim—when Tom Hess's *J'Accuse Marcel Duchamp* came out.

MR. MCMANUS: Yes.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I think we've done the Duchamp—ette business. That gets into the larger area of influence and affinity. I think influence is—I think the history of art is concealing influences and calling it originality. So this was mixed up with all those kind of things. I think it's a very complex gesture, as you have pointed out—a very complex gesture.

It's more than just taking his heartbeat. There is a certain primitive quality to it that I feel is implicit in it because one of the things that's lost in art in my view in the current trivialization of what art is—which is, I think, pretty well all around us—is the magical and dangerous qualities of art. I think art—making comes from someplace that is connected with a very deep and profound psychological matrix and we know in so—called primitive societies, it has a very specific function to stabilize the world and to determine certain fates and rituals and hostilities at times. But that is lost now.

I felt that taking his heartbeat and making him live again, if you tackle this in terms of the [film]*Metropolis* and the mad scientists—from the danger of the matter—because science was dangerous. And there was a time when the scientists in all these horror movies is a figure of profound danger and that we beware because they are going to effect something that is transgressive to our nature and dangerous to it.

So you know the Irish writers—what's the name of the—the Irish gothic writers, the one initiated the Dracula—you know, Bram Stoker. Then there's the other fellow whose name will come back to me who wrote *Uncle Silas*—Sheridan Le Fanu—which is very dark, very dark indeed.

But in making that, let me say this, that it was never a trivial act. It was fully aware—[laughs]—that having witnessed many and participated in many physical operations under anesthesia, this was an aesthetic operation under a somewhat dangerous context in that you are really stealing somebody's heartbeat. You are stealing an aspect of his person. And that has, to my mind, dangerous and magical connotations, which have been leeched out of it as time goes by. But I deeply believe in the power of art and I deeply believe in the dangerous nature of art. I'll tell you a story, if I may—

MR. MCMANUS: Certainly.

MR. O'DOHERTY: —about that. When I did *Art Since 1945—Art Since 1945* was a book to fulfill my contract with the publisher. What was the name of the publisher?

MR. MCMANUS: Was it Prentice Hall?

MR. O'DOHERTY: No, it was—begins with a P.

MR. MCMANUS: Praeger?

MR. O'DOHERTY: Praeger. Yeah. When I was unable to produce the book, *Art Since 1945*, and they wanted my advance back. I went to a lawyer and I said, I am going to make a book. And I want you to read my contract and I want you to tell me if I'm fulfilling the needs of this contract. So he said, yes, it's a book, so I guess if you make your wooden book, I'll go with you to the publisher.

So I got John Coplans to come as my art advisor. So the book was wrapped up. It's got an Ad Reinhardt on the cover—if I may say so, beautifully painted. And Barbara Rose, I remember, she was—the thing was on the piano—the book—it was standing on the piano after I had done it. And she said, oh, that's a beautiful reproduction of an Ad Reinhardt. She thought it was a real book.

So anyway, we went down and to make a long story short, they refused it and I called Joe Hirshhorn and Joe Hirshhorn bought it. It's now at the Hirshhorn Museum. And it's a handsome book, I must say.

The documentation of that story is interesting because the book and the documentation are one. But for some reason, I wouldn't give the documentation to Joe. And Joe Hirshhorn, who had bought a fair bit of my work, said, "O'Doherty, where's my documentation? Where is it? Where is it? Where is it?" I said, "All in good time, Joe. I just want you to keep thinking of me," torturing millionaires being an admirable sport. And Joe snarled back at me, he said, "I don't think of you for a minute." So I said, "All right, Joe, all right." So every time he'd see me, he'd say, "O'Doherty, where's my documentation?"

And eventually—I made a film on Edward Hopper and I was showing it in Washington in a screening room and so he—I don't want to thrown off this by the postman. He came to the showing and he said, "O'Doherty, where is my—where is my documentation?" I said, "Joe, I'm going to give it to you."

But I had developed the idea that if I gave it to him, he would die. Now, where did I get that idea? That if I gave this to Joe Hirshhorn, his wish is fulfilled, his artwork is complete—documentation and book. I gave it to him—I

forget when, maybe at that moment. And a beatific smile broke out over his face. He was so pleased. He died the next week.

MR. MCMANUS: We'll just hit the pause button here.

[Audio break.]

MR. MCMANUS: Okay.

MR. O'DOHERTY: He was a brilliant guy and very insightful and I have a feeling that when he was looking at it and looking at it and looking at it, it was just wonderful—because there is a story that somebody said I didn't understand Turner until I saw Ruskin looking at it. I forget who said that, but looking through another person at the work is an interesting kind of thing, you know, and it brings you back to the figures whose back you see is in a Caspar David Friedrich, you know, and that figure is the substitute for yourself and what have you.

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah, they were the *repoussoir figure.*

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. So there is something about that that—about the Duchamp portrait that's more than—there is a quasi—there is a potential darkness there.

MR. MCMANUS: A group of works that I would like to spend some time talking about and I think works that I think are really beautiful as they evolve and important are your Rope Drawings. They begin in the early 1970s.

MR. O'DOHERTY: First one was '73.

MR. MCMANUS: And they continue to today.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, they do. There's something like 112 of them or 113 of them. Yeah. And they—how did they evolve? They evolved from the grid. They evolved from language. And they evolved from this. From this.

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah, the Ogham vowel grid.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, because if—evolved from Vowel Grid. I had done these vowel grid drawings, which was a grid 15—by—15. Now, in Ogham, which is one of the most ancient forms of denotation of language and has a cousinship to serial music—four sets, four sets.

MR. MCMANUS: This is an ancient Irish sign language.

MR. O'DOHERTY: It is a written language. It was never spoken. And it is a translation of 20 letters of the Roman alphabet in the seventh century—some say sixth, some say seventh, eighth. But anyway, it's very early. And this takes the 20 letters and translates them into lines. And the horizon or defining spine of the language is a corner because they were done in standing stones. So to the left of the corner, to the right of the corner, across the corner or slanting across the corner—these four divisions gave you four different and four different letters. Four different sets of letters.

And this gets to the Rope Drawings and how they evolved just as the performances arose out of chess. But the vowels are—each of the sets is one to five. It's very simple: four sets of one to five. Above the line—if we call the corner of the line—the horizon I call it. Five below the line, five across the line and five slanted across the line.

Now, the five across the line—one, two, three, four, five strokes—one stroke, two strokes, three, four, five—they are the vowels. So we can tap them. That's U. That's I. So you can—you can't tap the others but you can tap the vowels. And the vowels in Ireland—in Irish language go broad vowels and slender vowels for reasons we won't get into. It's a linguistic—you need what I call a consonantal duenna [ph] between vowels before you can put a—on the other side of a consonant you have to have the appropriate broad or slender vowel. No matter how that puts a wrinkle into the word, you have to do that. That's a law.

So anyway, the 15—by—15 grid is five, four, three, two, one—that's 15. So I randomized across that up and down, vertical and horizontal. The vowels—one would be A, U would be four—U would be three, E would be four, O would be two, I would be five. So randomize them with different colors across the grid, you see, A, blue; I, red—so this recalls Rimbaud's poem, you know, Voyelles, with the black. He starts A, black—different.

But so I made many of these wonderful grids that I thought were—introduced something to the grid that Ros Krauss—my friend Ros said it is inimical to language. Well, I used the grid for language very vigorously. And then I got an offer to do something down in 112 Greene Street, which was an early artist space down there in Soho.

So I said, well, I'm going to do a big thing. There is a pillar and there is a wall and I'm going to do a huge one of those vowel grids. So the problem arose—it's interesting how these arise. I said, how the hell am I going to stretch my painted entity—whether it's thin layers of wood or what shall I do? And then I have to weave the wood vertically. This is a problem. This is tough to do.

So then, ah, maybe if I do a rope then I can do it this way and I can do it ceiling to floor. So I did. And a woman named Nancy Foote who was—eventually helped me as editor—as managing editor of Art in America—and then was managing editor of Artforum and then started her own design business—a fine lady, Nancy Foote.

So I did the ropes, painted the ropes in this randomized fashion just as in the drawings. And that was my first Rope Drawing. And somebody told me that—oh, who was that? She wasn't quite pop. But she was a very beautiful dark artist—lovely dark hair and she was a sculptor. Do you remember her?

MR. MCMANUS: Marisol?

MR. O'DOHERTY: Marisol—yes—came. And Marisol, who had a wicked streak, said, "Oh, we need to blow up and tear it down." Somebody told me that. She was very beautiful, by the way, and the last time I saw her she was walking swiftly in the twilight along the street arm—in—arm with an almost white—headed blond person who was Andy Warhol. So that was the last I saw of her. Not the last I saw of Andy.

Anyway, then I put a rope up there in the studio and I tied it to one of the pipes. And I stretched it across the studio, stopped it with a piece of filament, continued the filament into the wall, which invisible. So you have this rope just standing out there—like saluting when you came in.

And I studied that rope for a long time and then gradually evolved out of that room—sized installations. Initially, they were just like sculpture in three dimensions. They were drawing in three dimensions. I felt I'd really discovered something, invented my own means—which is always a thrill for an artist. I think I had invented my own means and I was able to draw any way I wanted.

So in Greene Street a year or two later, I did a—that was an important show for me. The guy who ran it was a fellow called Jeffrey Lew [ph], who was a wonderful chap because he was often stoned with acid and he was one of the few people who could handle acid and appear quite able to perform. I don't know what happened to Jeffrey. A very good man, very nice fellow, Jeffrey—generous, sweet nature. Anyway—

MR. MCMANUS: You've described those lines—and I really enjoyed this phrase that you've given—"the ropes alertly maintaining their midair posture."

MR. O'DOHERTY: They did indeed, God bless them—because then I got very good at it and in drawing. I could—like drawing a line on a piece of paper, I could see where the line stopped. I could start the line. I could cut it here, cut it there and suspend it with absolutely some braided invisible line on.

Initially, the first phase of it was just no painting of the ropes. The first one was painted obviously, the grid—painted grid. But they were not—oh, yes I did paint them. I did. That's true. I did paint them. And then they behaved differently in space as red and blue and yellow things do. But the first ones were just ropes in space—or twine or string or a quarter—inch rope. I had all kinds of varieties of ropes.

And spaces would be friendly or impossible. And usually spaces were manageable and you could set up your midair drawing—this, that and the other. Then gradually I began to paint the walls and sight the walls through the ropes. Very precise work. And then gradually—

MR. MCMANUS: Like the one that's behind me here in the dining room.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, yeah. But then gradually they became more related to domicile, to rooms, to inside and outside, to doorways, to—what do you call those?—portals. And I became very interested in rooms within rooms and what have you. So there's an architectural element that came in strongly.

MR. MCMANUS: The work that you began to do, what, around 1975, '76, studying Borromini's architecture—that must inform this.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Borromini has been a great source for me because—I don't think directly as such. I only did one that was reminiscent of him directly and that was a piece done for John Coplans in the Midwest. I'm trying to remember the name of it—Akron—at Akron. The Akron museum. And there's interesting stories about that.

But again, it's the mind. Borromini had a wonderful head. And he was very unorthodox in the way that he handled space. The one thing about him that is so much more interesting than his competitor, the architect—sculptor, the great sculptor—you know, *Saint Theresa in Ecstasy* [*Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*. -*Ed.*]—what's his name?

MR. MCMANUS: Not coming to me at the moment.

MR. O'DOHERTY: You know the one I mean. Is that he always things of the spectator. He always thinks of the person in his architecture—not a usual thing for architects, I must say. Generally, I feel that they ignore the spectator and just do their—particularly in modernist architecture, particularly in curtain wall architecture with very indifferent doorways and a lost spectator in their glass boxes. But Borromini always is thinking of, how do I affect the spectator? And how is the spectator made aware of him or herself in my work? And that was very important for me.

MR. MCMANUS: Let's stop right now and I'm going to change discs and—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Who was the great Baroque sculptor?

[END SD3.]

MR. MCMANUS: This is James McManus interviewing Brian O'Doherty at his home in New York City on November 17, 2009, continuing this tape.

And begin picking up the discussion about the Rope Drawings which Brian began working on in 1973 and continues to work on today. Brian, how many Rope Drawings have you done in total?

MR. O'DOHERTY: I think it's 112 or 113.

MR. MCMANUS: Most of them were very temporary installations.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, they're all temporary. There's one of them that's permanent in, of all places, Kalamazoo, courtesy of Jan Vondeman [ph]. He founded—he was asked to do a 20th century exhibition out there and so he found the space in the entrance hall, a wonderful wall. So it's up there. I presume it's still there. It's the only one. They're all temporary. And I don't mind that. I mind a little more than I used to now as I become more temporary.

But that was the idea because there was a certain reluctance to add the clutter and manic obstinacy of objects in the world which clutter everything—clutter museums, clutter collectors: things, things, things. Lucy Lippard once adapted Emerson in a wonderful phrase, for her pop art book, "Things are in the saddle and ride mankind." She adapted that from Emerson who had a slightly different—I forget the exact quote.

But the Rope Drawings, interestingly enough, they are fugitive. That may be one reason why they've never quite received the—not the attention, they've had attention, but not the examination, if we want to put it that way, of what they are and what the act of framing is. We know when a picture frames, we know when a tall glass frames, it makes something seem more important, more graspable, more digestible.

It satisfies a certain visual appetite that, also, I believe is part of the body's appetite and the Rope Drawings are very much about proprioception and balance. That's why, I think, dancers love them and have asked to dance in some of the Rope Drawings and they've done so, which is fine by me, as long as they don't knock them down. But there is something about the intentional wandering of the spectator within a *Rope Drawing*, which moments of vista—framed vistas which then, best seen with one eye and then slip out of register immediately as you shift and move.

There is also something about the tenses of occupation which I often talk about insofar as if you populate a *Rope Drawing* with the many places you've been or the places you anticipate being, you have occupied a series of tenses: I was there; I might have been there; I will be there when; I could have been there; I will be there now; I am here now—I am here now, which is the first structural play: I am here now, which based on emphasis, I am here now. I am here now. I am here now. I am here now. Four different meanings. But the occupancy of the—you were going to say something. I sense some pre—verbal tension.

MR. MCMANUS: I was just thinking that the idea of continuity is segmented here into the increments, the increments that you just described: the "was," "is," "will be," to simplify it. My mind quickly moved to your incremental registers in the Duchamp.

MR. O'DOHERTY: In the Duchamp drawings—yes, yes.

MR. MCMANUS: In the Duchamp drawings. There you had segmented a continuity so that we were in one place, we move—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Just remembered something. Excuse me.

MR. MCMANUS: Okay, let me turn this to pause.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Don't turn it off because I'll keep—I put this aside for you to see. Please tell me it's here. Oh Jim, Jim, Jim. Sorry I'm taking longer than I expected. I may Xerox it and send you it—send it to you. That's not a bad idea.

Okay—the Rope Drawings. They were how I began to write *The White Cube* piece. By the way, I should say that it evolved eventually into issues, matters of domesticity and enclosure and that is domestic spaces, trying to enclose a room within a room and then the whole issue of inside and outside—you're inside the cube but you maybe outside the little building that's built of rope inside and then you're inside that and then—so there's lots of inside and outside stuff.

Then, when you fix on something—Clement Greenberg comes riding his hobby horse back and you find the walls begin to breathe, as it were, because once you frame it, it becomes pictorial.

[Side conversation.]

MR. MCMANUS: Okay.

MR. O'DOHERTY: When you're inside or outside or involved with a *Rope Drawing*, there are times when the very precise and knife—edge relationships between the portals and window—like ropes, et cetera, and the painted walls coincide exactly. They can't fit exactly into register. At such moments as I say, Clement Greenberg appears because you are now in the push—pull pictorial situation and so in framing—in perfect framing, you flatten the wall and also mobilize the wall to move. I call that "making the wall breathe." That's mobilizing the white cube into some sort of variable structure that you can control with color and line, just very limited means that you can really change and alter space from just a gallery and the neutral space into a place, a place for occupancy.

Occupancy is a key part of the Rope Drawings and the successful ones become involved in their audience and to some degree in their community and there have been occasions when the audience, in some places, have resisted quite energetically the taking down of a *Rope Drawing* and protested against it and say, this should be permanent, and all this sort of thing, and rip into curators and directors. Well, more power to them, but you can't freeze a gallery permanently—you know, it's a museum or a gallery.

But anyway, the framing idea is to me a little mysterious and nobody has quite—I'm waiting for somebody to write something so brilliantly insightful that explains the effect of framing to me. It does seem to do something mysterious.

But anyway, as I was clambering around—we've talked about this before: on ceilings and floors and corridors, which are vortices of space and the corner is a good place for me as it was for Tatlin. As you're wandering around attachments, floor—to—ceiling, side—to—side, wall—to—wall, what have you, you find sentiments of "what is this little box I'm in? What is this big box I'm in?" That was the beginning of the "white cube." It made me aware of the context and the context had been forgotten.

So the story of *The White Cube* piece is interesting because when you publish something original—I think it's original—many people come up and say, I was just thinking about—to write that—just scooped me." And inaudible people who had never written a word in their life.

MR. MCMANUS: This was post—its appearing in 1976? It was before?

MR. O'DOHERTY: That's right. The first one, which had a sort of sensational appearance—John, that editor, John —

MR. MCMANUS: Coplans?

MR. O'DOHERTY: Coplans had a wonderful response to it because he gave it the cover and that one of the key things in modernism is the space, not the art, but the space. He was very enthusiastic. However, that enthusiasm only came after they had the damn thing for a year and ignored it. He and Max, Max Kozloff, were left isolated after that occasion of the big dildo by that very fine woman artist who's still around. I'm trying to remember her name. Do you remember the dildo affair? She published an ad for her—I think that's what it was.

MR. MCMANUS: Oh, Lynda Benglis.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Lynda Benglis! Yes, she published this very formidable dildo.

MR. MCMANUS: That's an incredible centerfold. [Laughs.]

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, exactly. And some of the—led by Ros Krauss, as I understand it, took great offense at this. I suppose it's a complicated feminine statement, in a way, but it seemed to me a wonderful, wonderful

piece. I think she's a wonderful artist, Lynda Benglis. She's still making art, still around.

Anyway, she outraged the editors, the contributing editors, many of them and they resigned, leaving Max and John alone with Nancy Foote, I believe—or maybe she was a little later. No—I think it was then. So anyway, I had sent this in and I had lectured on it a few times. I lectured in your part of the world. I lectured all these hotshots—Newton Harrison and—

MR. MCMANUS: Oh, down in San Diego.

MR. O'DOHERTY: San Diego. Manny Farber, the guy who worked with Godard, filmmaker who worked with Godard—edited some of Godard's films—and David Antin—brilliant guy. All those guys—but basically a snotty lot. So I gave that lecture and they said, "Nah." None of them knew about that. "What's so great about that?" Which is very interesting. I gave it first from Maurice Tuchman and LACMA. Good response there. I gave it a few more times. I said, you know, you do that to find out what's happening. So I had confidence that it was something different.

And that was really confirmed by the instant and very vocal and intense response to the magazine which sold out like that. So did the second one. Of course, then they called me up even more, even more. But this must have been written around 19—early '75 or maybe even earlier, late '74, because it was only published on—I forget the exact date. July was it, or something like that, in 1976. But it became instantly—what's the word? Infamous? Famous? Notorious? Read.

MR. MCMANUS: Well, it became important right away.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. And that was—

MR. MCMANUS: It was a teaching tool. I know that I and a lot of my colleagues have had it happen quickly.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Really? Really interesting. Now, I then put the three of them together—three or four of them together—and I went to George Braziller and I said, George, I'd like you to turn these into a book. George sent it up to Columbia and the word he got back and he passed on to me was, well, they think that something could be done about this if it was done properly. [Laughs.]

Now, that's the reason why I had de—academized it. As you notice, there are no footnotes. It is written in a concentrated, often ironic and aggressive and amusing, I hope, style. Now, if I'd put a hundred footnotes in there, it would have been ignored.

MR. MCMANUS: Your wit is omnipresent.

MR. O'DOHERTY: It's gone, is it?

MR. MCMANUS: No, it's on.

MR. O'DOHERTY: It's on.

MR. MCMANUS: Your wit is omnipresent in the text.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Thank you. I meant it to be. So then it lay there and so then a woman from your part of the world—used to be married to Henry Hopkins, Jan Butterfield—

MR. MCMANUS: Jan Butterfield lives now in Baltimore, I think.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Oh, really? I thought she was out there. She had a tragedy in her family, the poor lady. I think her daughter died, which I thought was a sad thing, to survive one's issue. But she was, at that time, the companion of the artist out there who did very good work—Sam Francis. And Sam Francis started a publishing house and he published very interesting stuff.

MR. MCMANUS: Is that Lapis Press?

MR. O'DOHERTY: Exactly. Lapis? [pronounced as la-piss -*Ed.*] [They laugh.]

MR. MCMANUS: Lapis.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes. I presume it has something to do with "la pain." I don't know what Lapis Press was.

MR. MCMANUS: I think it probably did, yeah.

MR. O'DOHERTY: But anyway, Annie McCoy, another West Coaster, gifted young person who came over here

and is a good friend, she said to Jan Butterfield, that should be published in a book. And so that was the beginning of that. They went bust and then it was published by one of my least favorite publishers—that's the University of California Press in Berkeley. Don't care for them at all.

MR. MCMANUS: Well, the transition from essays in *Artforum* to the Lapis Press publication took 10 years.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah.

MR. MCMANUS: A long time.

MR. O'DOHERTY: A long time.

MR. MCMANUS: And then 1999 you have the—

MR. O'DOHERTY: And Germany—Germany was paying attention. Wolfgang Kemp had already translated the first one into a little book, so the Germans are ahead of us always. But you were going to say something.

MR. MCMANUS: Well, in 1999, the UC-Berkeley Press.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Was '89?

MR. MCMANUS: Ninety-nine.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Ninety-nine.

MR. MCMANUS: Now it does the new edition.

MR. O'DOHERTY: That's 10 years ago. What'd you believe, Jim? This is unique for an art book—utterly unique for an art book. Every year, I get about three—thousand bucks from that book. Unprecedented—nobody gets money from art books.

MR. MCMANUS: No, tell me. [Laughs.]

MR. O'DOHERTY: Nobody does. So it's now being translated into Spanish. Did you see the French edition, by the way?

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah, it's been done in French.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Oh, it's very interesting. The woman who wrote the text—a very interesting text. I don't read French but I have—it's been academized beautifully here in terms of footnotes and all sorts of stuff. Her name—I've forgotten her name. Her name is Patricia Falguières. Mine is biddable today.

But it was the Rope Drawings that began this and then it just keeps going on and on and on. To some degree, it's become a kind of albatross around my neck and has divided attention or taken attention away from my real work or my work, I think. But anyway, be that as it may, if you divide yourself, both in terms of personas and in terms of activities, you're breaking very fundamental rules of the art world and I think this should be said that if you take a guy—I would thoroughly dislike the person I'm going to describe.

The person who was a doctor, who was a television presenter, who was a critic at *The Times*, who wrote successful novels, who wrote *The White Cube* and other associated malfeasances, who made art and who also makes art. Well, if I find that guy in my sights out there, I'm going to say, screw him. And that was a lot of the hostility that I got within the art community because you're breaking rules.

Now, it is interesting—I talk about that in America, particularly, there is a sense, a sort of invisible pressure at the borders of each discipline, whatever the discipline be—an outward pressure to insulate each field from the other—to insulate music—I was writing about Morton Feldman—insulating music from visual art; insulating the writers—the novelists, the writers, they're hopeless with art, even what's—his—name, the poor man who died recently, the wonderful Updike, Updike who wrote passably well about art. But there is a pressure not to let that field be breached.

I have made a career of breaching fields. I have made a career of saying, I will not be determined or controlled by your unwritten and ironclad rules. Therefore, you have to pay and I have been willing to pay that price. I say this without, I hope, self—dramatization but I say it with some passion because I bear the scars of it and now in my old age, at the ripe age of 81, of course I can do anything and it's just—I am forgiven because now my generation is half—forgotten, unless you're very famous, and also old age is presumed to be relatively harmless. They should read the old Yeats. Anyway,—

MR. MCMANUS: My mind keeps wanting to go back to Barbara Dawson's comment in the introduction to *Beyond the White Cube* catalogue, that line, "O'Doherty does not fit easily into the canons of contemporary art." And I wonder if she couldn't have been meaning, at least in some part, what you just described—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Possibly so.

MR. MCMANUS: —is that we cannot, that we cannot easily hang a label around your neck—

MR. O'DOHERTY: True.

MR. MCMANUS: —as a "this" or "that," that you are not a painter, that you have not given us this easy—to—organize, chronologically and thematically arranged series of works moving toward masterpiece, followed by experiment, followed by masterpiece, et cetera, the kind of canonic theme.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, I can't be old, so I must be nothing, as there is a—I'm aware of that in medicine, where I started, that if the thoracic surgeons—special group of people—start going into the abdomen, the abdominal, the GIT surgeons say, "who the hell is that guy coming in? What the hell does he know?" It's interesting.

So I remember also William Harvey, when he described the circulation of the blood. He studied in—where the—Padua. He studied in that wonderful anatomy theater in Padua that looks like a telescope. And I sat in there—I love medical history, by the way—I sat in there with my knees up to my chin because they were smaller then. Do you remember that? That's wonderful. Do see it if you haven't seen it. Just while you leave the giottos, go over there and have a look at it.

But I remember Harvey, when he described the circulation of the blood—which, by the way, the heartbeat: You're interested in this heartbeat thing, I'm sure, because he described the heartbeat as the firing of a pistol. You got the sino—auricular node, you got the impulse from the auricles, then the division of the ventricles then opening up the lung valves—what do you call them? Pneumonic valves. Then the other one going down into the aorta, blah, blah, blah. So anyway, it's a wonderful bit of engineering.

He described the circulation of the blood like the firing of a pistol: The heartbeat was like the firing of a pistol. But he said something that's relevant to this discussion, or this monologue. He said, "I fear not the hostility of the public; I fear the envy of my colleagues." So say something, Jim, to break this dreadful monologue.

MR. MCMANUS: Okay, so the book, *The White Cube*, or the writing about *The White Cube*, contributes in ways important to the series of the Rope Drawings.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes, it—if I took them out of the Rope Drawings—this is mildly interesting and I—

MR. MCMANUS: So the early Rope Drawings contribute, then, to your writing at the collection of essays that becomes *The White Cube*.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes, yes, yes, exactly. There was something that has flown in and out of the mind that seemed relevant a moment ago but we'll move on. Now it's gone.

MR. MCMANUS: The early drawings were in single rooms or single spaces.

MR. O'DOHERTY: In corners.

MR. MCMANUS: Corners of rooms.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. Lot of corners.

MR. MCMANUS: And then you started using two rooms, what, about 1976, '77?

MR. O'DOHERTY: So I needed the whole room around 1977, around there, as far as I remember. It's in that little thing I gave you—that little Japanese book of the drawings in the '80s. But I feel that the Rope Drawings are far too—there's a lot—each has a different mood and they varied from the piece I did—*H—Block*—in Belfast, which I was scared stiff doing it actually because it was the twelfth of July when King Billy—William of Orange beat James at the Battle of the Boyne and they commemorate that every year, quite violently.

So H—Block is where they kept all the extreme prisoners and the political prisoners and you know, this is how you enter the H—Block. These are two of the ugliest colors you ever saw—I'm showing this photograph to Jim of the *H—Block* piece in Belfast.

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah, green and orange.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Green and orange. And then on the outside, this scrambled—what did you call it—brownish umber thing is the dirty protest. Do you know about the dirty protest?

MR. MCMANUS: There's a bit of Patrick Ireland there in the coloration.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, that's the green and white—the conflict, the great conflict in colors.

MR. MCMANUS: Right. And the brown on the outside.

MR. O'DOHERTY: And the brown is the dirty protest. Do you remember about the dirty protest?

MR. MCMANUS: A little bit.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. That was—what's her name—the Iron Lady, Thatcher, wouldn't allow them—

MR. MCMANUS: Margaret Thatcher.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. She wouldn't allow them political status and they refused to wear their prison uniforms. So they said, "Okay, you can stew in your own dirt." They wouldn't clean the uniforms—clean the—beg your pardon—the cells. So there they are in the cells with their own feces. So they took the feces—they took their own shit and they painted the walls of their cells with their own shit.

It's called the dirty protest, this sort of excremental transcendent weird use of your own body and it's awful to describe the space that's containing you. Norman O'Brown would have loved that. It is something that—touched me deeply. When I did this, it was, I say, the twelfth of July when the Orangemen, as they call them—

MR. MCMANUS: And the year for that piece?

MR. O'DOHERTY: Let me see—'89. But they were outside in the street and the gallery had a big picture window. And I said if they know what this is, they're not sophisticated enough to see the balance between the green and the orange, the dialectic blah, blah, blah. They'll beat the hell out of me. So they peered in the window—these guys—and the big Lambeg drums are booming, booming, booming.

This is always proto—violent and so they peered in and they looked around. And it was only art. And they went away again. It was only art, which refers to my point that changing my name was a far more successful political art than any art I could make. There was some vicious responses to that in the North.

One I particularly remember—one guy said, "I'm changing my name to Joe Blow for the next duration of this review" and he attacked the thing right royally and the name Patrick Ireland and what have you. That's what you want because it's supposed to be a provocation to make people think. So I never told Barbara I was going to do that because she would have been very worried. But I got away because they thought it was art—nothing to do with them—nothing to do with anything.

MR. MCMANUS: Should I put this on pause while you check the phone?

MR. O'DOHERTY: No, I'm not going to answer it.

MR. MCMANUS: We could be stopping all the time with the frequency of your phone—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, don't bother. No, no, we'll—

MR. MCMANUS: So the Rope Drawings, Labyrinths, about which we've really not talked very much and CHESS all come together to create a venue for performance in your work. And this is—

MR. O'DOHERTY: The last one, yes, passing through the—they're not complicated. I don't want the Labyrinths to be frightening or oppressive. The last one I did—*The Lookout* in the 17th—century fort in Kinsale in the South of Ireland—that was a performance space and as well as a lookout, as well as a sculpture, as well as an artwork—this multipurpose thing that is raised there on the crest of that greensward of the fort, which had quite a place in Irish history and which echoes with dead voices, but—

MR. MCMANUS: That was done earlier this year?

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, it was done earlier this year. So that is my first architectural structure, which opens up a whole area for me if I get other opportunities to do that because I had an architect, I had a builder—very good builder. I had four hard—hats who—we worked very well together—who are good eyes. And the Irish all said, "This one's a great sense of humor." They're great to work with and especially down the country—the blue—collar guys that you work with in these occasions are—if you give them a task, they'll do the task if they like

you.

But generally, I—there have been some performance—like spaces, Jim, like the—Borromini's—what was it called at Akron, the one I did it for John Coplans' Borromini something or other, which is based on Borromini's little entertainment—you know, the one that funnels prematurely with false perspective. And where is it—in the—I've forgotten where it is in Rome. They restored it recently and now you can't walk into it.

MR. MCMANUS: I thought I had it written down here, but I don't.

One of the Rope Drawings that's fascinating to me is one that you did bringing together a *Labyrinth* in the outside room, a *Labyrinth* though which you must pass to get into the second room space called *Caligari's Rope Palace—Caligari's Rope Palace* and this was done in the mid—1990s.

MR. O'DOHERTY: That far away—yeah. It was done for P.S.1—Alanna Heiss has been so original at P.S.1. She gets to show up on museums that are just stumbling there around, just wondering what to do. And it's a pity she's no longer there, but she reached 65, which is, you know, very severe limitation if you apply that to artists. You can't make art after 65. You have to retire and you don't make any art or you will be prosecuted.

MR. MCMANUS: What are we doing having this conversation because both you and I are past the limit?

MR. O'DOHERTY: We're past it, Jim; we're past it. But by god, we won't give up—keeps us going, keeps us alive. That was a *Labyrinth* painted in a dark sort of blue—blue, very dark blue—gray and it was a *Labyrinth* in which you travel around—several left—hand turns to the center, then you unwind in the right—hand tunnel. So it's a sort of DNA—type spiral—an anti—spiral.

And then you go into the light—filled room beyond, which is full of light, color, paradox, sidelines. And one of the things about Rope Drawings, I think, that people very often miss because they think if they do the sideline or the vista and there's several on each work, obviously, then they think that's it—when in fact, the inventive and resourceful spectator will find and make all kinds of make—and—break gestalts with the ropes.

And they're legion. Some of them I don't even anticipate when I put it up and I'd say, oh god, look at that. That's interesting. So you find all kinds of surprises, meant and unmeant, but cheerfully accept it in these room—sized Rope Drawings. And the two—gallery situation was something I like very much because one is a preface to the other.

I did the Morton Feldman—Morton's journey out in an odd space in San Francisco—I forget when—but that was—I think Morty died in '87—and that was a sort of sober, sort of monolithic, dark entrance. So when you get a little dark—adapted in there so that when you go into the inner room, it plays with light and color; you're sort of blinded for a moment.

That piece, actually, was interesting because for some reason, the floor had been painted blue when I got there. And I said, "oh my god," I never paint the floor. I can use that blue. It doesn't come out too well in my photograph, you see a bit of it there. But it was wonderful. It helped the piece enormously because it played so well against all these other colors.

MR. MCMANUS: Now, for the listener to this tape—the reader of the transcripts, there is some good recording of the Rope Drawings in the catalogue for your Hugh Lane Gallery/Grey Gallery retrospective, "Beyond the White Cube." And that—does that make up most of the collection of published information and images of the Rope Drawings?

MR. O'DOHERTY: They're published in various other museums' catalogues and stuff. What really, I should do, is—

MR. MCMANUS: But to a lesser degree, so that there isn't a—

MR. O'DOHERTY: That's the beginning. This is the '80s. The '90s are not well—documented and the '10s, as we get to the end of this now, what are we? Are we in '09 or '10? We're in '09, aren't we? So we're going to go on to '10, where we'll be in double figures.

So there are four decades—this is the '70s, the '80s. The '80s are well—documented. The '90s are moderately well—documented because there's a lot of stuff not in that catalogue you mentioned, *Beyond the White Cube*. And there's nothing really major about the 21[twenty—first century]—the current decade, I should say. There's some things sparingly. So I should really get them all together and because they don't do slides anymore. Jim, transparencies are for older, obsolete people like—

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah, digital world is—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, it's a digital world.

MR. MCMANUS: Is there a correspondence between, say, the Rope Drawings and some of the architectural projects that you're now—that you've been doing recently?

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, I've learned a lot about the spectator, the observer, the walker, the person in the work. I've learned an awful lot about that and that helped me very much in this new direction, which may just be cut off very quickly because you need people to make large commitments.

But I learned an awful lot about how to design spaces where people would be—or people would want to be. And that is—implicit in each *Rope Drawing* is, shall we say grandly, a theory of the spectator, an idea of the spectator, of what spectator? You know, the human biped, large, small, whatever, in all its variety.

We should not forget, however, that most people—I would think most people—in my experience, they look into the room where there is a *Rope Drawing* and walk away. So I consider that—the piece is editing its own audience. People are not curious. The people who are curious are kids. Kids are enormously curious and searching.

But I think that there—one is your audience. I think the unsophisticated audience is very valuable to me. The elitist audience is obviously broken up into various categories of insight and interest. But the so—called untutored audience, I find, has been very responsive to the work. How do they get in there? I mean, how do you get untutored audience into a museum or into a *Rope Drawing*? I'll tell you how.

I did a piece in the Detroit Institute of Art. That was a big show. I did two rooms and several other rooms—they're all well—known people. I can't remember who they are now, but the names are just very, very familiar. And the guards—the guards were so fascinated. At the weekend, they brought back their families and they would—

MR. MCMANUS: They loved them.

MR. O'DOHERTY: They would hold up their children to look at the sideline because they were too small to see the exact sideline. And that was very rewarding for me and I found that consistently, the guards like the work. It's something they deal with. There's another occasion at LACMA—one drawing in two rooms and the guards said, "We don't want to be part of this."

This was not painted walls; it was just sort of like a "Leonardo"—two wings going off in the center of the intervening doorway—two wings going off like one of his flying machines. And the guards said we don't want to be here. I don't want to be in this place. The kids will tear it down. You know, people will come in; it's not going to last.

Now, something very—it was a very instructive moment for me—the date would be—I don't know, about '78, '76, I don't know. But what happened was the piece was never compromised. It was never attacked. And the kids—young people came and they sat around the walls and made it a place and read books and weren't chased away. And so that was a successful transfer of space into place, a white cube into a habitable—

MR. MCMANUS: Into a habitable space.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, yeah. So that, to me, is a criterion of success. Is it used? Is it not used? How does it define its spectator? How does it attract its spectator? And what kind of spectator does it use to play itself? I think these are difficult questions to answer, but they're ones that I've learned how to make happen.

There are two ways, obviously, of dealing with the spectator. One is rather brutal—brutal coercion of attention and there are many brutalist artists. There are some anyway, but I'm thinking of one in particular that I don't get along with, though I won't mention a name. And there is the gentle suggestion, the art of gentle suggestion. And perhaps you might move there; perhaps not. So you respect the freedom of the spectator, rather than to—that's why my *Labyrinths* are not coercive or frightening. I just want the passage through these—there are several exits, several entrances. They're not unicursal labyrinths where you only have—

MR. MCMANUS: And the ones that I've seen, the walls are not so high that you have a fear of being cloistered.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Some of them are low and some of them are nine—feet high. Some of them are quite low and—but they're not frightening because you can always get out. Punishment of the spectator was such a thing in modernism, wasn't it? Spectators—they don't know what we're doing; the future will know.

We're posting this. Put a stamp on it, send it into the future. There's an enlightened audience out there, but these dummies here right now, they're don't know what the fuck it is, right? So now, with the temporary work, the audience is all you have. So why am I going to brutalize the audience and say, stay out? No way.

MR. MCMANUS: No, you have to engage them.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes.

MR. MCMANUS: Let me stop this and we're going to start a new disc.

[END SD4.]

MR. MCMANUS: James McManus interviewing Brian O'Doherty at his home, New York City, November 17, 2009. This is the beginning of disc five.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I'm going to ask you a question, Jim. Why do you think *The White Cube* had such an immediate and extraordinary response of anything I've ever written in 1976? The first one, the second one, the third one—not so much the fourth one because that was 10 years or more later. But—and I should add, by the way, that some of the original lectures from which they were written were lost. Half of one is lost, which is a pity. It's the one—"The Gallery as a Gesture, Part One"—half of that was published; the other half, I lost.

MR. MCMANUS: It's now gone.

MR. O'DOHERTY: But why do you think it had this extraordinary response?

MR. MCMANUS: Well, I can really only speak from my own point of view in this, I suppose, but the gallery itself had become such an important center of—cathedral—like—and this is part of your observations in the essay—a cathedral—like space that was separated from the larger set of spaces that surround us on a daily basis, that we, as audience entering the gallery, then, confronted the phenomenon it identified as art and something we understood through its being present inside that space.

And your writing, I think, importantly begins to put questions before people about the significance of that space and the ritual relationship that we are asked to assume between the objects that fill that space and the space—the space itself. You know, it's a bit like being inside the church, passing through the narthex into the nave of the church. The narthex, as a design space, is a kind of—

MR. O'DOHERTY: What's the narthex?

MR. MCMANUS: The narthex is the entry area of traditional Romanesque and gothic cathedrals. And it's—I see it as a sort of decompression chamber where one leaves the—

MR. O'DOHERTY: The preface.

MR. MCMANUS: Where one leaves the secular world behind to enter the sacred space of the church.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I see.

MR. MCMANUS: And you enter a sacred space that is the gallery or the museum space in which you—which you are to understand this object or those objects as works.

And the writing became, I think, a very good vehicle for getting people to think about the necessity of that kind of relationship—relationship in the gallery to the works of art—the role that the gallery would play as a certifier of its content.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Interesting.

MR. MCMANUS: And certainly, in the 1970s—and this was a time when you were really interested, also, in alternate spaces, that the alternate space created a new place, a new venue where the art had to resituate itself in relationship to its audience. So I think—you know, I think those are among the reasons why that writing—it struck a chord. It struck a very important chord.

MR. O'DOHERTY: It struck a chord. I never quite understood why demystifying the white spaces of the gallery suddenly became a—a sensation, literally a sensation overnight. I never quite understood that. Were people sick of the gallery? Were people resentful of it?

MR. MCMANUS: Well, maybe another piece—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Had people never seen it? Had it become so invisible—whatever, all of these things, I suppose.

MR. MCMANUS: Another possible piece of the argument might be that the gallery had become the epicenter for

commerce.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, there was that resentment in part, by some of us who were not inclined or successful, perhaps, in terms of money. White cube—white cube, that's an interesting point. What was I going to call this thing? It's not a white cube. It's very rarely a white cube. So I said—I want to give a sense of density, a block of matter which inside is mysterious.

So *Inside the White Cube* was much more interesting because there's a sense of density, then saying inside the white gallery or the white box—a box would imply space within, but the cube, number one is conceptually an easy thing to visualize or handle in your mind or with your thoughts. And secondly, the density of it means exclusion. So the privilege of entering it—

MR. MCMANUS: Well, and also, the geometric configuration of the cube.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, it's easy to get.

MR. MCMANUS: Is static. It's a representation of stasis. And I suppose it echoes the theme of kind of mausoleum.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. So anyway, that's why I call it "the white cube" and the phrase took off. The good thing is, when people don't know it was originated by me, that means it's really become part of—

MR. MCMANUS: Part of the vernacular.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah.

MR. MCMANUS: Another important writing that you did, *American Masters*.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, that one's out of print, unfortunately and it was to be published by the University of California Press at Berkeley and the editor got fired. So it's lying there and I must add—by the way, Ros Krauss wrote a very nice introduction for that edition.

And then it was never published and I have to go around to get it to be published again. It's hard to get your work republished again and again. I don't have that problem with the cube, but the books—the novels, they go out of print very quickly. Even when it was a bestseller like the McGreevy novel—that sold out several times. Everything in this country, anyway, temporary, isn't it?

MR. MCMANUS: You might talk a little bit more about the *American Masters,* the content of it, its organization.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, I was—

MR. MCMANUS: What brought you to—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah—and I don't know if this is on tape or not, but I talked about it when I was a kid in Ireland and the avatar of culture was the—*Time* magazine and I used to read about Stuart Davis and our friend, the—Edward Hopper and to some degree, Duchamp. But I was always fascinated by both their works. They both studied with Robert Henri. They were both complementary in a way. One was pretending to be provincial and the other's pretending to be an internationalist.

And so they both—there are interesting cat's cradle of relationships between them. So when I did that book, I said, "I want to do the preface to the big boys"—Pollock, de Kooning, Rothko—"and make these two boys, Davis and Hopper, just as big as the so—called giants," which was in those days very difficult to do because there is a brutal sense among scholars of a fault line beyond which nothing exists.

Remember that era? Before abstract expressionism—Arthur Dove, who the hell is he? He doesn't exist. Charles Sheeler—what is he? Some "Mickey Mouse" guy. There was a brutal, almost Stalinist purge of previous scholarship and previous artists. You remember this, Jim, don't you?

MR. MCMANUS: Yes, I do.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Before the abstract expressionists. Now, these two guys, I thought, were major, major figures. So anyway, I did them. I knew both of them. Davis' easel is right here in the studio.

MR. MCMANUS: Stands in your studio.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. And he lived across—his studio was opposite mine here. And so I was very fond of both of these men because they were fine people—very fine people and wonderful, wonderful artists. And both very

interesting to talk to if you could get the pest of Mrs. Hopper out of the way so that you could talk to Edward—"Eddie," as she called him.

Then, of course, Pollock. Pollock had been written to death, so what was I going to write about? I was going to write about Pollock's myth and the vicissitudes of his myth and the conflicts—the Greenberg versus Rosenberg—that particular conflict, which was very interesting.

And also the mythology of Pollock and the mythology of each of these artists and how it enhanced, suppressed or altered what I call the voice—that is, the genuine nature of the work, distorted by reception or by publicity or by mythology. So the voice generally suppressed by the myth of this artists—all them in myths. Sometimes, the myth was in consonance, as with the—the little box man, Cornell. But anyway, I wrote about the myth.

I then embarked onto—I was a great reader in those days, in the late '60s. And I read everything and I educated myself—I will confess to being a good self—educator. I have received no formal education on many of these areas, so there's, I'm sure, quite a primitive quality about my work that I don't recognize. Anyway, I wrote two very ambitious exegeses about de Kooning and Rothko, two utterly fascinating people. Didn't know de Kooning very well, only met him a few times.

Rothko, I knew well, very well in some ways. And after that triptych of Pollock, de Kooning, Rothko—I said, now I want to do somebody who stands for the '60s. And that, I knew Rauschenberg much better than I knew Johns. Also, Johns had been written about superbly. Barbara Rose wrote a wonderful thing about his prints—some really brilliant stuff.

So I said I'd write about Rauschenberg. So I wrote about Rauschenberg and he stood for the '60s. I made my claims for him—I don't think they were true—I said he would be the most important figure of his generation. I don't—I think Johns is a more important artist in many ways—because Bob [Rauschenberg] turned out an awful lot of rather unexciting stuff after his great days in the '70s—in the '60s and '70s.

But I did my job there, I think. And I think Bob was a much more fun person to write about and in some ways more interesting because Bob was a social phenomenon as well as an artistic phenomenon. And those what we talked about yesterday—EAT—electronics—what's it called?

MR. MCMANUS: Experiments in Art and Technology.

MR. O'DOHERTY: In art and technology, which you were involved in on the West Coast. Then I said, now I'm finished here. But there are two artists—that one should stand for the American internationalist and one should stand for the American provincial—outsiders.

So Cornell, I felt, was an outsider on the left with his dream of European culture and his busy curatorship of this cultural exchange out in Utopia Parkway [Queens, New York], where he would make connections with all kinds of remote figures. Once, he told me that he wants to contact Delacroix. So he sent, in a dream, he sent Duchamp to talk to Delacroix and bring back love—interesting—he told me this dream.

MR. MCMANUS: Well, we had that letter.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Oh really?

MR. MCMANUS: In our Washington, D.C., show. It's part of a letter—

MR. O'DOHERTY: It was Duchamp he sent.

MR. MCMANUS: It was part of a letter that he had sent to Teeny right after Duchamp's death.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Oh for heaven's sake. He told me this, so it's really—he wrote about it, too. That's grand.

Now, the outsider on the right that nobody would even spit at was Wyeth—Andrew Wyeth. So why Andrew Wyeth? Well, you know, Andrew Wyeth was an interesting figure. As Rothko said to me, he is about the pursuit of strangeness, but he is not whole as Hopper is whole.

Rothko said some wonderful things to me. He said George Segal does walk—in Hoppers. [They laugh.] Nice, nice. He was a very good critic, Rothko. Hated color field, by the way—thought it was totally without substance, purely decorative. But anyway, why did I write about Wyeth? Very good reason. You didn't grow up in the country, by any chance, did you Jim?

MR. MCMANUS: Mm—hmm [Affirmative].

MR. O'DOHERTY: You did grow up in the country? Well, then you know country ways. You know country

people. You see, Wyeth is greatly misunderstood because he's not an urban artist. He's a rural artist and rural life is full of the harsh cruelties that he sometimes paints. It's also full of chains of association like—as I described in that—you go down. The smoke is coming out of the house. Is the cart or horse or car there? No, it's gone. Are they in? Are they out? You go in. There's silence—is there anything wrong?

All this chain of deductive reasoning that are second nature to people in the country—also the loneliness of country life—I think very few city people have walked along a dark country street and heard your feet following you. I don't know if you've had that experience. As your feet hit—even in the widest space, they seem to have an echo behind you so you think you're being followed. And I've talked to people if they've had that experience. They say, yeah, yeah.

So there is something about Wyeth that admits to his sentimentalities, is very genuine to country life. And so I felt that he was a person for whom no great mastery could be claimed in the level of the others, but who was a genuine rural artist who should be respected for it.

I was harshly criticized for that. Some said I wouldn't review a book in which it tried to take Wyeth seriously. That's more of that narrowness of a kind of professionalism of this is my trade, I'm an artist, that's impossible, this is terrible. I learned early in life and I've tried hard to keep through it, and not always successfully—don't criticize other artists. It will come back and bite you in the ass. It will come back and bite you in the ass.

MR. MCMANUS: It's a lesson we can all learn.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah.

MR. MCMANUS: In the—

MR. O'DOHERTY: So that book was, you know, pretty well—received, I must say.

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah, I had a hard time finding a copy for myself, which I did.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I can give you one.

MR. MCMANUS: I have one.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I have a first edition down in the basement somewhere.

MR. MCMANUS: Then in the early '90s, you become a writer of new kinds of subjects:

MR. O'DOHERTY: Novels.

MR. MCMANUS: The novel.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Novels, yeah.

MR. MCMANUS: Yeah, your first novel was *The Strange Case of Mademoiselle P*.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah, that was Mesmer's famous case in the—Anton Mesmer's famous case in Vienna in the '70s—in the 1770s. He was a friend of Mozart's father and the case was—became a European case—a case of Maria Theresia von Paradis—was the daughter of another court functionary. And she went blind at the age of three. Whatever she saw must be hysterical blindness because he was recovering her sight. She was, I think, about 17 or 18 at this point and she was a favorite of Maria Theresa's court, you know, that old rascal—had a morality committee, too, by the way.

But they're in—what's the name of the palace? Schonbrunn or something in Vienna—I don't remember the name of it—anyway, that big, huge palace. But that book—there's an interesting thing about novels. I tried to write novels. It never worked for me. And one day, I sat down and wrote that and it wrote itself. Isn't that weird?

It was given to me and in the mysterious way things are, Barbara had the same experience with her first novel, *Alice's Neck*, which approaches the Holocaust, I believe, in the most original way. The second one was part of my exorcism of Ireland—*The Deposition of Father McGreevy*. And it's very rural—just when we're talking about rural things.

MR. MCMANUS: Oh, yes.

MR. O'DOHERTY: It is an invented village in Kerry [Ireland]. It did not make the Irish happy because in those days they were going along in their Irish—what do they call it—that very successful—the Irish—something that you know, they were very—economically—successful in Western Europe. We call it the Irish something or other.

And they're riding along in this gilded limousine and they want to forget their origins and the past and the rural life. So a lot of Irish people dislike that heartily even though it was on the bestseller for a brief moment. And then you know, now that they're going through hardship, I'm sure they'll find that book more accessible or more useable.

MR. MCMANUS: A considerable shift in mindset to move from having written criticism—narratives about contemporary art to the novel. What took you there or what you urged you to make this shift?

MR. O'DOHERTY: There are some people or subjects I've always wanted to write about. I think the blindness idea is fascinating because having worked on experimental psychology in Cambridge, England, the matter of how you perceive when blind and how sight is reborn—how you misinterpret space and how you have to learn space—we do forget that space is a learned experience and that it is a big—as the psychologists call it—a big, buzzing confusion. And so somebody who is blind and sees space, they can't tell near and far. You know, this book may look like a bed. They have no idea of how to discriminate. So perception, of course, is a learned experience and space is a learned experience.

I think that's very useful for me in the Rope Drawings because I've always been aware that I'm trying to get back into that pre—perceptually educated time when space is just a big nothing that I have to shape and form and I can do it very simply with lines and color.

So the business of—you make space. Space—isn't it there for you to work with—you have to make it just as you have to learn how to perceive it. So space is very much a learned experience, a learned language, as it were, a perceptual language. And I found Maria Theresia von Paradis' experiences when she was regaining her sight just kind of thrilling.

And you know, she wrote about it and her doctor wrote about it and there was—she was, by the way, a composer. You can still hear her music. And Mozart wrote a concerto for her and I went down to Carnegie Hall a couple years back as they were playing her concerto. It's not one of the great ones. It's got nice things in it now and then, but she was very tight with Mozart for a while and she was a good composer herself. I mean, she was not negligible. She did something very sweet for the cello.

But anyway, that was—I just handed that book in. You'll be how amused how—and it was quickly turned down. It's always turned down by a couple of people. And I said 'holy shit," you know, maybe just throw this in the drawer and forget it.

I've had fun writing it because it is the process of everything that gives you the pleasure. So Leo Lerman—wonderful Leo Lerman was around. And so I said, "Leo, a friend of mine has written a piece about Mesmer's greatest case." He said, "Let me see it; I'd love to see it." So I sent it to him under another name—proper, you know, it wasn't going to be me. And old Leo was too smart.

He said, "You've done a very nice book. [They laugh.] That's a lovely book. Would you do it on Mozart next," he said? I said "no, I'm not going near Mozart." But Leo then immediately got it published by—I forget the outfit—they have a little temple as their logo. Let's not torture ourselves with that.

But the second one was written with great pleasure on this fictitious—fictitious village up in the mountains, would occasionally come down to the town below. When I lived in Bray [Ireland], the people from the mountains—the Wicklow Mountains would come down and they were wild. They were different from the townspeople. There was always a conflict between mountain people and townspeople and sometimes broke into violence. And so that was helpful to me.

I should tell you just that—so that I'm properly adjacent in case I think I'm any good at it, that I've written a book about the Chevalier d'Eon. It's over 400 pages.

The Chevalier d'Eon is one of the most—perhaps the most famous cross—dresser in history. He lived half his life as a woman. He was born 1728—I was born 1928 and he died in 1810. I hope I get beyond—up to the 1810, maybe beyond. So anyway, he was a spy—an early feminist, the greatest collection of feminine literature in Europe. He was a diplomat.

He was a brilliant writer. He was a fencer with a European reputation. He—what else was he—totally interesting guy and he was part of Louis XV's secret, which always reminded me Nixon's White House, where Nixon had his own state department outside the State Department, you know, which is interesting. So Louis XV, who's a properly screwed up guy, God bless him, he had his Secret—that is, his men.

And it's like the CIA. And he spies on each European capital, and d'Eon was the man in London. And so d'Eon fell through his own egotism and lack of—excuse me—lack of patience. Money was at the bottom of it. But anyway, he was—do you want to hear this?

MR. MCMANUS: Yes, I do.

MR. O'DOHERTY: So anyway, he's given them a lot of trouble. He's given Louis XV and his prime minister a hell of a lot of trouble. He knows all the secrets and he could be dangerous. So—[inaudible]—down to it—it's something unprecedented. He took all the private and the medical correspondence and published it.

It was a European sensation, but it was the end of him as a diplomat. So now, they want to get back a letter that the king wrote to him saying, gather—they had been absolutely whipped by the English and they were destitute. They were just really, totally beaten up by the British. So while they lay there panting in the corner with their sides healing, Louis XV got the idea, well, let's invade Britain, which is pure fantasy.

And he said to d'Eon, "I'm sending you some spies. You just find out what their naval defenses are like on the coast"—all this sort of carry on. "And I charge you, Chevalier d'Eon de Beaumont and so on and so to do this," signed Louis, Louis [pronounced Lewis -*Ed.*], Louis—crazy, imprudent thing for him to do, which had been signed by one of his ministers.

So they wanted to get that letter back because if he gave it to the English, all hell would break loose. So who did he send over to get it back but Beaumarchais? And there are these two foxes having at each other. It's a great story, but it's been turned down by several agents. I was trying to get an agent because you get money if you get an agent.

I've never had one for novels. So I sent it to the man who had such a success with—in London—with the McGreevy book because it was short—listed for the Booker Prize and all that stuff. So that helped its sales, of course. So I sent it to him. He said, well—I said, this guy will probably—first publisher I sent it to was this guy because I couldn't get on with the agents. I really couldn't. So—an old story, right? So I sent it to him and the other day, he sent me a letter saying it's too long. It's too long.

So that wasn't good, so—it's a terrible time for publishing, Jim. In publishing, they're just decimating their staff. Nobody wants to publish long books. It's expensive. So I think what I'll do is simply put it in a drawer and wait until things get better and then try and shyly bring Monsieur d'Eon out from his hiding place and see if we can get it published. Barbara—I tend to depend on her judgment—she thinks it's far superior to the other novels and she's a tough critic. So we'll see.

MR. MCMANUS: In *The Deposition of Father McGreevy*, you bring to life in the pages of that book two old friends, one real and one from the literature—Maginn, William Maginn.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes, I do. You're so right. I was wondering—

MR. MCMANUS: First, Thomas McGreevy—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes, I missed what you were saying for a moment. You're dead right. I named it after Tom McGreevy in part—old Tom, bless his heart. I think we talked about some of this yesterday. He was the friend of Beckett, the intimate friend of Beckett; they wrote to each other every day. He was a friend of Joyce's.

You see him in the pictures in Paris of Joyce in the '20s with this young man—several young men, whatever, behind, including Tom, looking very grave, and I think they wanted him for the crazy daughter. Beckett wanted—Joyce wanted Beckett and McGreevy for the daughter and one of them as a suitor but that didn't work out, of course—they were too smart for that poor child.

But yes—the end of course always brings a smile to my face. Maginn is a delightful person and a trickster and a joker—a sort of Nabokovian type, Nabokov being one of the people I admire a lot. Tom of course was an extremely brilliant man—a great poet, by the way. His poetry has entered the canon and then he ended up as—I don't think I got this or we got his on tape yesterday—young Tom is the curator of the National Gallery and a major mentor for me anon.

MR. MCMANUS: I read Maginn in that book as you.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, it gave me a chance to comment on the action.

MR. MCMANUS: The quest.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah.

MR. MCMANUS: You were the one who was conducting the quest. Maginn—you were wearing Maginn's manteau.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah. I did. I did all the footnotes—Maginn did all the footnotes about the fairies and about

this and that. There's a lot of information in it—how do you get information into a novel? You can't bring it in dead so there were footnotes there. Of course, the master of a footnote in novel—there's a little line of text and then a page of footnote, that long—is Flann O'Brien.

And I would recommend *The Third Policeman* which is—you would enjoy enormously. The other, more difficult one, is the first one that Graham Greene was so mad about, called *At Swim—Two—Birds—At Snámh dá én*, which is a translation of the Irish and it's like a place name. *At Swim—Two—Birds*—has a certain Indian quality, doesn't it? American Indian name.

MR. MCMANUS: We've just spent some time talking about an important part of your career and that is as a writer and critic and a novelist. In the last few years, more and more attention has come to be paid to you as an artist.

MR. O'DOHERTY: True.

MR. MCMANUS: And that important part of the manifold and complicated Brian O'Doherty is becoming visible: the retrospective at the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin in 2006 and then the iteration of it that took place here in the American Grey Gallery [Grey Art Gallery, New York University] in 2007 are important parts of that.

MR. O'DOHERTY: They were of that, yeah.

MR. MCMANUS: I believe that there's been some other events since then that are important acknowledgments of your—

MR. O'DOHERTY: I don't remember. What are you thinking of?

MR. MCMANUS: Isn't there something at P.S.1?

MR. O'DOHERTY: I don't know. Did I do something there?

MR. MCMANUS: I remember Barbara telling me that a year or so ago or—where you had been—the acknowledgement of you as an important artist has taken place.

MR. O'DOHERTY: I don't remember.

MR. MCMANUS: Ah. Maybe Barbara will refresh our memory on this.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Making the art has been the single course through all of it. It is the one consistent, unending, nonstop activity at all times. The novels come late. The writing is intermittent. The criticism is intermittent. The filmmaking—I made one film on Hopper and would have loved to make more, but I am not good at raising money and you have to raise money—particularly difficult now because money isn't around.

The art is—you know, I'm fortunate to live so long, Jim, for the art to be acknowledged or begin to be understood because essentially, what makes or breaks your name as an artist is other artists. And if they are positive about it, that's the preface to it being taken up by other people. I have always avoided, perhaps foolishly, gallery—much gallery involvement. I spent years at Charles Cowles who no longer is there, because he had a lovely space and he generously let me do installations he couldn't sell. That's the only reason I stayed there.

I've been out of the gallery scene now for quite a while. Not eager to get back. I have not been a good curator or promoter of my own work. I am a very good promoter of other people's work. There's a paradox there and I am surprised, sometimes, if I may say so, I am surprised at my own reticence. I'm sure that pathology could be examined in some way and revealed as some wrinkle in my psyche, but there has been this—Whitney mentions it there, says that he often gets in his own way.

Earlier today, you said something that stuck me very sharply. You said, "It looks at times you've had a gun firmly pointed to your foot." [Laughs.] I think there has been an anti—success gene that has been very persistent in my nature and I don't know why. Maybe you can tell me, but I have not been eager for unqualified success. I have had—in everything I've done, I have had very satisfying measures of success but I don't want more than that. I don't want more than that.

I suspect it's part—that if you no longer—if you do have success—and I've seen that with other people, other artists—you don't belong to yourself anymore. The public forms—has a voice in most stuff. The public forms a perception of you and then that perception is something you have to deal with. You have to relate to it; you have to reject it; you have to manipulate it.

Even Hopper said, sometimes the critics say something and then, right or wrong, "You give it a push," were the words he used, which you wouldn't suspect from old Edward. You would think he would be above the fray but

he wasn't. He was shrewd enough. I have not had that shrewdness. Barbara frequently reminds me of it which is a little difficult and painful but she has said that I've gotten my own way again in my own way, frequently and you mentioned it and Whitney mentioned it so it must be true.

MR. MCMANUS: But not so much in your own way that I think it has pushed you out of view and given the number of very interesting and I think significant things that are taking place in your life this last few years—the reprinting of *The White Cube* in French, German and now into Spanish.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Oh, it's all over the place. South America.

MR. MCMANUS: The celebration of *The White Cube* in a symposium earlier this year in France, in—[inaudible]. The events in Ireland where you and Patrick Ireland, in his postmortem state, remain celebrated.

MR. O'DOHERTY: That was a good piece, yeah.

MR. MCMANUS: This conversation that we're recording today in some ways is born out of that just ecstatic phone call that you made to me right after you returned from Ireland this last spring.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yes, I do remember that. Great pleasure.

MR. MCMANUS: Such a rich and wonderful phone call, with your great enthusiasm for what had happened, for what had taken place. Not just to you, but the coming together of peoples from two parties that were—seemed irreconcilable.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Of these two parties, yes. Oh, exactly. It was extraordinary. It was. Yeah. You know, you always want to do it your way and not be diverted from your way and so I've done that. I think that's a satisfaction. You're also willing to take what comes, whatever blows you suffer, and I think artists take a great deal. They're very vulnerable. They're not as vulnerable as actors—I think that's the most vulnerable of professions because you are your own property to promote and perform with. But I think it's a tough trade and I think I've been very fortunate.

I've kept a presence now for over 40 years and in New York [New York City], that's a tough thing to do. I've seen people come and go; I've seen people that I thought were extremely talented and were in the '60s and they have been more or less out of the picture which is painful for me because, you know, the way in which reputations are codified is so antique and erratic and arbitrary that you have no faith in any system of any implicit system of justice. And why should we want for justice when we look at a world that is stewing with injustice and atrocity and murder and horror?

So in terms of one's own little ambitions and one's own circle of activity, all you can do is the best you can do for yourself and try and ignore the world because you are projected into a totally random universe, it seems to me. Generations change in New York; generations are forgotten and originality is reinvented by masking the past and re—presenting it. There is an engine in every great city that gobbles up people and spits them out and I'm very fortunate to be still here and producing. That's what Duchamp used to say.

MR. MCMANUS: Do you think there's a Moloch here in New York City?

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, it is a Moloch to me. I think there certainly is on Wall Street—look what it did to us. The collecting world is another corrupt area. Duchamp used to say that 100 artists die every minute. He said, every day, there's a loss of 100 artists. It was interesting. He was a wise man, old Marcel.

MR. MCMANUS: Right after the first of the year, you and Barbara are going to begin a three months residency at the Getty Foundation in Santa Monica—

MR. O'DOHERTY: Yeah.

MR. MCMANUS: —and the topic of the work is, in many ways, a continuation of something that has interested you for quite some time.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Well, they invited me because of *The White Cube,* because their theme for the next two years is the presentation of art. Now, I'm all presented out. I've said what I wanted to say so I said, "You know, what I do suggest," I said to some pleasant lady there, "That you've got to make a gallery available so that we can experiment with presentation in that gallery." And she thought that was a good idea because there—

What are the implicit ideologies of presentation? There is a very good book by Victoria Newhouse, *Placing Art* [*Art and the Power of Placement*], that deals with that very subject. She follows up various exhibitions in various cities, particularly the Pollock exhibition that went around Europe, and discusses how the presentation each time altered and changed the nature of how the work was perceived.

I think there is experimental work to be done there, which brings me back to my early experimental psychology days in Cambridge, and I would like to run some experiments in presentation. Now, the man who is in charge now is Thomas Gaehtgens, who invited Barbara over to Berlin in the '80s as—he was also—did a conference there for Getty and Barbara gave one of her better papers, I think, at that—it was very productive for her later; she expanded that and was very successful.

But Gaehtgens then went to Paris where he started an institution in Paris, the exact nature of which I don't know. But Gaehtgens is a wonderful guy because he's an up person. He is not somber and down and—[inaudible]—he's up, he's inventive, he's lively, he's interesting. So I hope I can earn my keep.

MR. MCMANUS: Oh, I'm sure you more than earn your keep and give us something that is going to add to the richness already presented Brian, it has been my great privilege and pleasure here to sit with you for a number of hours over the last couple of days.

MR. O'DOHERTY: We've had fun. We have had fun. I've enjoyed it enormously.

MR. MCMANUS: Rehash some ideas.

Again, thanks so very much.

MR. O'DOHERTY: Thank you, Jim.

[END SD5]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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