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Oral history interview with Charles Simonds, 2012 July 31-August 14

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 tape-recorded interview with Charles Simonds on July 31-August 14, 2012. The interview was conducted in Manhattan, New York by Christopher Lyon for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Charles Simonds 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

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's July 31st, 2012. This is Christopher Lyon. I'm interviewing Charles Simonds at his apartment and loft in Manhattan [for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art].

We are going to begin by talking about Charles's life, and – so you were born November 14th, 1945, in the city?

CHARLES SIMONDS: In New York City, in Manhattan.

MR. LYON: And as is often said in bios of you, you were the younger son of two Vienna-trained psychoanalysts. Your mother was Anita I. Bell, and what is your father's professional name?

MR. SIMONDS: Robert Simonds, Dr. Robert Simonds.

MR. LYON: Dr. Robert Simonds. And you have an older brother?

MR. SIMONDS: Jonathan.

MR. LYON: Jonathan.

MR. SIMONDS: Older brother. Two years older.

MR. LYON: Your only sibling?

MR. SIMONDS: Yup.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

And I understand that both sets of grandparents originated in Russia?

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. From Minsk and Pinsk, is what I was told. No real idea.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] Okay.

MR. SIMONDS: But certainly one side of the family was from Minsk.

MR. LYON: Minsk, okay.

MR. SIMONDS: Minsk.

MR. LYON: And – let's see. You lived – you grew up on the Upper West Side –

MR. SIMONDS: Mm-hmm. 84th Street and Central Park West, the first eight years of my life. Essentially next to the Museum of Natural History, which was –

MR. LYON: Well, that's pretty interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, that was useful.

MR. LYON: Did you spend –

MR. SIMONDS: And at eight years old, we moved to 82nd Street and Park Avenue, so I then was next to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. So my childhood was divided between – what shall we say, nature and dinosaurs, and then art and culture, if you will.

MR. LYON: That's kind of too perfect.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, it is. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: Well –

MR. SIMONDS: I mean, I – it certainly was a big part of my life because my brother, who was two years older, was also an artist in the beginning or had a talent – you know, had a facility with making sculptures, portraits. And he would lead me, you know, by the hand, essentially, to see such-and-such a – I remember there was one painting that he just was enamored of at the Met. I don't even remember what it was, but he would go there almost like a religious experience – [laughs] – to stand in front of this painting of this woman. And – you know, somehow, him being an older brother made it as if it was something important that I didn't quite understand – well, why could somebody be so excited by standing in front of a painting? It's incredible. [They laugh.]

I mean, I was mostly playing basketball two blocks up in the part with my friend Danny, but Jon would lead me there and he'd – I guess sort of try to help me understand or clue me in to something that he saw. Let's put it that way. Actually, that's pretty much what it was. He saw something, and it meant a lot to him, and I think he then wanted me to share it, wanted – or also wanted to sort of show me that he knew something I didn't know, in a way, because it was a rivalrous kind of relationship.

MR. LYON: And your grandparents lived in Brooklyn?

MR. SIMONDS: No, our family was a very funny family. One side of the family, my father's side, was very poor. He was the only – he had seven brothers, essentially no mother, who died in the influenza epidemic.

MR. LYON: Oh.

MR. SIMONDS: So the children all grew up with a father who was a junk collector, had a horse-drawn buggy, collected junk. And he had lost one hand – I remember – we would only see them on Thanksgiving, when they would come to my parents' house and the two families would join, and he would play – they would – the men would play pinochle. And he would stuff his cards in his – what was essentially a black glove, and hold the thing there. And we – otherwise, we only went to see them in Brooklyn in some basement. They were all very poor; there were seven brothers and the father who, I remember, was called Pops. We would go see them, usually at some religious moment. And so this was very sort of frightening and strange, down in a basement somewhere with people mumbling and jumbling prayers and what.

And the other side of the family was my mother's side, which was very cultured, and my mother was a violinist in addition to being a doctor, but also her father was an opera singer and a pharmacist, and the mother – I would go visit them – they lived, actually, very nearby on 83rd Street and Broadway. They would – you know, it was sort of the cultured side of the family. So if I went to see Grandma, which we did every weekend, every Sunday – we'd go have dinner, at Tip Toe Inn, we'd go to Grandma's house, bring the dessert, and go to see Grandma. You would always – if you arrived there, she was sitting there – sitting – next to a radio that was playing opera. She would just sit there and listen to the opera. And she was a very lovely, wonderful woman.

And that was sort of the cultured side of the family. I mean, the differences were very stark. I can't say that one side looked down on the other side, but it was clear that there was a very different kind of milieu in each household, to the extent that I don't even know what the other household in Brooklyn was like, but it was a little scary, I guess – [laughs] – is the best way to describe it.

MR. LYON: I read somewhere that you had – you lived there for some time, but that can't be the case. No, okay, good. Good.

MR. SIMONDS: And, I might add, some of that primitive – I always considered my father's family as a very primitive kind of mentality. Very – bottom of things. He, for instance, he always preferred my brother, and I finally after many years somehow understood that my brother – which came out of his mouth sometimes – was the firstborn, so the firstborn, I guess, held some special place in his mind – worldview, and I was just the second one. And – so he certainly very clearly preferred my brother. I mean, there are endless memories and anecdotes that we don't need to go into.

But to the extent that he preferred my brother, my mother – for instance, I remember once going to an exhibition – my first really sort of important exhibition was a projects exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. And of course then I finally – I thought I should invite my parents, because, you know, this is something. And so they came and they loved it and they were very proud, and so forth, and from that moment on, every time I had an exhibition, no matter – I mean, I had a big exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum 10 years later. Any time my father went to see something – or the Castelli gallery – any time my father would come and say, "Well, you know, I actually liked the thing in the MoMA the best."

So it was as if, you know, no matter what I did, it would never be as good as what was.

And my mother – so it was, in my father's eyes, nothing I could do would be any good, really, in a certain way. And – or not good enough. And in my mother's eyes, anything I did was the best thing that anybody had every done. There's no question about it. I mean, she thought anything I made – I mean, she certainly favored me over my brother, also – anything I made was the best thing that anybody, anyone had ever made.

So I was caught in that kind of ridiculous double bind, I mean, in a way. Both of them are so completely unrealistic or so out of touch with – [laughs] – any reality, it's just a projection of somebody's desire, I guess. But I lived my life, essentially, knowing that no matter what, I couldn't get any real substantive information from either of my parents. Everything was so colored by family –

MR. LYON: Because it was so extreme in each direction.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, and so ridiculous, actually, is what it was.

Notwithstanding that my mother actually, after she died, I discovered there – a paper – she wrote a lot. She was well-known and wrote many papers. And there were some notes of sort of her reaction to one of my – to the Guggenheim exhibition, her psychoanalytic reactions --

MR. LYON: Interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: -- and sort of anecdotes about my childhood, and so on and so forth. And it was sort of funny – I mean, it was sort of comical because it was a little bit naïve in terms of any art-critical idea, but it was – it was cute. It was a good sort of interesting – sort of full of affect, how I'd describe it.

MR. LYON: What was she like? What did she look like?

MR. SIMONDS: My goodness. What was she like? She was very short. She was originally – started as a schoolteacher and had to lie about her height, because you had to be five feet to be a schoolteacher. Very short and really quite – she was very well – very well-known and very – how do you want to say? Not revolutionary but very – she had her own theories and her own ideas, and she was in a little coterie of all these New York Psychoanalytic Institute people. She was like a player in that group. And we used to spend all our summers at Lake Placid with Theo Reik and all these strange people who they had – David Beres and Charlie Brenner. Their family people – like, the family. And they were all well-known – Phyllis Greenacre – well-known psychoanalysts of that era.

And my mother was – given that her name was Anita Bell, developed her own theories of testicles and balls and ascended testicles, and thought that all these Freudians with their beards and penises were just – you know, got it wrong. And she thought castration anxieties had to do with disappearing testicles, ascending testicles when you defecate and conflations of defecation and elimination with testicular movement, and sometimes – she had her own theories, which prompted her to actually resign from the New – I think she's the only person that ever resigned from the New York Psychoanalytic Institute and said, "You know, screw you. I'm out of here."

And then she went off and did sleep research at Yale, and so – and she was, I think – yeah, the question is, what was she like? She was a tremendously empathetic kind of person who, for instance – at the end of her life I took care of her, put her in an apartment near Union Square, and she would go out in her wheelchair and talk to all the psychotic bums in the park, in the most, like, normal way. I mean, it was like – well, what is it? [Laughs.] So she was a terribly unthreatening, very empathetic kind of person. She was very small, but very smart and very sensitive, I guess is the easiest way to describe [her].

So – I mean, in a way it was a funny mixture, I guess, of somebody who was very – adamant's not the right word, but very – had her own thoughts. You know, there was no – she developed her own thoughts and followed them, even though – I have no perspective on her career, other than now and then I run into somebody who says, "Oh, Anita Bell – Belle of the balls." You know? That was her nom de whatever. And so she left a trail. But I think she was probably, you know, put aside since Freudian – at that time was very in the ascendant.

MR. LYON: I mean, there are kind of interesting parallels with your – you know, you seem to have felt a freedom to kind of follow your own path.

MR. SIMONDS: Absolutely. I – at root that's my mother. She was saying, "You know, screw you, I'm going to do what I got to do, and the rest of it, figure it out," you know. For other people; it's not my problem. And I think that's how she went about her – she then ended up doing – wiring people up at Yale and having them dream and waking them up and say, what were you dreaming about, when their testicles ascended, and so – I mean, she just went and followed her thoughts wherever they went and found some way to do it. And I think that's certainly – I think that's what I do. I mean, I – I think maybe at some point in my life, I might have thought – invested some authority in the context that surrounded me, but that passed very quickly as being incidental. I mean, you don't divorce art and what people were thinking art was earlier in my career. It was, you know,

something I had to think about as a graduate student in art, whatever. But I sure turned my back on a lot of it pretty quickly, I'd say. [Laughs.] Or it became incidental, I think. And not very useful, either.

MR. LYON: Interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: I think I probably – my career, in a certain way, parallels my mother's career. I'm sort of on the side somewhere in my own little – you know, whatever you want to call it. Notwithstanding that I think I know better. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: As apparently she did.

MR. SIMONDS: Yes, exactly. [They laugh.] I mean, better for me in any case.

MR. LYON: And was your father, then, more kind of like –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, he was absolutely de rigueur Freudian. Everything was absolutely rigid and – he was not very creative thinker. He was by-the-book kind of – anyway. And – I mean, it was – he had a closed mind, I'd say, essentially. My mother had a completely open mind. I mean, she would look at anything and find it fascinating and wonderful.

MR. LYON: Interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: So –

MR. SIMONDS: My father was very sad, in a way. I mean, in a certain way you can sort of – I can excuse a lot of his behavior by realizing that he had a terrible life, really. I mean, you know, the father would come home from junk collecting and ask the oldest one, well, who did what bad? And then he'd take off his belt and whip them, each one – you know, the number of whips per how important it was. So – tough, yeah. So he was very rigid – primitive. Not a happy guy. Angry, mostly.

MR. LYON: So was it – was it your mother's initiative that you went to the New Lincoln School or –

MR. SIMONDS: I have no idea. My brother went to – actually, originally to Walden School, which was a different school. Yeah.

MR. LYON: But didn't they end up uniting or something like –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, but then much – after we left the school.

MR. LYON: Much later. Much later. Okay.

MR. SIMONDS: But – well, we lived on 84th, and Walden was on 88th, I think, at that time. So my brother went to Walden and then from there went to Lincoln. I'm not sure why, except at that time the New Lincoln School was a very progressive school that mixed professional – children of professional people with kids from Harlem, with international students. And so – and so it was a very yeasty and slightly pinko kind of environment. And I don't know why they chose it, but it certainly was wonderful.

MR. LYON: And I just, you know, read a little bit about it, that it had a fairly interesting arts program. Did that –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. Yes, it did. Some of the teachers became real well-known educators in the arts. Lois Lord ended up at Bank Street, I think. And there were some others. I don't know if at that time, if I look backwards, you know, there were – well, I do have one memory that's worth recording.

But, you know, maybe like everybody else, little rabbits and – we should take them out some time. You'd really enjoy them. Rabbits reading the newspaper and cats and stuff like that.

MR. LYON: Oh, that's nice. [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: And in fact if you turn off I'll go get it – I'm going to get it. It's right here.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. You're going to enjoy them.

And then – I guess, they do bring back happy memories.

[Break.]

MR. SIMONDS: Do you see the cat? The cat is really good.

Okay. Here we go – we're going.

Ain't the cat good?

MR. LYON: Cats? The cats? They were very good, but they're both funny.

The rabbit is holding up a little newspaper with red lines representing the lines of type. Is that it?

MR. SIMONDS: A little picture.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And –

MR. SIMONDS: Actually, it's apropos, a book called *Spotty the Rabbit*, which is a very great story about – essentially about racial profiling underneath –

MR. LYON: Well, your rabbit has a black face –

MR. SIMONDS: So – but anyway.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: So there was good sort of art instruction. And so when both my brother and I had – this is very a small school so I knew everyone. My brother and I both had much facility to make – well, there you are, animals, and so –

MR. LYON: So obviously you were doing some ceramics at that point.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. Well, clay, not –

MR. LYON: Clay.

MR. SIMONDS: My brother was quite good at it, but it was the time of Sputnik and at that time, everybody had to try to be a math or science person. And as it turned out, my brother was quite a brilliant mathematician, and he went along doing his math. And then they assumed that I was too and in fact I was. And they, you know, we used to – we were kicked out of geometry because we put up both our hands, you know, to get called on.

So finally they made up special classes for three of us in statistics and probability and then we went a place called Watson Labs [Watson Scientific Computing Laboratory] at Columbia to do the first programming with punch cards because they thought we were really – you know, they wanted their Sputnik response or whatever. And I could feel, you know, the pressure. And there were three of us, Andy – four of us, Jon, Andy, Betsy, and I.

And along the way we had sort of theoretical number theory stuff and – mostly with this little guy, Birnbaum. We'd do, like, proofs. And so it was like, you know, it wasn't like doing computations or anything, it was like creative thinking and math, trying to solve the theorems and so and so. And I remember one test that I took where every – there were four problems, I got everyone of them absolutely wrong, but Mr. Birnbaum wrote on the paper, "A+, your solutions are so creative." And I thought, uh-oh, you know, this is not good. And I – you know, I was very insecure about that situation. I thought it was really, you know, I thought I knew that I didn't know what I was doing and he was projecting that I knew more than I did.

And coincidentally at that time, my brother had gone off to college and he left some of his clay, Plasticine. And this is essential in my biography, I think, because even to this day this day, this movement of my hand is from that moment I can – it's like I'm back at that moment.

MR. LYON: And, you know, you're like modeling the –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. The way, the feel of the clay.

MR. LYON: The feel of it, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: And he left behind this clay. So one night, I don't know, I finished my homework. I was sitting there with this clay and I made this wrestler that looked – it was like I watched my hands doing this thing and I could – really, actually couldn't believe. It was like a – like something was happening that I had no control of, nor did I have any understanding that I could do it. And all of the sudden I was making this thing and I made this wrestler with all the musculature and some of the crouched wrestler down on the ground and it was like, holy

cow, this is sort of interesting.

And so the next day with school, I put it in a shoebox and I took it to school. And I brought it into school – small school, everybody's like, "What's that? What's that? Where'd you get that?" I said, "Well, I made it." And they said, "No. You didn't make that. Geez. Give me a break. No. You didn't do that." Because it would look really good. It was like somebody, like a figure with muscles and. And the teacher thought I was extraordinary. And they – nobody sort of believed that I made it.

So I – [clap sound] – right then smashed it and made another one right there, at the school. And it was powerful, a really wonderful moment. It was like, "See?" And I think to this day – certainly that's when I decided to drop mathematics, but to this day, it's clear to me that I felt that moment so intensely as a – like, oh, you have something that you're able to do and now you have to decide what about that. Are you going to take on the responsibility, what kind of responsibility do you have towards that? Like something that was given to you that you didn't learn, you just have it.

And actually it mostly was as if it were in the hand in the way of handling something. It wasn't like a mental thing, it was like a physical thing. And I remember the sensation of that. I mean it was so magical, in a way.

Since my brother had spent all of his time stealing my girlfriends by making sort of expressionist portraits in clay of them, I couldn't do portraits, so I returned to hands. And I used to do portraits of people by sculpting hands so the whole identity of the person was told by the kind of hand. So I did endless hands.

And I spent all of my time doing that enough so that my parents then, which speaks well to both of them – decided, okay, Charles can go on Saturdays down to somewhere over on Christopher Street – I wasn't so old. I could go by myself Saturday morning and take the subway and then the crosstown bus over to Clara Fasano and Jean de Marco who were – I mean it's hard to describe in the context of now but, they were – they used to be at the Lever House, little exhibitions. I don't know what the name of the group was, but they were like realistic sculptures who did very academic prosaic things. Jean de Marco mostly did reliefs on churches, you know, modern 40s, 50s churches.

And I went there each Saturday and learned how to model. So I would make Prometheus and, you know, all sorts of kind of classical versions and some portraits of classical figures and stuff like that. And we learned how to model with Plasticine. And a lot of angels and putti – and I'm very angel wings and I got very good at that. And I learned how to model with clay.

MR. LYON: Now how old are you at this point?

MR. SIMONDS: I guess, I was trying to think of that – think that through and I think probably about 14 or 15, probably.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. Not much more than that. And I would go. And it was so weird. They were a very weird couple, very poor, lived above a dog training place and guard dogs and it was the Village, which was a little bit weird for me, you know.

MR. LYON: How did – where – well, who made the connection?

MR. SIMONDS: Could be that the art teacher at school –

MR. LYON: Oh, yeah. Of course.

MR. SIMONDS: – said, you know, if – your child should go get lessons. [Laughs.] Who knows – in art design. But, no matter, that's what I ended up doing.

And then I became very proud of what I did and, enough so that when I applied to college – I remember, I applied to Berkeley and – because my girlfriend was going to Stanford – and the fact was that we were the only two kids that went west of the Mississippi – but I remember taking with me my fancily made photographs because the sculptures I made had been photographed then by a photographer. And, you know, like a portfolio, if you will. And I remember taking them with me as if to show what I can do. And I remember arriving in Berkeley and – I can't remember if it was Sidney Gordin or Jim Melchert who said, "Well, yeah these are very nice, but there are many other things that you might learn to do." I mean at that time, I think, he was making welded sculpture, you know.

So I think that I was sort of – that was suppressed, to a certain degree. And I went on, did a lot of welded and soldered sculptures and finally, towards the end, returned to my clay, which is sort of interesting. And certainly we'll get to that later, as I developed after graduate school, sort of my own way of working. My whole life has

been a return to that material and those experiences. I mean I think that's the gist of what this little anecdote is about is that this moment of seeing connection with the material, that was so powerful, was the thing that I finally returned to after trying to unlearn and forget all the things that I've been, quote, "learned or taught," in art school as an art major, if you will, or even graduate school.

MR. LYON: Let me dial this back in time, just a little bit. There's an anecdote, and I don't know if you want to talk about it or not, about – was is it Lucy who brought this up, that there being like a mirror on your mother's –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh. Did she bring that up?

MR. LYON: She may have.

MR. SIMONDS: Could be. Yeah that's certainly true.

My parents, when I was young, they're both psychoanalysts. So they had patients who would come. And they would come in the same place where we lived. So they're actually in the first place in the Central Park West. There was a funny kind of dosado of patients had a waiting room and they had to go through the hall where we also would have to go if we had wanted to go from our room to the kitchen. So there was – there was a slight chance that might actually get to listen or once a patient went in, then you could go back out. [Inaudible.]

And so my mother's office, if you will, was on one spot in between, then there was a bathroom and then my brother's and my room. And the bathroom had doors on each side. So it was basically a shared bathroom. In fact, not used by the patients because they had their own separate bathroom.

But so in between patients, my mother would come out to say, you know, "How are you kids doing?" and so and so. And I remember vividly, unfortunately, how this – on the – our room side of the bathroom was a door that had a full-length mirror on it. So my mother, who would then come through that door to see how we were doing and give us kiss and blah blah blah, would then, the door would close and she would go back to work, as it were, to her patients, which we never quite clear what that meant. And – [they laugh.]

Well, for a four or five-year-old, it's hard to know – [laughs] – I guess.

But in any case, when the door would close, there I would see myself having just been left. In other words you had the image of abandonment, of being left. And I think – well, we'll get to that anyway, but surely somewhere in my psyche, certainly in terms of the "little people" and abandonments and, you know, peripatetic or whatever, is this feeling, I guess, is the easiest way to describe it, I guess, of – this feeling of loss, of being abandoned, but also of loss, I guess, is maybe closer to what it feels like. You feel like something's gone away and there you are seeing yourself having lost. I think that's the image for me or the feeling that that mirror always had.

And funnily there's some interesting photos – I can get them out for you. But there, somebody came once, a very fancy photographer, to do quote family pictures. And one of the pictures is – there was another full-length mirror on another door in the house, that's of me looking in that mirror, of sort of dealing with the mirror.

My brother was actually afraid to look to do it. I remember this was a big drama – Johnny doesn't want to be taking a picture looking in the mirror, but I'll do it. And it's very sort of coy and timid image of me sort looking at myself and it's very funny. Let's turn it off. I'll show you.

[Audio break.]

What?

MR. LYON: Can I ask you –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh the image in the mirror.

MR. LYON: Yeah – [inaudible.]

MR. SIMONDS: So yeah. So there was essential certainly in my life. It left indelible mark on me. No question about that.

MR. LYON: Now you said – [inaudible.]

MR. SIMONDS: If she remembers that. Could be?

MR. LYON: Well she said, you know that in so many words, you know, "The crucial relationship here is Charles and his mother."

MR. SIMONDS: Is Charles's what?

MR. LYON: And his mother.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. She's right about that. [They laugh.] Well, I mean nothing bad –
MR. LYON: I mean I don't – wasn't –

MR. SIMONDS: – just that's the way it was. I mean, yeah.

MR. LYON: So another possibly crucial memory that gets mentioned a lot, is the trip that made, maybe, at about six, age of six.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, to the Southwest.

MR. LYON: – about 6 – age of 6? You know –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I think it was probably about 6. It was 1952, so I was 7.

MR. LYON: Or 7? Okay.

MR. SIMONDS: Well, 6 or 7.

MR. LYON: Fifty-two, okay.

MR. SIMONDS: I think it was '52, because we had a – we had a –

MR. LYON: And she was visiting the deaf school?

MR. SIMONDS: Well, she – where she went, she was doing her, quote, "research." So she went to some deaf school to meet with some woman who ran the deaf school. I don't know what it was about, but they had to sit there on the lawn and talk. And my father was ill at the time; he had some respiratory problem. So he was back at the hotel – Fonda del Sol or whatever – and we went to this Indian school.

And my mother was very serious about her work, in a way. I mean, my mother was very peculiar; it's hard to explain. I mean, for instance, my mother is the person who, on that trip, insisted that a train stop in the middle of the desert so that our family could get on the train. Now, how she managed that – in the middle – literally, there were no train stops or anything. We have to get on that train, so this train's going to stop and we're going to get on the train.

So my mother was like very – obviously very – I think she could do whatever she wanted to do. She would just do it. She would insist: This is it; this is how it is. Not in any – as if she had some privilege or anything, she just had a sense of necessity, that if she – if I say, "that's what we do." And that was that.

And so she was very serious about her work. So she's talking to this woman – I remember it as if it were now, because it would – I remember the lawn and the lawn chairs, and she's sitting there with the – this woman, and we're supposed to sit there with our hands folded and be quiet. I mean, obviously she was struggling because her – my father was back at the hotel; we couldn't stay with him.

MR. LYON: Right, right.

MR. SIMONDS: So we had to come along while she did this interview. And we kept on being told: "Be quiet – shh, shh – just sit still." And my brother and I were – we weren't so much mischief, but we weren't perfectly behaved children, let's put it that way.

And Johnny said – we were sort of playing with a garden hose and spraying water. And they said, "No, you can't do that." And everything was like, you can't – no, no, no – and mostly coming from the woman of the deaf school, who was very, who was much more uptight than my mother was. And so finally my brother said, "Come on, Charlie, we're getting out of here." And we – we were near the – this big lawn in front of the school, and then there was a gate and then you'd go out and you were on the street. And we split – like, woop!

And I guess they didn't realize it fast enough because nobody found us. And we started walking. And our version was, we're walking back to the hotel. And oddly enough, at the age of 5 and 7 – or 6 and 8 – we knew where we were going; we were headed back to the hotel. So – which was a fair distance.

And so I remember – I remember even now, there were – the cop cars going back and forth, back and forth – and it seems at that time the town was a small town – all the town had been put on alert to find these two – [laughs] – errant children, I guess. And we arrived back at this plaza where the Fonda del Sol was, and there was like a

convocation of – it was as if the mayor was there, with all the police cars, and everybody was like freaking out – where are these kids – certainly, because of my mother and the woman from the deaf school. And we just arrived as if we were going home. And so – I mean, I don't remember, but the denouement was not fun, I'm sure. But we got our comeuppance for being completely errant.

But I do remember it as a moment of – that, and I'll give you another anecdote in a second – but as a moment of running away, which was certainly the pattern of my whole childhood, mostly because of my father favoring my brother and me saying, "I'm out of here." And I ran away so many times. Same in Lake Placid – the same – the town had to go search all over and. I would often run away. I think I've always run away. In fact, my life is about running away, in a certain way.

Oh, the other thing happened on that trip, which is what you're asking about, which was very compelling to me is that we went to visit a place called Frijoles Canyon, which are, you know, homes dug into tufa, soft rock. And we – it was like a playground in a certain way. And I remember my brother and I sort of digging a little, quote, "fire pit" and making a little chimney and so on and so forth – and then as if we inhabited – I mean, coming from New York city, as two kids who grew up with, you know, Gene Autry and whatever else, we were in this fantasy of cowboys and Indians. And all of a sudden we were Indians and we were, like, we made our fire pit and we were living like Indians, fantastically.

And certainly it still is a very vivid memory for me, this feeling of, you know – well, there were – fortunately, or funnily, some – lots of – my father had a 16-mm film camera, so there were a lot of films of John and I climbing in these dwellings, and so – and sort of playing –

MR. LYON: And these were ancient – well –

MR. SIMONDS: These were – yeah, they're kept now as a national park, you know?

MR. LYON: So dating to, what, the 14[00s], 15[00s] – 1400s, 1500s –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I – it's hard to know; I don't know.

MR. LYON: Frijole Canyon?

MR. SIMONDS: Frijoles, yeah.

MR. LYON: Frijoles.

MR. SIMONDS: It's next to that nuclear place – what's it called –

MR. LYON: In New Mexico.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: Los Alamos.

MR. LYON: Oh, near Los Alamos.

MR. SIMONDS: Next to – next to – it's on the same ridge.

MR. LYON: So –

MR. SIMONDS: And then I even took my children there and let them reenact what I did, for them. It was a very wonderful trip.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, it was very good.

MR. LYON: Well – so when – and that was your first experience of the –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, that's the only one in my childhood – I mean, because you mention it as if I'd gone many times.

MR. LYON: Yeah, there –

MR. SIMONDS: That was the only one. It was like, you know, the family vacation. But I – when I started to do

the work that I've done professionally, or whatever you want to call it, I went back then every summer. And that became very important to me – which we'll get to, I guess.

MR. LYON: Right, okay. So –

MR. SIMONDS: This is going to be so convoluted to try to edit.

MR. LYON: Let's talk a little bit more about the running away that – I was really struck recently when you used – you kind of used the made-up word "orphanness" to describe your –

MR. SIMONDS: It's not a word? So it's not a word?

MR. LYON: It can be, I guess.

MR. SIMONDS: It's not –

MR. LYON: I mean – I mean, it's – you can make –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: You can get an adjective out of anything, I guess. But you know, to describe a kind of existential stance, you know, a kind of finding-my-way-home kind of –

MR. SIMONDS: Yes. Certainly, reinventing your – or making – I call it making home.

MR. LYON: Making home.

MR. SIMONDS: Making yourself feel at home. And surely, the whole nexus of all the thoughts involved in going to the street and finding a home anywhere is really – it's predicated on – being able to find a home anywhere is built on that necessity, I guess, of being able to make home – be at home rather than be errant or lost, to be somewhere. And it's about being somewhere, because the – actually, the making of a dwelling is about being in that place and becoming in that place.

And so, surely, that's – I think that's the root of a lot. It's not so much – you say, "existential stance;" I mean, that makes it sound – [laughs] – more thought than it actually is because I think – [laughs] – I mean, certainly maybe it is from the outside, it's something existential in that. But I think it's just, you know, a *feeling* of needing to be – to be, rather than not be or be lost. You *are*, because you have a place and you've made that place, actually.

MR. LYON: But then, you – it's so striking to me, the way you kind of, like, are able to let go of it and walk – and walk away from –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, once you've made it, you don't need to be there. You can go to the next place. [They laugh.] It's like – I mean, no, no, no – I mean, it's very – it's very obvious to me.

MR. LYON: No, what I mean is, like, the two things is – are like so intimately intertwined.

MR. SIMONDS: Well, the sort of obsessiveness and necessity of it becoming to be is a very – I mean, for instance, the worst thing – Lucy can tell you that for sure – don't get between me and what I want to make. In other words, never. There were moments where something, because of whatever, got in the way of me wanting or needing to do what I had to do, and that's the one place nobody wants to be – including you, I might add. [Laughs.] Don't get between me and what I got to do.

And so the level of the power of the need to do – to make that be is certainly the – what motivates it, I think. It's as – I mean, it's – gives rise to all the obsessiveness, gives rise to all the, you know, the kind of masochism of working in very strange and cold, or gutters, and sitting in dog shit or whatever else; there's a kind of – well, I think we've actually mentioned this – you brought up an interesting point that it – was it – I think it was you – was that – to deal with extremities, so much – that there's so much about extremity, or impossibility of so. And there's certainly a big component in what I go about, that I create. I mean, who would have thunk to get yourself in such a bad place, to have to do such-and-such-and-such in order to get to do what you want to do? It's as if I concoct a kind of an impossibility in order to sort of challenge my power to do; It's hard to really characterize. But certainly, that is underlying a lot of it – it's this kind of passion or compulsive necessity – for it to be.

And I think some of that is built on "to be" in the sense of to create it, to make it – not just being me hypothetically or logistically or punitively or fantastically being in a place, but it also has to do with the physicality of the thing *becoming*, to be. I mean, it's a very acute behavior; you know, visually, it's very acute.

You know, I work with tweezers, and it's very precise. And I'm making something really just the way it's got to be. So it's a kind of – there's something very harsh in its necessity that's – it has to be that way. It's a very – compulsive I guess is the way to put it.

But it's not just behavioral; it has to do with the physicality of the – you know, it boils down to grains of sand, finally. For instance, I actually quantify my so-called successes in making what I see in my mind's eye in, on one hand, with the five or six phrases in a particular dwelling, of all the dwellings I've made, that capture the kind of tristesse or whatever it is of a certain way that the sand fell on the bricks, in a certain little buried piece of a corner of a building. And you know, now and then I get a glimpse of what I actually wanted to see.

I don't know if you follow me. In other words, there's a kind of precision to this thing that's so vivid – the mind's eye version of it is so vivid and so rooted on the physicality of the – whether it does that or not. You know, most of it is people think I'm so careful with the work with tweezers and everything. Mostly it's very sloppy compared to the vision. And when it actually succeeds in being the way it's meant to be, it's completely revelatory compared to everything else, which looks sort of like pushed-around mud to me. It's kind of hard to explain, but –

MR. LYON: So do you – when you're – when you're working, then, do you have a kind of vision of where you want this to go?

MR. SIMONDS: I have a vision of – for instance, when I do, quote, "object works," I see it beforehand and then I execute it.

But the dwellings in the street, for instance, tell their story as they go, but in a given phrase of what I've then seen as the story, is what I'm – that's what I'm referring to in this – this is a little trail that passes by the edge of a building, and it just happens to have been so much time ago that the thing – the brick just fell. And it's just so – it's so – just buried just so and, you know, slightly sticking out or slightly giving a kind of remembrance of something.

MR. LYON: So – I – you know – in and out, you know, as we've been talking this, is this whole kind of like Proustian, you know, recovery of the past, you know?

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, it's very past-related. Even though I think forward towards the next home for the little people, or me – but I – certainly it's something about things that once were, or things that once were –the way they're remembered is more wonderful than they ever were. So in fact, it's a kind of wish that it were better – [laughs] – in the past than it actually is, in fact – or was, in fact. Do you – do you follow me?

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: Good. I'm sure of that. It's a kind of retelling of the past to try to make it nicer than it really was. [Laughs.] You all right? I think that's actually what I'm doing, is kind of wishing to remember things in a different way than they are. That's fair.

MR. LYON: Interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: Tough.

MR. LYON: That's hard.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. I guess that's probably what I'm doing a lot of. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: Since – because the – I mean, because the – so much of the little people's dwellings is about something that clearly had a life in the past, you know?

MR. SIMONDS: Yes.

MR. LYON: Because we don't –

MR. SIMONDS: It's like looking – glimpsing back.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. You don't know all of what happened but you know some. And some tells you a lot of what you might imagine happened. I mean, I think that's – there's a coefficient of projection and imagination which I think the past allows – you know, it's not interfered with by the present, and it's – you know, to live now and to – like you and I are sitting here, we have to deal with each other. But if you're recounting for yourself something from before, you're free to reimage – to think of it however you would like. I mean, you can invest it

with whatever you need rather than what it might not offer you in the present. It sounds a little enigmatic –

MR. LYON: There's a really powerful connection here with psychoanalysis, because psychoanalysis has to deal with the past and how the past is constructed or reconstructed –

MR. SIMONDS: Or reconstructed, yeah – yeah –

MR. LYON: – or misrepresented or –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, I can see the connection that you're making. I never thought of it that way, but I accept that is one of the kind of gambits that you psychoanalyze.

MR. LYON: I think are many – many other activities have to do with that, too, you know. I mean, the law, for one, you know, deals with, you know, what happened, what really happened, you know?

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, interesting. Yeah. That's a good point, yeah.

MR. LYON: And that's something that you dealt with in your work as well, is this –

MR. SIMONDS: Morality issues, yeah. Yeah.

MR. LYON: Morality and death, justice and –

MR. SIMONDS: And – yeah, finding certain formations of that, yeah.

It becomes very, it has many tentacles, it goes off into many routes.

MR. LYON: But a lot of activities don't do that. You know, engineering – you know, you don't deal with the past, you know? It's all about making –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, no. You see – yeah – no, no –

MR. LYON: No, you don't think so?

MR. SIMONDS: No, you see, this is – now we're going to go into it at lunch – no, now we've got –

MR. LYON: Okay, good.

MR. SIMONDS: – we're going to talk in some substantive here.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. SIMONDS: Because you're here – you're sitting in front of – not so much engineering but, for instance, there's a whole realm of my thinking that predicates on – it's not – engineering's an interesting way to describe it, but I'm going to give it a little twist – I mean, which is to say life forms and the structures, engineering of life and its physical manifestation as a function of growth or as a function of becoming and being is – you know, you can't somehow – you're not – no engineer is just in the present in that way.

I think of the root of engineering – and the best engineering, in any case – not in the contemporary sense but in a kind of sense of how do you structure the world – is somehow – I mean, there's a whole realm of my work that deals with the correlatives between simple growth forms and simple structural forms, whether it's through mathematics or whether – you know, Fibonacci or whatever – there are so many realms in which all that stuff is manifest as kind of – let's not call them secrets, but at least as leverages towards how you might consider to build something or engineer something.

I never think of an engineer as being – or maybe somebody who just makes a – plugs in a formula to make a bridge, but the better ones are ones who are trying to deal with, I think – or should, if not – try to deal with some correlative to sort of – I mean, and let's say in the newspaper you find little, you know, discoveries, that oh, the structure of a whatever is somehow presaged and, you know, clued to a simple cellular structure or a buckyball or whatever. You know, there are so many – I mean, it's hard to grasp in a few sentences, but there's so many kinds of ways in which to engineer or make or construct that are based on natural events, if you will, okay?

MR. LYON: Sure. Yeah, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: And you know, so – so, you know – I – and by studying nature, as it were; thinking backwards of nature – you know, which you then might say, "well, that's just primitive growth forms." But in fact, they're very prescient towards the present.

In the universe, there's a time issue in there that's not just – you know, a good engineer is not just living – it's the same with modernism and all this stuff with – like as if it were – you know, for instance, my son that just wrote this one funny thing using – you know, trying to deconstruct, I guess, my – I don't know – but trying to deconstruct modernism by talking about the burrow, the hole, as opposed to building, and architecture and minimal spaces and blah blah blah.

But I mean the long and the short is he somehow – you know, the root of all these Bauhaus and so forth was a religious moment, in a certain way. It was built on tremendous, kind of, religious issues, spiritual issues of forms and so on and so forth which then became very mechanistic in the broad view or whatever. I think of the roots of all these things as being very earth-related, for instance, or very early images of growth.

And yeah, I mean over here we have sitting in front of us all these patterns in nature or the, you know, Goetheanum or the theosophists, all these people who try to deal with nature as a kind of – not a clue, but a kind of – well, even – I mean, the ones that fall off into sort of – wafting religious about it. But they all are using a kind of belief structure that allows nature to take a very primary version of how things are – I mean, do you follow – as opposed to culture, for instance.

I mean, you know, we're going to get to maybe, you know, some of these issues that I've dealt with about, you know, did anybody think an egg and what – you know, when does architecture become more than a nest and become style and become culture and things like that? And when people think self-consciously about how they build to – make a home?

MR. LYON: Okay, that's –

MR. SIMONDS: It's a bit – much more complicated.

MR. LYON: There are – there are – there are forms that are, in some – in some conceptual sense, prior to other forms, you know? And –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. Okay.

MR. LYON: But let's try that – to make it –

MR. SIMONDS: I like that. That's a good – that's a good avenue to think of it as. Okay.

MR. LYON: I'd like to distinguish from those activities that are somehow in the past, you know?

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, okay.

[Cross talk.]

MR. LYON: Conceptually prior, as opposed to something that's literally in the past. And I had never thought of you as – in a sense, as operating in the past in some way. And so this is totally fascinating to me, to hear you talk about – you know, you're trying to recover something that – at some moment, that resonates –

MR. SIMONDS: I'm sure that's a lot of what motivates me.

MR. LYON: I never thought about it. And you know, and it's really – so this is totally fascinating to me.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I think –

MR. LYON: So this other issue is also totally fascinating –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah – no, no, it's another issue.

MR. LYON: – but I think they are so much different.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, it's going to be hard to bring them together. But I understand what you're saying and I think, certainly, that's part – a large part of the sort of wistful pathos, sadness of what I think a lot of my behavior elicits is this kind of – you know, for instance, working in the street, you know, people are very protective and very – you know, they're very upset when their things are destroyed and they're very – you know, they're – there's a lot of tension around that.

They're very – they like taking care of you; they want to care of the dwelling. They're trying to hold it and preserve it and love it in some way, and see it as precious and valuable to them. And so – and I think that that's – it's like – I don't know if I can put it that way, but it's as if I'm going back to some moment that maybe wasn't so wonderful and I'm remaking it in a way that makes it very precious.

I think somehow, underneath –it's very tangled, but – because it has my version as opposed to the person coming by – but, you know, the projection versus my projection. But I think there's a kind of empathetic kind of – just fellow travelers of something that's been lost that you wish or hoped might be other than it was. And it's now – here we are, but there it was. And maybe it was better, or –

MR. LYON: In some alternative past? Yeah, good.

MR. SIMONDS: In some – yes, exactly. That there's some relief in that, some succor –

MR. LYON: So a glimpse of an alternative –

MR. SIMONDS: – succor in it; there's some sort of safety in it or – they're very – you know, for instance, the dwellings are very – people describe them, they're very peaceful places, places that are – that people relax into. They say, "Oh, I wish I could live in there." They always say that: "You know, oh, I wish I could go in there; I'm in there; I want to be in there." And this is kind of – it's as if they all want to go back there.

We – but it's a – well, I don't know which one they're looking at; I'm looking at mine. But – [laughs] – but in – no matter, they're still – that's the feeling that they have is, oh, it's so nice to be in there, I could just crawl in there and cuddle up to the –

MR. LYON: Well, you've said that people, culturally, see the *Dwellings* in terms of their culture. So like if it's in Turkey –

MR. SIMONDS: Yes, they always project it in terms of their past; everybody.

MR. LYON: – they see it in terms of the primitive culture there –

MR. SIMONDS: Absolutely. It's "de rigueur." Yeah, I can try to –

MR. LYON: – and if it's China, then they see – they –

MR. SIMONDS: Kids in Berlin, from Turkey, they're back in Turkey.

MR. LYON: But that could also – you know, that's the cultural version, but also you're talking about the individual version, where individuals –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah – yes, as a feeling.

MR. LYON: – project backward into it, and so –

MR. SIMONDS: I think it's a feeling as much as it's – it's not a – because it – the – I mean, oddly, the *Dwellings* are completely generic; there's no architectural style, or they don't reek of any particular time and place. And so people are really just, you know, on the wing. You know, they're – oh, yeah – I mean, a guy – how can somebody see Turkey and one guy can see North Africa and another one sees the American Southwest, you know? [They laugh.]

MR. LYON: Can't be all of them.

MR. SIMONDS: So there's a lot of projection going on.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: But that's totally fascinating.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, it is.

MR. LYON: Okay. Well, I'm sure this will come up some more.

MR. SIMONDS: This – we're killing this tape off, aren't – [laughs] –

MR. LYON: No, I'm thinking if we – maybe we will stop and I'll put another disc in.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, in case we run out. And I'll make our dinner? Or not yet?

MR. LYON: Well –

MR. SIMONDS: I mean, we can go on and on. I – you know, you can see I'm –

MR. LYON: I think maybe we go on a little bit because you're almost at an hour, and –

MR. SIMONDS: An hour already?

MR. LYON: Yeah, let me stop here.

MR. SIMONDS: How many hours are we allowed to do?

MR. LYON: Well, they've asked for three –

MR. SIMONDS: Good luck.

MR. LYON: – so I thought we'd shoot –

MR. SIMONDS: We've got about more – six is what we're looking at. [They laugh.]

MR. LYON: Okay. So I'm going to – just to be on the safe side, I'm going to stop this –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah.

[End of Disc.]

MR. SIMONDS: We could just launch into some good sort of – we did discover something.

MR. LYON: I think so.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. I actually – I never arrived at those thoughts thanks to you. It certainly is about putting a rosy look on the past. You know, sort of sadness about things that weren't and they make it better.

MR. LYON: So this is disc 2, just to throw that in. That's – I think – I had never heard you talk about –

MR. SIMONDS: I've never thought of it. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: So we did – but we did get through some of this – we talked about Jean De Marco and Clara Fasano – and you think 14, 15 is this – the age there. And so you – did you go to Berkeley in the fall of '64?

MR. SIMONDS: '63,

MR. LYON: '63, okay.

MR. SIMONDS: Just at the beginning of the –

MR. LYON: I – yeah, that would be '63. So then you would have been a second – a sophomore at the time of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement?

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I guess so. Yeah. Mm-hmm. I think that's probably –

MR. LYON: That's interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: I – well, the irony was most of my friends at Berkeley, by happenstance, had – were graduate students in either English, and moreover, in political science. And so – I don't know, I fell into a little clique of graduate students, had a girlfriend who was a graduate student. And so when the Free Speech Movement started, they were the organizers – you know, they were the, quote, "steering committee" of the Free Speech Movement. So they were the ones – because they were all so politically savvy and so organized.

And – I mean, this is before cell phones or anything like it. They had walkie-talkies and – I mean, they were so ahead of everybody politically and so adept. And you know, for instance, one of my best friends was an English graduate student who went – that was the summer when everybody went to the south to do voter registration and stuff –

MR. LYON: Right. Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: – so – and which fed, you know, Andy Goodman was a relative of one of the kids in my high school – so this whole thing was so – you know, it was like all of a sudden, the world was starting to make sense. I could see what – Bill's going to do registration and reading Shakespeare to black kids in the South and – I mean, it was a whole nexus of kind of attitudes about our culture at the time, and it was like a way of me sort of

starting to see, well, what is the law really about.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: And that was a pretty quick awakening, and particularly because some of these political science graduate students were so astute in terms of analysis of, you know, who's doing what. And so – and, I mean, the Free Speech Movement was comical and – I mean, you may or may not know much about it.

But, I mean, for instance, the sort of orchestration of political theater. Mario Savio lived down the block from me, and the ways in which he was able to – you know, I don't know if you know any of these incidents, but I mean, it's worth recording one.

You know, as this thing progressed and the – you know, the administration and then the government and Reagan, each one more desperately tried to figure out ways to kind of put a lid on what was becoming, you know, a revolution, they would go to these endless, ridiculous extremes to try to – you know, notwithstanding the beginning of it with the – surrounding the police car that had arrested a kid for distributing, you know, political literature.

I mean, the whole theater of it was quite extraordinary. Joan Baez was playing music while people went into the administration building and blah, blah. But there was one incident that I think gives a kind of tenor of what – for me, what it all represented and somehow. There was then this big convocation at the Greek amphitheater which was up on the hill near to Lawrence Radiation Laboratory where they were doing, you know, research for whatever. And there was a kind of convocation where the administration was to present – a lot of factions in the administration and the faculty and the students.

And so there was some version of trying to appease – you know, I think that one of the – either Clark Kerr or somebody was going to resign or something, et cetera. And Mario Savio arrived to this dais – you know, there was a stage with all these people – very officials with, you know, California Highway Patrol were there, you know, in Nazi stomper boots standing around and so on and so on. And Mario Savio had this, quote, "petition," and the petition was this scroll that was like four feet long.

And he's carrying this petition and he attempts to go on the stage with this petition to sort of present to whoever – the administration – this petition. Now – it's stupid, whatever. The policemen then grabbed him and wrestled him off the stage, right? And so the message to everybody who was there was this kind of repressive blah, blah, blah.

And from that moment on, I remember this moment where everybody just streamed down from up that hill down into the campus, and it was all over. I mean, it was like chaos. And, you know, there was no going back at that point.

And oddly, I remember calling my father from a phone booth in – on Bancroft Way saying, you know, well, listen, Dad, you know, I may get arrested. He said, "Well, you know, do what you got to do," which I thought, you know, where did that come from? What a guy. This is the – I – you know, I said, well, you know, it's so serious here and maybe I'm going to get arrested because we're going there. And he said, "Well, if you've got to do it, you've got to do it." This was, like, completely out of character.

I was like – I put down the phone and I was thinking he might have said, "Well, now, don't get arrested, and maybe we care about you." [Laughs.] It was more like, "Yeah, do what you got to do. Don't bother me." Very weird.

But I – certainly, the Free Speech Movement changed everything in my life. I mean, it was just – there's no way to explain, honestly, what the sense – I mean, all of a sudden, you realized you were walking in history, you were part of history and you knew it. And you were somehow – you know, so-and-so and so-and-so, I knew them all and, you know, they were all – half of them were on TV and whatever else.

There was this sense of the drama of the situation that was so momentous that – and that, somehow, you were in it. You were just there. And certainly, it garnered for me a tremendous belief in activism and being able to do what – I mean, it starts from my mother, but do whatever you damn well want, you know, what you believe, and let the chips fall. And surely, that was – that cemented that problem for me. I mean, the whole level of activism in that situation was so powerful.

MR. LYON: But you would – you would later go on to be an activist in the Lower East Side and get very involved in community action and so on. Do you – do you think the Berkeley experience fed into that?

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, it was direct, I think. I mean, it was – and again, it showed me – I mean, it certainly gave me license to think what – you know, if you've got to do it, you've got to do it. And – I mean, I don't think – I didn't

go to the Lower East Side to make an activist gesture, I went there out of my homemaking lostness and seeing that I – that there was an audience or a group of people that I could really connect with, for having worked previously in SoHo – pre-SoHo SoHo. So it was like a way of trying to find people who would love me better.

And – but then I understood that, you know, in terms of community organization and – you know, I mean, it was like the mirror of Berkeley, how do you organize. And people knew – already were there doing that. I mean –

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: – endless community groups and, you know, meetings and whatever else.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: So it was just like I'm home. This is, you know, like, this is what it's – what we were doing. [Laughs.] It was almost like second nature, actually, is what it was. It wasn't anything foreign to me.

MR. LYON: Right. So the – let me return to Berkeley a little bit. What was useful to you for – you know, in your sort of art terms about your experience there?

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, a couple of things. Yeah, a couple of things were very useful. Certainly, one – two teachers or professors that I had worked – mostly gave me license and were very revelatory.

Jim Melchert was a ceramicist who loved me to this day; comes to New York and always looks me up. He was a ceramicist who had a very – at that time, very fantastical ideas about clay. So, for instance, I remember him saying, you know, well, clay can be anything. It can even be a zipper. And he would – you know, he had a facility with clay and he could make a zipper. And certainly, that stuck with me because clay was so important to me, but I had dropped it and done welded sculptures and such. But all of a sudden, it reminded me, yes, I can do anything I need to do with clay.

And the other person was a man named Harold Paris who was – I became his – like, you know, you get to be –

MR. LYON: P-A-R-R-I-S?

MR. SIMONDS: P-A-R-I-S. Harold Paris.

MR. LYON: Harold Paris.

MR. SIMONDS: And he was a very strange, Jewish guy living in the docks of Oakland and – you know, before lofts were lofts, I guess he was the loft – the proverbial loft artist living in squalor. But he was a professor and he was very neurotic and strange with his wife and his girlfriend who was a student. And I became his assistant because I – at that time, I was making Plexiglas boxes.

And he – all of a sudden, he had this show. He said, "Charles, can you make me 50 Plexiglas boxes for my show? I want to put these what were mostly little rubber erotic-looking items, sculptures in – under boxes." And I – so I did it for him and then I became, you know, like family to him. And he certainly, along with – Sue Bitney was his girlfriend's name who was – there was – I can't remember the name of the little, quote, movement that there was at that time, but it was somehow eccentric.

It was – it became Lucy's version of eccentric abstraction. But there was a kind of moment there where there were these very erotic forms. Sue Bitney made very colorful, erotic soft sculptures and Harold Paris is doing S&M-looking, you know, erotic pieces of rubber as sculpture and rooms where the walls were soft. And they were very, you know –

MR. LYON: Wow!

MR. SIMONDS: – progressive, let's put it that way. And I remember that that certain, you know, the whole notion of – you know, the teachers, they were pretty kind of straightforward. That – you know, it was – it gave me license in a certain way that there were so many ways that you could do to make art, so to speak, in the context of making art. And so they had a big influence on me.

MR. LYON: Okay, so Jim Melchert –

MR. SIMONDS: And actually, the – there's a good little anecdote we don't need to necessarily include it – but Lucy came to give a lecture at – when I was an undergraduate at Berkeley, and I remember seeing her on the podium, this cute girl. She was, like, in her 20s maybe, I guess, or 30s – 30s maybe. And I remember her. So it was very funny, you know, because we're – 15, 20 years later, we came to be friends. Very strange. It was weird.

MR. LYON: More like eight years later, but –

MR. SIMONDS: No, no. I think it was more.

MR. LYON: No, you met her in –

MR. SIMONDS: '73. Oh yeah, you're right. You're right. Eight years later was – yeah, you're right. Time – that time is so much bigger – [they laugh] – eight years later.

MR. LYON: But you also – and then you also had mentioned studying with Stanley Fish.

MR. SIMONDS: Yes. That was very important to me.

I was living next to – I had an apartment when I was a sophomore. It was a fabulous apartment. I was in a two-apartment – a house that had two apartments. And next door to me was a – I can't remember his first name – but Bacon was his last name. No, no. He was – his girlfriend's name was Bacon. His girlfriend was the daughter of Kevin – not Kevin, the father of Kevin Bacon, who was a big city planner in Philadelphia.

MR. LYON: Oh, okay.

MR. SIMONDS: He would redesign not very happily, clearing large areas and so – and he and his cohort, another guy, Stanley Fish, had just come from Yale as these sort of Young Turk English professors who, proverbially, had to teach, among other things, the freshman classes and so and so.

And so he – and we get – we were neighbors, and he said, well, you just take Stanley Fish's class on Milton. I said, "Okay, I'll take Stanley Fish's class." And – notwithstanding that the two of them were rivals. And I took Stanley Fish's class.

Now maybe I was a freshman – I think I may have been a freshman. Anyway, I came from a – New Lincoln School where, you know, we were taught how to read and talk about – critically about texts and do analysis of literature and – I mean, we were – it was a very sophisticated school and very good. And I'm arriving in this introductory course on Milton with, I guess, 23 other kids who were from the California Public School System – because at that time, Berkeley is mostly populated by kids from public – it was a free university public school. And, you know, they didn't have a clue how to read a text or talk about a text or anything else.

And my memory is that Stanley and I carried on a two-way conversation about *Paradise Lost*. And it was at the time when – this is my memory so it may not be accurate – but my memory is that the two of us had a great time talking about *Paradise Lost.* And it was at the time when he was working out his ideas about his – he sort of invented a way of reading *Paradise Lost* that the actual cadence and manipulation and the procession of the text is a lesson in what it's trying to say as opposed to just the content issues of the narrative.

And so the way it was –

MR. LYON: So it was kind on embedded in the form of –

MR. SIMONDS: Yes, and in the cadence and in the – how it lets you think lascivious thoughts and then all of a sudden catches you up. It's like instructive –

MR. LYON: It's like experiential –

MR. SIMONDS: Yes, exactly.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: It's like the experience of reading the text is giving you the lesson that you're supposed to know. Hence, he wrote later a book called *Surprised by Sin*, which actually keys that idea and, in fact, dedicates it to his, quote, "students at Berkeley," who I take as me – my own hubris, but – in other words, he – since he developed it at that time. And I remember, and I know – first of all, I thought *Paradise Lost* was the best book there has ever – I never saw a book like that. Once I saw it through him helping me understand how to read it and so – I thought, this is the most amazing book. And I still believe that.

I still play is as a recorded audiotape when I'm working in the studio. I mean, it's – it's the greatest book ever written, as far as I'm concerned.

And whenever – I just thought – I mean, all of a sudden, I could see how tremendous it was; the epicness of it. I mean, it was a – it's a tremendous epic. I'm not religious and so it – it's incidental in a certain way – but the kind of scope and scale of its – sort of what it – it proffers. As he says in his letter to the muse in the beginning of it,

you know, what is it going to – what are we going to do? We're going to tell you about the – you know, the – man's first fall and the – we're going to tell you the whole shebang.

And I sure thought, yeah, that's the scale on which – I mean, certainly, it's had a tremendous influence on my way of thinking, well, okay, you're going to spend your life – I mean, I don't make art like some design thing or some sort of this form and that form. You've got to take on the whole shebang and try to figure it out; well, what are we doing?

And I – certainly, that's the lever of – and certainly in a narrative form – not in a content form, maybe, but in a narrative form – of the little people. It's an odyssey or – you know, the same thing. And, you know, it's like the story –

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm.

MR. SIMONDS: – and somehow that allowed me to think in that – it's about time and space, largely, to think in those terms and in terms of not necessarily discrete objects, but that you're dealing with a very – a life's work or a magnum opus or something that's big, and you're just – you know, put it – filling in little parts of it as you go to try to tell the story. And somehow, you need the structure that's going to allow that kind of sense of what's going on. You're not making, like, artwork, getting a little thing. It's not – it's not the same thing, in my version. That's how I think about things.

And I assure you that *Paradise Lost* offered me that kind of scale of perspective and sort of ambition, if you will, to get a kind of sense of what's the job that you're out there to do.

MR. LYON: But there's also something, too, in – that the experience of the work somehow teaches you a lesson about what you –

MR. SIMONDS: Ooh. Very good point. Yeah, that's absolutely true. But I think that's not by intention. That's by – that I discovered by doing what I did.

MR. LYON: But you felt an affinity with that.

MR. SIMONDS: That's hard to say. I can't say that's the truth, but I surely think that the dwellings, as they behave, and people's behavior with them, is the same idea of being able to encapsulate in the thing itself the problematic of what you're trying to say. And it – it's clear as day –

MR. LYON: That's what I'm trying to get at.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. I'm sure of that. I mean, that's why it doesn't need – matter if it's saved or – you know, all these things are so incidental, this kind of, you know – or even the issue – it's always, oh, ephemeral art – this has nothing to do with anything. It was – it's – these are all – it kind of – ancillary, corollary issues that have nothing to do with the substance of the thing is that it actually enacts the creation, being, destruction, loss, it's all there in the moment, you know, and processionally, in an evolution. So –

MR. LYON: Which is so interesting about art that it can convey something in a moment –

MR. SIMONDS: Yes, it is. It is.

MR. LYON: – which is so different from the narrative, sequential –

MR. SIMONDS: Yes, no. But – yeah, but I think – good point.

MR. LYON: I mean, it's just one of the – one of the astounding things about it.

MR. SIMONDS: But I think that's the received version of it. But I think the actual experience of it is what I'm talking about. In other words, the actual – a person makes this thing, which takes time to make, means it's becoming and created, is born, birthed.

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: And then it is responded to in a way that the people want – are able to witness that creation and birth and then destruction and death and loss so that the – it's enacted in the actual – let's call it a ritual of the – of the – of the making homeness of these dwellings. I think it's – you know? I think that's why they work or have an effect on people because otherwise, you'd be like a statue. You know, you sit there and you forget about it after a while because it's gone. It's invisible. Now, we've got to have thoughts. We don't get lunch yet? Dinner.

MR. LYON: You don't get it yet. [They laugh.] Okay, so –

MR. SIMONDS: We get – we got two good points already, don't you think?

MR. LYON: Actually, we're almost there. If we could – I just wanted to ask you about – you did take a graduate degree at –

MR. SIMONDS: At Rutgers.

MR. LYON: – at Rutgers, right?

MR. SIMONDS: But that's worth talking about, because I chose not to go to Yale. Yale had solicited me to go to graduate school because I was – didn't go to some summer program, because I was a big hit at Berkeley, so they solicited me to go Yale for summer program and I couldn't go, because I was too busy working in a factory, I was so happy. And then when I went to visit Yale, I saw that the sculpture studios, to go to graduate school, were in the basement of this building that had eight-foot ceilings and I said, what is that? And can we work off campus? And they said no.

So Rutgers, which was just like Berkeley, you could just – they didn't even want you there. They said, go work wherever you want, we don't care if you're even here. [Laughs.] Consequently I spent a lot of time playing ping-pong.

But you could do whatever you wanted.

And I wanted to come east, back to changing seasons.

MR. LYON: Yeah. Who was at Rutgers at that time? Anyone –

MR. SIMONDS: Mostly people you won't know of. John Goodyear. Oh, one – Bob Watts, somebody – a Fluxus kind of person. Nam June Paik came down then. Peter Stroud – you won't know these names. But moreover, the students were interesting. And so I think Keith Sonnier and Jackie Winsor had just been around, and – oh, George Segal was there a little bit. But I didn't really – none of the teachers really affected me very much. Mostly it was the students, the fellow students, kind of – kind of camaraderie.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah. And then you taught a bit at Newark?

MR. SIMONDS: I was married at the time and brought my girlfriend from California with me, and we – in order to sign a lease, we had to get married because you couldn't live as unrelated – at that – you imagine this time it was. You couldn't live in New Jersey suburb as unrelated, in a building. So we got married just to – we didn't expect to stay married, but we married and I then, when we graduated from graduate school, I had to make us a living, although she was already a – well, she worked at Avery Library as a librarian.

MR. LYON: Oh.

MR. SIMONDS: So she was quite – she took a library –

MR. LYON: What was her name?

MR. SIMONDS: Joanne Maude Oakes – O-A-K-E-S.

So she worked for Mr. Placzek – do you remember – know who that is? Avery Library has a big architectural –

MR. LYON: Right, right.

MR. SIMONDS: So she was quite – did quite well. And so I took a job as a – first as a janitor, cleaning up after rats and things for – that's a good story, we should put that in some time. It's a wonderful story.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. SIMONDS: But we'll do that another time.

MR. LYON: We'll remember the rat story.

MR. SIMONDS: The janitor, janitor. But then finally I got a job as a teacher and I was a professor, and there is a good anecdote in there which we'd probably have to exclude when we edit this thing, but – so – well, it sort of jumps around a bit, though, because we should then first talk about Chrystie Street and Gordon [Matta-Clark] and all that stuff.

MR. LYON: OK. Well, that I've put in early career, is the way I've dealt with – [inaudible] – actually –

MR. SIMONDS: So we're getting up into there, because –

MR. LYON: Yeah. So maybe we – you want to take a break?

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I'll make dinner?

MR. LYON: OK.

MR. SIMONDS: Is that all right?

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

[Break.]

MR. SIMONDS: We're on –

MR. LYON: So we're going to talk about your early career now, and I read that you had revisited New Mexico in, like, 1969 or so. Is that true? What led you to go back?

MR. SIMONDS: Well, the whole – all of my work comes from a couple days. All of it. And certainly that prompted me to go back to New Mexico. But those days were essentially of – I was a teacher at Newark State College, a professor, but no matter, we'll get to that. But I went and collected some clay – I was going for my students to take them, I asked, well, where can you get free clay? Oh, you go to Sayreville, New Jersey, you get some clay. So I took my class there and we just went and made things in a clay pit in Sayreville, New Jersey. And I brought my clay back, also, to my loft where I was living and working.

And somehow – I don't know, it's hard to remember, because I'd been doing a lot of strange things before that – which we should talk about. But at some moment, all of a sudden I had some clay and I squished it down, I had the sensation that it was a place, I sprinkled some sand on it, and it looked like – there's a place. And I think *all* my work, no matter – 40 years now, came from diving into that place. There's no question about that. All of a sudden, that place could be any place, and it was the most magical little arena of places that you can – I think within a couple of hours, I made three or four completely different places – an African landscape, a this landscape, and that landscape.

And – but all invested with a fantasy of a place. And it was like all of a sudden, I was in that place. And it was – there's no way really – put a kind of value to how powerful it was, because whatever was going on in me, all of a sudden I had a home, a – that was where I was. And you know, at that time, then I started to make – I called them ritual places, but there were many different kinds of places. Then I developed a way to make a brick, and as soon as they were bricks there was kind of a sense of a kind of architecture, which meant a kind of people, like a story of a people. And then the places sort of became like a *story* of one place to the next place to the next place. And there was like a connection between the places, as opposed to different places. And then it was springtime and I was on Chrystie Street and the kids were playing in the park, the windows were open and I heard all these kids outside, and it seemed like, jerk, why are you sitting inside here in the dark in the back of a loft? You could go and make these places outside. It was simple as that.

And because I'd worked, you know, doing things outside – Gordon Matta and I were friends, in the same building; we went and did some of my things, some of his things out in the streets and in Sayreville. And so the idea of working outside was like a given for me. And so I said, well, okay, I'm going to go make them outside. And I called a friend who – studio on Greene Street, because I was still referenced to art. And I said, Ted, can I make a dwelling, one of my little things on your window ledge?

MR. LYON: And this is Ted Victoria?

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. And he said sure, why not, whatever. And so I made a little dwelling there, and then of course as soon as I did that – this is like 1970, I guess – it was on the bottom of Greene Street, maybe at Broome or something like that. And I said, oh, I could just have my – little people, already, were – they existed as a kind of story of dwellings for a people, even though you never saw the people. I could migrate them up the street. Why not? So I started from Ted's, then I went into the gutter, a little further up the street, and continued to work my way up –

MR. LYON: Oh, that's interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: – up the street. It was a migration. And – because it's a story. And I mean, at that time, there were cliff dwellers and shepherders – you know, there were guys on the plains were in the gutter, and there were up on the window ledges were cliff dwellers. And I knew Jeffrey Lew from Gordon, and so Jeffrey said, make one

out at 112 Greene Street, send me one sort of inside and outside of 112 Greene Street. And Holly Solomon had a loft building –sort of like an exhibition space called 98 Greene Street. She said, can you make one on my window ledge – I mean – so everybody wanted to have one on their window ledge or whatever.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: So I mean, little people were very busy – we were really busy. And I – I mean, I was in a kind of obsessive fanaticism, I was making dwellings – that the little people needed a home. So you know, it was very – people who met me at the time were a little concerned, because I was very – all I talked about were the little people.

And so I migrated them up, and then I remembered – this is probably more – clearest and then ultimately why I went back to the Southwest. But at that time it was before SoHo was SoHo, so there were only very few – I think only gallery there was Paula Cooper Gallery, 112 Greene Street, and OK Harris maybe. And I remember working on 112 Greene Street and at that time, there were a lot of truckers, workers who moved rags in and out or – mostly like small-time factory places. And they became completely enamored of this cuckoo guy, and they would tell me all about what happened to the little people the night before – I mean, it was like, endless. And they were delightful. And they didn't care – you know, it wasn't about, what are you doing. It was like – whatever.

And then, of course, there were these – this I remember very vividly. There were these moments where – because I was facing the wall, facing back to the street, making my dwellings. So I would sense people – you know, truckers would just come by and say, hey, what's happening – you know, what are you doing now? And then I would sense somebody would stand there a little bit timidly and kind of like watching. And I realized that they – those were artists who – I remember this so well – you know, who thought – I know what they thought because they – some of them expressed it. There was this kind of "hmph!" and walking away, because I – they'd say, what are you doing? Eventually I sort of teased them into saying, well – and they'd say, well, what are you doing? I'd say, well, I'm making homes for little people. And they'd – you know, it's just like – whoo – you were completely off the –

First of all, it was minimalism at that time, and there was no fantasy, I was making fantasy things, soft things, ephemeral things out of clay, which said "craft" – you know, and I was – you know, and I was cuckoo, evidently. I mean, there was no question – actually true. I was a little bit, like, out there. And you sound, just talking about little people, and no little people there, all these sort of these things. And I remember thinking to myself, well, this is ridiculous. You know, these people have nothing to offer me, the art person. And certainly any comments they made were things I already knew anyway. So I thought, oh, okay, I'm going to go find me a neighborhood where I could deal with just normal people, like the hoi polloi, as it were. Nobody special. That was how – the feeling I had.

Because there was something that reeked of specialness about the art – you know, there was some judgmental issue and sort of like – and I thought, well, this is not what it's about. This is just fun, and we're having a good time. And so I went and – at that time, I lived on Chrystie Street, so the neighborhood that identified itself to me in a kind of geography, because I had the idea I'm going to go and infest a given geography and a given neighborhood with a fantasy. Like, kind of a mythology that would waft through the neighborhood and people would have it in their memory and psyche. I went and chose this neighborhood, Avenue A to D on 14th Street to Houston, which was a very coherent neighborhood at that time. Mostly very manly and tough. But I went, not knowing the neighborhood yet, I went to sort of – I think it was between 8th and 9th Street on Avenue C. At that time, you would probably then – I've characterized it, once I learned what the neighborhood was about, that it was like Broadway in the neighborhood, if you can imagine. It wasn't like – it was like the sort of main drag, almost.

And I sat down in the gutter – I remember this very well – by a hydrant, and I started to make a little dwelling. And I remember sitting sort of next to dog shit, and I made my dwelling. And it was so quick that – you know, because it's a street neighborhood, there's people hanging out, and people, for whatever reason, not necessarily going somewhere but being where they are. And so, you know, I had a crowd of people and the plumber came and this guy came, and they all said, what are you doing? Wait, wait, this is great, what are you doing? And they were all very excited. And wonderful people, just welcoming people. No story, just like, "Oh, this is cool. How'd you do that?" You know.

And so I had a great time, and I then did that for seven years, actually, in that neighborhood. Worked all over the neighborhood, and I remember this feeling very quickly that when I really knew that I was on the right track, as it were, where people would come to me and say – because people would hang out, and then they'd go bring their friends, and they'd come back and say, "Well, how's it going? What's happened? What are the little people up to?" And so on, so on.

And then somebody would say, “Well, I saw the dwelling you made over there on 3rd Street. And I realized I never made a dwelling on 3rd Street. So I thought, well, is somebody else doing this? Or what? And then I realized that these – the people were imagining dwellings where there were no dwellings. So in a certain way the fantasy was so powerful to them that they were fantasizing the fantasy, making their own fantasy, even though it wasn’t. And I remember the feeling at that moment where I said, this is – this is good. [They laugh.] This is – this is special. Because it was so compelling.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: And all of a sudden I realized that it was – it had infected the psyche of everybody in the community, and all of a sudden there were dwellings everywhere, even if I didn’t make one. It was like a very powerful realization.

So – and then I started to understand some of the corollaries of what they meant and how they functioned and the behaviors and so on and so forth, which we’ll get into later. But it was a kind of revelation, I guess, in a way, that this – that you could do that. I mean, I remember thinking of it as – very clearly, I’m a – you know, I have a physics interest. And I thought, this is kind of political physics of some sort. You know, you’re sort of a very small amount of mass and energy is affecting a tremendous amount of time and space. It’s like a very explosive kind of – the psyche of the situation was so – kind of mushroomed – you know, explosive is the best way to put it, which I never would have – you know, would have known. You could have never thunk it.

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: [Laughs.] So going to the Southwest.

MR. LYON: I feel that we – yeah, going to the Southwest – well, go ahead.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, oh – so then, since I started to think about, where is this coming from for me, and thing like that. So I went to – some friends and I, we went to do a hiking trip in the Southwest for me to try to also recapture some of my memories of my early childhood there, but then I started to get very involved in the issues of the rituals – you know the Indian dances and so on. And I started to go very regularly. But particularly then I got very involved in the Shalako – there’s a Zuni Shalako festival, which is essentially predicated on the kind of – every year they build one or two new houses that are then consecrated during the Shalako festivals, so these different personages come and dance in the house. And so it’s kind of a moving dance from one house to the other that essentially consecrates the house and gives it its homeness – makes it home.

And somehow that fit so neatly with a lot of things I was thinking about, and I started to think – I mean, certainly that’s the source, for instance, of the circular people, this dwelling that has to do with building one around a circle, is it’s sort of a new dwelling each year and somehow connected to the past. And so all these things start to coalesce. I mean, finally they’re such a mixture – I mean, this may be more interesting. There’s such a mixture of them – of personal, psychological and personal stories. I’ll give you an example, which is that – I spent a lot of time – what’s called *Three Peoples* – linear, circle and spiral people. This is a text I’ve written about and so on, so on. But the source of that was living on Chrystie Street, you know, white loft, and having built a kind of hanging – what do you want to call it, a thing where people can sit and – little U-shaped thing where everybody would sit and we’d all talk and swing, and Gordon and I would get very animated and swing back and forth, back and forth. We’d sit there, and I remember – at that time, my wife Joanne was a librarian.

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: And we had painted the loft white, and I started working this pink clay. And I remember – and we were having a difficult time, because she would clean in the morning, at 6:00 in the morning, and go off to work, and then she’d come back and the house was pink. You know, it wasn’t fun for her – and so I was sitting on this swinging seat, trying to figure out, how are we going to get along? And I’m looking down this loft, which had fluorescent lights, straight down – fixture after fixture, a very long row. I said, ah. [Snaps fingers.] I’m going to make a linear dwelling, and I’ll make a dwelling, and I’ll make a mess, and Joanne can come after and she can clean up, and she’ll have the satisfaction of cleaning up, which she loved to do. And then I’ll make another dwelling over here, and then she can come after and clean up again. And we’ll just proceed through life in this kind of path of a dwelling –

MR. LYON: Why do I – why do I think this didn’t work?

MR. SIMONDS: Well, it didn’t work. [They laugh.] But the – no, but the long and the short is that it – okay, you have a linear dwelling, you have a circular dwelling, you have a spiral dwelling – all of a sudden I could understand a way of thinking about time and space in – as expressed in a dwelling. And the Shalako festival was in a certain way a hinge for a lot of that, because it was a cyclical issue of building a dwelling each year, seasonally, on a solstice, essentially.

MR. LYON: Okay. Okay. Good.

MR. SIMONDS: Convoluted enough?

MR. LYON: Yeah. Perfect. That was one of my questions.

And then – so your first show was being invited to Iowa? What did you say?

MR. SIMONDS: Oh. Oh, that's funny. Yeah. Well – yeah when I was a graduate student, I was invited to go up to – a man named Ulfert Wilke, who had a wonderful collection of African art, had been a professor at Rutgers. and then retired and took his African art collection and donated it to a museum in Iowa, Iowa city, and became, I guess, an emeritus professor there, or something like that. And he then arranged to do a show of seven graduate students out from Rutgers out in Iowa –

MR. LYON: Got it.

MR. SIMONDS: – where I went and brought back a baby pig, Francis Bacon. [Laughs.] It doesn't matter. But in the – [laughs] – we can cut these things out. It doesn't matter. And –

MR. LYON: [Talking to the dog] Candy, do you realize what was your predecessor?

MR. SIMONDS: And it got time – I think the other person he worked with at Iowa was a man named Hans Breder –

MR. LYON: Yep.

MR. SIMONDS: – who did – I think there were kinetic kinds of – oh, I should mention that actually in Berkeley I was an assistant for a guy named Takis, who was a kinetic sculptor.

MR. LYON: Oh, I've heard of him.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, and he was a wonderful man. I helped him – when they had a big show of kinetic art – Peter Selz – I was his assistant. And this was a similar thing where Hans Breder, then we all came out and sort of helped him with his things and how to show. He was very nice. And his girlfriend at the time was a – that's what your question was originally – was Ana Mendieta –

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: – who became a victim of Carl Andre.

MR. LYON: I think they got involved in 1969.

MR. SIMONDS: That sounds about right. Yeah, this was a littler earlier –

MR. LYON: It should be around about –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, no, you're right, you're right. No, no, '67 to '69 was when I was at Rutgers. That's right, yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah. So, yeah, so she was a – I think she was an undergraduate at that point. She got involved with him and they were together for about 10 years, you know, until she came to New York.

MR. SIMONDS: Sounds right. I didn't like her.

MR. LYON: But I always – I always thought that her – well, that there's some kind of parallel, if not connection, between your –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, I think she's –

MR. LYON: – early films and –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, no, she – but that was more via Lucy.

MR. LYON: Oh, really?

MR. SIMONDS: She was around when – because Carl was a friend of Lucy's. And then so when was with Carl she got to know my work through Lucy, and I think certainly – yeah, I think there's a lot that she's arrived from, from my work, no question to my mind.

MR. LYON: The pieces that you did, like the *Birth* –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, all the body things, yeah.

MR. LYON: So you just –

MR. SIMONDS: That's much later, though.

MR. LYON: It's not too much later.

MR. SIMONDS: Well –

MR. LYON: It was '71 or so you –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, but those were busy years.

MR. LYON: Yeah. Okay, so anyway – well, I don't know if we need to break.

MR. SIMONDS: Seventy-two or '3, I think.

MR. LYON: So you shared the building on Chrystie Street with Gordon Matta-Clark and Harriet Korman?

MR. SIMONDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmation.]

MR. LYON: Did you – and you said you worked with Gordon?

MR. SIMONDS: Gordon and I did a lot of things together. I mean, I lived on the third floor and he lived on the top floor, so every day he would come through my loft on his way home.

MR. LYON: Oh.

MR. SIMONDS: And so we would have fun talking. And then we did many, many projects together. The *Photo-Fry* we did – I helped him do his *Photo-Fry.* He helped me with my tarot – I had a whole set of tarot cards.

MR. LYON: Oh, I heard – I read about that.

MR. SIMONDS: He did all of that. That was for that.

MR. LYON: I didn't know anything about that.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, he did – that was – [inaudible]. He would come and –

MR. LYON: What kind of – what did you to with tarot?

MR. SIMONDS: I was making – before I discovered my little place with the sand and the clay –

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: – I was making a kind of – I called them stations, different moments. And I was making all sorts of – this is too much to – we have to take a whole other tape for this because it's – no, no, it's, like, endless. I would take molds off the bridge – what is it – the Manhattan Bridge, off the railings, and I would make these tremendous staircases that are made out of cardboard from the molds, covered with Plasticine, and little tadpoles and evolutionary processions, and blood in tubes and two-by-fours that were broken and bandaged, and the shadows were made from my hair. You don't know anything about this stuff.

So I did some very, very strange and esoteric things, and a big dome with a *Voyage to Cythera* all sculpted in relief and, I mean, all sorts of sort of – how do you explain? There were, like – It's too complicated. I'm sorry, we'll have to do it another time. Because I would sit in this loft – you don't know any of this. It's too hard to explain easily. You know, the loft was white and I drew a circle on the floor, in the back. And I would spend my day – Joanne would go off and I'd spend my day sitting for however much time in one moment on the circle and then move to the next moment – kind of a meditation but it wasn't – that's too strong a word for it.

And I'd just sit there, and then move to the next and then the next and the next. And I would just sort of fantasize ridiculous things, I guess, I mean, as best I can. I mean, if you saw – I have some photos, very few, but, I mean, things you would never – Daniel Abadie saw some of them and he still – he's like that. I mean, it's hard to explain but little drawings that look like infant drawings, children's drawings; little funny, simple colors and big tubes of vinyl filled with blood. I would collect my own blood, for instance. My mother was a doctor so she could arrange to have – I collected pints of my own blood and did all sorts of strange things with my blood.

What to say? I mean, I have some notebooks of it. Actually the drawings are hard to look at. [They laugh.]

But in any case, so it must have been some sort of expiation of a lot of issues of sculpting, in a very traditional way, my past, my – thinking about my body and myself physically, and –

MR. LYON: Well, the early – this early work like the pieces that you did in clay, you used your own body. I mean –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, a lot of the bricks are soaked in my blood and so forth. I mean, all of it translating onwards, but it was all – I think it was all kind of a way of trying to find, well, what are the – you know, a kind of scramble of trying to find, what are the essentials? And funnily, at the end, the essentials were very simple. There was my body, which means also my blood and myself, my being; and my body, the Earth, which was the clay.

And, I mean, I guess essentially that and time – I mean, it was all pretty much what it boiled down to if I had to think – you know, it was kind of reductions of dealing with all these fantasies and things and doing this, do that, but ultimately what was I left with? I had a certain hand on clay, and the clay was very important to me. That was something. And there was myself and my body –

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: – and time and fantasy – [inaudible] – but the fantasy got rooted into – I mean, I think it ultimately became essentially a religion of trying to make a – you know, a kind of structure of being, you know, of –

MR. LYON: Do you feel like you were, in a sense, looking for something to believe in, to –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, I don't think I was looking for something to believe in. I was trying to get rid of things that weren't –

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. SIMONDS: – to be believed in.

MR. LYON: So kind of like –

MR. SIMONDS: And as soon as got rid of all those things, then you were left with, well, what have I got left? And then you could see a relationship between things that are left. So I don't think I was *looking* for an answer so much as getting rid of what is it that's not in the game here, and what are you left with? And then what you're left with is actually pretty simple.

And then what was amazing to me – actually I think it's very clear to me, which is why this explosiveness of this place and so – is that the things that are – those few things have in their interrelationship tremendous amounts of possibility and understanding, you know, relationships, so that you can – you can structure an entire – as I have – world and history and time and being in – I got only a couple of things. I got my clay, my body, and a relationship between body and Earth; you know, your relationship with where you come from, in a certain way; and time and, you know, your beingness here.

So I think – I think that's all there – that there is. And, you know, I sort of invented a world from that. It's not like there's any – I'm not looking outside somewhere to find another version of me. It's just me, or what I've been able to see in me –

MR. LYON: Right. Right.

MR. SIMONDS: – through that. Nobody is going to understand anything we've said. [They laugh.]

MR. LYON: Okay, so we talked about that, and talked about that. So these – so you did, I think, these mythologies, the *Birth* and then *Body↔Earth*.

MR. SIMONDS: They're simple to explain.

MR. LYON: And then *Landscape↔Body↔Dwelling*.

MR. SIMONDS: Well, I mean, somehow the premise of this – you have the Earth and you have yourself, so you were born from the Earth. So somehow – I mean, you mentioned in there somehow as if it were a performance. It's not a performance. It's just a kind of ritual or kind of something I do for the experience of doing it. In fact, normally nobody sees me do these things.

MR. LYON: Right. Okay.

MR. SIMONDS: Occasionally I've been filmed. But essentially it's for the experience of – in that case, rather excruciating experience of being buried in the Earth and feeling like you're going to either die and be buried and suffocate –

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: – or you're going to get out, and being reborn from the Earth. And it's a kind of effort, if you will. And so there's that. And then if you –okay, you became, you're a being, you have a form and so; then you go back and give your body's imprint back to the Earth, which was *Body↔Earth*, which was the other one you mentioned. You sort of reform the Earth as an impression of your body, so the Earth has a kind of a body form.

And then *Landscape↔Body↔Dwelling* is essentially a marrying of those things, where you sort of – I mean, if you take your body and you reform it into a land, a landscape; remodel it, refashion it as a landscape so that, you know, as you breathe the Earth breathes, it's a living body Earth. And then if you think of your body as your first home, it's a way of sort of experiencing building a dwelling on that landscape. You make yourself your home, I guess is the easiest way to describe it metaphorically or experientially, that all of a sudden you are home.

And, I mean, there are other, I guess, implications of – if you want to get into your psychosexual Freudian ba da ba. I mean, there's all sorts of issues actually underneath that of birthing and things like that, male versus female and so on. But essentially the experience is mostly about –

MR. LYON: It's also – you know, there's, like, the notion of, you know, baptisms and coming of age kinds of things –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh.

MR. LYON: – where you're sort of birthing yourself. In a sense you're sort of liberating yourself from –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: – you know, and remaking yourself, taking responsibility for yourself, you know.

MR. SIMONDS: I never thought of much in those terms.

MR. LYON: It's all interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: There's lots of, you know, coming-of-age kind of aspects to this that are very interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: I never thought of that. Yeah. Yeah. I've never thought of that. But certainly it's an experiential issue of sort of feeling –

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: And since it takes three hours or more to do, you are rooted on – I mean, you feel the Earth underneath you, you have your body, and then the Earth is above you, is part of you and above you, so that you breathe and the Earth breathes. It's a very compelling experience. And so that certainly formed a, I would say, a mythology of my work. That's how I describe it is it somehow sets the structural –

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: – relationships of the little people, if you will. That's their religion, if you want, some of the structure of how they see the world. Hence their dwellings in the beginning had ritual places that had body forms, which became architectural forms much later, but there were sexualized parts of the Earth that had a kind of body reference. So they're natural forms that they discovered and sanctified.

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: I mean, it's pretty esoteric but it's the way it is. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: OK, so this is like – we've talked about the beginnings of the – you know, the "Little People" and so on. After you split up with, divorced Joanne.

MR. SIMONDS: I left and Joanne left too. We both left the place. And I moved to 28th Street –

MR. LYON: You moved to 28th Street.

MR. SIMONDS: – because my brother had rented a building for his rock bands that he managed. And it was a wonderful time for me, actually. I lived in a place that – I mean, I was cuckoo. And I had a delivery bicycle and it was in a – the bottom floor was a green space for Bill's Flowers, which had a flower shop across the street, and he would keep his greens there.

So every morning I would go downstairs and I'd find the seasonal green – I would have a little path to walk through between evergreens at a certain time and whatever else at a different time. And it was – it would smell beautiful and I would go out and spend time. And I never had to lock the door. It was like – I mean, I was the guest of my mice that lived there. And it looked pretty weird but I was very happy.

I had this delivery bicycle, and I would go around town, especially on the Lower East Side at that time, and make dwellings. I would have the clay in the delivery bicycle and a change of clothes in case I got invited somewhere. And I would go – actually, mostly it was on the street. I mean, I ate on the street. It was wonderful, but I think – I mean, it was very tough, you know – it was weird.

MR. LYON: You said that you had a kind of coffin that you built for yourself so –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, yeah, because my brother's rock bands would come and – if one came it was all right because you'd have music. But if two came, it was impossible and you'd have – so you couldn't sleep. So I built a kind of soundproof coffin to sleep in. It didn't work very well, so I would mostly – actually, I spent most of my life on the street. I learned a lot about the street and I met – I mean, a lot of people lived on the street at that time and so I had a lot of friends on the street. It was very weird I have to say.

MR. LYON: Right. Right. And so sometime around 1972 you met Lucy.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, well, I was still living on Chrystie Street.

MR. LYON: Oh, you were?

MR. SIMONDS: This was before, yeah. And there was a woman who lived next door named Lutze, who was like "Ms. Impresario," and she just loved everything about what I did. And she was somehow connected all over everywhere. She was the daughter of some German minister. And she would go to Harlem churches and she was in everywhere art, this and that. And any chance she had she would trumpet this cuckoo guy who lived next door. She was really adorable in a way. She just – I mean, she was responsible for many, many things, which we'll get to, of me going to Germany or me going to Oberlin..

And somewhere along the way she has a party. And, oh, I made her a dwelling in her loft on the floor as a kind of thank you because she just, you know, was very nice to me. And she had a party, and then I remember going to a party and seeing her show, so Lucy came to the party. This thing on the floor – I remember watching Lucy try to figure out, what is that? [Laughs.] You know, it's like this thing on the floor that was some fantasy place, you know? It was like – and so – for whatever reason. I think at that time I also had met Dorothea Rockburne –

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: – who was an artist.

MR. LYON: I know Dorothea.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, and she'd asked me to go do a kind of thing for her students at SVA. So I remember lying on the roof of some building at SVA and building – doing landscape body drawing on the roof of SVA, which I guess shocked a lot of people, but no matter.

So then Lucy asked if she could have a tour of the dwellings, like could I show her the – because she figured out that they're out in the street mostly. And so I gave her a tour of the dwellings, and I remember being a little bit disconsolate about trying to do that because half the dwellings were destroyed, so I would take her to a place – I mean, for instance, I worked opposite the Fanelli café when I was doing the Greene Street dwellings.

MR. LYON: Oh, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: I worked opposite – and Fanelli was so sweet. He would come bring me soup and – I mean, everybody was, like, trying to help me. And I still remember taking Lucy to this vacant lot and there was this remains of a dwelling that had long ago been beat up and destroyed. I said, well, and here's another dwelling. And I was trying to imagine, what's Lucy thinking? There's this sort of smudge of clay. [Laughs.] There's not much to see, and so and so on.

But it seemed she must have caught some of the feeling of what it was about, because she says – I remember she said – she said, "That's very impressive" – [laughs] – to her. I mean, I was walking around in slippers – you know, horsehair slippers from Tunisia and going a little crazy and going off to Tozeur and blah, blah, blah.

MR. LYON: She thought that she met you at a – at some kind of event at the Whitney, but I guess she's maybe misremembering.

MR. SIMONDS: She's totally misremembering. I never met her at the Whitney.

MR. LYON: But she said that – she told me that it was your curiosity that attracted her to you.

MR. SIMONDS: Curiosity?

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, I never heard that. That's interesting.

MR. LYON: I thought that was an interesting comment.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, yeah. I'll have to ask her about that. She's going to have to pay for that. [Laughs.] Curiosity.

MR. LYON: But what attracted you to her?

MR. SIMONDS: Well, it was very instantaneous for me because she was so – I think – and I remember her saying much later – I mean, what I was doing was so out of the ken of anything she was visiting in her mind. I mean, it was all minimalism and Carl Andre and everything, and all of a sudden somebody was making something that was very personal and not just fantasy but kind of a vulnerable fantasy, you know, kind of human in a certain way. It was human in a real way.

And I remember her reaction as being, you know, like, oh, this is what I've always wanted from art in some way, that it was somehow going to tell her that it was all right to be like that. You know, there was something of an innocence in what I – which is true. There's an innocence in what I do. It's kind of – there's no agenda. I mean, I always used to advertise to her afterwards. I'd say, well, you know, by the way, you don't need a college education to understand what I'm doing. Because at that time all these conceptual artists and philosophy and this and that – [inaudible]. I mean, it was very complicated. [They laugh.]

MR. LYON: Yeah, making art complicated.

MR. SIMONDS: Well, but, like, you had to really think a lot. And I said, you know, you don't need a college education. By the way, the person in the street can understand what I'm doing. And I think she caught that in a real way. I'm not being glib. I think she – she felt that, that it was something very human and wonderful in a certain way, or touching. It was something that she would want that was missing in art somehow. And I think that was what I reacted to in her, that she – which I had the same with for instance Holly Solomon. Once I was standing by a counter in her loft and I sort of stroked a pussy willow, you know, sort of thing. I saw a tear come to her eye. And it was as if she understood who I was, in some way. It was like a kind of – there was no – I mean, I think – and it's true to this day, but I think at that time I was like an innocent, in a certain way; I was just doing what I had to do with no – I wasn't making art or anything – just doing it, what was important to me. And I think people reacted to that; there was a kind of honesty to it, or a simpleness. Pathos, there was a lot of pathos.

So there's kind of this poor guy; he's like – [they laugh] – and I think it would be interesting to talk to Lucy about that, but I think that may have been part of it, that she sort of could feel the feeling of what it was.

MR. LYON: Now, that's interesting. Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: Wasn't it about Clement Greenberg, or –

MR. LYON: Well, that – that moment – I don't know her, you know, career so well, but it's – it always struck me that that period was a kind of interesting moment for her, where she makes a transition from being kind of the champion of this conceptual work and all and begins to like –

MR. SIMONDS: Feminism? All these different – many different things that – that are – I'm sorry; I'm –

MR. LYON: No, no, you were saying –

MR. SIMONDS: But that sort of yeasted through, you know, the kind of this monolithic version of art-making;

minimalism, whatever – conceptualism – that there were so many – there was – became very multifarious, and also political on some levels.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: There was some issues. I mean, I think she also identified –

MR. LYON: Well, well then, she's got involved with the protest against the Whitney and, you know, all this kind of stuff.

MR. SIMONDS: That, but also, I think she had – she understood – you know, I will never forget a dinner party we went to, but she understood me working on the Lower East Side and *why* I wanted to work there and *why* it was important to me. And I remember going to some – I won't say whose – dinner, with all these fancy art – I mean, they were all my -- the people I learned about in school, and they were all so special and important. And I was trying to sort of meld them with – who's that guy there? You know, we went to this dinner party and they're talking about how they spent their day. And I had just come from the Lower East Side, and try to clean up to go to this dinner party. And I remember the – one very excruciating thing; I said, "I got to go." And so we left, which for me is completely – you know, I would never do that. I'm very proper, in some funny way – [laughs] – I would never get up from a dinner and say, "I got to get out of here." And so I said, "I got to go." And I remember she was – "well, we got to go." Because I was so, kind of, infuriated and appalled by what I was seeing as what these people thought was how you made art – what it was about. It was nothing to do with anything that I was experiencing because I was experiencing something completely different.

I mean, I remember going to the subway. And I remember – I was just about to jump in front of the train because I thought, "I'm living in an insane world. I got to get out of here." And she understood that. There's no question – I mean, to that extent she essentially saved my life 50 times, because she – I think she held my hand through some of that – those issues that were – I mean, at that time they were much more excruciating to me than they are now; I could – pardon me – give a fuck now. But at that time they were – you know, I was trying to reconcile, well, what am I doing, with what are – what are these people doing? And these people are the art people, or whatever they are? You know, these are the – like, special artists, and – well, not a good time, I got to say. Well, horrible.

But I think, certainly, Lucy – at least, for whatever reason, I think she just loved me. But she certainly put up with – I mean, we've spent these very excruciating, you know, late-night talks, lying in bed, and sort of take her to task for all these shitfaces, I mean – hence my – remember my little text, where there's a little –

MR. LYON: Yes.

MR. SIMONDS: See, it says "expurgated." [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: Yeah, everything's expurgated.

MR. SIMONDS: Well, that's the source of it. I mean, I mean – I thought this, "what are these people talking about?" It was like – I – there's no way to explain that, Chris. The – I – there's no way to understand because, you know, there's no way to explain *how* ridiculous they looked from the gutter of the Lower East Side. It was like, "How did" – I mean, they – Carl Andre's *Bricks* –

MR. LYON: But they were gods.

MR. SIMONDS: Yes – but that's just it; I was –

MR. LYON: To – I mean, to –

MR. SIMONDS: To me –

MR. LYON: – young art students and everybody, you know?

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, yeah. And I mean, the only one who didn't invest or inhabit that was Smithson. He was the only one who was somehow engaged in something that I understood and that he – who understood me. The rest of them were like in some netherland. It's really netherland. To this day, I think it's netherland. I'm sorry to say – it's complete netherland.

MR. LYON: What was Smithson like?

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, he was wonderful – I mean, to me he was wonderful. I don't know what he was like to other people. [Laughs.] But I think it's – wonderful to many people, I think.

I think the thing that struck me about Bob, other than the particular things that we were able to interchange, was that he would always have something he wanted to talk about. It wasn't like, "let's see if we have something to talk about." He had something – he brought it to the table: "I want to talk about this." I mean, it could disappear very quickly, but it was something substantive that would get you going. And then you would sort of, "Oh, okay." And it was never – you never had to wait to talk – in other words, talk him out of anything. You – were like, "Okay, we're going to talk about this."

And so, I mean, for me, in our own little interchanges, we had a lot to talk about in terms of issues of time, and a kind of sense of perspective of – I mean, the thing that I think was so important to me – to me from him was that he was thinking about earth in time – in a real time, in a grand time, in a large time. And there was a kind of – I mean, he's more geological and – there were other issues in terms of – but I think we for instance, we saw the city as earth articulated by mind through time. There's no question – we both saw a kind of articulation of matter, of earth matter, in – for whatever reasons, in time.

And it was a way – a kind of a breadth of that way of thinking about things that – I mean, he had very different attitudes than I did, and I think his – I think it was – this is harsh to say, but I think he was also very entrapped in the art world – I mean, this non-site issue and all these things which were so predicated on a kind of certain – a given of art-making.

MR. LYON: True.

MR. SIMONDS: And I think that –

MR. LYON: But he also was thinking outside the art world, in his notions of entropy and, you know, all this kind of stuff that was – you know, when you look back at it now it looks like he was proposing a model that stepped –

MR. SIMONDS: Yes. I agree.

MR. LYON: – that stepped – that stepped outside of Greenberg and so on for the first time.

MR. SIMONDS: Yes, I agree. I agree. I absolutely agree.

And I think that that part of it has been largely lost, from my version of what's happened in the interim.

MR. LYON: Yeah, and so –

MR. SIMONDS: But I think that was – and certainly the premise of his thinking is that. And that – I think that's what interested me about him. He wasn't thinking – he was thinking about real things, yeah?

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: I mean, we had many issues of, you know – I mean, for instance, eroticism was something he was – he was very fascinated by my – I remember he – I gave him a photo of me, you know, with a dwelling on me. And I remember, he was just completely like – [laughs] – he was like half – he wasn't embarrassed, but he was – you know, Bob.

MR. LYON: Oh, no. I never met him.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, oh. He was very clumsy. He was like a little gangly guy, and a little bit clumsy and a little pimple-faced – pockmarked. And he'd say – he – but tremendous brain. And he would – he would – you always had the feeling of somebody who was awkward, and I mean also mentally. You know, he was very adept but he was at the same time awkward; he was a little bit – I think he thought quicker than he could speak.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: So you could – feeling in his fumbling – like more things were going on, like somebody who – largely, also, I think because of these time issues, and he was trying to fracture things through entropy into all these different things, that his kind of arena was very complex in a certain way, and not – it wasn't pedestrian. I think of art, thinking it was pedestrian. He was really thinking about things. And so he – it was always a little bit like – thinking it through a little, is the feeling I have.

But we should cover the – not now, but we should cover –

MR. LYON: You went to –

MR. SIMONDS: – the trip to the clay pits.

MR. LYON: I was going to say. You and he exchanged trips, sort of?

MR. SIMONDS: We decided that what we were going to do – [laughs] – he – what we – I really liked – loved Bob, and also because he was – I think he was the only one of those people who just accepted me – you know, because I was the next generation.

MR. LYON: Oh, right.

MR. SIMONDS: So I was like the – you know, Carl Andre was a former boyfriend of Lucy's; I was a threat, some Young Turk who was – so I – and Bob, it never occurred to him in that way. He was just like, "there's this guy; he's sort of funny." And he was absolutely open to thinking – and he thought about what I did.

And so we got to be friends. And he came to Maine, for instance, where we were – where Lucy and I would go in the summer, and we had some wonderful talks there. And so – and for instance, there's a good example of his awkwardness, because he was always – you know, Maine's all about sand flats and mudflats, and he was – he always looked like he was going to get stuck in the mud, you know? So like, he couldn't – couldn't really deal with walking in the mud, you see.

And so we decided – when we're along the way, we said, okay, I'm going to take you to my so-to-speak source place, which is my Sayreville clay pits. And then we'll have lunch and then you're going to take me to your quarry up by Montclair.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: And so – [laughs] – it was great. So you know, Sayreville clay pits are sticky and – it's just kind of, you know – actually a lot of quicksand there, which Bob – actually, I – and there were also – was a very famous steam shovel that had sunken into this quicksand, in this clay pit.

MR. LYON: Oh, uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: So you know, he could – immediately could identify where we were, but at the same time, it was very, kind of, yucky, if you will – pink and soft and sticky. And so we – and very sexy, you know, I – because he was already kind of familiar with my – you know, this is where I lay down and got born.

And so we did that, and then he said, "Okay, now we'll go to this diner," and he took me to his favorite diner somewhere up by Montclair.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: And then we went to his quarry. Now, his quarry is black stone that's been cut very geometrically, and with precision. So this is like this kind of hard-cut landscape.

And now, I think I always thought afterwards that – which is something I always thought about his work – you know, for instance, once I went to his house, and he was – there was a – you know, *Amarillo Ramp*, was his last work. And he had – in this house, he had a – which Lucy and I actually visited a few days after he died there, by chance. And he had a model, a kind of Plasticine model of the *Amarillo Ramp* that – in his house, in his loft.

MR. LYON: Oh, uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: And the thing looked – but all thumbs, you know? It was like somebody couldn't model something. It was like completely – like even a grade school kid have done a better job, you know? But you know, and you look at his drawings; they're so perfectly beautiful, articulate, in a childish way, but he – in modeling, he couldn't do it.

And so, you know, I remember this feeling that – I thought of Bob as so – there was such an element of conceptual – it was like somebody who would conceive things but wasn't – you know, all – even the – all these landmarks are – what are they called – land –

MR. LYON: Earthworks, yeah – or, whatever.

MR. SIMONDS: – were done not by – you know, so there was no – there was no real hand –

MR. LYON: No.

MR. SIMONDS: And no handness in it. And it was like somebody who was detached from the earth in a funny way. I mean, I think this was something that we – we're aware of each other –

MR. LYON: That's interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: – because my whole thing is about the touch of the earth and this sort of smell and feel and moment of wet to dry – moment of the earth, of the clay and so and so –that his was the kind of conceptual frame that was somehow – and, as his writings, could take into a kind of conceptual frame, and make from that kind of something really meaningful.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: But it was not about getting sticky and wet and –

MR. LYON: No.

MR. SIMONDS: – which is what we discovered in that trip to the clay pits and the quarry, because it was –

MR. LYON: Got it.

MR. SIMONDS: – very different worlds.

MR. LYON: Let me stop for a second –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah.

[End of Disc.]

MR. LYON: Interview with Charles Simonds, August 7th, 2012 at Charles's loft.

CHARLES SIMONDS: And we've lost the first 30 minutes of it – [they laugh] – chatting away about morality plays.

MR. LYON: Yeah, but this is – this is great stuff, so since last week you've been –

MR. SIMONDS: Cogitating.

MR. LYON: – cogitating, reflecting on what we – what we talked about and realized that for you, there's a connection, looking back at your experience at Berkeley, between your discovery of *Paradise Lost* and your exposure at that time to the literature of early America, the moral speculation, philosophy of Jonathan Edwards and other early writers.

MR. SIMONDS: And also the early English literature of morality plays and Spenser and all these other things. I mean, it's a funny joining of things.

MR. LYON: So – and the notion that the dwellings, in some sense, may be kind of stages for one to experience, reimagine –

MR. SIMONDS: I think what I was trying to say – and in a way – this is, I suppose, before the tape started along – is that there's a funny – if I look backwards, and – which I would never have – [inaudible] – that wasn't proscriptive to how – why I went about doing what I do. But if I look backwards and I say, "Well, okay, I have two shrinks for parents and one very moralistic" – my father was very moralistic and very rigorous in sort of moralistic ways, and my mother was very open-minded, so – and if I mix, somehow, these kind of images I have of my childhood as being very concerned with right and wrong and so, and I mix that with, for instance, living through the Free Speech Movement, which, in a certain way, was also a morality play. It was political street theater, and it was a way of sort of battles between good and evil and bad and good and so – and at the same time, what I was exposed to at that time, particularly, I think, particularly Stanley Fish and his *Paradise Lost*, which had a tremendous impression on – made a tremendous impression on me – but this sort of sense that the act of reading and going through an experience could configure your – you sort of evaluate for yourself your role or your position morally or ethically in the world.

If I think, then – take those two things, along with my, you know, transcendentalist, New England preacher friends who were, you know, studying early American sermons and so – if I put all those things together as a kind of mix, they are, to me, the kind of groundwork for the dwellings, going in the street, creating this kind of environment, where then – whoever, as it were, which is part of it, comes by and stands there with you facing a wall, making a dwelling together, each one making their own fantasy, and then talking about very personal things often, very confessional, and with no eye contact, so you're in a kind of free-floating association like a shrink's couch, I guess, in a certain way, that the arena for my finding that moment, which I think is somewhat serendipitous and somewhat coincidental in some ways, but it's as if I somehow found an arena that allowed for all those kinds of issues to be focused in one very ephemeral moment.

And in a way, in a very transcendental moment – I mean, metaphorically, they're obviously very – they have a metaphoric resonance through time – but I think in this certain way, they are as if I was – I created my own little shrink's couch that was filled with a kind of morality issues and a kind of – you know, if you think about this whole issue of well, what happens to the dwelling and the tension that surrounds the dwelling and people saying, well, you know, if you touch that, I'm going to whip your ass, and that's kind of when people try to protect it.

But then, you know, it – you're putting little visors over it or trying to take it in order to take it home so it will be protected, but of course then they destroy it, so they – you know, what was there for everyone then, because you want it as one person for yourself, destroys it for everyone else.

All built in there are these endless little conundrums of problematics, of, you know, what is it, who owns it, what is your relation to your community. You know, if you take it and then it's not there for everybody else, it doesn't function the same way that it was. It was given as a gift for your block, but at the same time, it's going to get destroyed, and there's all this kind of problematic of, you know, the inevitable destruction of it, which has a kind of pathos. I mean, it's built into even watching it be built. People are already imagining it being destroyed. So there's a kind of sadness and – you know, it's just kind of something becoming and being dead at the same moment, instantaneously.

You know, and I think in that, all that, is this kind of life-death morality play that people are then – it's very sticky, and – like the clay. I mean, it's this – it's as thorny and sticky as – you know, looks so innocent and so kind of precious and simple and innocent, but it's so thorny intellectually, I think, and emotionally, actually, I think it's more emotionally for people who deal with it, because it's very dramatic on some level. The destruction of it is very painful and upsetting. There's a kind of lostness, deathness, destructiveness, anger and, you know, sadness.

All sorts of things go on in there that are – that are – I think carry endless little moral conundrums. [Inaudible] – very – I think they're very problematic, you know? They look so – they look so – you know, for instance, any of these people can say – try to – I think trivialize the dwellings – "Oh, he makes houses for little people" – but actually I think that the truth is they're very – they're very tough. You know, they're – they have a kind of toughness intellectually and emotionally and politically on a certain level. You know, people – how you relate to the world in time and space and your place in history and who you are and where you are and what your values are are relative to where you are. And I think that part is – who's to say where it comes from, but I mean, I think I, by happenstance, fell into that situation.

But I – as I look at our last conversation, I think it – I can reflect it back to all these funny kind of – you know, I'm going to go out there as an innocent and see what the – pardon me – the fucking world's going to deal – what they're going to do for me or not and, you know, leave me in the gutter or stamp – tromp on me or take care of me or whatever, or possess me, or –

MR. LYON: Well, the connection to –

MR. SIMONDS: – think they own me.

MR. LYON: – the connection to the early American experience is so fascinating because it's almost as if you are re-enacting settlement, you know?

MR. SIMONDS: Oh. Yeah, I never thought of that.

MR. LYON: And –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, the sort of existential issue of, like, are you going to be able to survive, yeah. Yeah, I think that –

MR. LYON: Yeah. You know – and the kinds – the kinds of issues that arise in a place that's not settled, that's –

MR. SIMONDS: Or wild.

MR. LYON: Or – that's wild, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, wild. I mean, it – in whatever form, or reverted to a wildness, because I'm working in a relatively derelict environment, so it – and I think that that is a – you know, culture has fallen apart, so there's a kind of, you know, a problem of survival, actually, and which is altogether true of the neighborhoods that I've worked on in the Lower East Side, you know.

I think I've recounted this and, like, some guy being dragged to the – a local firehouse was – his testicles in ice water, because he's OD-ed and they're hoping to keep him alive long enough to get him there. I mean, it – not to mention all the buildings and everything falling down and burned down and everything else. There's – you

know, there's some very real issues of, in fact, how are we going to survive here, and – you know, which we filtered through community groups or filtered through self-identification issues or, you know, services of whatever form.

The other thing that occurred to me, which we should – it's a little segue to the side here – is that after we talked yesterday, I realized that, you know, for instance, something that would never – how do you explain this? Now, so I grew up in New York, and so I've lived within probably a mile and a half of where I was born – [laughs] – for most – almost entire – my entire life except for Berkeley and Berlin.

And lo here I start to work in the gutter on – Avenue C, and then I get involved in community groups, you know, work on 2nd Street, there's a nice lot, and I can try to start to organize it to make a play lot with the community. And on that block is a place called the legal services [Mobilization for Youth Legal Services] – you know, there are all these sort of agencies that administer to the community to try to help – the Association of Community Service Center. I – what was it called? I can't remember. Legal services.

It's like going – and in order to get this play lot, I'm going to need to try to get support from all these different entities to get funding, to get permissions from the city, and so – and I go into the legal aid place [Mobilization for Youth Legal Services], and there is a guy that looks familiar to me. And I say, "I think we know each other. " "Yeah? Okay." "And – John?" "Charles?" John Falk. John Falk, I went to camp with. John grew up in Westchester and, you know, went to fancy law school, and here he's doing his time to try to do something good. And there he was right there in front of me. [Laughs.] It's, like, what are you doing here?

And the same in many – so many different kind of funny – how do you – it's hard to explain, but the funny thing about the Lower East Side at that time is it was a collection of endless little nuanced kind of relationships that even to this day, I see – you know that I go swimming every day. And there the lifeguard is a guy from the Lower East Side, you know, who is now and Jack Agueros [ph] is – become senile, and there's an article about him in the paper. He's, you know, the guy who ran the legal services thing [Mobilization for Youth Legal Services]. So all these people are sort of – it's just like a funny village of people, I guess is the way that I think of it, that's still there. You know, it's – it's, like, goes on and on and on.

That's aside from what we were talking about.

MR. LYON: Can you – so you began working on this play lot, La Placita, and –

MR. SIMONDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Oh, we should cover that, yeah, because that actually was interesting in the funny things that –

MR. LYON: Well, I want to keep this a little bit art-focused, but it's interesting to me that you had to negotiate between, the world of social service or community involvement –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, community groups.

MR. LYON: – and doing your artwork, and I'd be curious to hear your thoughts about that.

MR. SIMONDS: Well, I mean, the reality was that I certainly – although I, even at that time, still had – Lucy was my girlfriend, as it were, and she was very much involved in the art world as a figurehead, in a certain way, of some parts of it, feminism, for instance, but my days – [laughs] – were spent in this community.

And so my entire time was really spent – you know, I would just – which is really how it is – I would go to a meeting, and I – there was the Lower East Side Coalition for Human Housing, and we were having the committee meeting about open space problems. And so we'd put on that hat, and we'd talk about open space, of which was, for instance, La Placita and tried to do things with vacant lots and community gardens and all that kind of stuff. And then we'd put on another thing where we'd talk about sweat equity – the lower side coalition, they're sponsoring sweat equity and these, you know, Wall Street tax shelter guys want to come and talk whether they could fund a housing project, get some tax shelters. And so there was all this stuff that was going on endlessly, you know, a little youth group, the Young New Yorkers, who I joined with to help to actually build our little play lot was like a reform gang, essentially.

And, you know, all these endless things that had to do with that, which had literally nothing to do with the – you ask about the art community, and nothing whatsoever, and – to the extent that it was – it was excruciating in – endlessly excruciating to me to go home then at night to Lucy's house, at that time, and then go out, for instance, maybe out to dinner to so-and-so's artist dinner party with fancy wine, and they would have endless talk about which wine, and some of which I didn't know anything about. [Laughs.]

I felt very intimidated anyway, because I was the youngest person always there, and they were all fancy, special artists who I'd read about, and so I was really – to say it was a schizophrenic life is a euphemism. I mean, I was

completely living in an unbridgeable world. I mean, there's no way, literally no way I could explain to anybody how I'd spent my day. There was no common ground to explain anything. This is absolutely sure and true. There's *nothing* I could say that could give them even a clue as to what it was I was doing.

And I think it was very difficult for me, in a way. I think I was very lost, because the reality of how I'd spent my day was so real and so wonderful, and I – you know, it was, like, how do you say, when everybody loves everybody, and, you know, a sense of a community, which has, you know, I don't know if you've ever been part of a community, but everybody loves everybody, you know trying to help each other in a certain way. I mean, it's a way of – those people who you're trying to work with, you're all trying to do it together, you know?

And, you know, – just this little anecdote of – we were doing the play lot, and I would say, "Well, where is the hammer?" And I'd see seven kids run to the other end of the lot to see who could get the hammer first, you know, and bring it back. And it was like, you know, everybody is celebrating being. And then I would go listen to people complain about some art whatever it was – I don't know how you want to describe it – art issue, and I think it was very difficult. Upsetting, to say the least.

MR. LYON: How long were you involved with these activities in –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, seven years or so.

MR. LYON: Seven years –

MR. SIMONDS: So it was a long time.

MR. LYON: That's a long time, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: There were some crossovers of people who, for instance, lived in the community who were artists, but it wasn't really – I mean – well, for instance, it's a good example, but the little – with the play lot, which I said, "Well, I would – look, here's this vacant lot. I'm making dwellings in this lot." Everybody said, "Well, you know, we never – it would be great if we could fix up this lot." I said, "Well, it – what do we do if we want to do that?" And then, "Oh, there – oh, there across the street is the Association of Community Service Centers. Why don't you go in there and see if you know – can find out somebody who could help?"

So we started to do that, and we started to organize this particular block. And that's sort of how I got involved in all these different groups, which covered this whole neighborhood. And, you know, along the way, then, so we tried to figure out how to do it, and we've – two pieces of property. One woman lives in Florida; she didn't care, and the other one was city property. We had to go through all the things with the – but the play lots, you know –

MR. LYON: So it was two contiguous properties?

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. And then we have, like, the department – the play lot's division of the city is under the Department of Highways, at that time – sort of interesting. [Laughs.] And there was sort of a non-entity that nobody cared about. But it functioned to some extent to write a letter to say, you know, "We can give you this property at that time." And then we were going to go to the Parks Council, and they found some funding, and then New York State Council on the Arts, and then we got to Harlem and pick up some rubber mats from a play lot that's being destroyed, and pass through a machine.

And, you know, then, okay, here's where it's interesting. So I asked Bob Smithson, when I'm trying to raise some money from the New York State's Council on the Arts, "Can you write a letter?" So – and he writes this wonderful letter that says, you know, "Yeah, this is a great idea, and blah, blah, blah." And it's a set of – it was amazing – I mean, for instance – to me, it was – he could understand some version of what it was I was trying to say. He says – so to the city, he said – it's a nice letter, actually; it's worth reading it to the record –

MR. LYON: No, I've read it, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, that said something about, you know, "It will expand the horizon, and it's, you know, a way of restoring the land for the people in the community." And it has a political bent to it, which is part of what it was originally about, was some sort of empowerment of recreating the earth for the people who live there rather than it being nonplace.

And I think he got that. And so in a certain way, maybe he was one of the few artists who could have ever made any kind of – how do you want to say – not – it's not a leap for him, but, I mean, everybody else – they had no idea what I was talking about. I mean, they were often – anybody who had any relation to this at all was off in the desert somewhere in some esoteric thing, or even Bob was making nonsites and putting them in a gallery. So, you know, it was like, everything was headed back into the – or Gordon, who was cutting up buildings and putting them in a gallery. You know, it was like taking from the community rather than trying to do something –

and so, you know, there was a kind of – the whole focus was, I think, totally in a different way, for me. I mean, I was going *there*, and they were coming *here*, as it were.

MR. LYON: Right, right.

MR. SIMONDS: Very different.

MR. LYON: What finally happened to the play lot?

MR. SIMONDS: It got built, and it lasted for a while, and then I think finally what happened – we had nice hills and a slide and a wonderful celebration to open it.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: And it went on for a couple of years, and then people started to use part of the – I think it had sort of a swing thing. They used the swing part – people on the block used it to hang car motors from to recondition the car motors. [Laughs.] I mean, it was – almost like, as it should be, you know –

MR. LYON: Oh, like – yeah, like –

MR. SIMONDS: No, it was like, well, okay. It could be used for that.

MR. LYON: Like those things that you use to –

MR. SIMONDS: I mean, that was a time when people were stripping cars and burning cars and stealing cars. And some guys decided, well, this is a good place to get the engine out, lift the engine out. [Laughs.] But it had a mixed future.

I mean, it actually, had a very wonderful moment of – particularly, the young New Yorkers, this youth group, where they designed their own mural, which is their version of their history, coming from Puerto Rico, the promise of New York with the kind of image of the Empire State Building, and then the reality as they saw it of playing in the street, stickball.

And they sort of – I remember the moment of that, of their sort of trying to find an image that said something. And their version of the image had to be something about their history, which was very telling to me. It was something about – wasn't anything to do with me, it was about letting them sort of – you know, I put this piece of clay ground and then they were free to do what they wanted. And it was – it's their version of trying to make some meaning, I think, out of their lives as they perceived it in terms of a display of it. And I think it was very wonderful, and it was – that's what it – if I had any intentions, that was certainly something like what I would have hoped, that there was some – this is us, this is what we did and this is why we're here.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm.

MR. SIMONDS: And I think that was wonderful. Then they planted a big Puerto Rican flag – [they laugh] – facing Houston Street. It was, like, in your face, this is our turf.

MR. LYON: Now, you, in – what year, '73, you went to Artpark. Is that right?

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, yeah.

MR. LYON: So you –

MR. SIMONDS: That was a summer.

MR L: – so you created, again, a full-scale thing, or at least part of the – in some –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, before I went to Artpark, actually, I went to downtown Cleveland, the Flats of Cleveland, and worked with a housing project group.

MR. LYON: I don't think I knew about this.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, you didn't. [Laughs.] And – I mean, that was – because I was big into community organizing at that point. [Laughs.] And so somebody in Cleveland, who was – decided I don't know what – I think it was – what was her name, [Marjorie] Talalay. She was –

MR. LYON: How do you spell it?

MR. SIMONDS: T-A-L-A – is it – I have big catalogue of the Cleveland project.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. SIMONDS: But they invited artists to go work in the – essentially, the downtown obliterated area of Cleveland. I think it's – whether it was called the Flats or what. I think I may have to look at that first and see. But from downtown going up towards the Heights there is this no man's land. It was largely vacant lots and a few housing projects. And, you know, the – since there's a lot of open space, they invite a lot of artists who did, like, constructions and – out in the landscape. And then they asked me to come, and I said, well, I'll go work with this housing project.

There was one isolated building that was a housing project, and I said, I'm going to try to organize the people in the housing project to do something in the vacant lot next to the housing project. And what was sort of amazing, I just sort of went into the housing project – [laughs] – and said, look, I've got this thing going on here. Do you want to try to do something over there? My best friends are all from there, Aisha and her daughter – [inaudible].

So I worked with this housing project and we had a couple of community meetings in the rec room of the housing project.

MR. LYON: This is a great picture [showing book].

MR. SIMONDS: And all these – yeah, you haven't seen any of it. All these kids and I and the fathers – these are like family affairs. It was all the fathers and the daughters and the sons, we all built this kind of growth structure –

MR. LYON: Oh, I see.

MR. SIMONDS: – of burlap sacks that was sort of a – like a garden that was half like a fort for the kids that then started to grow and so forth.

MR. LYON: Cool.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, it was fun. It was fun. I was very big into that. And I think some of –

MR. LYON: What a cool photograph. Did you take the photograph?

MR. SIMONDS: No, somebody – some of the people who worked –

MR. LYON: I mean, it's just – you know, the poses of the kids fantastic.

MR. SIMONDS: The kids are great. I think those are the greatest kids in the world. You never met kids like that. Unbelievable. And, I mean, they were so happy. So we had a great time.

But then I went from there to, I think – I'm not sure of the date, so it's hard. I either went from there to – I think I went to Albright-Knox and then to Artpark. I'm not sure – all these people wanted to go to Albright-Knox. They went to hire a bus so we could go all together – [laughs] – to see my, quote, "art show." But they went.

So – and then I went to Artpark; I think it was after this. Yes, I'm pretty sure. Yeah. I was the first artist – that's what you were going to ask about is the – I was the first artist invited to Artpark, but purely by chance because, at that time, I was living on Prince Street with Lucy, and our next-door neighbor, literally across the fire escape, was Rita Reinhardt. And Rita Reinhardt, who still to this day is my closest friend, I guess, was – when they made Artpark, they were looking for somebody, quote, "from the New York art environment" to choose the artists and help administer the charter so we could come and go

And they hit upon a guy named Dale McConathy, who was the literary editor for *Harper's* [*Bazaar*] magazine –

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm.

MR. SIMONDS: – and I don't know what else, but he was very close to – at Reinhardt and Smithson and a number of other people. He even wrote an article about my – I think it was called "Keeping Time: [Some notes on] Reinhardt, Smithson, Simonds." It's a nice article. But he was chosen as the director of the arts part; Artpark had an arts part and it had a theater part. He was the director of the arts park, to choose the artists. And he essentially, I guess, hired Rita as his second in command.

So Rita – well, he knew me also, actually. He edited *Three Peoples* – my text, *Three Peoples.*

MR. LYON: Oh, okay,

MR. SIMONDS: So he then – I – they chose me as the first artist to go to Artpark.

MR. LYON: Cool.

MR. SIMONDS: Mm-hmm.

MR. LYON: And –

MR. SIMONDS: Except the – going there, I arrived to discover that it was a horrible place. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: Because there were – there was a lot of – I mean –

MR. SIMONDS: It had been originally – as far as I can tell, it had been – originally, it was created because when they built the power generating stations, the Niagara Mohawk power generating station, they had to cut tremendous sluice ways and they – all the rock they had to cut out, they dumped in front of the escarpment, which is right there – it was actually the original location of Niagara Falls, which is now seven miles upstream; cut a gorge seven miles upstream 50,000 years later. But that original escarpment is Niagara Falls.

And they dumped all this rock in front of this escarpment, and then, over years, it accumulated – became a chemical dump essentially, a dump. And people were dropping all manner of stuff. I mean, I think it was destined – it was before Love Canal, but it was destined to be another Love Canal. And then along the way, they decided, oh, the best solution to this chemical dump is –

MR. LYON: Hire a bunch of artists. [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: No, worse, much worse. We're going to make a theater.

MR. LYON: Oh, god.

MR. SIMONDS: We're going to make this a cultural moment. We're going to cover over this chemical dump with a theater and an ArtEl, is what it was called, designed by Hugh Hardy, who I still see.

MR. LYON: Oh, Christ.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. And this ArtEl will have, like, a zoo. Artists on the L, a walkway to the theater where there'll be cooks and weavers and artists doing their trades as it were that – almost commercial and blah, blah, blah. And that was the idea of Artpark, somehow, in the honor of Harry Bridges, who was a state senator who was involved with the arts.

This is how – you know, they would put a cosmetic gloss over this, actually, chemical dump. And I remember I arrived before it actually had opened; they were still building this ArtEl. And it was not five minutes before I talked to some of the workers and they said, well, you know, look here. We're all covered with rashes from all the chemicals in this plateau of rock, 50 acres, 25 feet deep, which is all sulfurous and horrible.

In the summertime, it was very hot and dusty, and they were breathing in all this shit. And I said, this is not cool – [laughs] – I don't think I'm going to work here very happily. So I wandered around and I found this little piece of mostly buried – originally that had been a scenic, 19th century scenic railroad that went up this gorge to Niagara Falls that provided, like, tourist views of Niagara Falls. And when they built these power generating stations, they knocked out the railroad tunnel that had the – full access to this gorge and destroyed the tunnel and – to bring out the rock.

And I found a little fragment of the tunnel, so I said okay. And it was up in the gorge; it was away from all this crud that had been dumped. I said, this is – I'm going to turn this into a little house as essentially my first little people's dwelling that was full-scale, and I would go live in it. It was sort of like I'm going to camp out in my – I'm going to build a house and I'm going to go camp out in it.

And, of course, then quickly, there were all these kids who used the gorge, that part of the gorge to go fishing and stuff who got involved and they made it into their little clubhouse, essentially. And so we all hung out together and made this wonderful dwelling, actually. You could see Toronto from the –

MR. LYON: And you – and so you spent the summer there?

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. I was the only artist then invited back to Artpark, the only one that was ever invited back.

MR. LYON: Again, there's this connection with you kind of reaching back to an earlier period of America –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, that's –

MR. LYON: – learning about the Iroquois and –

MR. SIMONDS: – well that – it's sort of nice of you to mention that because that situation was unique in that way, and I actually have to credit Dale McConathy with steering me that way because while I was there –I started to find out about the landscape, since I was working with the landscape, with the history of what was there. And he pointed me towards this Edmund Wilson book *Apologies to the Iroquois* in which then I discovered that the Iroquois Indians had a very elaborate anthology of little people. And –

MR. LYON: I love it.

MR. SIMONDS: – he describes all these rituals where the – in the – where they sit there in the dark and the little people are scurrying around their feet, and the little people carve the cliffs and they throw tobacco into ravines to appease them and so on.

And who would have thunk? And there I was, you know, sort of in my rightful environment with my little people and sort of –

MR. LYON: Well, there are – there are all kinds of parallels between that and the way the Scotch and Irish dealt with their little people – you know, appeasing them, leaving things –

MR. SIMONDS: Is that right?

MR. LYON: – behind for them, you know –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh.

MR. LYON: – you know, they had to be really careful because they could – they could wreak havoc, and –

MR. SIMONDS: – people have mentioned it and I've never really explored that. But I know that that's true.

MR. LYON: Yeah, it's interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: Little people seem to be in many cultures. It's clearly. It's funny that our world – I have to say, in a funny way, I think – you know, for instance, the Modern has a work of mine, so they asked me to record some thoughts about it for some audio thing. And then they completely ignored some of the conceptual issues of what I explained.

And if you listen to it, it's all about this, hey Joe, we need some more bricks over here, as if they're – you know, it's become this diminutive issue somehow speaking towards children. And in the – in the most corny way, I might add. But there's this sort of interesting issue, I think, if I think about my 40 years or more, now, making things. How – people have – would like to trivialize some of the issues.

It's almost as if there's an interest in trivializing – you say little people. As that becomes the kind of – the way of dismissing it. And it's funny how other cultures – for many cultures, this image of little people is a very potent kind of – or almost unsettling issue. And I'm sort of curious about why our culture – or actually, it's more I see it only reflected backwards in the park environment because, you know, the work on the street is little people, yeah, I get it. It's not as – you know, it's almost met on equal terms. It's not – there's no kind of, you know, non-serious issue. Well, you know, the art community would like to think of it as somehow not serious, if you will.

MR. LYON: Well, remember what you're flying in the face of when you're doing that. Since World War II, the defining characteristic of modern American art has been scale.

MR. SIMONDS: That and then I used to always tease Lucy and say, well, you know, you don't need a college education to understand what I'm doing. And, you know, the sort of over intellectualized, modernist or whatever, kind of overly thought version of creating – to that extent, I always think this way, I think I'm dealing in a much more different cultural version of what is art-making –

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm.

MR. SIMONDS: – in a much – actually, a much broader sense than – multicultural in a certain way also. But certainly historically in a much broader sense than this little, I think, kind of peculiarity of modernism or this all sort of – I think of it all as very esoteric to me, you see, in a certain way, in terms of not just intellectual history but even in kind of human history.

MR. LYON: I mean, I think there are a lot of points of contact between what you do and, you know, sometimes positive-positive, sometimes positive-negative, a lot of points of contact with what was, you know, going on in the larger art culture of your time.

MR. SIMONDS: You think so?

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah. I mean, even –

MR. SIMONDS: I think of myself as really out – off somewhere else.

MR. LYON: I know, but I think that you almost can't help but think, you know, part of the world that you live in. I mean, even today, I was reading this *New Yorker* article about Tino Sehgal the – you know, the kind of – you know, he's very fashionable now. He's the one who did that piece at the Guggenheim where all these people standing on the ramp and you had to walk your way –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, you talk –

MR. LYON: – talk your way through it and all that kind of stuff.

MR. SIMONDS: – yeah, yeah. I did read that. Yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah. Well, I mean – but the concept behind it is not making objects, but having people experience the work – the work is the point of that. And when it's over, it's gone.

MR. SIMONDS: That's gone.

MR. LYON: He doesn't allow – he doesn't sell any –

MR. SIMONDS: He doesn't record it or –

MR. LYON: – literary stuff. He doesn't sell photographs of it, like Christo, you know, nothing like that

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: That just – when it's over, it's over.

MR. SIMONDS: – he's closer to where I'm at.

MR. LYON: In a certain way.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: I mean, but – you know, in other sense, he's very far away from what you do. But it – I think it's interesting to look around and kind of make these little points of contact, not for comparison purposes or to say that one thing's derived from the other –

MR. SIMONDS: Right, right.

MR. LYON: – but to kind of locate what you're doing in a cultural – what did [Donald] Barthelme call it? The –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I understand.

MR. LYON: – cultural grid coordinates. [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: This is worth talking about, because this comes up often. People say, well, do you study archeology and this and that. And I have to say very little of my thinking about what I'm going to do or what I'm thinking about or how I go about what I think about has anything – the thought of an art thing is – formalist issues or any of these issues are almost zero in my thinking. They never even arise.

In other words, sometimes, there's a practicality issue or an efficiency issue that might somehow tangentially relate to some issues of how do you get certain things in time and space at a certain place – structural issues, which you might be able to construe or actually more often – or moreover, that I might find some sustenance from art gambits, ways people have thought about that that are useful to me, but nominally. I mean, very slightly.

Which brings to one other thing that I wanted to be sure to mention. You know, for instance, if I think about the things that gave me liberty to think about doing what I do and the way that I do it, there are only a few, and they're very definite to me and very – I can identify them like they're in my consciousness. And I would – for instance, list them.

Oldenburg with – both in terms of the animation and sexualization when working with Patty [Mucha] – of the environment, or making it soft and making it erotic and so forth and so on. *The Store*, his store, which had a tremendous impact on me, this issue of sort of entering the real world in a kind of mixed way. You know, you're sort of – it's a store but it's not quite a store. And so it slides into the real environment in a way that's sort of

surreptitious and it – it just sort of enters the world but it skews the world at the same time.

And his monuments, the proposals for monuments, the block that sort of was placed at the – the image of a block that blocked Canal and Broadway – the big cement block's going to block it are all these sort of – drawn images of things that changed the environment – changed the city, let's put it that way. It's largely about addressing the city because I think of those things as very much that way. And then the other thing which I can really simply identify, which occurred to me the other day when nobody is a – Artschwager used to – did at one moment in his work these horsehair blips that he then placed – I think, if I'm not mistaken or at least I happily misconstrued – he placed them in a kind of – he would just go in the Museum of Modern Art and place one in a hallway somewhere and glue it onto the wall without them even saying that he could or couldn't do that.

And so this kind of freedom to just go do something without the authorization or constraint or impresario-ness of the art community –

MR. LYON: Right, right.

MR. SIMONDS: – just do whatever you want to do. And that certainly is – has fed me. You know, I do whatever I damn well please. I mean, it has an agenda, politically and socially or whatever else and freedom in a certain way about the environment, but it certainly is a big component of how I think about what I'm doing, whether it arrives from Berkeley moments or other moments. It's a very important thing to me, that you're free – and this comes from my mother, actually, of stopping a train in the middle of the desert. I mean, you do whatever you want and you do whatever you've got to do. You do what you've got to do and let the world try to figure it – you know, deal with, or not. [Laughs.]

What were you going to say? I'm sorry.

MR. LYON: Oh, no. That makes sense. So – and I'd like to jump forward a little bit to –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, we haven't gotten very far.

MR. LYON: I don't think we – we're not moving forward very much. No, we've got to – we've got to make some – we've got to get in the airplane here. You –

MR. SIMONDS: We're going to be here for weeks.

MR. LYON: So you had now been working through the Lower East Side for a while and you've done a few things outside. And finally, Daniel Abadie got to you, and in 1976 I think you went to Paris. Is that right?

MR. SIMONDS: That's right. I'm trying to think of the sequence. Yeah. Well, what happened, I think, as I identify it, is this woman who lived next door to me on Chrystie Street – I think we've mentioned her – Lutze, was always sort of trumpeting all what I did. And so she knew a lot of people in Europe because she's from Germany and I guess she had a little piece of mine on her floor in her house there and would show it to everybody and talk about everything.

And then she got some guy, Wolfgang Becker was his name, who was a commissioner. He worked in Aachen at a museum and he was a commissioner for the Paris Biennale, and she got him to take my films of – my *Birth* films to the Paris Biennale, and they were very well received and they were a hit and so and so on. And it seems like this fellow Daniel Abadie saw them at – and they were very – covered in the press a lot. And so – and you know, I was just – I didn't take the film. Whatever.

And Daniel saw the films. And then every – for years afterward, every time he came to New York he would try to call me to try to get a hold of me. And you know, I was so – it's hard to explain, but I was so – I was not against the art world, but it seemed so pointless, the art world. I was so busy and happy doing my thing that there didn't seem much that it could offer me. And who kept on saying, well, I want you to – wouldn't you like to do a show in Paris? Well, I said, "Why?" You know, there was no – I couldn't understand it. Really? You know, why go to Paris? I was just happy doing what I'm doing here.

And then, in the meantime, sort of interesting story, because it was a funny story, because I then – I hadn't sold anything to anybody. I was just working on the street, kind of vagabond. Holly Solomon finally bought three things that allowed me to pay my rent for two years, essentially, you know, $300 each. I was living on nothing, between two rock bands in a building with my brother had rented. And this friend of a friend – I had an architect friend, Susana Torre, had bought a piece of mine. And she had a friend, and her friend was named Harry Torczyner, and he was the lawyer for Magritte, a very close friend of Magritte and had a big art collection, and he was an Ivory Coast representative, legal representative, Harry Winston's lawyer, Rockefeller lawyer, blah, blah, blah.

And he asked if he could have a piece, and so I – he said, “Next time he’s done, I’d love to come and see it and maybe purchase it.” Which he did. Funny story on that, but we won’t waste time on it.

But then it seems that Daniel Abadie went to Harry’s office one day because he was doing a Gnolli show. And Harry had many Gnolli – you know, it’s an artist at the time, Argentinian, very popular. And the story I then received – this is sort of – [inaudible] – is of Daniel, of Harry showing him around in his office and saying, “And here’s this and here’s that and this – you know, *The Rose in the Room with the Comb,* the *Rock with the Ocean and the Castle*, et cetera, et cetera. And of course, Daniel knew them all.

Anyway, but, and then he said – and Harry said, “And this,” look, showing my piece – “an artist you’ve never heard of,” because Harry thought he – well, he was the second person who ever bought anything of mine who I didn’t know, right. And so – and Daniel said, well, yes, I know that. That’s Charles Simonds, and I’ve been trying to call him for so many years, and he never answers the phone and he doesn’t want to talk to me.

And Daniel didn’t speak English very well the first few times he called. But then all of a sudden I got a call at Lucy’s house from Harry Torczyner, who was my, quote, “collector,” my only collector.

MR. LYON: So you took the call?

MR. SIMONDS: My only – yes, I did. [They laugh.] [Inaudible] – I couldn’t really say no. And Harry was cute and Daniel was cute and I said – and then Daniel said, “Oh, I’m going to do this show in France and would you like to come”? And I said, “Well, no, I don’t really see any point. But if you can arrange for me to go live in Paris and find me a neighborhood that’s like where I’m working, it seems like it might be interesting.” In other words, I could go and see if what – how does my work in the street deal with another culture. And so I think a year later he came back to New York and he said, “Now I’ve got it all arranged. You’re going to go stay in the rue Berryer Rothschild mansion and – which is a museum [inaudible]. “You’ll have a little show in the gallery there with Mayakovsky and you’ll go work and we’ll find – I have this neighborhood in mind.”

MR. LYON: Who was the show with?

MR. SIMONDS: Mayakovsky, the poet.

MR. LYON: Really?

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, it was a great show. It was funny, very strange. Yeah.

MR. LYON: Jesus. I thought that was what you said, and I thought, “Am I understanding you?”

MR. SIMONDS: No, no. It was very strange. It’s hard to imagine. And so then I was – it’s hard to explain this, but I was living in this Rothschild mansion, you know, which was the museum, with a 20-foot door with a little key and Madame Thomas who took care of me. And I had a little apartment there and I would go each day and go work in Belleville, which was – at that time, really, Belleville’s not anymore – but it was a really derelict neighborhood of mostly Spanish and –

MR. LYON: Did you speak French at the –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: You learned it at –

MR. SIMONDS: I learned it in school. And – but it didn’t matter because a lot of the kids there and the people there were either from Spain or from Tunisia or North Africa.

And – but it was a wonderful neighborhood. And I’d go work there in the street, and I mean, I had a spectacular time. Everybody was so happy. I discovered that I had a lot of currency. The “little people” had a lot of currency. And I mean, what was interesting is that the show was – the work and the show was well received, but the work in the street became a spectacular press phenomenon. I mean, every *Express, Le Nouvelle Observateur* – all these things, you know, double-page spreads about this guy who’s out there.

And there was this girl Josefa, who was a 10-year-old, who, you know, I – it’s parenthetical, but I think I’ve said to you before, you know, I’ve done this for 40 years. There may be 10 people in those 40 years who have taught me a lot, who I met in the street. Everybody’s very nice in the street and I often hear similar things, over 40 years. You start to hear – there's a pattern to some of the reactions. But there was this girl named Josefa, 10 years old, from Spain, who started our conversation. She said, “What are you doing?” I said, “Well, I’m making a house for little people.” She said, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know all about that. And she said, “In my world of little people,” without skipping a beat – there was no, like, you know, little people – it was like, “in my world of little people” – which obviously was very active in her life at the moment – she said, “well, you know, in my world

of the little people, if you eat something and you don't share it, it turns to poison in your mouth." And then she proceeded to sort of demonstrate to me what, you know, preadolescent morality and issues of good and bad and the kind of – *tristesse* of seeing that the adult world really wasn't as wonderful as a child's world or the fantasy of the child's world. I mean, it does refer back to some of our issues we talked about early on about thinking about – of this moment of my work that has to do with recreating a childhood that you never had. There's a kind of pathos and sadness of trying to put a rosier view on what was, sort of trying to recapture a way that things were that's not how they were but how you might have wished they had been. And I think that's where Josefa was. And you know, she was in the moment of where you're losing that –

MR. LYON: Especially at that age.

MR. SIMONDS: You can't invest in the fantasy anymore.

MR. LYON: That's such a crucial age.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, it was amazing.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: And so she and I, she hung out every day, and we just had a great time. I mean, I think I learned more from Josefa than probably anybody else, I've got to say. I'm sure, actually. I mean, she sort of –

MR. LYON: She brought you food, right?

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. Well, because everybody always want to try to take care of you when you work in the streets, so either want you to come for lunch or come and do this or whatever, and you can't leave because if you leave, you don't know if you're going to – for me, if it's I've got to make the "dwelling," make it at home. So you can't stop in the middle.

So her mother, who could see – actually, it was her aunt, actually – could see that this was more than just casual, kept on inviting me for lunch and then she arrived with this tray, with a – you know, white cloth and little bowls of stew and little flower. It was very, very special. I mean, it – they were wonderful people, I would say.

MR. LYON: Was it around that same time that you had the show in Genoa with –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, yeah. Yes, it was right after that, because this thing in Paris had become so – I mean, everybody heard about it, so – Germano Celant – who's a well-known critic – who was a commissioner for that Biennale; he it was at Paris Biennale. Then his – or girlfriend at the time was a woman named Ida Gianelli, and she said, "Well, why don't you come to Genoa and after this thing in Paris and go to work in the port area of Genoa?" – which was spectacular, I might add – another endless stories, which, depending how much time you want to spend on. But then I did a little exhibition there that also included a work that I was working on called *Floating Cities*. So I did an exhibition in the gallery of *Floating Cities*, and then I went out into the port area and made "dwellings." Do we want to talk about that all our – Felliniesque prostitutes – and all this other stuff? We don't have to. It gets repetitive.

MR. LYON: Well, the *Floating City* project, now that went on for several years you worked on it, right?

MR. SIMONDS: That developed after – continued to develop a lot, because then it –

MR. LYON: Can you tell me – what was the genesis of it? How did it –

MR. SIMONDS: The genesis of it – I don't know if it's directly from Smithson, but certainly, you know, this little tugboat with the little little park, I think he was toting around park.

MR. LYON: Oh, right.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, now this –

MR. LYON: Which they actually realized a couple of years ago, sort of.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, but no matter, this image of a – because I was making parks. And I have to say – and they play lots in parks, essentially land – blocks of land, trying to deal with urban issues of neighborhood and stuff. And surely that was, you know, somewhere on my hip or something nearby, but my idea – which grew out of other things, which we should talk about sometime – all these Rudolf Steiner and plant form issues and growth form issues and so and so, but it's a whole other discussion. But all these things have had to do with images of – or not images, more thoughts about the structure of life and how it grows and the forms it takes and the different relationships in time of things that grow.

Very quickly, the image of a little park on a barge opened up the – sort of segued easily into the idea of, at that time, I thought, well, I'm making fantasy landscapes. Wouldn't it be nice if I could make, for me, a little south sea island on a barge and if my best friend wanted to be on an English countryside, then I'd make a little landscape of an English countryside for him, and we could live next to each other, have our barges next to each other, and then if we no longer wanted to live together we'd detach and we could go floating off and doing whatever we wanted to do.

And so, I mean, it was a way of sort of loosening land from location, if you will. It was a way of making land on a slippery surface so that it could evolve, in a way, and could evolve relative to time and need or desire. That's pretty where it boils down to. It was a way of allowing fantasy to dictate home and location and neighborhood and neighbors and so forth.

And then that conceptually became *Floating Cities*, which were, you know, very elaborate communities of reconfiguring that follow images of simple cellular growth, you know, aquatic organisms and hydra and all different things – so metaphorically, things that could constantly reconfigure relative to need, meaning it evolved into an idea of floating cities, which were, you know, provoked by a little article I read in a newspaper I think in – somewhere in the '70s. You know, shipbuilders, facing a slumped market, float factories and then they were building factories in Japan and floating them to Brazil because it was cheaper and quicker to build it in a high-technology place than to send it to a low-tech [place]. And that idea provoked the idea, well, okay, these guys were very efficient, and they could then form their own little floating cities which became very economically adept and threatening to land-based economies, because they could make their factories or whatever else and go install them in a place and then come back and go somewhere else and so forth and then became very competitive with land-based economies, and that developed into a sort of paranoia of land-based economies going to visit -- it was a fiction that I wrote of land-based economies going to visit a floating city somewhere out in the middle of the Atlantic that was somehow filled with mystery and so forth. And I made a kind of toy – just what we're driving at here – made a little toy that was little pieces of – you know, if you've sort of fractured society into -- metaphorically, administration, or office buildings, production, little factory images, suburbia, sort of caricatures of what our image of society is – you put them all on barges. And then I would have this little putative ocean of glass on which these things sat, and a little croupier stick. And each day I would go and sort of pull them all in rearrange them. So it was a kind of way of exploring different images of, spirals or different generative images of – configurations of how people live. And that was shown in Genoa and then shown many other places. It traveled a lot. People liked that one. It went to Munster. It went to Geneva. It went to upstate New York somewhere – New Paltz – many places.

MR. LYON: So –

MR. SIMONDS: Does that answer the part of that that you wanted?

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah. I think so. I think so. I mean, it's interesting, you know, this constant tension between home, which I think most of us think about in terms of becoming rooted, and this impulse toward migrating, drifting –

MR. SIMONDS: Transformative. Yeah, peripatetic. Let's call it peripatetic.

MR. LYON: Peripatetic, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: Actually, I think of that. I mean, and since my son's involved in some issues about architecture in that way right now the issue of – I guess the way I would think about it is it's not about ephemerality, but it's about a transform – in other words how does architecture reflect and respond to living – as it were, living in a time idea, not just a – there's the issue – the opposite of that is architecture as monument or architecture as history of a particular edifice.

And certainly my image of the resultant issue – the emphasis is much more on the living issue rather than on the thing issue, and how the sort of – what becomes or is at a given moment is somehow a reflection of the changes, not just the moment, or the – process is the wrong word.

MR. LYON: Yeah, well, there's almost a narrative. I mean, you know, when you were talking before you were saying and then the, you know, these ones become jealous and they're out in the ocean and they're – and I'm thinking, wow, there's a whole story here, you know?

MR. SIMONDS: Well, there's a big story there. But it is an issue of – I think of the physical reality reflecting desire and need as opposed to historization or somebody who wants to leave behind something for eternity, you know, in a sense an edifice. I'm so totally uninterested in those issues.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. SIMONDS: Shall I start to boil the water? We're not even on page three yet, Chris.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] Well, I'd like to –

MR. SIMONDS: Where are we?

MR. LYON: We're getting to the end of the –

MR. SIMONDS: It's very rambling what we're doing, huh?

MR. LYON: I don't know if we can – I think we can do this. I'm just –

MR. SIMONDS: I have energy, as much as you like.

MR. LYON: Okay. We're into the – okay, that – we've just been going for an hour. That's not too bad.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, okay. That's good.

MR. LYON: Okay, so I – maybe we could get through to, like, 1981 or so, and then stop. And then we can –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, that means we got to go to Berlin, right?

MR. LYON: Yeah, so –

MR. SIMONDS: We did the floating cities.

MR. LYON: So then –

MR. SIMONDS: Berlin –

MR. LYON: So you came back to New York, I guess. What, in '77 you were here again or were you traveling a lot?

MR. SIMONDS: Well, to go to Paris that was just, like – I went from maybe September through February – Paris and –

MR. LYON: Genoa?

MR. SIMONDS: Genoa. So then I was back.

MR. LYON: But then what –

MR. SIMONDS: Then I went to Berlin. So that's another story.

MR. LYON: Right. And I have that as '78.

MR. SIMONDS: That's right. Yeah.

MR. LYON: And you got one of those DAAD residencies.

MR. SIMONDS: Right. That's a story worth recounting, and also because it involves Lucy going –

MR. LYON: One of the things that – now, just correct me if I'm wrong, the *Circles and Towers Growing* sort of comes out of that period?

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. Those were all built in Berlin.

MR. LYON: And then those were – I believe were really the focus of the retrospective, right? They were like the –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, the centerpiece of it.

MR. LYON: -- they were like the core of the retrospective.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, '77. Yeah, we can go through that. That's easy to do.

MR. LYON: So I'm just thinking of this as a –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I can cover all that.

MR. LYON: -- as a kind of a unit almost.

MR. SIMONDS: It is, actually. So let's start from the beginning of going to Berlin.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: So it's the same issue. This woman Lutze. We have people – she – I guess she was –

MR. LYON: She's like your agent.

MR. SIMONDS: She's better –

[End of Disc 3 of 5, track 2.]

MR. SIMONDS: [In progress] – [laughter] – an agent; I've never had an agent. But she was – she was – because she really loved what I do, and she – I think – I was very young; she was my – quite a bit older. But I was very young; she's sort of motherly in some strange way.

But she somehow – I think, you know, what – I think there's something in this that's – I've caught along the way. But for instance, Holly Solomon had the same reaction. I remember once, I was sort of stroking a pussy willow. And I turned over, and there's Holly Solomon starting to cry, with a tear in her eye. And I realized that there were some people – same with Jeanne-Claude Christo – had this affection for me that – I was very – I think, and I am still to some degree, but I was very – as if I were, like, innocent.

Because I was so crazy, there's no question about that. Everybody says, you know, all I did was talk about the little people, and I'm just very obsessed. And I was so, kind of – you wouldn't say lost, but you know, lost in the sense of – just in this fantasy world. And I think it elicited a kind of protectiveness and a kind of caringness.

MR. LYON: Oh, interesting – which is the same language – you're talking about the –

MR. SIMONDS: Not just in the street – the same language in the street – right, right.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: And I think there were many people who felt about me that way. In other words, they thought they needed to try to help me – not that there was something wrong with me, but that they would carry me somehow. And certainly, the Christos both did that, and so did Holly Solomon – and so did Lutze, was the first one in a way. And I think even Lucy had that reaction to my work in the beginning; it was this kind of – as if it were so vulnerable. There was something that was very vulnerable about it, or sentimental almost, vulnerable. You know, kind of as if something you'd want to care about. It's built into the little bricks, and the clay, and the vulnerability of it.

MR. LYON: Do you feel that you were in any sense asking for those kinds of reactions?

MR. SIMONDS: No, I think I was just in my own little world. But I think that was the world I was in. And it was a world that maybe was asking for that, but not by choice; I mean, I wasn't, like, thinking that.

MR. LYON: No.

MR. SIMONDS: I think I was just in my world. And I think it elicited that reaction. And certainly, Lutze had that reaction endlessly and was very protective of me and my work and so on, and a real advocate.

So she would always try to get – I mean, I was a fumbler and not very good at presenting myself, but she would always try to drag somebody – kind of bring somebody over and show them, and – and for instance, Gordon and I were in the same building by that time; he was like Mr. Beating-His-Chest and Mr. Self-Impressario. So I was the quiet one, in an ironic, funny way – weird.

And – but, so Lutze – [laughs] – this is very – particularly strange, but it plays out the same theme, actually. So she said, well, there was this couple that's here in New York with their children, and they run this thing called the DAAD – Karl Ruhrberg and his wife. And they're – I'm like bringing them to say hello and so and so – and they came, and I found Ruhrberg. And so Karl said, "Well, would you like to come to Berlin? We – I have – run this thing with this grant, and you can come and live there and you can work there," and so.

And I had already gone to Paris, and I thought, well, this going to – I had no money at the time, and this was something – like, tremendous amount of money. At that time, $30,000 to live and do your work and – he said we could do exhibitions and do whatever we want, and – "Berlin's nice – it has a neighborhood called Kreuzberg; it's just right for you." I mean, he understood what I was about. And – [laughs] – two nice daughters who – I

then became adopted by Karl Ruhrberg and his family, and I went – they said, "Come on, go."

So I went – and Lucy and I were together at the time, and Lucy didn't want to go to Berlin and live in Germany. So she said, "Okay, I'm going to go to London – to England, to Devon because I'm going to try my hand at fiction. And I'll go rent a farm somewhere in Devon, and you go to Berlin, and we'll go back and forth and see each other and so forth." Which worked out quite well.

And she wrote her thing, and I then worked in – they gave you your studio, and then there was a nice neighborhood, Kreuzberg, where I could work in the street. I think it was at the same time as a Documenta, so I went to Documenta – that was a big hit. And my things, and then also they did a big show for me in the Nationalgalerie, the –

MR. LYON: [Inaudible] – Berlin.

MR. SIMONDS: Berlin – and then also in the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum and Museum Ludwig in Cologne, and they produced – Lucy wrote a text called *Cracking*, which was then used as the catalogue; was like her kind of waltzing around my world. It's a very personal text.

And I worked in many, many cities in Germany, in the street. Got accosted by – it was at the time of the Baader-Meinhof terrorists, and so working in the street, a long-haired guy – [sighs] – you know, everybody was into sort of anonymous – you could accuse somebody anonymously because they were terrified at the moment of the Baader-Meinhof – people who really feared. And you know, I would always be the friend of the – kind of foreigner who was suspect to begin with. And by chance I was living in the apartment – it was – what's her name [Rebecca Horn]; she's a famous artist – I'd given her apartment to this program, and so I'd lived in her apartment – she's very well-known. And – but by chance, the lawyer for one of the – who's Jewish – for one of the Baader-Meinhof guys was the guy who had originally lived in this apartment. So the neighbors sent the secret police to come and ask me what was I doing there and so on and so forth.

But the one incident that's worth recounting, though, is in a – we should talk about that –I was invited to an exhibition in – it was called Kunst – *Art as Social Strategy*. A woman named Margarete Jochimsen did – was interested in doing political exhibitions, and so she arranged for me to do a show. One thing I did was take a department store window and have little kids make dwellings in the department store window, so all you saw coming, instead of seeing – Germany was very materialistic at that time – instead of seeing goods for sale you saw these back ends of these kids working on these little dwellings, which was great. And then I went and worked in the streets, in Bad Godesberg. And Bad Godesberg was the – at that time, Bonn was the capital of Germany, and Bad Godesberg was the kind of suburban, residential district for diplomats.

MR. LYON: Mmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: Very fancy district. And I found a little vacant lot in the downtown part of Bad Godesberg, and I started to build a dwelling.

Are we running out of tape?

MR. LYON: I don't think so.

MR. SIMONDS: All right.

MR. LYON: I think the same thing as last time, where it switched –

MR. SIMONDS: All right.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: So anyway – yeah, we can do it again. But – so I started to make my dwelling. I remember it was very cold, and I was standing – you know, I worked in vacant lots, so if you're at the edge of the vacant lot where the sidewalk people can see sort of what you're doing, and they get involved in something – but in this case the only niche for me to make a dwelling was sort of half-way into the lot. And so mostly people – if you're doing that, they think you're just taking a piss and they just say, you know, I don't want to deal with it.

But I remember this woman came along – old woman. And she started yelling at me, you know: "What are you doing there; you shouldn't be there" – and "get out of there," and so – and I – [snorts] – whatever.

And then I remember – you know, I'd lived in Germany already some months; there's a certain – at that time, the – all the police had Volkswagen buses, so there's a sort of very high-compression sound of the engine of the bus that I would really recognize. And I heard this sound – because in facing a wall you never see what's going on. And I heard the sound of this bus: It's a Volkswagen. And I figured the lovely woman must have gone home and

called the police and say, you know, this terrorist is out there planting a bomb in middle of that lot; you better go check it out.

I mean, I've had some wonderful experiences – [laughs] – in the street, but this was a good one. And so I knew sort of what was up. And at that time, all the police had machine guns; it was very common to see a policeman with a machine gun. That's the way it was; it wasn't like – it's hard to explain – here, but there, that's what it was.

And so the guy – these two very young policemen came out of this Volkswagen bus, one with a machine gun, and pointing it down, and the other one with a revolver. And they said, you know, what are you doing – "*Was machst du*?" And I said, well – I had already figured out this was potentially a problem – [laughs] – and I had better be pretty careful, and I figured out that it was really necessary for them to see what I was doing; if I started to explain there'd be no hope, because little brick – you know, little people, forget it –

MR. LYON: Die kleine Leute – [laughs].

MR. SIMONDS: Trying to – [they laugh] – it's not going to work.

So I said, you know – "Kleine Leute hier" – come – you have to come here to look. And to their benefit, I guess, they said, "Okay." And they sort of approached – because I didn't go to them; you know, you're not going to risk –

MR. LYON: Mmm. [Affirmative.] Yes, that's important.

MR. SIMONDS: And so they came with their guns; sort of looking very tense. But they came, and I showed them my bricks – you know, little bricks – "see, there?" My tweezers, you know, little house. And I remember I – and I knew what I was doing, enough to sort of – not watch what I was saying or anything but watch their faces, because I knew what was going to be.

And so these faces that were – they were very young, like in their 20s; very soft skin. But their faces were so tense – red, almost. And then they saw – little bricks, dwelling – what? Yeah. [They laugh.] It actually was what they – what I said. And I watched their faces melt, and they became like little giddy children; they became very soft and they said, oh, well – I said, "You know, it's going to take a while," and they said, "Yeah, well we'll come back." [They laugh.] And they came back and they had a great time. So we had a great time.

MR. LYON: That's good. Good.

MR. SIMONDS: You know what, I think I need to take her out [talking about his dog.]

MR. LYON: Yeah – okay, well, we –

MR. SIMONDS: But then, we need to – rest of Germany; what have we got? We have got the – all the exhibitions – working in Kreuzberg was very interesting –

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: But we don't need to – you know, I – I don't know, Chris, do we need to –

MR. LYON: I –

MR. SIMONDS: There's so many anecdotes – you know, for instance, the guy who –

MR. LYON: Yeah, no, I don't think so. I mean, I did want to talk about the – because I think that the *Circles and Towers Growing* is really – in a way, is the first time a body of work kind of gets shown in –

MR. SIMONDS: Yes, absolutely. Well, the Modern had a – had *Picaresque Landscape*, which then went to the library in the Lower East Side.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: So that was –

MR. LYON: That's important.

MR. SIMONDS: That's pretty visual for people.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: People remember that. And it was bought by the Pompidou, so it's a big deal in a way, somehow.

MR. LYON: Okay. So maybe we could talk about those – that, and then, you know, the – I mean, I remember – but to be able to see a whole cycle of works.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. Well, the – but that was actually the – I mean, in a certain way the *Circles and Towers Growing* is a recapitulation of the same issue in a slightly different way. *Picaresque Landscape*, which was going from linear people to circular people to spiral people – the same kind of issue of trying to bring to one time and place and evolution.

MR. LYON: Maybe we could talk about all of that, as –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. LYON: – in relation to the shows. Not so much to describe the shows, but describe those – talk about those works and –

MR. SIMONDS: The issues – and the issues –

MR. LYON: And the issues –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, we can do that.

MR. LYON: – because we can kind of segue a little bit into talking about your – the work, you know, that survives, that people can actually look at –

MR. SIMONDS: Yes. Oh, yeah. We're a long way from there.

MR. LYON: – which is important; you need to talk about that.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, well we've got some time to get there. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: So if you want to stop here –

MR. SIMONDS: But no – no, maybe we can – well, let's do that first, because then we'll take Candy [his dog] out and I'll put the water on and so.

MR. LYON: Okay, so you want to talk about the –

MR. SIMONDS: Why not?

MR. LYON: Okay. Okay, good.

MR. SIMONDS: So maybe – you know what we should do, is do a section on *Picaresque Landscape* that we'll then lift out of here and put it earlier on.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. SIMONDS: Is that okay?

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. SIMONDS: Because while I was working on the Lower East Side – I can say it that way. Howardena Pindell asked me if I would do a little projects exhibition for the MoMA. And so the – and I was working on the Lower East Side.

And so I thought – actually, this is easy to explain because in a way, here I was, working – you know, I'd make a dwelling one day and another dwelling the next day, and so – and there was all this kind of endless stream of dwellings that nobody could get their head around, other than I. And even the people in the neighborhood had a kind of spotty image of the – here was a dwelling, there was a dwelling – they were sort of wafting through the neighborhood, and they could – they even imagined them in places where I hadn't done them. But notwithstanding, they were – there was nobody who was catching the history of the little people, which was evolving, you know, architecturally and emotionally for me.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right.

MR. SIMONDS: And so – and so at one point, this woman, Howardena Pindell asked, you know, will you have a

projects thing; you want to make a proposal? So I made a proposal to do what I imagined then was a picaresque landscape, meaning a landscape traveling in time.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: And inasmuch as the – at that time, I had already evolved the *Three Peoples* idea of linear, circular, and spiral people, and I think of them as evolutions of each other in terms of complexity.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: Then I said, okay, I'm going to do a picaresque landscape that will have the origins of the little people – coming from crevasses, starting to wander around the landscape, straightening themselves out into kind of semaphore village, making a circular dwelling and a spiral dwelling – and then I put it all into one room, which is a – they used to have a little room for projects at the MoMA.

MR. LYON: Yeah, I remember; yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: And so I did that; it was a bit hit. Gerald Jonas wrote about it, "The Little People," in the *New Yorker* – and then I took that *Picaresque Landscape* and installed in into the library on – you know, on 10th Street on the Lower East Side –

MR. LYON: Oh, yeah. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: – so everybody in the community then could come and sort of get a sense of "what is this funny guy doing" somehow –

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: And it had a little map that explained the little people, and where they'd come from and where they went, and their growth house and all these different things which are all part of one world, really. And so it was a way of trying to put it all in one time and place, in that way.

And – I'm trying to –

MR. LYON: Well, so the idea then is to sort of take that and kind of expand it into – how many pieces are in *Circles and Towers Growing*? Twelve?

MR. SIMONDS: Oh – so yes, okay. So in a way – yeah, *Circles and Towers Growing*, which is a similar – ideologically or sort of – in terms of methodology – methodology is more the word – is a way of trying to do the same thing but with an added issue, which is that the narrative of the little people in *Picaresque Landscape* is just the history of these people. And the earth in the beginning is a kind of body – and then there are some rituals they have to – body and house, and relating to the earth and so forth – I mean, born from the earth, and so – but the narrative in there is a very simple – is in the world of little people.

Charles, I, then – you know, have been also exploring more other things that I can then put into this world of the little people such as issues of mixed metaphors of growth, plant growth and building – it's a mixed metaphor for building and growing – and somehow how these things can be all jumbled up and intertwined and then teased apart.

MR. LYON: Right – right, right.

MR. SIMONDS: And the *Circles and Towers Growing* is actually – was an attempt to try to pull together some of those issues – starting to introduce, because in the same exhibition were sequences of – how do you want to say – for instance, *Ground bud*, which is a way of – a piece of ground looking like it's budding, or like a –

MR. LYON: Oh – yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: – or *Wilted Towers*; the things that start to –

MR. LYON: So somehow, inorganic things that start to become –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, since I think the earth is organic, it's not so much inorganic – but – you know, the earth is very alive to me.

So – but more issues of mixed metaphors of building and growing, so that the Earth has not just body issues but also plant issues;

MR. LYON: Oh, okay. Thank you.

MR. SIMONDS: So since you have plant issues, you have – you have issues of growing and wilting, becoming and dying, which is different than building and ruining. So you know, as soon as you start to mix those things together it's – becomes a little more complex, actually, both visually but also – it's not just conceptually but belief-wise, how you *see* things, that somehow – how do you explain that – I mean, the *Growth House* is – essentially tries to marry issues of building and growing –

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: – and somehow puts them into a kind of hermaphroditic kind of structure, and – I mean, for instance, I think of building – being the son of the shrinks that I am – building as a kind of manqué, kind of – as if a male imitation of female growing, this sort of – because males can't understand the mystery of growth and birth and so forth.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: And so they build, as a kind of – what do you want to say –

MR. LYON: Compensation. [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah – whatever; you can use your own words, whatever.

MR. LYON: Yeah, anyway –

MR. SIMONDS: As a – but a – kind of reflective upon.

And so I think of the – *Growth House* is a hermaphroditic thing – it's just that you build something but then it grows.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: And so you sort of harvest the remains of your building. There's a kind of – the two things are intertwined in kind of marriage. And –

MR. LYON: And also the deterioration or, whatever, the –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, it's the same as – you know, I build ruins, and it's the same something – you build something that grows, but by growing it destroys itself. You know, it deteriorates its dwelling but it becomes your food. So it's –

MR. LYON: Right – right, right.

MR. SIMONDS: – it becomes your nourishment. Instead of shelter, it's nourishment. So it's – I mean, it's a little bit complex, I guess is the word.

But those issues of mixed metaphors like that interest me a lot, and the *Circles and Towers Growing* were a way of really focusing on that, because there's discrete objects sort of seen cinematically – so the same place seen at different times, over time. And I think there were 12 of those, and then there were also on – at the same time little, smaller sequences of threes that were more focused on the growth and shape –

MR. LYON: Where are they now?

MR. SIMONDS: They're owned by museums, in – one is in Des Moines, Iowa. *Brick Blossom*, it's called. The *Ground Bud* belongs to somebody that I don't know, but –

MR. LYON: Not important. I'm just curious.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: So they –

MR. SIMONDS: Most of the *Circles and Towers* – I've kept one side of the evolution, and the other side – *Circles* I've kept and *Towers* I've sold. [Laughs.] So *Towers* is all over the place. One's in Buffalo and one's in Paris. I don't know where the others are – other one is in Philadelphia.

MR. LYON: Why don't we –

MR. SIMONDS: Stop.

MR. LYON: Why don't we stop –

[End of Disc start of 4 of 5, track 1.]

MR. SIMONDS: Well –

MR. LYON: But –

MR. SIMONDS: – I had the Guggenheim show. I had the traveling show in – from Chicago, went all around the country, which was something interesting, to go to each city.

MR. LYON: I should mention that this is the fourth chip – [they laugh] – we're filling here. Okay. The Guggenheim show, right?

MR. SIMONDS: Well, the show that started in, actually, at the MCA in Chicago.

MR. LYON: That was all the same show.

MR. SIMONDS: Mm-hmm.

MR. LYON: But you made a special installation in the base of the Guggenheim –

MR. SIMONDS: It traveled and then – and for the Guggenheim one, I did *Age*, and the idea was that the show would travel around, then end at the Guggenheim with *Age*. And after two months of working on *Age*, I said, well, how about a year from now, because it was this tremendous thing to build, much bigger than I had imagined. So it took actually two years to build this thing. And so the Guggenheim show was actually quite a bit later; I think it was '83, and the Chicago show started in '81, I think.

MR. LYON: '81, yeah. So how big was the Guggenheim thing?

MR. SIMONDS: Well, it was built here, so it wasn't more than 27 feet wide, although installed, it was probably 36 feet wide. But the actual structure was about 27 feet wide and 10 feet high. But it was 72 four-by-five-foot sections that sat on a wedding cake kind of structure.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: I remember moving it from here and that there was this joke on the block – everybody on the block said, well, you know, he's putting – moving things into the back of the house and taking them out the front because 72 sections, when they came off the structure, were, I think, two days' worth of tractor-trailer trucks coming here and loading continuously all day long. So it was very elaborate.

And I remember Diane Waldman – this was the only fun part for me. When we were installing it, I was sort of with this forklift putting these things up on this structure, and we were standing on one of the balconies of the spiral, and Diane was looking at this and these very large sections were fitting – they had to fit together carefully and the – fit within an inch – quarter of an inch of each other.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm.

MR. SIMONDS: And she turned to me and she said, Charles, this is remarkable that – oh, you built this thing over two years, and all – now, it's fitting here so easily and perfectly. What would you have done if it – if it didn't fit – if they didn't fit together? And I remember this because we became friends over this. I said, well, I probably would have just walked away, you know? No big deal. Because I remember saying this at that time, I said, you know, I'm going to make art for 50-odd years or more. And if not today, it's tomorrow, you know, big deal. As if, you know, so what?

MR. LYON: Because, to her, this is like some peak of

MR. SIMONDS: Well, some version of – like, this isn't – should be important. I don't know.

MR. LYON: Apotheosis, – really. [They laugh.]

MR. SIMONDS: No, she was cool, actually. She understood. And so I said, you know, oh, whatever. If it didn't fit, I would have done something else. And I remember realizing at that time, actually, for myself, because it was sort of exciting for me to do a show in the Guggenheim Museum. It was a big deal.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: And – you know, I grew up in New York.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: So, for instance, this is a good anecdote. The opening of that exhibition where we had some dinner up in some room up on the ramp somewhere, and then they asked if I wanted then to go to the opening – since it was already under way, did I want to go downstairs and start down at the bottom or I could – and took the ramp where we were – some quite high up.

And I remember going out on the ramp and starting to go down this spiral and – you know, there's some energy of – it sort of brings you down. It's got a lot of gravity. And I remember looking – and there was somebody who I saw yesterday and I said hi. And then behind that person was my grade school art teacher.

And I sort of went down this kind of drain – it was a kind of down-the-drain because it was imploding. And of – my whole life in New York was like, you know, people I saw yesterday and people I saw from my childhood had come to see Charles' art show. And it was very impressive in some ways and it's sort of interesting.

But I remember thinking at that time, well, you know, so I'm going to do this. I mean, it's not like – I remember thinking, well, I don't care. I mean, I – something about an art career and whatever else. I was just doing my thing, and it's – my thing, I could see already then, even in the beginning, I could see it. I actually had a lot – I had a lot that I had to do, and there was my thing – took in tremendous amounts of thoughts and information and potentially then doing this.

So it was like, well, this is just one thing because it's a lot more that I got to do. And so it kept a funny kind of perspective on this – there was no – I mean, it still to this day – you know, in a certain way, the audience for my work is very incidental to me. I can't say it's not very important. Well, no, it's not, really.

I mean, in a certain way, it's not so – I don't feel as though much has been understood about what I do, even though a lot has been. I realized that I have so much information that's – you know, the reception of what I do, I think of as a kind of scratching the surface. It sounds very arrogant, but I feel that way.

And even I don't understand a lot of the things that I know that I've seen and brought to be, in a way. You know, there are a lot of connections that even I still discover. And I remember this in the very beginning of – because all the work generates from very few days of, you know, some clay on – sprinkling with sand and seeing a place and then having this understanding of body and earth and so on and myself.

And I remember it was like – it still is like a little – it's like a faceted object, faceted stone or rock, not a gem, but some sort of faceted thing that each time you – or a kaleidoscope in a way that you can turn it one way or another, and each time, it'll turn up another interrelationship that you maybe didn't really – you knew it's there but you didn't really see, well, that's really how it fits together, and you can then explore that relationship.

I mean, it's simple but it's very complex, so the many, many – whether it's time or issues of how things relate to building and growing and all these things are so tightly – in a very central point, very tightly knit, and then they can give you any number of exemplary moments that you can sort of bring them to a reality or to address a given time and place or space or history or whatever.

But the actual relationships are pretty simple but very generative. They make for a lot of possibilities, and I still to this day think I'm just – I mean, I feel like I'm kind of supplicant to my own work. It's like trying to understand what it's about because it seems to reveal things more and more in many ways. I mean, many, many ways, I have to say.

It's like endless. It's very strange. You know, if you ever think about, for instance, *Mental Earth* you could say it's a tremendous departure, but it's part and parcel of everything that it's about. So it's – it's like everything – it's like a little kaleidoscope, you turn it around, then all of a sudden, it's oh, yeah, that's probably a clear demonstration of something.

How do you want to say it? You want to know particularly about *Mental Earth*, why I said that about *Mental Earth*?

MR. LYON: Since you brought it up.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. Well, I mean, you know, for instance, I've been so fastened on, I would call it, if I were – you asked once about periods of my work, if are there sort of stages of my work, is it progressions or whatever. I don't think – it's all one piece, *but* I would say that, you know, in some ways, in the beginning, my energy was expended at trying to explain this to – it doesn't say it right, but trying to *say* what it's about. And so being very explicit, explicative – I don't know what the word is –

MR. LYON: Explicit.

MR. SIMONDS: Not so much explicit but to explain.

MR. LYON: Oh.

MR. SIMONDS: Explicate.

MR. LYON: Explicate.

MR. SIMONDS: Explicate. And to be in that – I was in a certain way in that frame and, you know, here's what I've learned or discovered and I've got to tell you about it. And I think it – demonstratively, you know, trying to say – you know, for instance, the issue of narrative, which is a very, you know, continuous theme in my work.

The narrative – were always in the beginning very conventional and very – how do you want to say it? – a narrative that goes from one place to the next, to the next, to the next, to the next, very linear. And so the narrative is – in a certain way, the coherence of the narrative is more explicit and more valued.

Now – hence, the little people and some of the stories about the little people, all these things are very – certainly within my mind's eye, I could tell even really specific stories about a given sculpture or a given thing that says this is exactly what this is about. So the narrative's confined within the notion of what it is.

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: They're coexistent. *Mental Earth* is like – as if I said, okay, well, pardon me, fuck it, I don't need to be so – I don't need to explain everything so much. I can just take glimpses of the narrative issue or of the, call it, more like a dream. I can take little vignettes of the narrative and bring them all together, and they will tell you more in a way. In other words, if you make some analogy to literature, you might find a more impressionistic version or, you know, whatever.

That – there's a less, almost stream-of-consciousness, or whatever you want to call it – that there's less – descriptive narrative is less the dominant issue than the impressionistic versions of parts of the narrative that allow you to sort of feel or emote other or – sort of evidence other issues – for instance, all the issues of mixed metaphors which don't fit easily into a narrative but building and growing and some of the forms that arrive from these kind of interactions aren't necessarily ones that you can be – if they become explicated, they look a little bit too descriptive and a little bit too corny almost.

I'm thinking of certain works that are very obvious to me. Whereas if you let the stuff kind of be a little more yeasty and less coherent, you get the same kind of material, but it's in a much more true way, I guess is the way I'd put it, less descriptive.

MR. LYON: But already in Chicago, you said to me when I first met you, something like, you know, my job is not to lead you through the door, my job is just to – you know, my job stops –

MR. SIMONDS: Absolutely. I believe that. My job – no, my job for me is to go in the door, for me. In other words, that's really the only interest I have is actually me to my work. So I need to go in there and find out or discover whatever. But at the same time, I don't think whatever goes on with me to my work is going to be what your story is. So I always felt – and it's certainly so clear in the street – that people – [laughs] – project all manner of things that who would've thunk. I would have never even imagined. And I think in a way that it sort of diminishes the hope or expectation that you could actually ever tell anybody anything, which I think I accept.

In other words, you basically are offering somebody a[n] arena or possibility for them to discover. And to that extent, each person's got their own discovery to make, which is not mine finally. It's – mine is my own.

And, I mean, this comes up so often – you know, for instance, people ask me to tell the story about a particular dwelling, and I can tell a very explicit story about my dwelling, but it – I rarely do it because it's so –

MR. LYON: Because that's your story.

MR. SIMONDS: Well, it wipes out anybody else's possibility –

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: – because my story's pretty elaborate.

MR. LYON: And also authoritative, so you – [laughs].

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, well, that's what it's about, okay. Yeah. Well, only to those people who believe it. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: So toward the end of the '80s, you know, you have – you have two children, Lia and Timothy. Did – just – I mean, just a dopey question, but did, you know, having children, having young children, did it open up any kinds of perspective on your thinking that –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, my whole life's been predicated on having children, so it's very – it was a wonder for me. And to this day, you know, they're 23 and 25, but certainly it's been a joy and a tremendous revelation, and in some ways – I mean, it's gone through lots of evolutions. But my children are very involved in what I do, even from early on, involved in actually making things with me in the studio. So they're very – to this day, Timmy is now endlessly saying, well, these thoughts – and now, he's involved in the theories of architecture – these thoughts are coming from you, Papa. And I welcome that.

At the same time, I'm a little bit hesitant to have it sat so heavily on them. But I – they're pretty strong in their own thinking. I mean, my daughter's involved with education of children, so it's very – also very close to – I mean, it certainly comes from my mother and I. And my mother worked with children.

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: So, I mean, I think we're sort of, like, of an ilk somehow.

MR. LYON: I'm curious about your –

MR. SIMONDS: I don't think it changed anything in my work.

MR. LYON: But you –

MR. SIMONDS: Was that your question?

MR. LYON: – not changed your work, but your perspective, your point of view in any way?

MR. SIMONDS: No, because I had worked so much with children before I had children. I mean, I've got a lot of children friends.

MR. LYON: That's a really interesting – I mean, you talked about Josefa, but, you know –

MR. SIMONDS: That was just like an endless –

MR. LYON: But, yeah. I mean, this is a really interesting – that I don't think we've ever talked about, which is the idea of having a serious audience among children. You know, not many contemporary artists –

MR. SIMONDS: I have to say I really – I'm sorry to say – I don't want to hurt your – offend you, but I have to say the most valuable reactions to my work, for me, have been from children, no question about it. Period. You know – I mean, other than – you know, I – since – I always say, well – I'm sorry, the art world hasn't taught me much because I actually studied art and I thought about these things, and mostly, they see what I already know. It's not like there's been a lot of revelations, really. The more revelations come from people who are looking at it from other perspectives, even in art. And, you know, I've worked in mental hospitals, revealed tremendous reactions to me. And you know, very – essential – not confirmations, but sort of reality checks to tell me that I'm actually saying something, which is wonderful.

But certainly, I would value – and I think it's not so many, but certain particular children who've, you know, taken me places I couldn't have gone probably. Yeah, for sure. No question. I – you know, and not any adults.

MR. LYON: But that's so unusual.

MR. SIMONDS: Well, you know, I remember once Dore Ashton did an exhibition of Joseph Cornell. And I remember this, thinking about this early on when I started working. And she did an exhibition somewhere where she put all the pedestals at a very low level so that children could see into the boxes. And I remember thinking about that. I mean, I've thought about that a lot. How do you want to say it – you know, there's a – you know, well, if something's higher up, does that make it more important and more adult?

I mean, you know, it's like a kind of funny idea to think that there's some levels of understanding that change with the elevation of the thing or something like that, like it's somehow more important or less important if it's diminutive and things like that. And I – I mean, I've thought about those things and kind of funny –

I mean, there's a level of art thinking, if I will, that's so pretentiously self-serious, you know, so overly construed

to me – I mean, to my eye. It seems so – I mean, it seems gratuitously prejudicial, I guess is the way I'd put it. It's like a very – why can't it be for everyone in a certain way?

I think I feel that way. I mean, it seems so cruel – [laughs] – like you're just like more exclusive in – kind of in a kind of dismissive way towards somebody because they're young and can't understand something?

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm.

MR. SIMONDS: That's weird to me.

MR. LYON: So –

MR. SIMONDS: I mean, actually – you know, I do a lot – I still to this day – you know, the other – two days ago, I had two kids here, 5 and – 4 and 7 – you know, to make dwellings and have a good time. They were friends of friends. I know their parents – their grandparents – and they had a great time. They took their little dwellings home with them and, you know, they'll remember it forever and so will I because, you know, there's nothing –

You know, see there? Timmy had a birthday party. You see up on the wall there? And when he was 5 or something, he had a birthday party, and all his boy friends came and they all then put their hands in a circle and we did a mold of their hands and – except for one kid who didn't want to get all yucky. And – [they laugh] – we then made 12 casts of it, and each one got it to take home as a party favor. And –

MR. LYON: Cool.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. The parents thought it was the best thing they ever saw, and so did the kids. And they all have them in their houses and so and so and so and so. And I don't know how to explain this, but in a certain way, that's – like I do casts of my children every year, and I do my own face cast every year on my birthday since 30 years. There's a – you know, it's – I do that because it's part of what I do; it's not because I'm making art. The same – you know, that is – that's just part of how you go about your life, doing things, and then you can share some version of that as a way of kind of coalescing certain moments and things like that.

And I think that's how I go about what I do. It's not like – the same in the street. You're just going to go do your thing – people hang out and do your thing together. This – I think this lacks the pretense of this, as if it were art or not art or some special thing, or –

MR. LYON: Yeah, big conundrum.

MR. SIMONDS: Kind of big collective, and – well, it seems –

MR. LYON: I mean, it's funny that – or the friends who would –

MR. SIMONDS: – people always take me to task because I don't say – "or you didn't photograph it or you didn't do this and that," and I – you know, pardon me, I ain't going to give a fuck on some level.

I mean, the same issue whether I'm going – whether I care, or – if this stuff's around. It's pretty, you know – it's a question – I mean –

MR. LYON: Maybe it's –

MR. SIMONDS: I see all these parents, these kids who are, you know, sons and grandsons of famous artists who are then burdened with the baggage of, you know, taking care of the –

MR. LYON: Yeah. The – yeah, that's – it's not –

MR. SIMONDS: The widows of dead artists –

MR. LYON: We've known a few of those.

MR. SIMONDS: You know, they – and in Europe, where I spent a lot of time, there's a saying – it says, the only good artist is a dead artist, with no heirs. So, I mean, it boils down to that because there's so many – literally, they're so impossible –

MR. LYON: It's interesting that you're friendly with Arthur Danto, who has made his whole philosophic career on, you know, how objects that are not art become art.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh –

MR. LYON: [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: I never thought of that.

MR. LYON: Yeah – [laughs]. It's kind of funny.

Now, there was a – there was a mysterious reference – and you're going to have to tell me what – if this means anything – in David Anfam's essay in the Anfam catalogue to a subconscious trauma concerning your father –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, yeah. I never knew what that was.

MR. LYON: – leading –

MR. SIMONDS: Hmm?

MR. LYON: Leading to a new departure of some kind.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. I think he picked that up from some – from – I think from an essay by Daniel Abadie that had – you know, there was a moment where – which wasn't – had nothing to do with that, but there was a moment – you know, body and earth are one to me. And so, in some ways, any landscape has a body in it – whether it be flesh or personage.

And so there was a moment in my work where I sort of flipped the text versus the subtext from earth and body underneath to body and earth underneath. It's a kind of inversion – and very by choice, I would say.

MR. LYON: Mmm. [Affirmative.] Interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: And consciously, because I grew up and began as a figurative sculptor, making portraits and so, making Prometheuses and angel wings and so on. I did traditional modeling. So there was a moment where, for instance, I decided to, well, bring that part up as the subject rather than the subtext.

MR. LYON: Right, got you.

MR. SIMONDS: And so – and since – I mean, some of them, as all my work has some psychological bent to it. So people started to identify with that; there was one work, *I, Thou*, which does refer to my father and I, as if that were some traumatic thing. I mean, I had a difficult relationship to my father, but at the same time it's just a sculpture. [Laughs.] In a certain way – [laughs] – it's not like – [laughs] – it was motivated by some trauma; it was just – I mean, it's hard to look from outside yourself, but I think in a way it's just there were many – *Man and Fish* has nothing to do with my father, but it looks like a man – a visage is eating a fish. I mean, it's got many levels of psychological issues and so and so; I don't think it comes from any childhood trauma.

MR. LYON: Got it.

MR. SIMONDS: But – I mean, there's been a bunch of literature about all that. John Beardsley wrote a lot about the grotesque, because there was a lot – there was a whole period of – which is interesting to me because in a way there's a – this may be more interesting, rather than the personal issues of psychology. But there's an issue of – which is from day one with my work, even in college and so – where there's a thematic kind of imagery that comes up that's very grotesque, in my work. In college – and there's some – pardon me, we can take this out of the tape, but – looked like a Chinese person, you know – black leather jacket with a bloated belly, and no clothes other than the black leather jacket – on a crucifix.

MR. LYON: Mmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: Now, it looked pretty grotesque. And as an imagery, it was just out of the blue. And I think there's been a lot of imagery like that in my work, many, many times. And usually I think I sort of suppress it; I don't know. It looks sort of corny to me, so I don't really accept it. I let myself imagine anything, always. And then I somehow have to decide whether I'm going to make it or see it or whatever. And I think I eliminate 90 percent of what I imagine. So –

MR. LYON: What are you –

MR. SIMONDS: And of those are many grotesque images that – you know, things that just don't fit – finally, don't have the right linkage to some of the ideas that I'm involved in. Those images are endlessly flying in my mind.

MR. LYON: That's interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: I have to say, my mind is very visually infested, so it's like endless. And then I have to somehow take one and say, "Well, now, let's look at this one a little more carefully and move it around." And I can actually visualize it in my mind, so I can look at it and then conceptually evaluate it as to what would – does it –

somehow I, with whatever kind of ingredients I'm thinking about, say, "Well, does – yeah, it works that way, but does it work in time or does it address some issue of place or, somehow, does it fit in the space in a way?" I mean, there are issues that practical issues, you know – "how – can I make it?" [Laughs.] "Or will it fit somewhere or can it be done, or is it totally like – you know, how much energy is it going to take to" – practical issues. You know, "how long will it take to do?" And I think I somehow evaluate things along the way that way.

MR. LYON: Do you feel that you in any sense have – not censored yourself, but sort of like drawn boundaries –

MR. SIMONDS: No; no boundaries.

MR. LYON: That then you won't go outside?

MR. SIMONDS: No – no, no. I mean, there are a lot of things I don't show. And there are a lot of things you don't even know about but that some people have seen early on that involve my blood and – I mean, since my mother was a doctor, I could get a pint of my own blood. So you know, things that were very, you'd say, grotesque and peculiar – I mean, people think you're really – like that.

MR. LYON: I –

MR. SIMONDS: But I mean – no question. And certainly, the early – just before I figured out my little imaginary world, I was making some very, very strange things. No question. I don't think any of them have ever been reproduced. There are some photographs of some, but I never even brought them. I mean, some people saw them, but – I wouldn't say I've censored them, but I've certainly never offered them.

MR. LYON: But you've directed your efforts within certain channels.

MR. SIMONDS: Not so much directed as there are certain things that are more important than other things.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. SIMONDS: So I've – because you only have so much time, so I've chosen things that in some way move, so to speak, the argument further somehow.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. SIMONDS: I mean, I rarely have done things even though – well, everything I've done is a tremendous waste of time in the sense that it takes too much time to make what I want to do. And I think there's something – a question you had along the way that we should address, which is I think I'm always pushing at extremities of trying to do things that are very difficult – like the porcelain things – very impossible to do – sort of the extremity of physically or practically what can be done. So I'm always doing – I'm mostly tilting against windmills in a certain way in terms of what I choose to do. So there's a kind of funny, self-defeating, you know, daring-do about it, which sort of tests the limits of what, you know, can be done physically or, you know – "well, I'm working in the street" – it's going to, you know, it's going to get destroyed and – you know, it's like, you're sort of ridiculous. There's a ridiculousness to how I go about what I do.

But I think there's something to be said about that, which is – I'm not sure what it represents, but at the same time I think I've chosen those things even among those things that are ones that move the argument further. I mean, for instance these – *Life, With Thorns* or the *Tumbleweed*, which are very extreme, difficult versions of porcelain-making – you know, Sèvres, they go nuts; "how you can do that" – and the challenge, the medium and the techniques and so on and so forth. But at the same time, they wish for something that I really want that is moving my argument further; not just because it's extreme; they've – because of the – what it is, the image of what it is. I mean, it's earth taken to a very extreme extremity. I mean, it's very esoteric and particular.

And you know, that certainly represents something to me. How do you want to say it – everything is – you know, I've worked – you look next to it, it's this thing that looks like a meteor – it's just a piece of earth, as if it landed like a natural phenomenon, and the other one is like the most overly articulated human act, to imitate nature. I mean, they're so extreme in a certain way, I think.

MR. LYON: When did you go to Sèvres, for the first time?

MR. SIMONDS: First time I went to Sèvres was when – after this *Picaresque Landscape* was bought, then, by the Pompidou. It was bought a man named Daniel Cordier. And then he gave all his works to the Pompidou, and one of them was *Picaresque Landscape*, so I had to go in and install *Picaresque Landscape* in the Pompidou. And it was shipped and it was damaged, so it had to be repaired. So they sent it to Sèvres, which was a free place to go for me to work, and I worked there – and I never told you this story – and so I worked in there –

MR. LYON: Yeah, I think you did tell me this story.

MR. SIMONDS: We did talk about that –

MR. LYON: Yeah, we did talk about that – so this was in –

MR. SIMONDS: 1995?

MR. LYON: Ninety-five?

MR. SIMONDS: Maybe?

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. SIMONDS: Yes, ’95; I’m pretty sure.

MR. LYON: Oh, okay, it was –

MR. SIMONDS: Because it was the LaCascia exhibition that then moved to the Jeu de Paume.

MR. LYON: And then –

MR. SIMONDS: Wait, wait. So ’95, ’96.

MR. LYON: And then – how did you –

MR. SIMONDS: So I, then, while I was there, he said, “well, why don’t you make some porcelain?” And so I tried to make my *Tumbleweed*.

MR. LYON: Okay. That was also the time that you worked at Sainte Anne?

MR. SIMONDS: No. Then when the show was on, which was a little later – well, yeah, the same time. A year – within a year.

MR. LYON: Within – so roughly –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, yeah. I was invited to go work in a – Sainte Anne was a mental hospital in Paris.

MR. LYON: Right. [Pause.]

MR. SIMONDS: We should talk about that, but that’s a whole other –

MR. LYON: Okay. So – we should talk about that. I wanted to – let’s see how we’ve done with talking about the work. We’ve talked about your –

MR. SIMONDS: That’s right we’ve got a ways to go with that, so –

MR. LYON: Talking about the films – so – this is going back a little bit. The *Three Peoples* texts and objects – I think that’s something people can read, yeah. Ah, okay, *Wilted Towers.*

MR. SIMONDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. LYON: We talked about *Floating Cities*; maybe we could talk about *Wilted Towers* and then talk about the porcelain pieces a little bit.

MR. SIMONDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Well –

MR. LYON: Or we could talk about the porcelain pieces a little bit. [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: No, no, no. *Wilted Towers* is worth – I mean, because it’s emblematic of a certain – well, the issue of building and growing; so growth forms and built forms is, you know, concurrent all the way through. So in a certain way, we’re just sort of moving from one side to the other, in some ways.

But *Wilted Towers* certainly is – for me, anyway – emblematic in its kind of – it’s very obvious, in a certain way. But there are other ones – *Rock Flower*, which is at the Hirshhorn – that make a kind of, if anything, too-descriptive statement about this kind of mixed metaphor of something that’s built. In other words, it’s all about things in time, so it’s about things that are built in time as opposed to things that are grown and then wilt in time. And there’s things that are built that ruin versus things that are grown that wilt.

And I often am working very consciously – or usually arrive as images, but then I’m very – kind of work them

around a bit with issues of those mixed metaphors, and what do they represent and sort of a form that they might take. And they're also a little bit like leverages on other things that I might do that kind of – it's like ways of thinking, let's put it that way, all right? Ways of thinking about something. And I use that – and *Wilted Towers* is one of them that I think of as clearly emblematic in that way.

And I guess *Life, With Thorns* or the *Tumbleweed* are also that, but they were more – they're not the same, in a way. But those are more about a narrative and these are more phenomenological objects, the *Tumbleweed* and the *Life, With Thorns* – although *Life, With Thorns* has a narrative, as things that grow and thorns –

MR. LYON: Well, even if –

MR. SIMONDS: So there's life and death in –

MR. LYON: Even if they are moments, they imply a span of time. A tumbleweed just, you know –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, I never thought of that.

MR. LYON: And the same – *Life, With Thorns*, you know, implies its past and its future.

MR. SIMONDS: Interesting. I never thought of them that way. I think of them as – because I guess so much energy is involved in getting them to be, and the possibility of them getting to be – so the energy or the – emblem for me is of something that is phenomenally impossible and – but is. So it's more of the creation than the philosophical issues of the time.

And so – and same with *Tumbleweed*, I don't think the difference is the space or the time or it moving and so and so – something about –

MR. LYON: But tumbleweeds are proverbially emblematic of restlessness –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. Transience, yeah.

MR. LYON: Transience, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: Transience – yeah, yeah, you're right. I never thought of it that way. I mean, it – I never – it would never occur to me. And likewise, I'm looking at *Life, With Thorns*; it looks so – [laughs] – how do you want to say – energetically static. [Laughs.] It's like so not-moving. [Laughs.] You understand what I'm saying? There was this – although it's grown and it looks so – like something's happening, it's absolutely static. It's looks like something caught in the spotlight, you know, in a headlight.

So I don't actually think in the way that you're thinking. I'm still trying to wrestle with what that means. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: I mean it's got an almost unavoidable, you know, Christian connotation of, you know –

MR. SIMONDS: People find that in *Life, With* – you know, crown of thorns, yeah.

MR. LYON: Crown of thorns.

MR. SIMONDS: People see that.

The only issue for me about that thing that interests me in the – towards the future is – you see, there it's in a Plexiglas case, but if you take off that case it is the most threatening object that I've ever been around, meaning that when you get near you're so afraid that you're going to break it – it is so *challengingly* fragile that it asks you to stay away. And so it's this very small thing that – relatively small – that creates so much energy around them that is so threatening, actually. I think of it as threatening. And I think it's, in terms of some corollaries to the dwellings in the street, which are also – they're sitting out there in this kind of naked way of being tremendously vulnerable but also very inviting and sort of curious and seductive in a certain way. And they ask you to come, but they tell you that you're – it's fraught with problems. And the fraughtness, I think, is what this *Life, With Thorns* speaks to me.

Wait – if they take it off, you've never seen it. But if you take off the cover of this thing, it is absolutely terrifying – even to me, who made it, who somehow might have some power over it. But people – my assistant, who had to help me once install it somewhere; she's like peeing in her pants because it's so – like if you breathe the wrong way, you think you're going to, you know – and it's true, you break it forever and it will never be again. So it's kind of got this terror. It terrorizes you. And I don't say that happily; I just think it's phenomenologically a funny kind of object, that could create so much tension around it. I mean, I guess in some world you could just kind of walk over and knock it over and there would be no problem, but it looks like it doesn't want to be – you

know, you don't want to do that. And so it has a terrible power over you.

I mean, it's one of the few things that – you know, for instance, I made two particularly because I thought, "Okay, if I made the *Tumbleweed* then I have to make another one for – because I have two children; because it's one of the few things I'd actually think to keep in my life, and then now each one's got the responsibility." But the – it's actually a curse, because even to just move it is like a whole production of, you know, filtering sand around it and having it encased in sand to move it inside. So then you have to uninstall it, and to reinstall it; you have to take all the sand away and blow it away. And so, you know, the whole kind of demand of what it is – it's like a curse –

MR. LYON: How – you have to filter sand over it?

MR. SIMONDS: In order to move it you pack it in pellets, either aluminum pellets – or sand is actually just as good to – basically, it's encased in sand so it doesn't get shocked. So – but then you have to have a little plug to let the sand drain out and so and so. So, you know, it's very awful. Someday, if I ever reinstall it, you can come by. It's like – it's horrible.

MR. LYON: So, but you wouldn't – you wouldn't sell those or –

MR. SIMONDS: No, no. Everybody wants to buy them but I don't want to sell them.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: Well, they're very seductive to people who like them. I may make one bigger one, but I'll sell – just because I don't want the responsibility of having it – [they laugh] – mostly.

MR. LYON: Do you need the help of the fellow that has the secret –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, there are three of us – four of us altogether. But there are two of them that are coming here; we're thinking to set up our own little kiln and do it, actually.

It's pretty neat, that thing, don't you think, Chris?

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: Did you ever see anything like it? You've never seen anything like that, huh?

MR. LYON: No. It's quite amazing.

MR. SIMONDS: Completely. Screwy, huh? I think it's – in some ways is does express something about me, this – we were thinking of –

MR. LYON: Well, I think – you know, I wanted to –

MR. SIMONDS: – you hit upon that at some point; I can't remember what you said –

MR. LYON: Well, I'll tell you –

MR. SIMONDS: – but there's this quality of –

MR. LYON: I'll tell you what I said.

MR. SIMONDS: Okay.

MR. LYON: Because I was going to ask you what you thought of it.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, okay. [Laughs.] Well – apropos. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: You know, what he said was – [laughs] –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, yeah. [Laughs.] Now we'll find out.

MR. LYON: – that the two of them, together, are like a two-sided portrait of you as a kind of existential prophet – you know, rootless, peripatetic on the one hand, and on the other this sort of defiantly – and I use the word messianic – and judgmental kind of character.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, interesting.

MR. LYON: You know, so the –

MR. SIMONDS: Judgmental. There's an issue there, yeah. I think that may be –

MR. LYON: May be morally challenging –

MR. SIMONDS: You know what it is? It's like a – creating a moral challenge.

MR. LYON: Oh, that's interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: I think that's more like it. I think there's a quality of judgmental, but it's not judgmental down on to the people; it's like, "Meet me where I am – can you meet me where I am?" I think that's what it is, because Rita for instance used to say, "Well, trust – well, being with you I always think that I have to try to be a better person." And –

MR. LYON: Well, I – that's what I was trying to get at.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: I mean, it's something –

MR. LYON: But it's not that you would judge her if she came up short –

MR. SIMONDS: No, I – no, no, no.

MR. LYON: It's just that somehow she –

MR. SIMONDS: I judge myself worse than everyone else. So you know, in a way, I don't think – I don't – you know, everybody else has got to deal with their own problem and how they think of themselves. For instance, if I do something wrong it's the worst thing in the world for me; I mean, I'm tortured forever by mistakes or faux pas or, you know, malapropisms or whatever they are that I might make. It's like horrible. This will haunt me forever. Maybe for many people, but for me it's very excruciating. If I said the wrong thing to somebody really badly, you know, I never forget it. And so there's some quality of that in me.

I think they create that dilemma of – like, they're challenging in the sense that like, you know, "can you deal with me" or, you know, "here it is, now – what now?" You know, "are you able" – I think that's – part of the extremity of the *Life, With Thorns* is it presents itself as something that's almost impossible to take care of. And it's going back to the dwellings and finding a home and being taken care of. It creates – like, here's this impossible situation. It's very wonderful and very beautiful, but it's impossible. And so it's just like – it tantalizingly and grotesquely creates a predicament. In other words, it's like "now what, okay?"

And I think – I mean, it will be interesting – unfortunately, I won't be around to find out, but I am sure that these things will never survive much longer than I live because the level of kind of care and attention that it sort of demands in order for it to survive is a reach at best, you know? I think it's not much fun, you know, because you imagine if that thing has its case off, and you were walking around the house? You know – I mean, forget it. It's not going to be.

So the reality of the object – even in casing, it's like an artificial, pretend protection – but the reality of the object is something that's impossible. And I think that's a realm I inhabit; it's like a – I'm demanding, in a certain way, something – kind of requiring or – because I think it's a challenge; I'm not like asking, I'm demanding in some ways that – "you know, okay, here it is; you – now you deal with it."

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah? Is that – I mean, I've sort of apropo-ed what you're trying to ask, right?

MR. LYON: I think so – yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, the talking –

MR. SIMONDS: It's very arrogant.

MR. LYON: Really?

MR. SIMONDS: Well, I think – no?

MR. LYON: You think? [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: No! I mean, I can't help it, but I think in the reality it's very arrogant. I mean, I can't help that it become that way because that's what I want, so I'm asking myself to make something that's very difficult, and demanding a lot of myself. It's not easy. So it's like I'm challenging myself first, and then the problem is that it sort of arrogantly says, "Well now, you deal with it, too." Or not.

MR. LYON: Or not – right. I mean, you don't – one could walk away.

MR. SIMONDS: Right.

MR. LYON: Right. You were talking about *Mental Earth* and the grotesque. To me, it was the – you know, there was an element of kind of expressionism and, you know, the –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I think that comes with loosening from a narrative.

MR. LYON: Yeah, and the smears – as in general, you know. And I was interested to see – in one work the smear turns into a portrait – you know, a portrait turns into a smear again, you know? [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: Yes. A smear – yeah. Well, both.

MR. LYON: But you know, the – but it's – it's pushed – it's in a distorted –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. That's a kind of simplistic version, but the issue of a smear is more interesting to me as a kind of vehicle to frustrate narrative. So all these things are about a way of avoiding an a priori story that I've got in my mind's eye that I'm going to tell and allowing the material to create an arena in which I discover a story, so that it creates a kind of free association issue. And so that the narrative is less – you don't know the narrative before; you're going to find the narrative or glimpses of it at best –

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: – as you do the actual work. So the smear becomes a kind of vehicle –

MR. LYON: Right, but also a blockage in some sense.

MR. SIMONDS: I think I'm like Leonardo – you know, looking in the –

MR. LYON: Looking in the clouds, or –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah – and seeing visages.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: It allows that process of being free – just sort of seeing the –

MR. LYON: Wasn't it Constable who did clouds, and then – you would see things – yeah –

MR. SIMONDS: I have, too; I'm – many of my works on the walls are – look like little smears that are clouds. And then I see faces in the clouds that are doing things inside.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: And it – I mean, it's a way of allowing that kind of images to arrive rather than knowing the image before I'm trying to describe it, which is a little bit – not boring, but it's kind of – has an a priori quality.

MR. LYON: But you've talked about being able to sort of visualize things mentally, very clearly –

MR. SIMONDS: Though – which is the exact opposite – that's what this is, the exact – how to frustrate, how to –

MR. LYON: So you're trying to frustrate that?

MR. SIMONDS: Yes. Because the imagery, in my mind's eye are very crystal. So – I mean, it's endlessly hard to escape the images that I see in my mind's eye; I see them all. And then it's – the execution of the sculpture is often really measured for me by, well, how clearly does it reflect the mind's eye image which I continuously recall, even move around in my mind's eye. So it's, like, how well did that represent that image? Which is kind of – it's not that it's boring, it's just –

MR. LYON: It's not discovery –

MR. SIMONDS: You don't discover it.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: You're discovering somewhere, then you might as well not have to make it. Because you discovered it, you still have to – so – it's great.

MR. LYON: Yeah, but – yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: You want to share it, you got to do it.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: And as you get older, time is shorter, so you don't want to spend all the time –

MR. LYON: That's interesting. I mean, there are a lot of that – that's a real story in modernism, isn't it? The attempt to frustrate; that facility of –

MR. SIMONDS: Yes; I think so. Or turning a painting upside down so you discover something –

MR. LYON: Sure – so you – so you can discover something, so –

MR. SIMONDS: – what you didn't see – yeah, yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah. That's good.

MR. SIMONDS: I believe in all of that. I think people are so, you know, teleological; they are so pre-wired that they see what they want to see and that's it. Yeah, yeah.

MR. LYON: Well, so much of contemporary culture is that predictable and, you know – you know – *Godfather* part 17 –

MR. SIMONDS: Dogmatic. Yep. Dogmatic – I call it dogmatic.

MR. LYON: Before we were doing this, I wasn't really aware that you were – before looking this stuff up, that you were doing the sculpted heads – the – I'm sorry, the casts of your heads every year.

MR. SIMONDS: Every birthday since I was 26.

MR. LYON: I mean, that's an interesting comment about –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, I think it began as a vanity, and it became a curse. [They laugh.] But – [laughs] – unfortunately. But I do look exactly like my father, who I cast when he was 60-something, and my son looks exactly like I do, at 24, when I was 26-something.

MR. LYON: Yeah, you showed me that last time. It's a little tough, a little startling.

MR. SIMONDS: Well, poor Tim; he knows what he's going to look like.

MR. LYON: Well, maybe we could use the – [they laugh] – yeah, maybe we could stop.

MR. SIMONDS: Or poor Chris. [Laughs.] What, have we got to page 10 yet? [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: Well, okay. What we did do is we – and I'm sure we'll return to it, but we kind of got through biography and work – I mean, there was late biography things we could talk about – definitely, we should talk about the Dumbarton Oaks installation, and maybe some other key things like that that – I mean, that's interesting because you had the chance to interact with, you know –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, other cultures.

MR. LYON: Other cultures and their work.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, it's interesting. Okay.

MR. LYON: But I sort of –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, maybe we made a lot of progress – or no?

MR. LYON: Yeah, I think we did. I think the last thing I wanted to talk about was just give you the opportunity to talk a little bit about sort of the philosophical issues around the work which you've already done to a

considerable extent – talk about some of the responses to the work – you know, critical responses, a little bit, which maybe you don't care about – [laughs].

Oh, and we didn't really talk about techniques and materials and everything.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh yeah, we have to – yeah.

MR. LYON: We need to talk about clay, we need to talk about color –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. LYON: – and –

MR. SIMONDS: That's easy. And we can do that easily, yeah.

MR. LYON: And –

MR. SIMONDS: Philosophical – I'm not sure how you want to go about that, but there a lot in there – issues in there. You know, like what is art? [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: Right. So you know, I don't think it needs to be quite so extensive. Yeah, maybe we could just do one more hour.

MR. SIMONDS: Now? [Laughs.] If you want. Do you want? Wait – well, how – well, we – or you mean as opposed to meeting one more time?

MR. LYON: Yeah –

MR. SIMONDS: You think you can get it all done today? I mean, we can if you want. I mean, it's up to you. Or we can do it again.

MR. LYON: You up for one more session?

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I'm up – whatever you like.

MR. LYON: Because I'm getting really weary.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. I think it would be better to try to cover those things with a fresh – is that what you mean, with a fresh moment.

MR. LYON: I think so – yeah, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I think it would be better.

MR. LYON: But let me bring some sandwiches or something.

MR. SIMONDS: No, no, I like our little dinner. You didn't mind it?

MR. LYON: I loved it. [Laughs.] I thought it was good. I'm just embarrassed; I didn't –
MR. SIMONDS: Oh – no, no, no. I like cooking. I'll think of – I'll get – gauge it better next time.

All right. We're doing good! I think we covered a lot of stuff, but there's no way they're going to organize it.

MR. LYON: Well, I was going to say –

MR. SIMONDS: Forget it.

MR. LYON: I can give them a little bit of an outline, then, which is – you know –

MR. SIMONDS: But it's all over the place.

MR. LYON: Hmm?

MR. SIMONDS: It's all over the place, where we're waltzing around here.

MR. LYON: So what?

MR. SIMONDS: I mean, I don't care. Nobody's going to ever listen to – [they laugh] –

[End of Disc, beginning of 5 of 5, tack 1.]

MR. LYON: The final interview with Charles Simonds, August 14, 2012, at his loft on 22nd Street in Manhattan.

MR. SIMONDS: All right. So the other thing you wanted to cover were all the materials and the techniques issues?

MR. LYON: Yes. Let's see what's left here. And then I had some, you know, really quotes that I thought would be interesting for you, or not – [laughs] – to respond to and see what you think about them.

MR. SIMONDS: Mm-hmm.

MR. LYON: But why don't you tell me a little bit about this allegorical way of thinking about things –

MR. SIMONDS: Actually, we'll have to find a place for it in the rest of the text. But I – it did occur to me after we talked last time. We were talking about all these, like, *Paradise Lost* and – I don't know if I mentioned *The Fairy Queen*, but all these literatures that I sort of got involved in in college. And I realized after talking to you that one thing that occurred to me was that very, very early on, in high school, I wrote a little fiction that the teacher took great interest in and had me read before the class and so on.

But that was basically – and so, you know, you're in the forefront of contemporary fiction, and this is the early '60s –

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: And I don't remember – I think I – [audio break] – but I had written a little allegory of the Second World War by – [audio break] – and sort of the doors opened and you saw the objects in a certain disposition and they changed, and each one of those acts, as it were –

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm.

MR. SIMONDS: – was a part of the history of the Second World War. And I realized that in a certain way, from what we've been talking about, which never occurred to me, that all this interest in *Paradise Lost* and in these kind of morality play issues, likewise, in the – some of the, you know, transcendental ministers, all the stuff that I, you know, bumped into in college, they all sort of coalesced around some issues about allegory.

And I think in a certain way, the "little people" and the "dwellings" and all this are – are a kind of – coalesced a lot of those thoughts of creating a narrative that's an allegory in a certain way that has a kind of moral – a morality play in the way in which the behavior of people's reactions and what goes on, and it's a way of enacting a morality play in – like a – like morality plays were often as a kind of folk minstrel version of going from village to village –

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: – as a kind of enactment of – in that case, I guess, religious issues. And so – but for me, in that way, I think I somehow put together this – I don't think was – certainly not consciously, but somehow, I must have put together this kind of behavior, if you will, that drew upon my way of thinking that was largely allegorical, I think, in a very narrative way and also maybe in its metaphoric way of thinking was always like a separate train of thought that was then reflect – you could use as a reflective onto the present or what existed politically, socially, beliefwise.

And I think that's what I've spent a lot of my time doing, whether I was aware of it or not, is setting up a kind of parallel – even if you look at the *Three Peoples* text that's largely a kind of little – you know, aphoristic, metaphoric, didactic issue of – you know, some issues of how people behave as a metaphor. And I think this sort of sense of a parallel – it's not a parallel universe, it's a parallel kind of allegory that sort of puts a warped mirror onto the reality that surrounds you and says, well, here's a way of seeing it in a slightly distorted way or a more conceptualized way –

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: – that reflects back.

MR. LYON: But it seems to have been important to you that people should not simply view it and think it, but they should act it.

MR. SIMONDS: Feel it moreover.

MR. LYON: Feel it.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. And experience it somewhat.

MR. LYON: Experience it. That's the word. Experience.

MR. SIMONDS: I have to deal with – yeah. And deal with it in a very visceral way. And I think saying – likewise, with the, you know, *Birth, Landscape↔Body↔Dwelling*, these things where I enact these rituals. Those people who have had to confront me doing it have the same kind of – it's a very visceral – it's like way of bringing something into a very intense, physical reality, something that's largely metaphoric, I think.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm.

MR. SIMONDS: You know, has that resonance, so it kind of – well, an allegory – it's an allegory of birth where we –

MR. LYON: Why do you think this – just sort of this urge to experience is so strong for you?

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, I think that's my chief interest, is creating experiences for myself that can in a certain way give me the experience of what I'm believing or thinking. And it's like an enactment of what I feel in a way that gives it back to me in a very visceral way. And I think it's a very – it's like a high, if you will. You know, it's a very intense and – I mean, it's a – it's very wonderful.

I mean, for instance, I spent so much time laboriously making these little "dwellings." It's a very boring time and it doesn't have the intensity, for instance, of finishing a "dwelling," which is a very intense moment, or enacting these rituals is a very – it's like being intensely in a dream physically, like you're actually in it, not dreaming it –

MR. LYON: You –

MR. SIMONDS: – because it has a physical reality.

MR. LYON: There's an interesting quote – and I'll probably get it wrong – by Artaud where he – he's saying essentially that the sickness of modern people is the inability – is the distance between what they think and what they experience.

MR. SIMONDS: Yes. I would – I would buy that in a second. Yeah. I think I'm able to bring to physical reality what I believe, so there's no distance. I can be what I think.

MR. LYON: So that's what he's basically getting at, yeah, that we don't – so he was looking for that kind of theater of cruelty where it wasn't – it was mostly cruelty to yourself, you know – [laughs] –

MR. SIMONDS: Mm-hmm.

MR. LYON: – where you would – you know – and the '60s was an interesting period because that's when, you know, Artaud was really rediscovered. I mean, he is –

MR. SIMONDS: Probably.

MR. LYON: – the blossoming of his reputation, I guess, must have really happened between about 1960 and the early '70s, you know.

MR. SIMONDS: It's a funny segue, but, you know, this mental hospital where I worked in Paris is the hospital where he was a resident or whatever you want to call it.

MR. LYON: Saint –

MR. SIMONDS: Sainte-Anne.

MR. LYON: Sainte-Anne, right. Sainte-Anne.

MR. SIMONDS: Right. So we crossed paths – [they laugh] – somehow.

MR. LYON: Spiritually or something, yeah. But – you know, but that's – but there's an aspect of your – of your work that seems so rooted in the kind of 1960s urge to break out and feel things and experience things.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I guess –

MR. LYON: I mean, I – you know, that's a two-edged sword to say that, you know, because it's also a period –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, certainly the cradle of some of these thoughts is the Free Speech Movement and political activism; political theater, really. And so certainly, the idea of being able to enact a political gesture, certainly, the "dwellings" in the street come from that to a large degree. But – I mean, it's certainly partial.

But also this whole image of political street theater, which was really what – the Free Speech Movement was very much about – showed me that you could just do things like that, you know, that – I think it also has to do with an issue of not even bothering to consider conventional formats, if you will – galleries, museums, whatever – conventional paradigms of how you might think that your thoughts would enter the world, that you find the one that's useful, you don't choose – you don't behold yourself or become a slave to the ones that exist.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm.

MR. SIMONDS: So, I mean, I certainly trace that to my own – my mother's behavior, which was she did whatever she wanted to and then found a venue that would, you know, help her get it done.

MR. LYON: I hope this isn't too far afield, but I had lunch with Lynne Cooke today –

MR. SIMONDS: Lynne Cooke.

MR. LYON: – who was the curator at the Dia for a long time and then –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, she did a show I was in in Spain.

MR. LYON: – she's at the Reina Sofia.

MR. SIMONDS: Not anymore.

MR. LYON: Not – she just left.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: Yeah. Just left. And her last show was opening in February. But her interest, which surprised me, is in, like, outsider artists. That's what she's going to be focusing on.

MR. SIMONDS: I hope you mentioned me. [They laugh.]

MR. LYON: I did, actually.

MR. SIMONDS: Mm-hmm.

MR. LYON: I did. And when we were talking about it, we were saying, well, the thing that attracted the Chicagoans to the outsiders back in the '60s when, you know, Roger Brown and Jim Nutt and all those people --

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, all those – yeah, yeah, yeah. I know who you mean. Yeah.

MR. LYON: – all those people were discovering Joseph Yoakum and Ramirez –

MR. SIMONDS: Yes. Right.

MR. LYON: – and all, was that these were artists who didn't ask permission. They weren't validated by the structure. They just did it.

MR. SIMONDS: Yes. I – well, and then, largely, I think I share with them the part of the source of that is not just this political issue that we're talking about – or street theater, but it is also – it's born out of a certain kind of compulsion or a certain kind of maniacal issue.

MR. LYON: That you kind of have to do it.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I think so. And, I mean, I'm not unaware of that in my own work. It's – you know, don't get between me and what I got to do is part of the problem I have because it is so compulsively rooted emotionally and physically, you know, in terms of behavior brick-by-brick. So I think it's – yeah.

MR. LYON: So there are examples in your – in your non-art world-related life where you also have done kind of extreme things. And you were mentioning climbing the mountains in New York.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, yeah. Well, people always characterize me as, well, compulsive and extreme and manic in

that way. But I –

MR. LYON: Well, extreme the way we mean it now, like extreme sports; you know, like BMX –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, yeah.

MR. LYON: – you know, it's like doing things that just kind of push your body a little further than –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, it wasn't – and certainly, that's a component of it, but I think – for instance, the 46ers is a good example; I'm an Adirondack 46er. First time my name was ever in print was as an Adirondack 46er. And I went to some camp and the camp was in the Adirondacks. And among the things that they did is they went and climbed in the high peaks region of the Adirondacks.

And, you know, at that time, I think was the 211th 46er, but those of you who wanted to – in the history of – you know, since they kept records, which is a hundred-odd years. So only crazies and two dogs ever climbed 46, although –

MR. LYON: Candy probably wasn't one of them.

MR. SIMONDS: No, no. But in any case, it's many peaks, so there was no reason to climb them. And in the '30s, there had been a hurricane and created all these blowdowns, so basically, you're climbing over fallen trees with shafts that would impale you if you weren't careful. So, I mean, there were many of these things that nobody would do in their right mind. There was no pleasure in it, it was filled with bugs and you didn't have a view at the top; it was just a ridge. And it was one of the 46 you had to climb if you wanted to be a 46er.

And I and three friends, we did that by going after camp and doing that. So – and sure, it's a marker for me of my behavior in that way. I mean, at the same time, at that camp, I was a big sailboat racer. I had the fastest three times in the history of the camp and so on, and went undefeated. So there are a lot of these nature extremity issues in a way. I mean, the sailing was one certainly in that way of – I was always, you know, in a really – a big blow. I was always the one who just went for it. And, you know, consequently, I did pretty well.

But I think – between the sailing and climbing, sailing's interesting because it has to do with if you really are into it – which I was – you realize you're the – how do you want to say it – the unpredictableness of nature that you need to somehow come to very awake terms with and make use of, finally, in a certain way, or be aware of so that you – there's this kind of – it's very prosaic but nature is, you know, unpredictable and bigger than you are. And at the same time, you somehow are able to feel it and hold it and use it.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm.

MR. SIMONDS: And certainly, that was a very powerful – and still – I still sail. It's a very powerful experience for me. And I've done lots of hiking and climbing out in the West.

MR. LYON: Tell the story of you – you had yourself sort of put on a rock off the coast of Maine, would that be?

MR. SIMONDS: Well, I – I had myself. I arranged – I had wanted to go stand on a rock. I've done that a few times.

MR. LYON: And what was the – what was the reason for this?

MR. SIMONDS: Well, I was very involved in tides. I mean, for instance, in graduate school, I did a recording – audio recording of a sunset. So all you had were the sounds and – it was in western New Jersey – the sounds of a dog barking in the distance and the wind and the sun setting. And I was very involved in – how do you want to say it – at that time, tides and natural phenomena.

So, for instance – actually, in graduate school, I spent all my time leaving skids of paper out in the – like, big skids of paper as if they were books that nature would then write on over a period of a year. Or, for instance, my master's show, I had a little heliostat on the roof of the gallery of the building in the school which brought this image of the sunlight down through the mirrors into the gallery. So you'd see an image of light in the gallery. And if a cloud went by, it would disappear, so things that had to do with sort of – how do you want to say it? Actually, the tie I would maybe make is allowing things to happen that you didn't control.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm.

MR. SIMONDS: Likewise, I was pouring wax on the floor and letting it take form and so on.

MR. LYON: Hmm. That's interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: Well, we should include my master's – the thesis in it, which will hold 24 questions about what is art. But it was all about sort of challenging the issue of, well, where do you – does your decision about making it art or not art or what gives it its validity as art, where do you find those moments and eliminating a certain amount of – certainly, all the formal issues and all the art things. But moreover, eliminating your willfulness in terms of making forms; it's the same that comes back with smearing clay and so –

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm.

MR. SIMONDS: And I think I explored that fairly extensively in many different ways. And then later, as I met Lucy and we went to Maine, and I started getting involved with the tides because the tides, the bay that we were on, had landforms that would change. It was a cinema of landforms changing by the tide, which interested me a lot, the actual form of the islands as they disappeared into sandbars.

MR. LYON: Seen from what vantage?

MR. SIMONDS: Well, written – initially seen from the deck of Lucy's house, where you could look down upon this extraordinary change going on. And then I started to think – because I had done this *Birth*, coming out of the earth, I thought, well, let – I'd like to see what it's about cinematically as it were to let the tide come up over me and disappear into the water. In other words, just – yeah?

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm.

MR. SIMONDS: So, you know, some issue –

MR. LYON: Interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: – of burial in a certain way but it's a different way. And so I did that. And then I got very interested in – there's a moment in August when the moon, full moon, sets and the full moon rises as the sun is setting. So it's moon and sun. And I thought, well, what better image would I like to have in my – I was in a lot of little films then; I still have these films – that I put myself on a rock in the middle of the water so that I could pan around and see just water, sun, moon at a certain point. So you'd see like sort of a cosmic image of earth – in this case, water – sun and moon. You know, sort of a celestial sense of where you are as a being a sort of timeless way, I guess is the best way to put it.

And so I found a rock out in the middle of – off the coast of Maine. I had a little dinghy and rode out there and parked myself on this rock with a lot of seals and birds and bird shit and stayed there with the tides coming in and out and filmed all this stuff.

MR. LYON: With some kind of –

MR. SIMONDS: To the anxiety of everybody around me who thought –

MR. LYON: I would imagine. Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: – god forbid there's a storm or a big wave, and Charles will be gone. And I was nervous too, but, you know, that's – in terms of extremity, that's how I went about what I do, so it didn't really – it wasn't a big issue. [Laughs.] It was like, okay, but I got to do it. [Laughs.] Sorry.

MR. LYON: Okay. Okay, good.

MR. SIMONDS: Does that – I don't know if that's – is that the question you asked?

MR. LYON: Yeah, that – no, that was – I mean, we were dealing with that. So let's – let's – well –

MR. SIMONDS: I – we should segue from that into this issue of the sublime and –

MR. LYON: Yeah, okay.

MR. SIMONDS: I mean, you might as well get the sense with that.

MR. LYON: No, that makes a lot sense because it's sort of made – and the larger, the sort of awesomeness of nature, the sort of –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, and also, an interest in its – in its – and religious is not the right word – but however you want to define the sublime. But certainly, I think my relationship to nature is very intense and very awestruck in a certain way. And to the extent that I am a natural being, I'm part and parcel of this whole – that's part – you know, people ask, well, what do you think about, Charles? Do you make – do you think about – I don't think

about formal issues in art.

You know, for instance, I go to great lengths to try to explain, well, I don't think about that stuff. It doesn't really interest me at all. And I'd like to see it in other artists' work, and it's very fascinating to me, and beautiful. But it's not largely what I think about, maybe some issues of the life of forms in art and some sense of sort of meaning of forms in a psychological sense or things like that, but not in a – certainly, not in a modernist, formalist kind of way.

MR. LYON: Well, there's something almost 19th century about some of this –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, that's what I'm driving towards. Yeah.

MR. LYON: You know, the Hudson School painters, you know, finding vantages where they could experience –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: – the awesomeness of nature, and artists going to the coast of Maine, you know?

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, I never thought of that. Yeah. But in fact I would –

MR. LYON: In Prouts Neck and all that –

MR. SIMONDS: – I would say that –

MR. LYON: – and French artists attaching themselves to rocks so they wouldn't blow away in a storm, you know. So they –

MR. SIMONDS: Who did that?

MR. LYON: Well, I think Van Gogh did, and –

MR. SIMONDS: Did he really?

MR. LYON: – and I think a young Monet did it, you know.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh. No kidding!

MR. LYON: I'll look this up –

MR. SIMONDS: No, I'd love to know that. Yeah.

MR. LYON: But, yeah. I mean, there are these stories. And, I mean, it may be – even be apocryphal, but –

MR. SIMONDS: No matter.

MR. LYON: – but the idea is that there was this urge –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, I think the issue of confronting nature in that way, in a real way, is – I mean, aside from – I'm not a – I'm not a plein air –

MR. LYON: But that was their medium. You used a camera.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. But – well, or myself.

MR. LYON: Or whatever.

MR. SIMONDS: Or myself. Yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: But I think the issues – well spoken; and then in a certain way I think – you know, it's occurred to me long ago – in a self-reflective way; not prescriptively thinking about "Why do I do what I do," but thinking about "Well, what did I do, or what have – what am I doing?" – that these dwellings, for instance, on the Lower East Side – or wherever, but particularly in America, which – Americans are endlessly, you know, predicating on the idea of the Southwest Indian – American Indians, which has a kind of pathos of a trampled people and it gets very maudlin and saccharine.

But underneath it is a kind of, you know, lost past – sadness of a lost past issue of the landscape; hence, you

know, this little segue we talked about of the apologies to the Iroquois, you know, different Indian tribes that had actually mythologies of little people – and this kind of sense there, then, that image on the Lower East Side, in the beginning on a very dilapidated and destroyed and, you know, fragile moment, neighborhoodwise and physically, of a landscape – I call it a landscape, not a cityscape – of a landscape that is going through ruination, if you will. And there are, then, the American Indian ruins – for Americans – believe so – positioned right in that same context as a kind of parallel.

And I think of that as – you know, one thought that occurred to me early on was, "Well, this is like – that the – these – the little people are sort of the conscience of our American landscape in that form, in that way." In other words, they put themselves in a position of being, in a certain way -- I didn't want to say a window or a signpost to a repeated history and of the loss of – you know, in a certain way, a loss – how do you want to say – the disconnection of a living environment from nature, in a way – because American Indians somehow symbolize to Americans something that's connected to nature and has a kind of politically – issue there. And – but somehow the Lower East Side at that time shows – it's the similar kind of carelessness, of not being in touch with nature in that way – I mean, if you think of the city at that moment as a form of nature.

So that certainly occurred to me. And I think – there was one other thought I wanted to try to talk about. It's gone; I'm sorry. As I was talking, I thought of something else.

MR. LYON: I don't know why– this just came as something I was listening to this week – this sense of time for the little people. Do you –

MR. SIMONDS: Yes. You know, that's actually what I was just about to try and explain.

MR. LYON: Okay, good.

MR. SIMONDS: Because that – the issue, actually – this is so clear to me, and it's – I think it – I think it answers your question. You know, the dwellings are ephemeral. I'm going to make them, and they're gone. Eventually they get destroyed and so – and so somebody walking along sees a little-people dwelling, and it's there, and then it's gone. Now, from the – it's a hard little reality twist here. It's like a little sci-fi thing.

But in a certain way – so the little people appear very incidental to us. Physically we walk in the street; they're there, and then they're – but if you let them really enter your consciousness, in fact we are the incidental moment to them, because in a certain way their time frame is eternal, metaphorically and in terms of imagination. They represent something that's in a very, very long time – not to say that they're always in the past – so that there's a tremendous stretch to their time. So if you were to think about it another way, if you really turn your mind on it, we are incidental to them. They represent a much longer and more permanent time, and we are the incident. They are looking at us at the incident of our lives. Do you follow me?

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: And I think in there is – it's issue of time, but it's also issue of – philosophically of a kind of tonic to our, you know – what do you want to call it – prideful thinking that today is so important. But in fact the time stretch – it's more of a philosophical issue or emotional issue. The time stretch of them, even as fragile and inadvertent and sort of incidental as they are, is a much more powerful time frame than ours, which is very incidental. It's really built on the day that we happen to see them. It's an incident for us.

MR. LYON: Do you think of their time as being one-directional or symmetrical?

MR. SIMONDS: Why do you say –

MR. LYON: Symmetrical meaning it can go in either –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, their world, in my mind, is – goes in many different directions. But I – it is – [laughs] – it is slowly – it's slightly moving forward, but it sort of leapfrogs around.

MR. LYON: It does, okay.

MR. SIMONDS: So each dwelling is not necessarily sequential to the one before it. Sometimes I discover something further back that I didn't remember until now. And then I'll make the dwelling that fulfills that moment in their story, even though they've moved all the way over here already, much further along. So there's very clearly, if you look at the images of the dwellings, a very clear evolution of how they've gone about building in their relation to the landscape and things like that.

MR. LYON: So would you, in theory, be able – if you had all of the dwellings you'd ever made –

MR. SIMONDS: I could tell you when –

MR. LYON: – you could tell them – you could line them up in the chronology appropriate to the little people?

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah – pretty much. I mean, there's some fine points. But yeah. Yeah.

MR. LYON: So –

MR. SIMONDS: No, I mean, they started with a – in a certain way, they landed– [inaudible] – in a way, with the landscape had a body kind of reference or form to it and a very sexualized piece of earth that they often sanctified and made into religious places. And then those forms – I mean, this is very broad strokes – I think those forms have become built forms. In other words, what were originally natural forms of the earth they've turned into built forms and constructed forms, made forms and conceptualized forms, so that they become more – how do you want to say – maybe emblematic or – but it was certainly more man- or little person-to-landscape interacting, as opposed to just finding something or responding to something.

MR. LYON: Is this in any sense similar to the adoption of natural forms in architecture – like, I'm thinking of columns –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, yeah. Yeah, we – it's a lot of stuff there that's influenced me or I've thought about. I mean, all of Rudolf Steiner things – there's a whole – I guess theosophist – but all these – actually there are books right there that we didn't cover that – sort of life of forms – you know, natural forms – this one is called, right, because I don't – just *Patterns in Nature*, Peter Stevens – all these are – and certainly source books – I'd say formal source books – let's put it that way – in other words, some issues of how things grow, the sequence of growth, and whether it's Fibonacci issues or whatever else. There's analysis in my mind of how things grow that is then somehow redacted or becomes reduced into kind of formal patterns.

So for instance, people ask me about formal issues. Some of those are very prevalent in my work, where I think about, you know, for instance, issues of spiral growth and stuff that are – that are in everywhere. And they certainly control some of the formal thinking. In other words, there – be – in order for the idea to be clear, it needs to follow some of the basic issues.

MR. LYON: So we're looking at Peter S. Stevens's *Patterns in Nature*.

MR. SIMONDS: But for – but all these – for instance, this – all – the Goetheanum and Rudolf Steiner and Gaudi and all these people who have a kind of organic sense of architecture have – I mean, I've brushed against them many times, certainly. I mean, I even did a little pilgrimage to the Goetheanum –

MR. LYON: This actually is funny, the way it evokes some of your landscapes, you know, with the wilted flower.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, it is. Yeah. It could just as well be me.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: It's better than – [inaudible]. It's better.

MR. LYON: I just happened to open to that page.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, that's pretty good.

This was given to me by a girl in London who said, "Charles, this is for you," and I think she was right.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: I mean, some of their theories – these different people's theories are a little too heavy-handed for me. But the images and the kind of sense of how things grow, as opposed to being conceptualized and built, is a big issue for me.

MR. LYON: Some thoughts here that I just want to see if you – if they resonate for you – the idea of personal identity versus, like, making cultural objects; that you think of yourself as more of a medium than an author –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, I'm incidental. I'm completely incidental to my work.

MR. LYON: So you're kind of following the little people rather than –

MR. SIMONDS: I mean, it's not even that. It's just – I think I'm a medium, at best, you know, and I'm not a very good one; I wish I could do a better job, sort of. I – for instance, I only – the only time I – the way I sign – I never sign anything with my name. The only time – I use my thumbprint, either in my blood or in clay, which is to say that it's my body that made it, if you will. But it could be any body. I pretty much feel that way. I mean, my

name – [makes dismissive noise] – doesn't count.

MR. LYON: Talking again about time – and I think you did talk about this before, how the little people represent for different audiences different pasts.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I think that's very clear to me.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: People throw it into their past, and it's usually a *tristesse*, a lost past – you know, a manqué – like, something that they've lost, that they – you know, not romanticize, but sort of idealize as something better than the present. I mean, I guess to that sense, it sounds sort of reactionary.

MR. LYON: This is kind of random; sorry. I'm struck by – and I think you've used this word a few times – thorniness.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, yeah.

MR. LYON: You used this term. I – the – you know, you had, in this particular quote where it was from – "The dwellings have a thorny center. They're consumed like a thistle flower. They stick in the throat."

MR. SIMONDS: Th – th – th.

MR. LYON: Look –

MR. SIMONDS: [Laughs.] Good point. I wish I could be a poet. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: Yeah –

MR. SIMONDS: Do you want me to try to explain that, or I think we've – may have covered that before – or not?

MR. LYON: Yeah, I think we have. You know, the way people would sort of try to protect it, but then it – yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. It's a mixed blessing.

MR. LYON: Oh, it's gone. Oh shit, how sad. Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. And it – I think also because it appears so innocent, you know, that it's a sucker punch in a way. People are drawn into it and become very intimate. And it brings up childhood things of play and care for – dollhouse, whatever. And then the thing starts to have a denouement that's very tough.

MR. LYON: So I'm struck that – and you had said this when we were first talking about doing this – that you have what I would regard as a pretty radical conception of what it means to be an artist. You said to me, I think that –

MR. SIMONDS: I think it's a reactionary concept.

MR. LYON: It's what?

MR. SIMONDS: I think it's a reactionary conception.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] A reactionary conception?

MR. SIMONDS: Well, I mean, to the extent I think I'm so much more rooted to what traditionally artists in other cultures may likely have been, I would imagine.

MR. LYON: Oh, that's interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: I think of our version – your – what you're asking – your version of art-making is an anomaly in a certain way, or a peculiarity of our culture at this moment, whether you want to trace it through modernism, with some hope for some utopian whatever. But it – you know, I think it's just one of many versions of what an artist might have or could do. And I think mine's probably more aligned – in track with many other cultures than ours.

MR. LYON: How would you describe that? Would you describe it functionally or –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, to the extent – whether you want to go through – functionally, yeah, in terms of if you think shamans, or if you think of people who somehow try to – or whether they try to or not, by whatever manner, they coalesce some of the belief structures that are endemic to where they are, and they somehow coalesce them and precipitate them out as gestures or objects or stories or whatever; and that somehow they, then, are a

referent to the culture at large. I mean, the difference – the problem you and I are having is that my version of the culture at large is much longer and bigger than your – when you say art, you're talking about now or in the next or last 50 years.

MR. LYON: Yes. Sure. Right.

MR. SIMONDS: And my time version is millennia, I guess. I mean, I'm very interested in, you know, very primitive forms of art – you know, first form-makings and things like that. So why did they make that? Or –

MR. LYON: Have you – have you visited, like, the caves at Chauvet and stuff like that?

MR. SIMONDS: No, I haven't been there, but I've always wanted to. But I – you know, I'm a tourist like everybody else, like, all around.

MR. LYON: Yeah. Just curious.

MR. SIMONDS: I'm not so much interested in ancient art as its ancientness as formal – the kind of forms. It comes from issues from my mother's way of looking at the world, of looking at forms and what the kind of – what they represent about people and what they felt, or what they were maybe unconscious of but that were what they were expressing. So it's less culture than it is maybe psychology for me. You understand what I'm saying? In other words, the imprint of historicizing some of this information is of less interest to me – and even in my own work – than the kind of generic issues of forms – you know, forms that are cross-cultural, for instance.

I mean, for instance, we wanted to talk about the Dumbarton show, where I, you know, somehow stumbled into all these pre-Columbian forms that were – who would have thought – I didn't know of them, but who would have thought? They're exactly, exactly the same – I would say exactly the same – as some forms that I came up with. So you know, that sort of confirms for me something that I am tapping into for myself that somebody else knew at some other time. And it's certainly not stuff that has to do with trying to figure out – which I think many artists are doing is sort of, "Well, what is the next thing in this art-historical dialectic" or whatever. I mean, it's just no consequence to me. Doesn't have any interests.

MR. LYON: So I mean –

MR. SIMONDS: I think we're very time- and culture-bound here, as it were.

MR. LYON: So this sounds kind of Jungian.

MR. SIMONDS: Well, people try to say that. I don't think I think that way, actually. People have often sort of proffered that towards me –

MR. LYON: Sort of archetypal – yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: – yeah, archetypal issues. I don't think I think that way. I think I just – because my doing this is from looking inside and trying to express things. So I mean, that's more a reflection from the outside when you say that. Or when I go and do the Dumbarton show, I find things that reflect back towards me. But I wouldn't – they don't – certainly aren't sourced from that. But they may be – maybe it's a fair analysis. Yeah.

MR. LYON: No, but the idea – the idea being that there's some kind of forms that we're all tapping into, you know, as some kind of archetypes.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I guess I would have to agree with that.

MR. LYON: You know, and – I don't know. This was a huge deal for artists in the '40s and '50s, you know.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, right, with – yeah, although their version of it – you see the same problem is, I think, of always translating it into art, like a Pollock painting with a – you know, or a Rothko or a whatever. There's this kind of imagery – it's like you're taking the image, but are you really got the soul of what you're talking about – because the format that you're dealing with is already so –

MR. LYON: Culturally – determined – yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: – culturally – that's what I'm driving at. You see what I'm saying?

MR. LYON: Yeah. No, that's true. I mean, it's like making it into a painting is –

MR. SIMONDS: Right. Like, who – so why are you doing that?

MR. LYON: Right. It's an illustration.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, somehow.

MR. LYON: Somehow.

MR. SIMONDS: Right.

MR. LYON: I mean, it could be a very sincere illustration. [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: No, no, but I mean, for instance, I would say that the drip paintings are more honest in that way as a – as form-making of that – tapping into that than somebody trying to – although Pollock's interesting, because the moment where he's still dripping and still – there's still some figuration – it's a very interesting moment for me to sort of try to understand, "Well, what was he thinking about?" You know, or "Was he sort of dragging one thing into another place?" Or you know, "Where was he?"

And I find it very fascinating that – just that moment where – and I've often – for instance, that happens with me every day – all these smears and everything, where I then find the imagery in the smear – sto that the gesture is an uncontrolled gesture that will create an arena or a – you know, a place in which I can find imagery. And the imagery is then, quote, theoretically unconscious to some degree because it's just coming out of the – whatever – like a, you know, Leonardo crack in a wall. But you at least are freed from the preconception of making, of – what did you say – illustrating.

MR. LYON: Illustrating.

MR. SIMONDS: Illustrating. You're not –

MR. LYON: Right. You're more finding it than dreaming it up.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. Right. Right.

MR. LYON: Right. Right.

MR. SIMONDS: And I think Pollock's – these drips where there's still a figuration is a very fascinating – one of the few things in art that I really think I've really interested in.

MR. LYON: In a way that's a challenge for a lot of modern art, to sort of find a way around the – you know, the preconceptions, the skill, the – you know, the –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, I hadn't thought about that. You think that's what people do?

MR. LYON: I think so, yeah. You know, there's a – there's a lot of – I mean – I mean, a lot of silly things. But you know, you think of, like, Max Ernst with his, you know –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, frottage and – yeah.

MR. LYON: – frottage and all that good stuff.

MR. SIMONDS: No – oh, I see what you're saying – gambits that do that. Sure, sure. Right, exquisite corpse or – yeah, yeah, to frustrate your expectations.

MR. LYON: Gambits that frustrate – are meant to leave you – [inaudible] – yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. Yeah – or your desires, in a way. Yeah, I think people have tried to find many gambits for that. I would – but if I think of contemporary art, that doesn't sound like they're doing that too much. No, no.

MR. LYON: Right. No, I know.

MR. SIMONDS: They're making productions of some sort.

MR. LYON: Seems that way, doesn't it? Yeah.

But – so you're reaching outside the concerns of the – what we conventionally think of the concerns of the art world. I mean, in a way there's like a Gaugin aspect to this – you know, like, "Where are – where – you know, where do we come from? Where are we going?" – you know, that wonderful painting in Boston.

MR. SIMONDS: Well, you know, Daniel Abadie – you hit the right – but did you know that was the headline for the article Daniel Abedie wrote for the – my Jeu de Paume catalog?

MR. LYON: Oh.

MR. SIMONDS: His – one of the first thing he quotes is: "Charles still explores the issues that Gaugin had the courage to write at the bottom of his painting" – [makes inarticulate noises] – which, I mean, I share that kind of sentimentality, I think, of thinking big – [laughs] – if you will, and sort of thinking you got to try to deal with it all – like, where are we, where do we come from and where are we going? Yeah. That's – I think that's pretty much what I think about.

MR. LYON: In a way, that's the question that the little people pose.

MR. SIMONDS: Yes, exactly. It's the question I'm asking of myself. I mean, somehow. Not maybe as well as I might be able to, but I still have hope. You know, hope springs eternal in my world. [They laugh.]

MR. LYON: And if you don't like this world, you can make another one. [They laugh.]

MR. SIMONDS: Well, it does. I mean, it's an open-ended world – it's never –

MR. LYON: In a way – I mean – you know, it's just one of the – crack cut open in a wall and –

MR. SIMONDS: It could go –

MR. LYON: Like, by golly, there's another glimpse of –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, they come every day I might tell you – I've discarded many. Not to mention all the animals I might have invented.

MR. LYON: I was going to – talking about that whole issue of permission and, you know, not being categorized. There was a quote – 1976 quote; "I've always thought my work as," –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, that's a good one.

MR. LYON: "Transsocial, transpolitical, transsexual, and transparental," –

MR. SIMONDS: Yes –

MR. LYON: Which – I particularly like the last one, "transparental."

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, transparent, which is –

MR. LYON: Transparent and transparental.

MR. SIMONDS: – a sort of screw you to all those people who think that if things have to be so complicated – I think my work's right – you want some more? Or you want some wine?

MR. LYON: Sure. Oh, wine sounds good. Just throw it in there.

MR. SIMONDS: You know, the – you don't need a college education; it should be intelligible to begin with. So transparent – I think my work is pretty transparent, actually – and there's very complex underneath, but it's right there. So you don't have to – what are you looking at? You don't have to think about it.

MR. LYON: You don't need –

MR. SIMONDS: That kids are my best audience because they don't have to think twice about what it is.

MR. LYON: Right, right.

MR. SIMONDS: But there's that, and then transparental because – I think we discussed – I really think I'm the product of my two parents and since they were shrinks, it's certainly played a big role in how I think. I mean, I can identify so many little threads of that, whether it's moralistic issues or psychological issues – we talked about shrink issues of – the mind's like a little couch for passers-by.

MR. LYON: Yeah. So when – but I like that when they're –

MR. SIMONDS: Transsocial because it traffics between everybody and then, for whatever reason, the art people have found some interest, which – I think of the art people as a social class, actually, to that extent. And so I say "transsocial." I mean, I think of them as a little social class in that way, and certainly the time that I started working with dwellings, it was so evident to me that there were these wine-drinking connoisseurs on the one end, and there are people who are OD'ing in the street on the other end. So hard to find one – I was trafficking

between the two in a certain way, psychologically. It's very difficult.

MR. LYON: It's funny because the art community, in a certain sense, were interlopers, colonizers in the world of SoHo and eventually the Lower East Side.

MR. SIMONDS: Well, yeah, that's a good question. I mean –

MR. LYON: I'm just commenting.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I don't know –

MR. LYON: Not that that ever necessarily would have occurred to you, but –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I don't think I've thought of – I mean –

MR. LYON: You would have had to have been able to predict the future, be able to understand the –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, well that, but also I thought – you know, if you really look at – honestly take a hard look at the art community at that time and the people who were buying SoHo lofts were pioneers, and so they weren't poor people, you know.

MR. LYON: No.

MR. SIMONDS: They were – they somehow had the privilege to do that –

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] And money.

MR. SIMONDS: And that's kind of a stretch from the Lower East Side at that time, where there were a lot of squatters, people were tapping into lampposts to have electricity and whatever else.

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: So, you know – although, I have to say – I think we've talked about this – the sense of community and helpfulness towards each other in the Lower East Side was so much more real than the, kind of – you know, I think I've described this – you go from a place where everybody was running to get the hammer to try to help build the play lot to a dinner party where, mostly, you heard about people kind of, you know – I don't want to say dissing each other about this artwork wasn't as good as – then, why would they do – you know, the sort of social gossip about nonsense, I've got to tell you. Kind of weird. Not a time I like to remember, actually.

MR. LYON: I'm struck by the – you know, when you put people on your couch, as it were, of the – you know, the artwork, the experience – that it's not their feelings or emotions that you're really after, it's their beliefs.

MR. SIMONDS: Why do you say that?

MR. LYON: You talked several times about – that structures model beliefs, that there's something – how people live in time and space is reflected in architecture – that they're – that somehow –

MR. SIMONDS: That's my image of it.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: But I think the way people respond reflects that, certainly. It's recorded endlessly in films and stuff, people saying, well, we should fix up this lot or whatever. They certainly have that reaction to it. But also there's so much that comes out from people in the street that's very, very personal. I mean, I'm thinking particularly about Josefa, for instance, which is, you know – I know –

MR. LYON: Yeah, but that's –

MR. SIMONDS: a – because I know all about little people, my world of little people, if you – if you eat something and don't share it, it turns to poison in your mouth. Now that says something about a very particular person at a very particular moment in their life, in a very personal way, I think. You know – and then, she can describe her family and her aunt and everybody else and so I'm hearing all of – I often hear very candid things.

MR. LYON: That's not a – that's – but that's not an emotion, that's a conviction of some sort. That's like at that moment.

MR. SIMONDS: At the moment, yeah.

MR. LYON: I'm not saying that – I'm not saying that that's permanent part of –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, but you know, hanging out on the street, some parts of the day are like that – dramatic like that, and some parts are very casual and kind of intermittent and sort of – you know, sort of, yeah, the other day, you know, I was over there and blah blah blah. And you get a smell of what, you know, people are feeling – I think it's as much feeling as – you know, I think the dwellings are a lever, and they do conceptualize things for people at certain moments, and they say yeah, this is – this is – this is shit, you know. We got to do something. But it's not always that way. That's sort of a way of analyzing it, I think, that I've chosen to try to conceptualize, because I try to think about, well, what's – what did I do?

MR. LYON: Sort of gnawing at this –

MR. SIMONDS: Go ahead.

MR. LYON: You know, pardon me –

MR. SIMONDS: No, no, no. We're doing good, aren't we? We're doing fine.

MR. LYON: But – hmm? Yeah, yeah. You said somewhere, if you identify yourself or society views you as an artist, you make things. Objects, things. But if you see yourself – but you see yourself as acting on your beliefs –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, I see what you're driving it.

MR. LYON: That's what I'm driving at.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, okay. Well, that's true. I actually believe that. I mean, the thingness of what I make is sort of an encumbrance in my life. Okay? In so many ways, and likewise in, kind of, now that I have to take responsibility for some of the things that I've made. The thingness is really, very – I mean – it's hard to say this, because it's so extreme, the way I go about making things. In other words, the thingness I'm making is so – real careful, and sort of like the tumbleweeds and the porcelain – you know, they're so extremus of thingness, which is interesting – I don't know where that's about, but it's – it has to do with trying to make it exactly how you want it to be, and why I envision it to be so complicated, I don't know, but certainly, there is a sort of issue of the material and stretching the behavior of the material, what's possible and so – and we should add – make a little note – make an anecdote about how come I started working with porcelain, because it'll give this in spades. But the – yes, the thingness – the thingness of the thing – it, once it's done, is of no interest to me. That's, I think, part of what you're driving at.

In other words, once it's done, it's not about having it or whatever. It's that I did it, so it's done. So what? Okay, now it's time to do something else, or the next thing, and so I don't think the thingness has – doesn't carry much currency for me. I mean, the adventure for me is the making, and the thing becoming, and whatever I discover by that process. It's certainly not about having anything or leaving anything or whatever you want to say. I mean, I spend almost as much to store the few things that I'm somehow obliged to keep, mind you, in a warehouse as I pay rent, and it makes me angry every day, you know, that I'm somehow responsible for this part of me – it's gone, you know, it's of no – it's just like, baggage that I have somehow – you know, I remember once, my friend Daniel Abadie said – you know, I did this thing at the Modern, *Picaresque Landscape*, and built it in a basement with cat piss all over it, and I'm allergic to cats. And, you know, the thing was wreck, and – but he said, "You know, Charles" – I said, you know – because it was in the Modern projects show – great, it was a big hit and went to the library on the Lower East Side, it was a big hit.

And then I had to do something with it, and I said, what do I do now? I can't afford to keep this thing. You know, it's like 16 by 18 feet of skids and stuff, and I kept on renting this stupid basement on Worcester Street, $45 a month to keep this thing because Daniel said, "Charles, whatever you do, don't destroy it, because eventually somebody's going to buy it." So yes, five years later or four years later, some guy – Cordier– bought it for the Pompidou for his collection, gave the collection to the Pompidou. So yeah, okay – and actually, in the long and the short of it, I made some money on the thing. You know, it wasn't like I – you know, but it was – I was so angry.

MR. LYON: So you're making an investment. [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: Well, I – no, I just felt so angry to have to, you know, feel responsible for this thing. That's what I'm driving at; it's the feeling of responsibility.

MR. LYON: Well, that's interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: Because the interest, for me, is in the making of it, and the doing and the moment of the

making. It's really about a moment, of the actual moment-to-moment making is very exciting for me, and can be very fantastic, and it's very wonderful. You know, it's like, something wasn't, and it is, it becomes. So, you know, try and imagine – that's kind of cool, if you can actually make something. It's kind of – it's hard to explain, but if you really –

MR. LYON: Yeah, no, that's –

MR. SIMONDS: – if it's something that means something, and you're making it –

MR. LYON: In a way, that's almost the core of being an artist, isn't it?

MR. SIMONDS: Well, or it's pretty exciting to be able to make something that says what you want to say, and the – you know, the moments are better or worse, but some of them are good, and so I find that the interest of my life; it's not – and some of the things I discover about materials and how they can do what I want to do. So it's certainly not about the thingness, objectness, which is what your original question –

MR. LYON: That was what I was driving at.

MR. SIMONDS: Now, I'm going to drive backwards, because we have enough time for this – I got to explain why I went to work at Sèvres, because it's apropos exactly what you're talking about.

MR. LYON: Oh, okay.

MR. SIMONDS: And it'll segue into the issue of the materials and the techniques and stuff, because in the beginning I – I just wanted to find – I didn't have any money – clay, so I found – I was teaching in a Newark State College – where do you get clay? Well, there's a clay pit in Sayreville, New Jersey; you can do dig as much clay as you want. So I went there and I found a guy who would take his front loader and load up my – Gordon's modest pickup truck, and I dumped, you know, a pickup truck of clay and put it into the basement, and I had clay for a year, and I would dig these clays and – that was the red clay and grey clay; I could dig by hand.

Had as much clay as I want for free, and clay is – we should take a little side trip here. Those two clays particularly are very, very – they're my – what do you want to say? My wives, okay? And there was – each one goes from wet to dry in its own very, very particular way, its own song of going – how it behaves, how it handles from wet to dry, so even – different versions of slippery to different versions of malleable, of soft and form making, and different versions of where you can cut it and let it fracture. Each one became very, very specifically, and my whole life, actually, is built on – mostly on those two clays and their behavior. How – for instance, I can make certain kinds of rocks at a certain moment of dryness of my gray clay that, if I were to try to do at another moment, it would take me years never to get there, but at that moment, I can do it as if I'm in a dream and it's sleeping and it goes so fast.

People have watched it. They say that can't believe it; it's like the whole thing just – [whooshing] – like that, and I can make rocks, right? And these clays have that quality for me. They are very particular, not to mention some elusive qualities of body and – built in this stone. One's gray and one's pink, so – but – and I don't have to convert them in terms of the forms, and so – but no matter, those are my marriage, as it were. And I collect other clays and sands and so forth that I use also. But – [laughs] – what I'm driving towards is that somewhere along the way – actually, with that *Picaresque Landscape* that I had to save and got bought, which then was delivered to Sèvres to be repaired – I think I told the story of the guy who came along – did we tell the – did we talk about Touzenis? The guy with this silver cane?

MR. LYON: No.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, dear. Do we have enough room on the tape? We'll find out. Okay, so my *Picaresque Landscape* was to be in the show in the –

MR. LYON: Oh, yeah, yeah, okay.

MR. SIMONDS: Did I tell –

MR. LYON: Yeah, you did – you did – you did.

MR. SIMONDS: Okay, then we won't go over it.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: We'll leave it. But no matter – while I was there – maybe we've already covered this – the guy said, well why don't you try working with some porcelain? So I went into one of the ateliers – they gave me some woman who was going to help me see what porcelain is about, and, you know, I said, okay, give me these

little – did I talk about this? These little pubescent – give me some of these running thighs of these little nymphs. They have all these molds from 1740s to whenever of these figurines that they were very famous for and they have all the molds and so you can take kind of part of the mold and use whatever you want. And so I said okay, I want a lot of running thighs, pubescent thighs, you know, legs, you know, running legs, because, what I want to do—it's sort of a little weird for our tape, but it's true, so we can take it out if we don't want [it]. I said, "I want all these thighs, you bring me all these cast thighs, wet—"

MR. LYON: How large are they?

MR. SIMONDS: [makes a noise indicating size] and I'm going to make—try to imagine this—I'm going to make chickenpox pustules that are drying and encrusted on these legs that are covered with drying wet silk. Do you follow me?

MR. LYON: Yes.

MR. SIMONDS: In other words, because porcelain, you can for instance, you can blow on it and leave an impression. You can paint it with a fine brush as if it were a piece of silk. You know, you can just make a little wave of porcelain and it looks like a flowing piece of fabric. You can make it look wet or you can make it look like it was wet and it's getting dryer.

Now this is a tremendous seduction for me because I always see in my mind's eye things much, much, much, much clearer than I ever can make. Sometimes I'm surprised that something works out nicely and it's okay but mostly it's a tremendous disappointment, the physical reality of the thing. It's like stumbling in the dark, near to where you were hoping to go. Okay, that's why I like the tumbleweeds, they are very close to what I actually envisioned,

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: --but mostly what I make is nearby, okay, and some of them are nice and I just accept that they're okay, that's the way it was, but in any case they are filled with regrets, I think I've spoken to this, mostly people don't see what's not there is my version, but I do. So all the things that didn't happen are very evident to me. But porcelain seemed to promise a level of specificity that could actually maybe tell people what actually I see, which would be great! Because I think I see a lot more than I can say. I'm sure. I know that for instance.

So I start to make these things. Now some of them worked out so-so, but very quickly I realized that this promise was like a—I don't now how to explain it—like a bad mistress, or something. You know, you get seduced into something and then it just wasn't the way you thought it might turn out. In fact there is a saying in Sèvres which translates, "Porcelain is like a former lover who will remind you," this is in French, I'm not sure how —"it will remind you in the firing of all those things that you said to her, even those things that you didn't even notice that you said and weren't acknowledged at the time that you said them, that just went by, but that offended her and they will return to you as fissures in the porcelain and the thing will break, when it's fired." And Sèvres is proud to announce that they are able to take 30 percent of the things that they put into the kiln out of the kiln intact. In other words, that's considered good, better than 20 percent at Limoges, or whatever else, that they're somehow pretty good at getting away with 30 percent.

For instance, then they commission me to do a service of plates and I stated making these plates and 30 percent of them—I'd spend a week on a plate and every third one came out of the oven and the other two were just gone, you know. It was a very bad, how do you want to say, relationship. [Beeping sound] Now what is that? My whole Internet fell down today. Is it you or me?

MR. LYON: I don't think it's me.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, God is it my Internet again. Maybe it's the tape that went off?

[Talks about the tape at the end]

[End of Disc, beginning of 5 of 5, track 2]

MR. LYON: Okay. Right, now, we did that. Okay. So do the different – your wives, your clay, do they signify different things like organic, inorganic?

MR. SIMONDS: Everything. Everything. Everything. They contain everything you would want, in a certain way. In other words, because they – one is flesh, on its surface, so to speak -- by its smell, by its tenderness, by its stickiness, by its softness – is flesh, metaphorically and kind of kinky – in all sorts of realms, it's like a metaphor for body.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: And the other is a metaphor for stone – and it fractures in a certain way, and it's most often my bricks, and so – it – you know, for instance, doing aged bricks, I rubbed them around in a bag, and it ages in this particular way that the other doesn't and so and so.

One of them is – it's hard – it's not softer and harder, but – because at different moments they are inversed. But no matter, they are very clear in the way they are. And because I've worked with them so, so long – I mean, forty years now – but even early on, if you're very attentive to them you see how many different things they can do. It's really quite remarkable, actually. And because of that, once you know them – this is hard to explain, but it's very clear to me – I can for instance invert their meanings so that – I'll try to give you an example.

For instance, early on there were many objects – works – I call them object works; pedestal sculptures – where there was a ritual place. And more often than not, the ritual place is in the early parts of the little peoples' world were, like, body forms. So you might see something that looked like lips or a vulva or whatever else, and you'd sort of see these forms. And usually, those forms were pink – were the pink clay, because they were flesh – it was obvious they were body forms.

Somewhere along the way, I all of a sudden inverted that and made the surround pink and the forms gray – which meant them to be stone, in a certain way. And so all these little, kind of, metaphoric kind of wrinkles, if you will, become very easy to – so they're very easy to manipulate and project into. So you can sort of invert – I mean, it's the same way that – for instance, I've often – this big shift sometime along in my work – you know, since this is all about in a certain way land and body, if you will, then there are moment where I – where, really, the land was always the text and the body was sort of infusing the land or giving form to the land, but it was still a landscape. There was a moment where I just flipped it around and I turned everything into body – visage, in a way – or body, sculptured body forms that had a land aspect to them.

In other words, the two clays allow – sort of provoke that kind of inversions, is the best way I can describe it – or, you know, text – subtext versus text, where you can take the subtext, turn it into the text, and take the text, turn it into subtext. And since they're all entangled and finally one thing, in a way, then you can sort of tease them in different direction – do you follow? It's a little esoteric, but –

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yeah, yeah – no, no.

MR. SIMONDS: I mean, I do that. For instance, if you wanted to think, "How – what do I think?" I'm often playing with that; we're all – I'll have an image in my mind's eye and I will – I will invert it. I will say, well, "What if I inverted that?" – put the emphasis in a certain way, if you will – maybe not the right way to put it, but put – the subject matter became one as opposed to the other.

MR. LYON: So – yeah. Well, you know, it's kind of an ancient thing with – you know, you think of Greek figures being black figure and red figure, and how they – how they – one's reversed out of the ground and one's sitting on top of the ground. And it's –

MR. SIMONDS: Huh. Yeah.

MR. LYON: – you know, this really limited palette, but you can do –

MR. SIMONDS: You can do something.

MR. LYON: You can do something with it, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, yeah. I think I think that way.

I think it's a way – part of it's a way of provoking oneself. In other words – the same with what we were talking about of smears and allowing something to come to be – it's a way of sort of frustrating your expectation or your knowledge as – that you – your de rigueur way of doing something so that you have to really look at it anew, you know?

MR. LYON: How did you arrive at the sort of size of the tabletop pieces that are the –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, in the beginning they were just the size of whatever I'd handled –

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: So some of them were very small, but they sat on a board. But I've made –

MR. LYON: You mean, they –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, there were two sizes that finally meant something to me.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: One of them had more to do with a landscape that was – implied that it went on forever, and that – mostly for – I think those are mostly 36-by-36 or 30 – a little more than 30-by-30 sometimes. Thirty-by-thirty, I think, is most of those. And they sort of allowed enough space that you could imagine it going on forever. So it was in a space rather than a thing.

And the other ones, which were smaller, are more things. There's a thingness to them that's different. One's a more landscape and one's more object, I'd say.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: Even though I think of them both as objects, actually.

MR. LYON: That makes sense.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: It's a narrower category but, I mean, it's a not a very – you know, for instance, I'm more interested in the objects that are gestural – and which I also call objects that are gestural to a particular space or place or elevation, things like that – you know, things that are on the wall.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] You did that print – a drawing, and also a print of the growth –

MR. SIMONDS: I made the print because the drawing was too precious. And I couldn't show it, so – Daniel figured out how to make a print.

MR. LYON: Is that the only kind of –

MR. SIMONDS: It's the only drawing that I ever made; I made sketches now and then. Few. Very few.

MR. LYON: Why just that one?

MR. SIMONDS: I can't draw.

MR. LYON: Oh. [Laughs.] Well, that one works pretty well.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, it's a – more than a month to make it –

MR. LYON: Wow, really?

MR. SIMONDS: – so I could have made four sculptures in the same time. So it was – the problem was, it was something that I had imagined that I couldn't make, back when I wasn't so sure I could make it. But I wanted the idea to be extant –

MR. LYON: Oh – I see.

MR. SIMONDS: – so I spent all this time to make this, oh, whatever, drawing. And it was – took ages. And people say, "oh, you can – such a great drawing; you should draw more." I can't draw at all, truthfully. I can't. No way. And you know, it was very painful actually. If you ask Lucy, she said she had to suffer through me in the back there, making this drawing a little bit each night. Horrible.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: The emblem – the image and the emblem and the idea is one of the most important ideas in all of my work, there's no question about that. *Growth House*. I mean, it coalesces a lot of my thinking all in one thing, so it's – this is important as can be. I refuse to sell it to the Modern, or – oh, I'm – one of the few things I've chosen to keep.

MR. LYON: How many – what was the edition, do you remember, of the –

MR. SIMONDS: Then we made a print of it – 75.

MR. LYON: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: [Name inaudible] – or something like that. It was basically a photographic print; it was like a –

MR. LYON: Nice.

MR. SIMONDS: The print looks great.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: They did a good job. But the drawing is – it's worse than the *Tumbleweed*, for me.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: It is. It's on par with that, in terms of extremis.

MR. LYON: Okay, so then we did –

MR. SIMONDS: We covered that –

MR. LYON: When did – when did you – I mean, the –

MR. SIMONDS: Rudy Burckhardt actually told me –

MR. LYON: Hmm?

MR. SIMONDS: We should talk about Rudy.

MR. LYON: Rudy Burckhardt?

MR. SIMONDS: We might as well, because he was so helpful to me.

MR. LYON: Sure, okay.

MR. SIMONDS: But – go ahead; we'll get back to the – when did the –

MR. LYON: Oh, so in the show at Knoedler, there, and – and then, you know, and they said "illustrated in your more recent catalogues" – some of the work appears to be more, kind of, kind of gestural, more – not expressionistic, but – you know, well maybe, you know?

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. LYON: But to – certainly more gestural and –

MR. SIMONDS: I think so. No, no, I think expressionistic – but more so, the term.

MR. LYON: Yeah?

MR. SIMONDS: Because actually, in the methodology of those works is an issue of allowing forms to become that are very intentionally loosed from narrative. And so expressionistic is like a – I don't know how to explain that, but as if – a little more surreal in the sense of allowing forms to be that don't fit into the narrative in it's – in a literal sense.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: But – go ahead, absolutely.

MR. LYON: And what was – what was the impulse behind this, do you think?

MR. SIMONDS: There was a moment where I – I think – I think that it's a mixture of a certain kind of confidence in having told a lot of a story that I know I know, and then knowing that there are parts of the story that are – like we were saying, subtexts that are information that's in the story, but that I would like to make more, kind of, in your face or in my face, moreover. It's more me than you.

But that – there were parts of it that should be more – that would allow a lot more information to get carried if it were loosed from any kind of didactic narrative.

MR. LYON: Okay.

MR. SIMONDS: And I very consciously remember that. It's came from these smears where I could allow things to happen.

And then I thought, well, why do I have to be – try to make things in the smear? Why can't I just let these things

become as – in a very organic way, I'd say is the best way to describe it.

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: And they looked to be of their own energy, in a certain way – and allow the forms to be very – they're very free, these forms. If you look closely at those sculptures – there are many now; they're very out there. And in terms of allow – what it – what they allow as forms, I'll put it that way. That could never be twisted or put into a narrative. They just go out off the side of the track; off – you know, if you have a narrative and it – they're just going out there until I feel they have nothing to do with anything that's in the narrative.

And so I think that that interests me a lot. And I think more – I think that's where I am right now because I don't feel – I don't feel any obligation to be coherent in the sense that I have been. The coherence is finally, right now, more of a constraint.

And I'm speaking more in terms of narrative. For instance, I'm telling a story. And the story doesn't have to be linear, it doesn't have to be sequential, it doesn't have to be – [laughs] – how do you want to say – visually descriptive.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: So it's actually a very wonderful moment for me, how I feel it, as a very open-ended – and they do capture some of the issues of gesture, which I've been exploring for so long now, into an arena where I can really be gestural – for instance, in free space as opposed to on a wall where it still has an issue of time and place.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: Or – time and place.

You know, if you're addressing a certain place or a certain wall or a certain texture or whatever, these things are freed from all of those kind of – what do you want to call it – needs.

MR. LYON: The way there were – the way *Mental Earth* was installed at Knoedler it seemed to have certain aspects that were more – that were not – that were thought about that – it kind of popped alive from certain points of view. I ended up thinking that most – they really came alive from the corners of the room.

MR. SIMONDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. LYON: I've – but I don't know, I was wondering – but that could have been totally subjective, whatever – but I was wondering how conscious you were of the point of view?

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, very. And I can see – the key to that work, for me, was it had an underside. In other words, it had a – let's call it a bucolic aspect, that kind of – the la-de-da story – and then underneath was a sort of roiling – kind of – whatever, as it were.

And so the two were very consciously played off against each other, where things would just sort of – oops, underneath is this terrible face that's screaming or whatever, whereas on top –

MR. LYON: Well, there did seem to be a head under –

MR. SIMONDS: Many heads.

MR. LYON: Yeah, there were –

MR. SIMONDS: Hundreds, actually.

MR. LYON: Yeah, okay.

MR. SIMONDS: Sometime you should take me through it.

MR. LYON: So that wasn't – that wasn't me reading into it.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh no, there's –

MR. LYON: They're there.

MR. SIMONDS: I – sometime I'll take you through that piece; there are horrific things in there. Some of them are – oh, it's terrible. Bloody tongues, and – you don't want to know. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: There seemed to be a head and a tail to it. Was that – [inaudible]?

MR. SIMONDS: Well, no. I actually got – it's interesting, I actually somewhere along the way said – when it was being – I was making it – it started to take a form; it wasn't by any preconceived – so it was like overgrowing organically. But then I – the image I found in my mind's eye as the kind of correlative was this *Victory of Samothrace* –

MR. LYON: Oh, interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: That was the image for me, you see. Somehow, a body with wings. And somewhere in there, in the structure of it, is that thought, but I don't think it has anything to do with what it is.

You know, Arthur Danto saw it as some other – I can't remember – some other very famous medieval sculpture of some sort; I can't remember which one.

MR. LYON: Yeah – well, I mean –

MR. SIMONDS: Some German something – [inaudible] – sculpture.

MR. LYON: Oh, like a –

MR. SIMONDS: I wonder if we can find; if we –

MR. LYON: The lime wood thing we sent them?

MR. SIMONDS: Go ahead. While you're talking, I'll look for this.

MR. LYON: Yeah – no. I mean, I also got the feel of a kind of roiling – [inaudible] – you know – [they laugh] –

MR. SIMONDS: That's pretty much what was going on. I think you got that. [They laugh.] [Pause.] He read it as an Annunciation.

MR. LYON: Who? That's interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: I wouldn't have picked up on that.

MR. SIMONDS: Tilman Riemenschneider.

MR. LYON: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, one of the – one of the modern sculptors.

MR. SIMONDS: I don't know – yeah, I don't know those images.

MR. LYON: I think?

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: But he did catch this one thing that's, I think, the truth of that work, is that – and feel energized from within. I think the issue with that thing is, it's energy from within, that kind of –

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. That makes sense.

MR. SIMONDS: – dynamic quality, which – for instance, that's an issue that's easy to make sort of this division between landscapes that are – in a certain way, the dwellings here are very passive, very laying down and these that are more body-related and gestural. Those are issues for me, actually, because what is the nature of the thing that you're making, how it reflects your physical being as a – yeah, I mean – I mean, that's part of what they allude to, I think. For me. But you know, in my own work, trying to figure out what I'm doing, it's a way of still having your body in the thing.

MR. LYON: Right.

MR. SIMONDS: You know, not just as a gesture by hand but – kind of sense of the energy of your body in it.

Did we cover everything?

MR. LYON: I'm just –

MR. SIMONDS: The only other thing we definitely should – how I make my bricks, which I cut like cookies – like laying clay out flat, like –

MR. LYON: Yeah, you want to talk about that a little bit?

MR. SIMONDS: Well, there's not much to say. I roll out the clay and then cut it with a single-edge razor blade, and it thickens so that the slab is the thickness of the brick. And I do pay particular attention of – I'm making bricks in advance of what I know is the time and place of the dwelling I'm going to build – so over the image of the dwelling.

MR. LYON: So you don't have a vast stack of many of your bricks out here?

MR. SIMONDS: No – well, I do have lots of bricks that I'm sort of –

MR. LYON: [Laughs.]

MR. SIMONDS: – my bank is my bricks. But it's more a question of, really, making the specific brick that fits to the time and place of the fantasy that I'm going to go and have it, so that some of them are – and likewise, then they get aged by being rubbed around, which also tells you whether they're a long time ago or more recent bricks. So there are a lot of little specificities of the actual making of the bricks – whether they're very thin, slate-type bricks or very thick, stone-like blocks, and so – that I control by the thickness of the slab and the dimension of the brick. But they're basically all made by rolling out a slab of clay and cutting it.

MR. LYON: And are the – are the wall pieces in something like – [inaudible] – so are they built on armatures, or –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah – *Mental Earth*. But many of the works now have – that – some extend quite a ways in space – have rebar – you know, I weld up a rebar armature –

MR. LYON: Yeah.

MR. SIMONDS: – with a kind of pretty good idea of – I mean, I see the thing, large parts of it, before I make it, so I can somehow – I mean, it's always a little encumbrance to weld something in a certain way, and then you get stuck with that unless you want to cut it off. So there are some issues with that, but –

MR. LYON: Right, right.

MR. SIMONDS: But usually I get a pretty good idea of what I want. I collect sands from all over the world.

MR. LYON: When was the – when was the last time you made a piece in the street?

MR. SIMONDS: I guess in Valencia, in 2003 or '4.

MR. LYON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SIMONDS: In a little neighborhood in Valencia. Yeah, I guess that's the last time.

MR. LYON: You've felt the urge recently?

MR. SIMONDS: No – usually, if I go and do an exhibition in a new city; I have no urge to do one on the Lower East Side here now – [laughs] – as you can imagine. And I don't – I feel like I've learned a lot from doing that. And really, the only interest now is of a new situation that will give me another group of responses, different kinds of responses.

So, I mean, I haven't been traveling a lot lately – because of my dog, mostly – but now, actually, I may very well start to. But it's more a question of finding a situation that was in conjunction with the exhibition. So for – often, if I do an exhibition in a new city then I'll go out – this is normally what I've been doing – go out on the street and make dwellings. So I guess before that was Toulouse, which was really fun. Each time, a different city.

MR. LYON: Yeah – [laughs] – good. And I have made notes about the responses to the work, which you've talked about – [inaudible] – and the old lady in the Shanghai – I'm sorry, China – oh, this was interesting: David Anfam. Odd quote: he was contrasting Mies's Seagram Building with your dwellings. [Laughs.] What an odd thing to do, seems so gratuitous.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. But I think I – [inaudible].

MR. LYON: I like the quote, though. "Simonds's faces are orientated along existential axes that link the human

presence on Earth to the cycles of nature, growth and transience." I thought that was interesting.

MR. SIMONDS: That's pretty good. That's pretty fair. Yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah, that's a nice quote.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. I mean, you know, I guess – the Bauhaus that originally [ph] teaches the Bauhaus kind of version of a modernist version as a contrast. But you know, the origins of the balance and all this had a very spiritual – lot of spiritual issues about land. And so it's funny how, you know, I mean, it's not – became this, you know –

MR. LYON: You know, mechanistic kind of, you know – yeah, yeah, true.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I think it lost its soul, if you will. Yeah, it seems to be problematic there. I mean, you saw how the – the utopianism of it became a kind of economic utopianism more than a spiritual utopianism.

MR. LYON: No, there was a whole aspect of the Bauhaus that was very much like 1960s hippiedom in a way.

MR. SIMONDS: Yes, it's making the world better, and everybody can then see it. And then, and I mean, that part of it, I share, you see, in a certain way.

MR. LYON: I was – I was in Chicago this weekend too, working on this Henry Darger project, and talking to the widow of Nathan Lerner, who was the guy who found Darger's work and saved it and all that stuff. But Nathan – I knew him pretty well – I mean, early '80s, he died about 15 years ago. He was – he was very close to Moholy, and he was, like, one of the first students at the New Bauhaus.

MR. SIMONDS: Oh, because they had a big thing going on out there. Yeah, I met one of the guys out there when I went to Chicago, yeah.

MR. LYON: Yeah. And he used to talk – he used to like to tell stories about Moholy, one of which was, Moholy was a fanatic on brown bread. You were going to die if you ate white bread. You could only eat brown bread. [They laugh.] You know?

MR. SIMONDS: Mr. Whole Foods.

MR. LYON: Yeah, Whole Foods, right. [Inaudible.]

MR. SIMONDS: A *Whole Earth Catalog* guy.

MR. LYON: Yeah, you know. But all this kind of stuff – I mean, you think of Kandinsky, you know – you're digging back in the garden there, with – yeah. You know, I think these guys were, you know, very soulful in many ways –

MR. SIMONDS: And connected to the Earth as well. Yeah.

MR. LYON: – you know, connected to spiritual things.

MR. SIMONDS: Did you see the Bauhaus show here which was spectacular? At the MoMA?

MR. LYON: Yes, yes.

MR. SIMONDS: I thought it was one of the best shows –

MR. LYON: There's so many people, it was so hard to get into. I hated that.

MR. SIMONDS: I saw it a few times. So I saw it once when there was not very many people there. And it was – actually, I thought it was spectacular.

MR. LYON: Oh, this was where I had the whole thing about the clay. I knew it was in here someplace. Okay, so we discussed – were there foreign sources for the clay as well?

MR. SIMONDS: Yes, well, wherever I go, I collect clay, and people give me clay and send me clay, and also, particularly, more particularly, sands, because sands are – I sprinkle on the top of them, when it's finished. And I collect sands from everywhere. I mean, I collect bags and bags. And each one has a certain momentness to it, you know? For instance, I'm very interested in sands that imitate fertile earth, or sands that imitate a very, very dry place. And each one has its own.

MR. LYON: You told me in Chicago, and I might – it's always possible I mistranslated something – that you used half dozen colors of clay, and that you rarely mix them. Were you using –

MR. SIMONDS: I almost never mix the clay, almost never.

MR. LYON: Were you using that many colors at that time?

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, well, because I'd collect – right from the beginning, I collected many clays.

MR. LYON: Many clays, okay.

MR. SIMONDS: I mean, there was one place, for instance, in Germany – Witterschick, I think it's called – when I went to Documenta where I shipped back endless amounts of different clays, because they had a yellow and a black clay, which was very good.

MR. LYON: And what – so what gives the clay its color?

MR. SIMONDS: Don't know. I mean, minerals –

MR. LYON: Is it minerals? Probably iron in red clay or something like that.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, minerals, I guess. Yes, for sure. But I'm not a – I don't actually – people are always – for instance, ceramicists. I'm such a frustration to ceramicists, because other than the time I go to Sèvres, and I don't have to bother with the specificity other than to know that there are sequential firings at different temperatures, beyond that, I don't have to know. But ceramicists are always coming up and saying, well, what cone did you fire that as? And you know, it has something to do with the heat of the kiln and stuff like that – and I endlessly have to explain, well, I never fire anything. So I really don't have any idea what you're talking about. [Laughs.] And so to a certain extent, my technical interest in clay is minimal. And there was – which is mostly reflected for people, when you say clay, they think about how it fires, and changes, and stuff. Which is of almost no interest to me, and it doesn't play in my world, because I just use it raw.

MR. LYON: Let me – let's see. I'm trying to think if there's anything else I wanted to say. You know, you've spoken, you know, eloquently over the years about your working methods, and stuff like that, and so all that information is available for people. So I don't want to, you know, just go over for the sake of going over.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, it probably sounds stale at this point. Do I – have I started to sound stale, maybe? No?

MR. LYON: No, I – just, not that. I just, I don't want to waste your time.

MR. SIMONDS: No, I'm just thinking, because I – some of these things I'm saying, I've said before, it seems.

MR. LYON: One other thing – this was interesting to me – that, you know, going through the – some of the historical sources of the "dwellings" that have been mentioned over the years, maybe by you and maybe by other people, I don't know. But, you know, if there's anything you wanted to say about it, but Chaco Canyon has been talked about–

MR. SIMONDS: Chaco Canyon, yes. Actually, Chaco Canyon is less important to me than the Shalako Festivals, which are very important.

MR. LYON: Can you talk about that a little bit? Because I'm really not too familiar with that.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. [Cross talk.] Yeah. Chaco Canyon is interesting, because it's an extraordinary place. I camped out there many times until they, you know, made it a more formal site. But the Shalako festival, which certainly had a major influence on me, and for instance, figures very directly in the *Three Peoples* concept, of people going around the circle, circle of people, and the "little people" too.

The Shalako festival – I mean, I'm free and happy to misinterpret it, and I may be incorrect, but it's how I choose to see it and have witnessed it – is a very elaborate ritual near the winter solstice, but largely predicated on the idea that they build new homes in the pueblo, two or three new homes, each year. And then the festival, which involves many, many other things and so forth – which is not necessarily worth going into, it's a long, long story – but involves basically this consecration of the new homes, so that all these mythological figures, these personages dressed in costume, come and dance in the new home. And the home then is sanctified in a certain way. And this issue of on the one hand, a new home, seasonally orchestrated homes, which is certainly part and parcel, people live by going around a circle, every year they build a new home – [inaudible] – all this figures so very centrally in my version of sort of how to think about homemaking, if you will, or building a home, that it's connected to some other thing than just real estate or, you know, a residence just like that, casually, that it has some rootedness in a whole other belief system, and, in that case, a natural system or a, you know, seasonal system, if you will.

It certainly had a tremendous effect on me, and likewise, the dances, which are – take place or rituals that take

place over – overnight, which I've been to three or four times, I guess – are very, very powerful, and so you – it's hypnotic, really. But the sense that this actually – all this energy of ritualizing something – it's actually taking place right before your eyes in that cinderblock home that has just been built and with the new windows in. You can still smell the paint. You know, there's some sense of – likewise, there are all Indian dances where they're wearing Sears' rubber boots. There's this kind of confluence of belief, irrespective of the fact that you happen to be ordering from a Sears catalogue now, that the belief structure stretches back into a very different kind of orchestration of time and place and belief. And that certainly had a tremendous effect on me. I mean, I've thought about that all the time, you know, things that have that – it's not that it's more authentic, but that they have some layer of belief, I guess, is the easiest way to say it.

MR. LYON: Coming back to that word.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah. Well, it is has to do with belief, that there's something that's really more –

MR. LYON: Well, there's the connecting, in some way, right?

MR. SIMONDS: – connecting, and more important than just nothing.

MR. LYON: Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean there's something arid about contemporary life sometimes, you know? I mean, I – just, you know, being in Chicago –

MR. SIMONDS: It's proverbial, this sort of loss – [inaudible].

The only other thing that may be worth mentioning in the same context: the *Three Peoples* also comes from – there's a Beckett play called *The Lost Ones,* I think it is. And it has to do with a group of people who live in a cylinder. And so he sort of writes about how it – what it's like to live in a cylinder, essentially. I mean, there are other Becketts, ones that play on this issue, and also Michaux is very big on people who live with their bodies rooted in the ground, they can't move. I mean, there's all these sort of – which have all affected me, one way or another – and certainly *The Lost Ones* very much so, as I conceptualized the *Three Peoples*, is sort of how you live in time and space, and how you, by living in a certain particular way in time and space, it affects what you – what your world view is, or how you believe, essentially, and both physically and experientially, and also abstractly. And I think those are – those are big influences on me. When you say, "What has influenced you?" I would say, well, you know, some of these American Southwest rituals, sure, and *Black Elk Speaks*, and all these issues, and you know, fantasies about time [ph]. And Beckett certainly was something I thought about a lot. And I think we've covered Oldenburg and Artschwager.

MR. LYON: And you know, John Neff made a list of – I don't know if this came from conversations with you, in his rather nice essay in the catalogue there, talking about pre-Columbian terraces, I guess, you know, relating to farming, Egyptian mastabas, Greek tholos tombs, Iron Age [inaudible], I don't know where this came from.

MR. SIMONDS: These all come from John, I'm sure. But I might say that – you know, I'm such a tourist of that kind of literature, of, you know, archaeological reconstructions and so forth, and – just as a tourist. And I think all the forums – you know, I've done a mastaba. I've done this and that. So in a way – [word inaudible] – what he's saying. But I think they just – they come as an image. So who's to say – you know, they're not – and people often belabor me about this. You know, for instance, I don't do any real study of ancient architectural forms and stuff, and probably my versions of all these things are very simplified and simplistic. They're more built on an image, kind of. And as we've said, like as a particular fantasy, like justice is built on a fantasy about justice, so it's more narrative story that has to then find an image, rather than any kind of recreation, for instance. It's not a reconstruction.

MR. LYON: Yeah, no, I understand.

MR. SIMONDS: I mean, well, many people start off with the premise that I must be a – which is sort of like, oh, that's the end of that conversation. [Laughs.] Just like, okay, whatever.

MR. LYON: No, that doesn't make sense. And you know, we talked about the sublime, I have that there, yeah, good. And also, I was curious of, you know, the idea of the – of the itinerant artist, you know, which is a fun idea.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I think that's what I am. I'm just a kind of guy with his little sack of bricks, I mean, kind of a nomad. I think it's true. I think rootedness has no place for me. Same with this issue of being saddled with the baggage of what you make. It's nothing to do with what I'm about, honestly. It's a real encumbrance.

I think of it referring back to other – that's what I said, to other cultures, other times, because there's an itinerant, as, like you – you got your wares, and you're going from town to town, on the road again, mentally.

MR. LYON: I had a funny thought. You know, I mean, I try to sometimes understand why I'm attracted to certain

artists, and not others, you know? And, you know, I was thinking about, like, what do, you know, Nancy Spero and Henry Darger and Charles Simonds have in common? [They laugh.]

MR. SIMONDS: Well, those are some sexual issues –

MR. LYON: It's a little hard to –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, there are some sexuality issues.

MR. LYON: There are some sexuality issues – but what I – what I came up with as a phrase in my head was something a little more conceptual, which was that you were all, in some sense, pluralists –

MR. SIMONDS: Pluralists.

MR. LYON: – that this world is not the only world, that there's some other world. Where for Nancy, it was – it was the philosophical, imagined, the what-if. What if –

MR. SIMONDS: Things had been different. Yeah, yeah, I understand.

MR. LYON: – women were the default gender, and males were –

MR. SIMONDS: Right. And Henry Darger –

MR. LYON: – and Henry, of course, created this vast other world in – within the confines of his little room that was a thousand times bigger than our world. Our world is just a tiny –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, yeah. Well, and my world is like that too, towards our world. Well, I think – I think, I guess I think that way. I mean, I think that's a good point, because I think this world, this world, here, is so incidental to me. It's so trangent and so – it's not that it's disappointing. I love – I don't know if you know me well enough – but I go in the street, I love everybody, I have to say. And I talk to everybody, and I'm friends with everyone. And I have a wonderful time talking to anyone. But notwithstanding, I guess I see a lot of things that I wish were in the world that aren't there for me. And so, you know, my world is really great. [Laughs.] If you put it –

MR. LYON: I mean, I think that's the impulse, you know, you want to –

MR. SIMONDS: I can make it much better. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: Yeah, that's the idea.

MR. SIMONDS: I mean, it's not with any moralistic issue, or it's like I'm better than anybody else. But for me, I can make it better.

MR. LYON: Well, and then –

MR. SIMONDS: And more meaningful. I think it's more about meaningful.

MR. LYON: – and for each of you, there's a – there's a strong element of justice. You know, because in Henry's world, it was protecting children –

MR. SIMONDS: Was it? Oh.

MR. LYON: – and in Nancy's world, it was, you know, gaining equal rights for women, and you know, inserting the woman as protagonist –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, yeah. Where do you see justice in my world?

MR. LYON: – and in your world, it's –

MR. SIMONDS: Working for the underdog guy, for the downtrodden?

MR. LYON: Yeah, standing up for the little people.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I think that.

MR. LYON: I mean, which is – it sounds absurd to say –

MR. SIMONDS: Well, no, only to the extent that I think it's – it does stand up for a certain kind of gentleness and vulnerability, that if you don't have to be waving a flag – or you can wave a flag, a very small flag – people don't

have to raise it, or pay attention to it.

Somebody once told me this great line. You know, they were giving a lecture, and they said, nobody paid attention. And then they started their lecture by whispering. And it was – the gambit was –

MR. LYON: Oh, smart.

MR. SIMONDS: So, yeah. Rather than try to –

MR. LYON: Yeah. I had a teacher like that in high school. She would never raise her voice. And I know, everybody would just have to come down to –

MR. SIMONDS: – come down to that level. Yeah. And I think I – in a certain way, maybe my "little people" are whispering, but they've got something to say. So they don't have to be a Richard Serra, or whatever else, killing people with their sculptures, or whatever. And I mean, it's just – there is, it's a little song and either you get it, or you don't. But it's the way it is, you know? I think that's true. I think that it speaks for a certain kind of voice. And it's a voice that welcome—that asks you to come, but you don't got to go.

You know, I always say this, when the "little people" say, what were you doing with the "little people"? I say, look, you know, the door is there, but if they don't go in, it's no problem, you know, then they just miss what's inside the door. There's not like –

MR. LYON: But it's more than that, isn't it? I mean, it's also – there's an element about property, and things and –

MR. SIMONDS: Oh yeah, there are many issues, yeah. Yes, that's right. Yeah.

MR. LYON: – you know, a world where maybe experience is more important than possession.

MR. SIMONDS: Yes, yes, I mean all those things. It's all written into everywhere. It's like a type of valuative system. I mean –

MR. LYON: It's a values system.

MR. SIMONDS: It's a – values, it's about values.

MR. LYON: So when you say that you, you can be out and be friends with everybody, but there's this other world – you know, that – some of those things characterize that world.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I think you're right. I'd agree with that. I mean, it's well-defined, my world, and in its "foil"edness to the real world, as it were, or whatever's around it, I think it makes it pretty evident, what the differences are. I mean, I don't think it's so innocently – it's not totally naïve in its stance, as it were. So very – it's very, in some ways, sophisticated.

MR. LYON: Well, that's the thorny part.

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, it's sophisticated in a certain way. It isn't – I mean, I think it's product of my being and my personality. It's how I – how I express myself. But it's – I think it's particular in its detail and its specificity.

MR. LYON: And in a way, each of you is a kind of moralist.

MR. SIMONDS: I think so. I've thought of that. We've talked about that. I think that's true – moralist, without being moralistic.

MR. LYON: Yes, right.

MR. SIMONDS: I think it offers a moral – a way, and it's by choice, or not. But it does say there's a coherence-to-it-ness.

MR. LYON: Yeah, that's what I'm getting at.

MR. SIMONDS: A moral coherence, I could call it. It sets a moral –

MR. LYON: It's – in itself, it's a complete world.

MR. SIMONDS: Yes. I think that's important. I'd believe that.

MR. LYON: Separate or parallel –

MR. SIMONDS: And I think that, actually, that would be – as much as what I might like to accomplish in my life, is having done that, lived a moral life, as it were, if you will. I mean, it sounds pretentious, but in that – right. I mean, I think that – like, I did what I thought I wanted to do.

MR. LYON: Good, I'm glad that resonated a little bit, because I thought –

MR. SIMONDS: Yeah, I think it's a real good point. [Laughs.] It would be interesting to come by Nancy and Darger and me. [They laugh.]

MR. LYON: Well, that's – that's kind of it.

MR. SIMONDS: We did it. [Laughs.]

MR. LYON: I came to the end of my –

MR. SIMONDS: You did great. I can't believe you stuck with this so long. [Laughs.] I mean, for me, it's easy, because all I have to do is say what's in my head, but you've got to sort of sit there and listen.

MR. LYON: [Laughs.] Well, I don't mind.

MR. SIMONDS: But we do have dinner, too.

MR. LYON: Okay, well, we're going to, we're going sign off now.

MR. SIMONDS: Great.

[End of Disc.]

[End of Interview]

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