Smithsonian
*Archives of American Art*

# Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972 October 4

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## Transcript

### Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Walter De Maria on October 4, 1972. The interview was conducted in New York City by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

### Interview

PC: It's the 4th of October, 1972, Paul Cummmings talking to Walter De Maria in New York City. Let's just start with the usual background, you were born in Albany, California?

WDM: Right. The first of October, 1935.

PC: And you went to school there?

WDM: San Francisco Bay area. Albany's right next to Berkeley, just right next door.PC: You went there to primary school, high school?

WDM: All the schools in the Bay area and then University in Berkeley.

PC: Give me some idea about your family. Do you have brothers and sisters, is there an interest in art at home or how did it start?

WDM: Well, it started really with the music, taking piano lessons at an early age and then later dropping that and studying drums, percussion, playing in the school orchestras and then playing in the school dance bands, getting into popular music and then even at age sixteen joining the Musicians Union. So I had the notion of what it was to be a professional musician.

PC: Right away.

WDM: Yeah, at sixteen. And I was encouraged by my mother to study piano.

PC: How old were you when you began?

WDM: At seven I was studying piano, then I dropped that when I was about twelve. I started studying drums when I was ten.

PC: What was the shift; what brought the change?

WDM: Well, I really didn't have the facility to be a piano player; I didn't feel it. it was a mystery to read those notes and make your fingers do all that.

PC: What about the drums?

WDM: Well, the drums was just an instinctive choice. You know, at one point in the fourth grade someone comes around and asks if you want to learn a musical instrument and I said yes and studied the drums. Then I also studied for three or four years with a private teacher, which very few drummers do.

PC: Who was that?

WDM: I studied for a short time with the percussionist at the San Francisco Symphony, I can't remember his name right now, and also with show drummers and night club drummers, people that could read music, professionals. So I was the school's percussionist. We'd play tympany, we'd play all different things so I was around classical music in the school orchestras, you know.

PC: Was this a family interest; were your parents interested in music; was it around the house?

WDM: Oh, no, no.

PC: Was there interest in music at home?

WDM: No, no, they didn't play records or anything like that. It could have been so from a general sort of Italian feeling, you know, that maybe there should be some interest in music, but both my parents were born here, one in California, one in the state of Washington, But there was this encouragement to go into music. One brother then tried the clarinet and dropped it and the other brother tried the trumpet and he also joined the Musician's

Union, played lead trumpet in the school orchestras and even in college he continued on. I played all through college, by the way, in dance bands.

PC: So it was a money-making thing.

WDM: It was a money-making professional thing. I was a professional musician. I mean on weekends I would go out and play and I played in the Richmond Symphony Orchestra, you know, the municipal orchestra, so I had a conception of what it was and I studied, as I say, a short time with the drummer at the San Francisco Symphony. I actually was thinking for a while I'd be a symphony musician, you know. I could read all of the scores and maybe I'd teach music or in some way my life would be around music. Then of course the interesting thing that happened was that, through being interested in music, I started being interested in the jazz that was going on in San Francisco -- San Francisco was a major jazz center.

PC: Right. This was what years?

WDM: Well, let's see, high school was about '50-'53 and college was '53-'59 so the Fifties was the high renaissance of jazz. I mean Charlie Parker and Bob and Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Count Basie, all the major jazz bands played San Francisco and naturally most of the artists were interested in jazz. It was the most lively, inventive music at the time. So I became interested in jazz and would go to the clubs and in the clubs you would see that the life of the jazz musician was so different than the life of the symphony musician.

PC: Oh, God, yes, there's no comparison.

WDM: I mean the drugs, the low life, the prostitution, the late hours and the mystique, all of the great self-centeredness of the jazz musicians, all of the cult of it.

PC: Well, that was also the time of the development of the beat generation.

WDM: Right, right.

PC: All the San Francisco poets started to emerge.

WDM: Exactly, Ginzberg, Kerouac and the beat generation, right. And the growth of the North Beach area. Well, North Beach had been active, but even grew more and so, being in Berkeley, it was a half-hour drive across the bridge and there you were, right in the middle of North Beach. You know, it was a meeting of all the cultures, Chinese, blacks, writers, the San Francisco scene and the art, the San Francisco Art School. By the way, I played in the San Francisco Art School band with David Park and all of the San Francisco . . . .

PC: I didn't know they had a band. I'd never heard of that.

WDM: Yeah, it's been going on for 25 years, now it's an institution out there.

PC: That's funny because some of these artists have been interviewed and have never talked about it.

WDM: Well, only the few I guess were active in the end. But it was great because, you know, there was a lot of dancing in the Fifties because of this band, whereas there wasn't that much dancing to jazz. This was a Dixieland band.

PC: Yeah, jazz was all listen.

WDM: Yeah. So actually I can't really emphasize the role of music enough, because to be going around and be carrying your drumsticks and you've got a set of drums in your car and you go to meet other musicians; you have jam sessions; you have the idea of what it is to be the creative artist. You have to create your own style, you have to have your own. Also jazz was sort of an outside, you know . . . .

PC: Illicit activity.

WDM: Yeah, it wasn't just the background music of television detective movies; at that time it was just really creating something.

PC: Were there any musicians who became good friends of yours?

WDM: Well, local musicians, not any really famous musicians. Later when I came to New York I did a little bit of playing with Don Cherry who is a trumpet player with Ornette Coleman. But that was just a few sessions, you know. It couldn't be a steady life because the jazz musicians were so involved with drugs that you were always . . . I mean one went with the other and it was part of the life.

PC: You didn't like that part of it?

WDM: Well, it was just too self-destructive, though being an artist is bad enough.

PC: What are the names of your brothers so we can keep them straight?

WDM: Well, one brother is named Jim and he's three years younger, he's a truck driver, and the other brother is named Terry and he graduated from the University of California in business administration and was an officer in the army and he's employed by some computer company in California. He's a junior executive. And so we all went separate ways.

PC: Was he the one who was the musician?

WDM: Right, he played the trumpet.

PC: So many of them go into computers.

WDM: Do they, musicians?

PC: Yeah, I have a friend who's a conductor who couldn't get away from computers and I think he's almost given up music now, fascinated by the whole thing. Well, what was life like at home? Were there books around; did you read a great deal?

WDM: Yeah, my mother made a point of buying all the encyclopedias and we had Life magazine, National Geographic, and I took naturally to books and read a lot. I was reading socialist literature and things in high school, which was very unusual for California. It might be something natural for a New York Student to do.

PC: Well, why was it different?

WDM: Why is New York different than California?

PC: No, that could go on for years. But why was that material available to you? Did you seek it out?

WDM: Well, it was read, there was a very good library and paperbacks were just blooming at that time. Also, you can't emphasize too much that Berkeley was very close. It was very easy to take a trip to Berkeley, be around the bookstores, be around the kind of university atmosphere. Even at an early age, and going to high school in Richmond which was six miles from Berkeley, I knew that if I was in the top ten percent of my class I would go to the University. So that you were ready, you know, being fifteen years old, you knew that if you really were that good, then after Richmond would be Berkeley, I mean it was the next step. And that's what my brother did too. So it was in a sense, although I was in a public school, it was like being in a prep school.

PC: You knew where you would go right away.

WDM: Right. Also the teachers that had the university preparatory students were really grooming that ten percent to make sure they got their quota in the University. It made them feel good, you know. So that although, as I say, it was a massive three thousand students in public school, you really had this feeling that Berkeley was there, or the University.

PC: Continuity and challenge.

WDM: Right. And then also you knew the levels too. Like if you didn't get into Berkeley then you'd have to go to San Francisco State College, which my second brother did, the truck driver. But he was interested in sports; he went there and played three years of sports and just didn't go on to graduate when he got through three years. And then if you didn't do that there was the Junior College, two-year college, now they're called community colleges. So it became quite obvious that in the intellectual field there were these levels. Then even being in the University, at Berkeley especially, that then there was graduate school. So then maybe, whether you were going to go into law or whatever, you were going to at least get an M.A. So at that time I was studying history and was very interested in politics and read a lot of politics, read a lot of history. We even had a course in Asian history in high school, which is very unusual. I mean Asian history isn't usually taught in high school

PC: No, but that's the West Coast, though.

WDM: No, even for the West coast.

PC: Really?

WDM: No, there's American history, world history, European history, but not the history of China, Japan and

India. This was a very unusual woman, a PhD, who was teaching high school. We had different things like that.

PC: How were your high school teachers? They sound like they were rather well-chosen.

WDM: Yeah, right. I guess every high school has a certain number of extraordinary teachers but again I think, because of the continuity of Berkeley, the high school teachers tended to keep going back for more and more study and a lot of them had advanced degrees, so that I had an excellent French teacher, took four years of French in high school and this French teacher impressed us how France was the center of culture, you know. I mean every day, every day. So we learned the history of French painting in high school. In a sense, this I guess was the beginning of my interest in painting.

PC: That was the first visual exposure?

WDM: Right. I never took any courses in art in junior high school or high school, only courses in music, because you only had one elective in the arts and I always took music and not painting.

PC: Well, had you made drawings ever as a child?

WDM: Yeah, I was drawing all through high school and I made friends with two or three people who were art students, I mean in high school, and I followed their careers right through Berkeley. I would go to visit them in the art department and at that time I found myself visiting the art department more than the music department and then I found . . . .

PC: Who were they, do you remember their names?

WDM: One was named Richard Overstreet, who went into films and lives in Paris now. And it's funny because we were in the French class too; he became very fluent in French. And then there was one girl named Irene Rodini whose mother taught ceramics at the Richmond Art Center and I went down to visit her and actually made my first sculpture there of clay, just three pieces. I found that rather unsatisfactory and the . . . .

PC: In what way?

WDM: Well, I didn't really like the modeling and all that idea and had no feeling for ceramics or anything like that. The interesting thing there was that (that was perhaps when I was nineteen or twenty) that really set me to thinking that if I were to be an artist, I would be a painter and it had to do with drawing, everything had to do with drawing, not with construction, three dimensional.

PC: What kind of drawings had you been doing then?

WDM: Oh, maybe everything almost, like cartoons, I actually have these drawings, I haven't looked at them in fifteen years. It was every subject matter in the world, landscapes, object.

PC: In various styles?

WDM: Yes, in every kind of style.

PC: Well, were you aware of art magazines at that time?

WDM: No, but here again the role of geography is so important, because I lived in the San Francisco Bay area, just a few miles from Berkeley and a few miles from San Francisco. When I was sixteen some of my teachers brought us to San Francisco to see the ballet and we would go there to the symphony and, in the complex of San Francisco Civic Center, right next to the opera house, is the . . . their museum of modern art. I don't know what it's called, the San Francisco Museum. And so it was easy to go by the Museum to see the Matisse, the Braque, the Pollock. They have a very small collection with, you know, a few choice things, a Henry Moore, very small. I mean, as I look back, it seems like it was thirty or forty things really. So it was easy to go and visit the Museum and then go to the symphony and then later, when I was going to the jazz clubs, it was easy to go to the Museum and then go to the club later at night. So the thing is that I think the geography's the most important thing. I mean being in California you feel that you're not a part of the tradition, the state is only a hundred years old; you only know three or four points of history. You know about the gold rush in 1849 and you know about the 1906 earthquake, that's all you know.

PC: That's why you studied the Orient.

WDM: You know the Spanish were building missions before that and the Chinese came to build a railroad and that California had good wine and that it was the promised land. And at that time I think there were only eight million people in California, in the early Fifties. Now there's 24 million people or something like that, so there was a lot of hills; there was a lot of flowers, you know.

PC: It was just before the great shift . . . ?

WDM: The great shift of population. And there was a great optimism and the great romantic tradition of San Francisco and Jack London, and you know, the idea of jumping on a boat and going to Japan was always there. Go to Alaska; go to Hawaii. You know, there's a great romantic tradition in San Francisco.

PC: But it was always up and down the West coast and toward the Orient. I mean you didn't really think of going to, say, Europe?

WDM: You never thought of going to. . . no, no. Those places just seemed really remote. And the fact that I studied French in high school was even unusual because most people would study Spanish because they thought I'll go to Mexico or something like that.

PC: Well, just following the geography, the mountains, were they as much a part of the world as they seem when one goes out there?

WDM: Well, the funny thing is that I really didn't explore much of California when I was there. Up to the time I was 25 I never got to Los Angeles. It was just a matter of going to the ocean, the seashore. I was more impressed by the ocean than I was with the mountains. You know, it's not like being impressed by the Rocky Mountains. I mean the ocean is the central factor and you're dominated more by the ocean in San Francisco than you are in Los Angeles. Even though Los Angeles is on the ocean, you're not really conscious that it's there, with all the smog and the whole thing.

PC: Well, it's close to the Bay.

WDM: Yeah, the Bay locks it and then the Bay is like a canon and it shoots out to the ocean and all the rivers are coming out to the ocean. You have this sense that all these rivers are going into the Bay and the whole thing is going out to the ocean. So you're really dominated by the physicality of San Francisco, the sunsets over the bridge, and this incredible nostalgia, this great romantic sense, the fog, the hills, the architecture. You're just loaded with it, and then the tradition of poetry, the tradition of music, it was like the little cultural capital of the West. So this is drummed into you and you really believe it and the people out there really believe it. And it's true to some extent. So if you take all the things together, I would say that coming from an Italian family, growing up in music, having he proximity of the University, having the proximity of all the advantages of San Francisco and there were three museums, not just one. There was the deYoung Legion of Honor. And there were a lot of painters in San Francisco in the area, that being there in the Fifties with the growth of the whole "beat" movement and the growth of the whole black culture and everything, that in a sense I think everybody must have been touched by it. If one had any direction toward the arts at all, as I did initially with music, it wasn't hard to fall into it because in all it was a fertile, explosive time, even as it continued in the Sixties with the hippies and rock music. It was in a way just a continuation of the Fifties with the jazz and the beats.

PC: Sausalito Heliport has a great recording studio.

WDM: I know the guy who runs it, Willie Jacobs, right.

PC: Well, what about your parents, were they interested in this musical activity of yours? What kind of attitude did you get from them?

WDM: I got a lot of encouragement. Even after I started to go more into jazz and I was staying out late and things, still they were for it. It was a great thing and I never got any negative reaction from my parents, which is very lucky. I'm sure a lot of artists get a lot of negative reaction. So I was in music, one of the brothers was in sports and then the other one was kind of in music. We all got encouragement for whatever direction we wanted to go. I think their only plan was you grow up and you go to college. They were going to work hard enough to, they owned a small business, to just make sure there was enough money to go to the University and from there you could go into anything you wanted and, in fact, absolutely anything. So there was no definite direction. Nor any pressure to join the family business or anything. It was wide open and every brother took a different course which was really nice, as I think about it now. it was the best way it could be. The other good thing, of course, was like the University of Berkeley, the California system was free; there was no tuition at all, zero. All you had to pay I think was like a hundred and fifty dollar incidental fee for group medical insurance for hospital, dental care and all. So actually it was free.

PC: As long as you kept your marks up.

WDM: Yes, just as long as you passed. That's very different from the Eastern system here where you go to N.Y.U,, not to mention the Ivy League schools, with enormous tuitions, thousands of dollars. I think California was one of the first states to have a very high quality state university system.

PC: I know even at the land grant colleges in the Midwest you paid tuition and it got very expensive after a while.

WDM: Right. They may have pushed for some kind of a tuition in California too, but I know it was resisted for a long time and they've tried to keep it low.

PC: Well, how did you like the University? I mean you came to it as a practicing musician. Did you have a sense of what you wanted to do there or not?

WDM: Well, I really loved it and hated it; I loved it because every opportunity was available, you know . . . .

PC: Too much so?

WDM: Well, I think you made your basic choice when you decided between the sciences and the liberal arts and then having made that choice -- by the way, the field of the sciences in Berkeley was terrific -- you know, knowing that the cyclotron was on the hill and that they were splitting atoms or, you know, tracing their paths.

PC: All those Nobel Prize winners walking around.

WDM: Yes, right. It was a very good atmosphere. I think that helped set the tone and I made very good friends with some geologists and physicists and I learned a lot from these people and I liked the idea that there was not such a range of subjects but that you knew that basically most of the people teaching the subjects were experts in their fields. And Berkeley was challenging Harvard at that time, outstripping them in all of these Nobel Prize winners and there was really this sense of Berkeley, not U.C.L.A. or anywhere but Berkeley being the Harvard of the West.

PC: Were the classes very competitive?

WDM: Very competitive, and that in a way was the bad part which is I think why the revolution of the Sixties had to happen, you know, people were so uptight about getting good grades that . . . .

PC: It exploded.

WDM: That people were going to classes eight hours a day and studying eight hours a day, you know, The competition was so keen and the kind of bureaucratic nature of Berkeley, the beginning of the large classrooms, three, five hundred people in a class, that kind of thing, and then having to deal with student teachers and so forth. There was a lot of bad aspects at Berkeley, I mean its over-competitiveness and its massiveness, its bureaucracy and its general . . . well, you know it was like being inside the Pentagon or something. It was like a heavy, almost governmental . . . .

PC: Ritualistic and . . . .

WDM: Yeah, very.

PC: But you found all these things even in a kind of day-to-day class room basis?

WDM: Yeah, right, it was grim, it was grim in a way and so that what I did was to go through several majors. I started with political science, thinking that I would go into the State Department in diplomatic service, and then I started to take lot of history so then I found that I didn't like the political science courses.

PC: For what reason?

WDM: As a discipline I didn't like the way it was taught or studied, I didn't . . . .

PC: Well, it's very flexible.

WDM: Yes, but the difference between the theory and the practice wasn't made clear. At an early enough point, or it seemed, it had all the weaknesses that social sciences could have and none of the fun. Maybe it was just that the first three or four teachers I had weren't good or something, I don't know. I did have Eugene Burdick there, the guy who wrote The Ugly American, at that time. He died at a young age, but he was right; he really knew what was going on. I mean there were good people to study with there. But anyway I found that history itself became more interesting because it was more, I guess it was more abstract. So I took a lot of history and philosophy and I thought I would major in history or philosophy. At this point I was nearly convinced that I would become a college teacher and that I would stay to get an M.A. and a PhD. and really be into the academic life.

PC: Well, what about the music, was that still going on?

WDM: I was still playing in the bands but I dropped out of the college music scene. At this point I had enough regimentation in the classes themselves. I didn't want to go to another place and be told what point to be at, and all of that marching band is absurd, and the symphony orchestra I didn't find that good in quality. At that point I made an interesting observation that the jazz was an alive form of music, a music which was creating itself, which demanded all the technique of classical music but much more inventiveness and the idea of reading the score of classical music became oppressive.

PC: Over and over and over.

WDM: Yeah, but it's even worse for the drummer because he may play for twenty bars and then he has to rest 240 bars before he plays another 20 bars and the notion of standing there counting the measures . . . . But basically I mean, having gone through some of the classical literature, you know, the symphony literature, I found that there was no need to replay it. Also, hi-fi was coming on and, you know, a very interesting thing happened. One day the San Francisco Symphony orchestra was convinced by some hi-fi promoter, maybe Ampex or someone, to set up giant speakers on the stage and then they played a tape of a certain symphony and the first five minutes they lip-synced it, you know, they pantomimed the whole thing. It was all being played over the speakers and then they all stopped playing and the symphony continued playing over the tape and before a life audience. And when I heard that, I realized that there was no need for the symphony to be there any more.

PC: Well, the business of the performance itself didn't interest you that much then?

WDM: No. Performing as a classical musician is like all the aspects of being a plumber, of being a carpenter. I mean there are the blueprints and it was up to you to saw at this measure, you know, and build that little house. I really recognized the distinction between the composer and the musician; the musician was there just to interpret what the composer had done and I didn't have the facility to compose.

PC: But what about the interest in jazz?

WDM: Well, that was getting stronger actually and I was spending more time doing that, like playing almost every night and playing every weekend and going to more and more sessions. I was getting pretty good and I was playing with higher and higher quality people. Then I started to run into the conflict which plagued me for six or eight years afterwards, whether to stay with music or to go into painting and, as it happened, I went into painting.

PC: That became apparent about when?

WDM: That became apparent by the end of college, by the time I was 21. At the time I was 21 I had been drawing all through but not taking any art courses in college.

PC: You had no formal art training at all?

WDM: I started taking one or two art history courses every semester as part of my options. You see, my second year I switched from political science to history and so, as one of the options of history, I could take art history courses. I nearly considered switching to art history but I ended up having more credits in history than in art history and so I graduated with a degree in European History, having taken nearly every art history course given at the University. So all of my training was art history but not painting or drawing or sculpture up to the time I was 21. Then at that point I made the decision that I didn't want to be an art historian; I wouldn't be a good historian. I wasn't good at languages; I couldn't read in German or Latin and French, everything necessary to be really familiar with the literature. I didn't want to write about other people; I didn't want to study other movements or other people's lives. I had seen the way the teachers lived; I didn't want to live as a teacher. By the time I was 21 I had given up the idea that I wanted to teach in the University and so there was this crisis. I had thought that I would probably be a teacher and now what am I going to do? I was getting much closer to living like a musician again, like going out to live as an artist. I think probably the most interesting moment in a young artist's life is when you really make the decision that that is the way you are going to live. So I stayed on at the University for two more years until I was 23 and took nothing but painting courses for two solid years, including summers, you know, to catch up on everything I hadn't done. In fact, I think it was 2 1/2 years before I finally got a master's degree in painting which will become an MFA somewhere else but they call it just an MA at Berkeley. So I got a MA in art.

PC: Well, what kind of teachers did you have in the art classes?

WDM: Well, I guess in the course of two years, 2 1/2 years, I had nearly every professor there.

PC: Any that you remember to be outstanding or influential?

WDM: Well, the most outstanding and influential teacher at Berkeley was David Park. He was a figurative painter, sort of an abstract expressionist figurative painter. He was sort of blending the two and the reason he was the best teacher was that he was the freest spirit because, in the Fifties, the pressure to be an abstract painter was so strong.

PC: Tremendous.

WDM: Yeah, every single teacher, every one in the country, everyone in the world, was imitating the best abstract expressionists of New York. They were just buying those art magazines and making these little copies. Even I guess in earlier times, American artists used to get the French magazines and copy Picassos and things. So the pressure to be an abstract painter was so strong that I had admired Park for being a figurative painter, even though I had no taste for figurative painting myself at all. Also Park was a musician and he played piano in the San Francisco Art School band and invited me to play in the band. And he also, you know, had the most . . . he smiled all the time. Whereas all of the other teachers were just really terrible.

PC: Grim.

WDM: Grim, right. I only wish I had Park's spirit myself. The fact is that he was such a . . . he was, you know, a nearly saintly person. In actual fact he influenced every single person in the Bay area. He spawned a school of probably no less than fifty realist painters who painted with this thick paint technique.

PC: Right, and wide lines.

WDM: Right. I guess the most famous at this time is Richard Diebenkorn. And then there were people like Elmer Bischoff and, oh, it was an entire school of San Francisco figurative painting and Park was the leader, I mean definitely. Diebenkorn came after Park. So there was Park right in Berkeley and he was just great. Then I would say the next most important people were all the visiting New York artists that came to Berkeley. Berkeley had a good program inviting two different New York artists every year, so I was able to see six or eight of them when I was there and I guess . . . and the most famous might have been Marca Relli and . . . .

PC: How did you like that program of visiting artists?

WDM: It's excellent, it's excellent because the real artist is coming into the midst of people who are basically teachers, and the real artists's attitude is always different than the teacher's attitude.

PC: That was really apparent?

WDM: Absolutely, sure. One guy that helped me a lot was Herman Cherry, an old guy, you know. Cherry has a terrific spirit; he's a great story teller and a . . . .

PC: Tough little guy.

WDM: Right. He's a tough little guy and he knew his own limitations as an artist, which even made his life more tragic. But the fact that he, you know, would stay with it . . . . You know, the personal quality is to be looked for as much as the professional style. So it was nice to hang out with a guy like Cherry, play tennis with him and go out and have Chinese food or something and hear him tell stories about the New York Club, about Resnick, about de Kooning, about Kline, all of the legends, you know. How people argued, how people fought, how they drank, how their lives were all messed up and so that was like a bridge between Berkeley and New York. Had these visiting people not come out, then New York would have been an absolute mystery. But the fact was that you could actually measure and judge these guys. You had an idea of what it was like. Also you'd hear a New York accent for the first time.

PC: Which is different?
WDM: Yeah, you could learn to speak another language. I would say that a lot of the other teachers were helpful, though, like there were some that had their own good life styles, you know, and some that were sympathetic. And it was a place to paint; it was a place to judge yourself against the other students, a place to judge yourself against the teachers. It was like just a workshop.

PC: But how was it? Here you were in your early twenties starting to paint and many of these people had been at it for a few years.

WDM: Right, since they were teenagers and in high school.

PC: Where did you come in in that continuum?

WDM: Well, I think that the point there was again the jazz, because playing jazz you knew what it was like to do a drum solo. Now if you do a drum solo, you take all the elements, all the techniques that you have, all the

possible colors of the drums, the tom toms, the cymbals, the bass drums, the snare drum and then you have to mix all of these elements together. You have to change it from playing fast to slow, you have to change it from playing loud to soft, you have to change it from playing complicated things against simple things and not only that, you have to play all your hands and feet against each other in different counter rhythms. So, being able to do something like that, I had a notion of what it was to improvise, to take many elements, put them together into a work, the solo being the work. And it's difficult to do a good drum solo. The point I wanted to make was that then the idea of taking the range of the palette, of having twenty cans of paint in front of you and twenty brushes and then having your choice of what colors to take and then what forms to make on the canvas, the whole notion of abstract expressionism just locked like a chain, like a, I don't know the image, you know, but just . . . .

PC: Fell right into that concept.

WDM: Yeah, absolutely the same concept of working, so that Pollock's notion of throwing the paint was almost the equivalent of free jazz, you know, of absolutely . . . .

PC: Hofmann's push-pull of the balances and all those things.

WDM: Right. By the way, Hofmann taught at Berkeley and he taught all the teachers who were there, so in a sense Berkeley was an extension of the whole Hofmann Provincetown school, so that we were very attuned to what New York's mind was like in the Fifties. They worked out a system at Berkeley whereby in the beginning you would draw from plaster casts and then you would draw like Cezanne. You would break up the casts into facets, and then they would teach you Cubism, teach you Picasso and then from Picasso they would teach you Hans Hofmann, which was like dark Cubism, black and brown Cubism, then into more of an influence of color, sort of an expressionist Cubism and then it was very easy to go from Hofmann to de Kooning, because in actual fact I don't think de Kooning's a radical painter at all. I mean de Kooning is like a Cubist with some sort of German Expressionist colors thrown in. I mean his subject matter of the disfigured woman or something like that is out of Picasso's Cubist subject matter. I never saw de Kooning as a radical painter at all and I couldn't ever understand why he was the god he was in New York. I think the reason he was was that New York's mentality was very childlike in a way; I mean, it didn't know this.

PC: Part that, and also part his personality.

WDM: His personality was so great that he could attract those followers. But if you look at it historically I think it was because America hadn't had that much contact with European art, with the European tradition of art. It only knew it through books and reproductions, so that it had to work its way out of its own provincialism of the Thirties. We think of American painting of the Thirties, the regional painting. And then to see what happened in the Forties; you had regional painting of boats and little cities as kind of Paul Klee Cubism, Surrealist painting in the Forties, bright colors, very . . . .

PC: Well, you had the immigrant artists here too for a while.

WDM: Yeah, but if you really think about it, we didn't know that much and then in the Fifties they still had to work themselves out of Surrealism. Then they worked themselves out of Surrealism into a pure Abstraction. It was such a terrific struggle that very few people could make it. I think really only like Newman and Rothko made it out of the woods, made it out of that jungle of crappy symbols, you know. And so in any case, getting back to Berkeley, we went from Cezanne to Picasso and Picasso to Hofmann, from Hofmann to de Kooning. That was where the course left you off. At that point you were up to 1957-59 and Berkeley was claiming of course that this form of Expressionism was the last word on art. Having known that, you could go out and teach it to a thousand other people.

PC: Right.

WDM: And they didn't of course really note some of the more important . . . you know, they weren't acknowledging Rothko and . . . .

PC: Was there any sense on your part of their being interested in having the students become professional painters or was it to make teachers?

WDM: To make teachers. See, they weren't professional themselves; they didn't know what it was so . . . .

PC: So the New York artists really made a great deal of difference.

WDM: Yeah, they filled in the gap then between what I knew as a professional musician because I could see that a lot of their attitudes were the same, you know. Nevertheless, I don't want to disparage Berkeley that much because, had Berkeley not been there, I wouldn't be here right now. And also, we know that the fact that there

was a large art department in a university was a relatively new phenomenon because before that you had to go to the art school.

PC: Right.

WDM: You had to go to the San Francisco Art School or the California College of Arts and Crafts. I visited those places too, and I found, in their way, even though every student there was an art student, it was even more closed intellectually because you didn't have all these other people around you so that you were too insulated.

PC: From the other professionals.

WDM: Yes and I found the art students were just dumb, you know, and had an attitude I didn't like, really. I don't want to give the impression that everything that went on in Berkeley was wrong, although I've looked at the list of their teachers now and it seems worse than ever. But they did give you absolute freedom while subtly absolutely encouraging you to paint in their way.

PC: Right.

WDM: But supposedly if the person wanted to be a figurative painter he could.

PC: Well, how was Park? Was he dogmatic in any way or did he let you kind of go your own way as long as you were doing something?

WDM: Well, even Park was perhaps influencing people to paint in his style but he certainly in the seminars would have reviewed abstract painting as well as figurative painting.

PC: Well, what kind of things did you do when you first started in the studio?

WDM: Well, I did 100 paintings in the two years. I did a painting a week often, averaged that. I painted in several styles, but basically abstract painting, the California style of thick paint, and went through two years of basically Abstract Expressionism.

PC: You had no real interest in representational painting?

WDM: No, no.

PC: Any reason why, do you think? Or just no appeal, no empathy.

WDM: Basically no, again because the improvising with the paint was much more exciting. You didn't know how the painting was going to turn out; I'll say that for it. It was a way of painting that was very close to jazz. You'd start to paint with all blue, then you put white into it, and then the black would come into it and then, if you didn't like it, put blue back on top of it so that the notion of its give-and-take was a very valid form, a very free form of painting in that whole tradition of Expressionist work. You know, attack the canvas, jump on it, use a very free gesture. In fact, I found the rhythm of the painting similar to the jazz; you mark in the same way you might play and so actually I didn't fight it at all. I found it very conducive to me at that time.

PC: The physical activity of painting was like playing the drums.

WDM: Yes, it was. It was, and the only difference was you could stop and sit back and analyze it, jump into it again. So I found it was a good way, it was a natural thing to do at that time, being a young musician, to paint in that style. San Francisco itself was romantic and when the style (also like jazz), when the style is still discovering itself then no one knew who might make a certain breakthrough within that style so that it was a very exciting time. And although we knew the lead was coming out of New York, there was the feeling that perhaps somebody might make a breakthrough on the West Coast. Then after only being in it two years, I could see the limitations of the style and then, following Parks advice, I could also see that the style wasn't my temperament basically, not in the longer run; it wasn't to be that way.

PC: What prompted him to say . . . ?

WDM: To say something like that?

PC: Yeah.

WDM: Well, he just said something like, you know, every person will find his way, some people will shout and some people will talk more quietly and the students picked it up. But his point was that he was going to paint in a figurative way in the face of massive resistance, you know.

PC: Because that was his way?

WDM: Right, that was his way, his figure of a person standing on a beach, a person drinking a cup of coffee, these very personal images, were very important to him and he knew that everybody would and should find their own way.

PC: What about Diebenkorn, was he there then?

WDM: Diebenkorn I think was teaching at Oakland Arts and Crafts College, and then later he went to Stanford.

PC: But he was around?

WDM: He was around; he was around as a great stylist.

PC: But he kept switching from figurative to abstract.

WDM: Well, basically, at that point he was just with the figurative and the funny thing is that the abstraction that he'd switch back to is the kind very common to the Bay area in the mid-Fifties, but he was a great abstractionist in the mid-Fifties; he was very facile.

PC: You know, I'm curious about one thing that relates back to a little before when you were talking about improvising in jazz which sort of implies a certain amount of composing ability. Do you think that works in a very similar way in relating it to painting?

WDM: As to abstract painting, I think it does very much. In a jazz tune you would have a certain structure upon which you can make variations and I think a person starting abstract painting, if he had a basic idea of what form or style it would take on which he could make certain variations . . . . I mean, let's face it. Most abstractionists could find an image upon which they could make two hundred variations in their lifetime, changing the colors or making it bigger and smaller. Most artists are really dumb and they are lucky if they can find one thing just to talk about and, who knows, most jazz musicians play the same variations maybe all their life through making variations on those different structures.

PC: Variations on variations.

WDM: And variations on very limited numbers of structures, too. Nevertheless, it all implied freedom, it all implied this freedom of a way of life which was, is California culture. California culture is superior to New York culture because it is more in contact with Asia. It's new, it's more in contact with technology, it's more in contact with nature. So you found in California a growth of poets, you found a growth of painters and musicians but you also found all of the car cults, you found the surfing cults, health food people, yoga and strange religious cults.

PC: Oh, yes, every kind of that you can think of.

WDM: But if we look at those things now like health foods and the Eastern religions and the accepting of technology . . . . Whereas the eastern intellectual establishment would look down on technology, the person in California would use the technology, like tape recorders were immediately accepted in California, everybody would have a tape recorder and hi-fi sets so that it would use the technology and use all the various influences which came with it and accept in a very natural way, so there isn't a background of structured how-to-live or how-to-think so much. It was a good place to be. I think had I been brought up a second generation Italian American in New York City or in Philadelphia or Boston or an eastern city, I probably would not have been an artist, I probably would not have had the range of experience that I have had living in California because of the great openness of California.

PC: Well, here also with Italian families there is a great . . . .

WDM: Oh yeah, great clannishness and the Mafia thing.

PC: Well, there wasn't that whole family thing out there.

WDM: No, we weren't living in any kind of ethnic ghetto or anything like that.

PC: You didn't have relatives down the block and two blocks away and three.

WDM: They were scattered over 20 or 30 miles. We would see each other once or twice a year and it was a big deal. In fact the incredible thing was, up until the time I was 21 years old, I didn't know what a Jew was; I didn't know even what the various nationalities meant even after having gone through the University. I wasn't aware of the incredible . . . like you could read European History and the history of all the wars but not really be aware of the great competitiveness of these ethnic groups the way they are in New York. So I mean there is a great

homogenized feeling in California. You hear a person's last name and you may not register that it's English or Swedish or whatever, German; whereas here in the East you might register that more quickly. But there was a great openness of feeling and a terrific place to live one's early life. The only limitation I found in California was a certain intellectual limitation.

PC: How would you describe that?

WDM: Well, I would say it's wrong to describe it in a negative way that way, saying it was limitation. It was that they were so open to these other things like cars and sports and that they spent a lot of their energy and sailing or something so that they were not going to be locked into books the way the eastern person is locked into books. There is not a compulsion to read . . . . Well, to understand part of it, you read the San Francisco Chronicle as opposed to the New York Times. Well, the San Francisco Chronicle is almost like a magazine; it's so lively in its writing. And the Times represents the doggedness of the-nose-to-the-grindstone intellectual.

PC: But also there seems to be a kind of involvement with having a nice time and making everything very pleasant to do, you know, sort of an influence of that warmer climate too.

WDM: Well, that's true. In actual fact, again getting back in geography, I think the reason that Europe developed the culture it did was that it was in a northern region with the relatively cold winters and so forth. If you're in a cold winter situation then you're indoors and you're much more likely to be reading and writing than in the climate that's always conducive to outdoors. In some sense, it's that simple.

[END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE ONE]
[SIDE 2]

PC: This is Side Two. Well, did your parents speak Italian? Was that language around?

WDM: They speak Italian but they never spoke it at home. They only spoke it to my grandmother who later came to live with us, so I would hear it spoken around the home.

PC: But you never learned it?

WDM: I never learned it, unfortunately. No, it's too bad.

PC: Maybe it helped your French, though.

WDM: I would say that the interesting thing was that later in studying history at the University -- European history -- that then perhaps I gave a special eye to the Renaissance and to Rome and so forth which I didn't have any consciousness of probably before I went to the University. I mean my grandmother would tell me that the northern Italians were different than the southern and better, you know.

PC: Oh, they're very competitive.

WDM: Yeah, you know if she saw caricatures of Italians on television or heard on the radio, she'd say those are southern Italians.

PC: Or Sicilians.

WDM: Right, you have nothing to do with those. And having blue eyes and blond hair and so forth . . . I was never conscious of that kind of aspect in the Italians. But the interesting thing was in studying history I found that at the end of every chapter was always the cultural history, you know.

PC: In one paragraph.

WDM: In one paragraph, right, exactly, really small, like this palace was built and this painter lived, you know, and a few pictures. Then I found of course that that was going to be part of the documentation of history, that history would in some strange way be identified by a certain number of objects produced by the painters in some way that would capture the style and feeling of the time. Which is a great mystery, you know, why people should have expressed themselves this way in this century and in this way in this century. Why should they have chosen these forms against all others. It's fascinating.

PC: Even more so, why does one may, working by himself . . . ?

WDM: Catch it, yeah.

PC: Catch the whole decade or generation.

WDM: That's right.

PC: And it's usually not the greatest public figure who does it either.

WDM: No, often it could be a person working on his own. So what happened was that through the Berkeley years I had a lot of time to think about this, think about San Francisco, think about the difference between being a musician and being a school teacher.

PC: Were there students when you were getting the MA that you became friendly with, or you've kept up with?

WDM: None. The only person that I met of any consequence at Berkeley was the musician Lamont Young, who now is the premiere musician of modernist classical music, absolutely the best.

PC: When did you meet him?

WDM: I met Lamont when I was 21 or maybe 22, maybe about 1957 or '58. And then I knew him '58-'59 when I was in graduate school. In '59 he was in contact with Stockhausen, with Cage and so again music came into my life, not through jazz, but through the electronic music of the time. One of the earliest electronic composers, Richard Maxfield, a tragic figure, was composing for tape in the early Fifties when this was utterly blasphemous in all of the composition departments or academic music departments in the world or this country and he was composing for tape which now is, it would seem, accepted.

PC: Everybody does it.

WDM: And it's used in all forms of composing. Nevertheless, at that time tape recorders themselves were new objects.

PC: Were you interested in that music concret business?

WDM: Well, though Maxfield I learned about it and at that point I totally rejected this what I was later to call the neurotic school of electronic composition where the tones would jump around and would be very erratic and I came to really prefer a much, the word "control" is wrong, but the much more static side of music. Lamont and I would talk hours and hours and hours about this.

PC: How did you meet him? What was the occasion?

WDM: Well, Lamont was studying for his master's degree in music at Berkeley, but how did we meet? We may have met through another musician friend of mine, Lauren Rush, a composer, now at Stanford University. Lauren played in bands with me and was a classical composer and Lauren was also studying for his M.A. at Berkeley. He introduced me to Lamont who had come from Utah and then to Los Angeles, and then to Berkeley. Lamont had also studied jazz and was really in this area of avant garde classical music. Then, Lamont learned about Happenings through Cage and he went to Germany and studied with Stockhausen. So I became acquainted with the classical music scene, not that I wanted to play it or compose or anything else. But again it was very interesting to watch another field develop, you know. I think it's really important to know two or three fields, not only your own.

PC: Right, it enriches the whole thing. What was he like in those days?

WDM: Well, he was sort of like a criminal, a dope dealer, you know, which was also interesting. He, you know, would live off other people and things like that and, well . . . . The story of Lamont is a very long, long story. But the point is that, when Lamont decided he would come to New York, that again made it easier for me to come to New York. He would come to New York to study with Maxfield and to be a composer here and then I knew that I would come to New York and be an artist.

PC: Did you know what you wanted to do when you finished your academic regime and that was it?

WDM: Well, I would say that I finished in '59. At that point I knew all the musicians who had come from New York too, you know, all of the jazz musicians came from New York. All I knew would be that I would come to New York and be an artist. And the important thing was when I graduated I was so disgusted with this whole program of painting that I wasn't going to change just from abstract painting to, say, hard edge painting or to geometric painting and that I would give up painting, which was my natural sensibility and go to building boxes, building a form of static sculpture. And there was no static sculpture in 1959; all of the sculpture in the middle to late Fifties was welded iron of sort of Stankiewitz . . . .

PC: David Smith.

WDM: David Smith, Stankiewitz, all of this group of welded metal in very expressionist, cubist, surrealist

configurations. So possibly through the influence of a kind of Japanese sensibility which existed in California, I started to build very small boxes, very clean, quiet, static, non-relational sculptures.

PC: Were they built there?

WDM: Yeah, I built about two or three of them in California in the late Fifties, early Sixties. In the summer of Sixty I had drawings and sketches for about 24 so, when I came to New York, I knew that I would not go to he Cedar Bar; I would not seek out all these expressionist painters, these expressionist sculptors, all of these men in their fifties and sixties, just as Lamont probably knew he wouldn't make music concrete. We started with a very conceptual idea of very limited means, very static, very quiet works. I took a loft and I started. I eventually built about one of these a month; I built about 24 in the first two years I was here, '61 and '62.

PC: They were all wood, right?

WDM: All of wood, not painted, very simply done. One interesting thing I should mention is I did study with a designer carpenter, and I took that as a part-time job in my last year of college -- oh, no, after I left college. There was sort of a year's break there and in that time i worked with this guy. He taught me to use all the power tools and I could saw and I could hammer and measure and so forth. So I was competent enough just to make simple boxes and things, simply cabinetry.

PC: Who was he?

WDM: His name was Martin Metal, M-E-T-A-L, and he was trained in the Chicago Bauhaus and I didn't have any relation to his aesthetic point of view at all.

PC: What kinds of things were you doing with him?

WDM: Oh, we would put in shelves or room dividers or redesign somebody's house or something.

PC: Oh, kind of light house carpentry.

WDM: Light carpentry, right, and I only lasted about six months; I wasn't really too good at it. Nevertheless I learned enough to make a beginning in using wood as the medium and the important thing was that, by the time of rejecting expressionist painting and rejecting expressionist sculpture, and then having this idea of very kind of, I don't know, at that time conceptual point of view to design the sculptures completely on paper, to make them incredibly simple so that when I came to New York all I needed to do was find a loft and buy a few saws and things and start to build. I met Robert Morris in San Francisco, whose wife is a dancer. He at that time changed from painting to box making also; he had also some carpentry training. He came to New York about three months earlier than I did, the summer of '60. I came in October of '60. He started making these boxes of various types and I started making them and we were very close friends and we saw each other every day through 1961, 1962. I mean every day. I mean he was new to New York and I was new to New York. But it was not a matter of working out a style here, those decisions had been made by the time I was 25 in California.

PC: Where did Bob Whiteman come in?

WDM: Whitman of course is from the east and Whitman was friends with George Segal, Red Grooms, Jim Dine, Claus Oldenburg, the whole . . . .

PC: Right, the Happening crowd.

WDM: Happening people. I don't even remember, I don't remember where I met him. It could have been just by going to the Happenings down there. By the way, Lamont and I had staged three Happenings in California in 1959 and '60 which are probably the first Happenings done in California and we performed them at Stanford, at University of California and California School of Fine Art. So we were very aware of Cage; we were very aware of the Happenings, so that upon coming to New York, you know, all of these options were available. You could go into Happenings or you could go into your own form of sculpture and at that time the Judson dancers had their own style of dance, which is a very static form of dance. They were trying to break away from the more symbolist form of dance such as what's her name . . . who's the grande dame of dance? Ah, Martha Graham. They were trying to make a more formal, in a way, form of dance, namely Simone Morris, Robert Morris's wife, Ivonne Rainer and so forth. So, being very close to Bob and Simone, I met a lot of the Judson people and possibly it could have been that Simone was in a Happening of Whitman's. We would go to visit Simone at night after rehearsals and probably I met Whitman there. I think that's how it happened. Yeah, I'm pretty sure that's how it happened.

PC: Because you had an exhibition of those boxes at Great Jones Street.

WDM: Right. And so then when Morris left Simone and Whitman I guess was having a divorce or something and

he married Simone. So at that time through Simone I became very friendly with Whitman and became very distant from Morris. And at that time we started to realize that possibly Morris and I were in a competitive situation and not in some kind of collaborative situation. In '61 and '62 my wife and I may have seen Simone and Robert Morris almost every day and then it turned out that in '62 and '63 I would spend a lot of time with Simone and Whitman. And Whitman was a kind of independent character and, besides being independently wealthy, was very sort of eccentric. He made a bunch of sculpture of parts of the body, you know, like a large foot, a large ear, a large chest, a large nose. These were made of vinyl, of large stuffed plastic vinyl, yellow, red, blue. This was before Oldenburg had used vinyl. He didn't use it till a year or two later and this can be verified historically. Whitman did these in '62 and in January of '63 Whitman and I took this storeroom loft at Nine Great Jones Street, which is the same as East Third Street, near the Bowery, between Lafayette and Broadway.

PC: And it had been Janet Kashin's gallery, right? Or was she after you?

WDM: That may have been down the street.

PC: No, it was called Nine Great Jones Street. Was it afterwards?

WDM: Must have been afterwards. We had the first Nine Great Jones Street. There was one other gallery on Great Jones Street . . . .

PC: And it was a different number. Were you upstairs or downstairs?

WDM: No, we were on the street floor.

PC: Oh, but it was a room in the back, wasn't it?

WDM: No, it was entire street floor loft. Well, we had a beautiful show and it was January of '63. I showed about fifteen of these plywood boxes and Whitman showed five or six of these stuffed vinyl sculptures and we had very good response for a two-artist show. All the Happening people came and a good uptown representation. It was a freezing winter, bitter cold, no heat in the loft and so we rented it ourselves and we kept it after our show. Whitman put on two beautiful Happenings, we also had a jazz concert with Don Cherry, and we had a film series of Joseph Cornell's films. The only mistake we made is we didn't take more of the underground filmmakers of that time who wanted to show there. But it was becoming unmanageable to start getting too many people there running the gallery and running our own lives so we only kept it from January to June of '63. We had the double show, Whitman did two Happenings, very beautiful, and then that was about it. I wanted to have another sculpture show but there wasn't enough time to prepare more material and so I would say that that takes us right about up to '63 when I showed these plywood boxes and that was before anybody had shown work of this type.

PC: You hadn't shown things in California, had you?

WDM: No, I was maybe in two group shows of painting and that was it. No, nothing significant at all.

PC: What was the idea behind the boxes, I mean was it proportion or size or just the presence or what were you driving at?

WDM: Well, that's a large question.

PC: I mean, since they were, you know, originally conceived as drawings?

WDM: Well, it's not only the box -- a lot of them were almost rectangles, some horizontal and some vertical -- it was that the box or the rectangle, the absolutely pure geometric form in my mind, you know, had contained, you know, all the right information about the universe and about oneself and about the time, whereas the expressionist's welded sculpture which was improvisational, emotional, the forge and sort of blacksmith idea, didn't contain anything for me personally as a technique or as a subject matter and the clean, fully conceptualized rectangles and forms of the unpainted wooden pieces contained all of the feelings that I myself personally would like to possess and at the same time I think contained the what was to later become the basic cool, cooler intellectual feelings of the, "intellectual" is a bad word, say, more mental attitude of the entire Sixties, of our entire times. So that what was later to be called minimal art was already formulated in '61 or '62, although it didn't come to the public's attention until after the Primary Structure show of 1966. But something doesn't happen in 1966 unless it's already being developed several years earlier, so usually what becomes a large movement to the public . . . .

PC: Has been going on for a while.

WDM: Has certainly been going on for several years before and in my case had been going on for about a good six years before 1966. So that became actually the basis of my work for the last twelve years. Even though it

may have changed materials, the feelings have been the same.

PC: Did you participate in any Happenings here in New York?

WDM: Yeah, I was in one of Whitman's and I think that's all. I didn't see myself as a performer.

PC: How'd you like those experiences?

WDM: Of the Happenings?

PC: Of being in a Happening, I mean it's obviously quite different from playing drums in a group.

WDM: I found it more similar to being in the symphony orchestra; you're filling out this part, you know.

PC: That's marvelous. What about Whitman? how long did you maintain a close relationship with him?

WDM: Oh probably very, very close from '62 to '65, and I think he's one of the true geniuses, you know, true geniuses of the New York art world, but because his forms are dispersed and he works in many mediums and he hasn't had a gallery, except he had that one show at Pace Gallery with the laser, you know, the first laser show in the world, probably. He's had a lot of personal ups and downs; this is his third marriage now. For some reason, he's been a little unmanageable and a lot of people don't know Whitman's work. You see, Dine had a very expressionist sensibility so that when you saw a Dine Happening there was a lot of yelling and screaming and that kind of thing. Oldenburg had a very ironic, humorous sensibility so that in the Oldenburg there was a lot of caricature and there was a lot of really slapstick, side show type of very broad humor but, of course, very sophisticated humor. So Dine was the expressionist, Oldenburg was the humorist, Whitman as people have said, was the poet. I mean his things had very light lyrical sensibility. There was one Happening where girls in fantastic costumes came out in little cardboard cars; they sat down in cars and then they ate like lunch and there was something like, just, you know, like a summer's afternoon. There was something about the sound of nature, this very light touch, like a fog, like very, you know, just an incredible flower. He'd named this Happening "Flower," you know. This incredible thought of the girls changing color costumes and then the idea of the transparent walls coming down around the audience and having the color of the walls change slowly or something, an incredible sensibility, very, very fine and many images but always with a very controlled light touch, which of course was very different than any of the other Happenings. There was a great range of possibilities in Happenings although unfortunately the word Happening has come to mainly be associated with sort of an expressionist type Happening, you know, like a big confusion.

PC: What were the happenings that you did in California?

WDM: Well, they were closer to Whitman's in a way. We had meditative Happenings like one I did with Lamont in the courtyard around the Architecture building and maybe half a dozen people went around and handed people orange peels or an orange to peel or something, and maybe a little piece of mirror so that the people . . . it was like there you were and there were a certain number of objects to contemplate, that kind of thing. There were very few elements, things with very few elements, very long periods of silence going on for a long period of time, not a lot of acting, not a lot of elements, not a lot of expression.

PC: Sounds more oriental.

WDM: Yeah, it was much closer to that, nevertheless the connection with the Happening. The idea of interaction is very interesting, you know, the idea that maybe the art world is going to express itself with the spectator totally engaged, you know, with the actor just a few feet from you, with the sound all around you. Not the theatre in the round, which is still a proscenium. Did you go to the Happenings on East Fourth Street?

PC: Oh, sure. People fell on top of your head and you got splashed and . . . .

WDM: Right, and newspapers were being thrown all over. There was always a lot of newspaper, there was a great scene and . . . .

PC: It was like a painting that . . . .

WDM: Yeah, it was like it was all being created around you; you were in it and maybe you had to at least move closer to other people and change your position in the little area and so forth. Well, maybe these things are all known now, but the idea of being absolutely part of it, that was the important part of the Happenings, that you were absolutely part of it.

PC: Well, the audience as performer.

WDM: Yes. And in actual fact, if, when a person is looking at painting or sculpture and you're not participating in

it even to the level that you participate in music when you're hearing it, I mean if you're hearing it as background music, then it's background music; if you're walking through the Whitney Museum and you're just glancing at things out of the side of your eye, then it's background painting, and if you look at painting and you're only saying, ah, it's this style or that style, it's nothing. Unfortunately that's probably the way 98 or 99 percent of art is experienced: as category, as sort of intellectual judgments. If you actually aren't carried away, if you actually aren't physically moved and you know, like, you know, just, you know, fearing for your life and sanity, then it's almost like not "working." That's the Fifties phrase: "working." Does the painting work? Like, if you actually don't lose your breath, if you don't lie down and die, if you actually aren't run out of the place, you know, if your heart rate doesn't go up, if you actually don't lose your breath . . . .

PC: Something's got to happen to you.

WDM: Right, and something major. If it doesn't fulfill those simple requirements, if it doesn't even give you the feeling you'd have swimming in the ocean or riding a horse, or any of the heavy drug experience you might have, if it doesn't match any very important massive, powerful experience you've had in your life, then it isn't a real work. Now some works of art may have had that power at a certain time, because it captured a certain symbolism, but then you lose it. But all you can ask is that it at least have it once and then hopefully it would have enough power to last, you know. So the thing that came out of the Happenings or the experience of, say, Lamont's music, which is very physical, very loud . . . . Lamont was the first classical musician to use heavy amplification and giant speakers so that when you went to a Lamont concert we had all the big rock speakers back in '64. Simultaneous with the development of rock, we had these massive sounds so that the sound was actually going right through you. In Lamont's music you were totally saturated with the music and all I wanted out of my own work was that if you came to an exhibition that you'd absolutely never forget it, that's all. If I can't fulfill those requirements then I just won't show; I won't show just to make minor variation on what I've done before. So that's why I don't make an awful lot of work or I don't show but maybe every three or four years over long periods of time, or why I don't even go out and see people very much unless I have something to say. So I tend to be somewhat of a recluse and tend not to show regularly and so forth.

PC: Yes, because you don't appear in group shows frequently like so many people do.

WDM: Right. Or publish even a lot of articles and so forth. But I think, you know, clarifying all this now I'd like to give a lot of credit to Whitman and a lot of credit to Lamont. From Lamont, being a musician, I got so much energy and basic attitudes from the world of music. Whitman I considered from the world of theatre actually and I found this energy in his kind of theatre which of course I never found in Broadway plays or narrative plays at all. They never had the emotional intensity of the pure Happenings.

PC: Well, I think that's true but I think what you see on Broadway is never as intense. For one thing, it's not as ritualistic and it's not . . . .

WDM: It is ritualistic.

PC: Oh it is, but the degree is so diluted by trying to make a smash hit.

WDM: I think it's limited because it has to follow the narrative form.

PC: Well, the Happenings all have some kind of thin . . . .

WDM: But really . . . .

PC: You know, Lucas Samaras running around doing something.

WDM: Yeah, but I think it's a shame. You see, Whitman of course could have, he could have gone to Broadway, he should have done it, but what he did finally was that Osaka Japanese World Fair Pepsi Cola EAT thing. He brought all the people together. He brought the musicians, he brought the designers, he brought the sound people and still it was for Pepsi Cola or something. And it was a big mistake on his part although everybody said in itself it was fine. Well, Pepsi closed it after a few months. I'm not sure you can make those kinds of collaborations unless everybody knows aboveboard what everybody is doing.

PC: And we don't have enlightened patronage here yet. Your association with Lamont Young then carried on for a number of years?

WDM: Oh, with Lamont it was very, very close, especially '58, '59 right through '64 or '65 and even through to today. But in the early years, '60-1 and 2, I was very close to Morris. Then say from '63 to '64 with both Lamont and Whitman and it was never collaboration on exact projects but just that the energy of these people and the energy of their fields, again, going back to the fact that music could give one so much energy, I think may be found in my work in possibly in the sense of time in my work. For instance I did this piece on which there has

been no article yet but it's a piece of about three miles of lines cut into the desert in a certain configuration and it takes you about four hours to walk through this sculpture. Now the notion of experiencing the desert, experience this sculpture . . . . By the way, it takes about two or three hours out of Las Vegas to drive to this place, it is about 100 miles from Las Vegas.

PC: Whereabouts is it?

WDM: It's a 100 miles northeast of Las Vegas; I'll draw you a map, sort of back roads out there in some hidden valley.

PC: Was that something you did for Scull?

WDM: No, I've never done a landwork for Scull. But anyway it takes you about 2 or 3 hours to drive out to the valley and there is nothing in this valley except a cattle corral somewhere in the back of the valley. Then it takes you 20 minutes to walk off the road to get to the sculpture, so some people have missed it, have lost it. Then, when you hit this sculpture which is a mile long line cut with a bulldozer, at that point you have a choice of walking either east or west. If you walk east you hit a dead end; if you walk west you hit another road, at another point, you hit another line and you actually have a choice. At that point you decide which way to go and so forth, then you continue, you walk another mile and at another point you walk another half mile so and at a certain point you have to double back. After spending about four hours, you have walked through all of the three miles of the thing and you would have gotten your orientation because the sun will also be setting in the west and this is lined up so that all the lines are either east-west or north-south. Now I did this piece in 1969 and I haven't done an article on it because I didn't find a way to photograph it properly. You can only photograph in multiple views, you know, like this is looking east and this is looking . . . .

PC: A satellite shot.

WDM: Well, that's true, but that's a different experience because that's an experience like a drawing but this is an experience at ground level, it's a different experience.

PC: How wide are the lines?

WDM: Ten feet wide, eight or ten feet wide.

PC: And they are how deep?

WDM: Oh, it's about a foot deep, two feet deep and about eight feet wide. The point I'm making here is that the most beautiful thing is to experience a work of art over a period of time. For instance, architecture we know has always thought about this. You go into the palace, you go into the house, you experience the different floors, you sit in certain rooms for certain amounts of time and when, after an hour or half hour or four or five hours you walk out again. You've experienced all of the proportion and relationships; you've experienced something over a period of time. Well, most sculptures have always been confined to being a single object, no mater what the style of configuration -- expressionist or figurative, whatever.

PC: You look at it from this point and that point.

WDM: You look at it and maybe walk around it and, basically, let's face it. How much time does a person spend with a piece of sculpture? An average of perhaps less than one minute, maximum of five or ten, tops. Nobody spends ten minutes looking at one piece of sculpture. So by starting to work with land sculpture in 1968 I was able to make things of scale completely unknown to this time, and able to occupy people with a single work for periods of up to an entire day. A period could even be longer but in this case if it takes you two hours to go out to the piece and if you take four hours to see the piece and it takes you two hours to go back, you have to spend eight hours with this piece, at least four hours with it immediately, although to some extent the entrance and the exit is part of the experience of the piece. So what happened, though, which was very interesting in connection with the idea of theatre or film is that to build one of these pieces becomes a major logistical economic undertaking. Like if a person wants to make a movie, we all now that it takes sixty or eighty thousand dollars to make a feature film of any kind, black and white, not too much original music and not too many name stars, and it takes four or five hundred thousand dollars to make any medium size picture and a million to two million dollars to make any decent type of major film. Well, the notion that maybe a piece of sculpture might take an investment of forty or fifty thousand dollars and . . . but when it's finished, it gives the person an experience with could take him several ours or several days to experience is something I've been fighting now for the last four years, starting now the fifth year.

PC: How do you mean fighting?

WDM: Fighting because there is no gallery structure or museum structure set up to finance major works of art

like this.

PC: It's not a portable saleable object.

WDM: Well, I'll find some way; I'll find some way to sale it but it's not portable. I sort of made a jump there from Lamont and Whitman to the land sculpture but partly just to emphasize this point about the experience of a work through time.

PC: Well, if we can go back here, what about Cage? You heard about him from Young; did you read his books and writings and did you hear his concerts? Did he give any out there?

WDM: No, I never heard any concerts in California. I may have heard the records from Town Hall. I found that Cage was a great gatherer of ideas himself. He had studied with Suzuki; he had studied Zen. So if Cage was studying Zen he was studying it in the same way that all the people in San Francisco were, you know, in the sense that . . . .

PC: How do you mean that?

WDM: Well, Cage was studying Zen with Suzuki; all the people in San Francisco were reading every book on Zen that came out. So in a sense that was a bridge for me between San Francisco and Cage's sensibility. Then Cage was interested in all of the freer forms of modern music. So, being around music and around tape recorders and everything, I was sympathetic to him and also he was a great story teller. I think that in a sense his ideas about chance were very well tailored to being another way of reading the litany of abstract expressionist dogma. You go to the painting with the idea of chance, of seeing how it will fall. And then he was saying you go to the composition, to the keyboard, with the idea of chance. Later when I was to start reflecting the ideas of chance, I became less and less interested in Cage and less and less interested in his music. I never did like his music actually. But the ideas were always well stated. Then, when I made my statue of John Cage, I think it was partly a recognition of the fact that Cage may have been caging a lot of people.

PC: Oh, I'm sure you're aware of that.

WDM: Yeah.

PC: Did you get to know him once you came to New York?

WDM: No, not at all. The interesting thing is that Cage now at this point has become very influenced by Buckminster Fuller; he's read all of Fuller's work.

PC: Well, they are old friends back to Black Mountain College years.

WDM: That could be, but he's really expounding a lot of Fuller's ideas now.

PC: Really?

WDM: Yeah, and he's much more involved in the political technological sense of the time and not so much a personal sense of being, you know . . . .

PC: When did you start rejecting the interest in chance?

WDM: I would say -- that's really hard -- I would say that it may have been when I started to see the extreme limitations of the romantic point of view, that what seemed to be total chance and total freedom was often just truly an exposition of a certain really fixed expressionist style of work. And also I found that I didn't really want to personally live that kind of a dead drunk absolutely raving wild man life.

PC: Do you think the lifestyle influences the work that much?

WDM: Yeah, I really think that.

PC: The work and the man, his life, are one?

WDM: It sounds like a cliche but it's probably more true than not. I don't see how a really quiet person could be, well, "quiet" is the wrong word. Just leave it the way you said it. I think that what great romantic themes really had to be expressed in the Sixties could be expressed better by a musician. I mean like the Rolling Stones from '64 to today, nearly ten years in ten great albums, twelve or whatever they did, really expressed a lot of that. You know, the feelings the people had in a really romantic but still very sly way. So they are professionals; they could express that. I mean John Coltrane could express this incredible expressionist kind of saxophone playing but really very brilliantly controlled and intellectual. He had the power and he had the mind both.

PC: Have you continued an interest in music or jazz?

WDM: Well, I can't remember if it was '65 or '66, but I joined the Velvet Underground rock group and I met John Cale, Lou Reed and this was six months before they met Andy Warhol. This was when it was just a band and I would have stayed as the drummer of that band and this is very early, if you realize that the Beatles only came on the scene in '64, to be with a really all electrified guitar rock and roll band. It was a great band, the first band to have any drug lyrics and the first band to have heavy electronic feedback in it. I could have stayed with that band, I mean that would have been my band; that would have been a really great style. It was an acid rock band; it was a beautiful, really great band. Yet I came to this almost third conflict. The first may have been between jazz and painting. Then in the early Sixties I was trying to play music with Lamont; I wasn't with Lamont's band at that time and Lamont was in between . . . . He went through a period of Coltrane eastern music and electronic music and it was sort of mixed. It lasted about a year and then I didn't want to sort out those influences so I rejected playing with Lamont. And it was very tiring to bring all the drums around, you know, and then after playing all night, you couldn't do anything during the day and this was a period of months. I thought, are you going to play or are you going to do the sculpture? You know, are you going to be an artist or a musician?

PC: The conflict was still going on.

WDM: Yeah, it was really going on because I was playing with this good band, with this great musician, and records were coming, contracts, great hi fi sound, tape, everything you could do. Music was in a great renaissance, but I went back to the art. Then when I was with The Velvets, here was a real choice. I mean it was just breaking all over the place; I knew that we were really good and they went on to make this great album. But then I said, do I want to go to rehearsal every day and every night, you know, take all these drugs? Do I really just keep playing these rhythms, is that going to be enough? That was really a painful decision. I said, no, put it down. I'm not going to buy another set of drums; I'm not going to haul these drums to another place and I just can't keep playing these songs. I can't do it. I don't want to go out on tour; I don't want . . . and then of course I was about 29 then. You see, being a musician is something like being an athlete to some extent; you really have to be young and strong to do it. So I put it down pretty much. I made one tape in '64 of drums and crickets which unfortunately I haven't played, and then I made one last piece in 1968 with the ocean and drums. So I made two drum compositions. Later these tapes fell into the hands of some recording engineer who put out an album called "Environments" with the sound of the ocean on one side and (a very successful album) the sound of birds on the other. Well, that's just a little story neither here nor there. But I basically stopped in '68.

PC: So it's really gone on until quite recently.

WDM: Yeah, till just four years ago.

PC: How did you get involved with the Velvet Underground? What was the kind of lead into that?

WDM: Well, it came through Lamont. Lamont had a viola player called Tony Conrad who is also a filmmaker and who also did the soundtrack to Flaming Creatures. Tony was a mathematician from Harvard and was a friend of Lamont's, possibly from his Stockhousen days; he may have met him in Germany. Then Tony came out to California. I was 24 and Tony was a few years younger and Tony was playing viola with John Cale who was from the Velvets. So Lamont had this fantastic band of two singers and two viola players, and the viola players were playing drones just rrrrrrrrrrr like that. Then he had these fantastic concerts at Larry Poons' loft with that band about '67 or '68, somewhere in there and this band was terrific. If this band had toured . . . I mean it was so beautiful. And of course Marian Zuzelo, Lamont's wife, had a slide show on top of them absolutely simultaneous.

PC: These were those line things?

WDM: Right, with the sort of snowflake patterns, you know.

PC: Right.

WDM: Like Arabic script and focusing very slowly in and out of focus. She had a light show like Lamont had his own sound and light show as early as '64 or '65 and top rate. I said, why don't I just join this band and we'll get a record contract and we'll tour? I mean it's great; it's fabulous.

PC: It wasn't enough?

WDM: It wasn't enough. And also the logistics of touring with a band means that your life is part of that band and, like most artists, I just was too much of an individualist and I couldn't be part of a group and groups contributed as much to the whole Sixties. I could only be part of a group loosely with Lamont or loosely with Whitman but not on a day-to-day performance basis.

PC: Yeah.

WDM: But Lamont's static music and Whitman's touch, it was really fine. Lamont is only now coming out with records, only now coming out with the second record. Lamont has influenced Terry Riley who has made beautiful records. Terry Riley influenced Steve Reich who has made these records for Columbia and Phil Glass evidently discovered a similar type of music independently. So now they have what they call a Hynoptic School of music. Very static, long long tones without great variations from measure to measure, more like a solid state or a solid feeling. Rather than having great variations in pitch and variations of melody, you carry on solid . . . .

PC: Drone.

WDM: Yeah, almost like the drone is the basis of it. Lamont developed that and I played a certain part in it, making certain tapes like in '64, and Terry Riley developed it in his way using the tape delay, where you play a certain thing and then three seconds later it plays again and then it echoes again and the beautiful N C and Rainbow occurred on Columbia Records. I was very close to Terry and I nearly formed a band with Terry and John Cale. We were playing right in the other part of the studio, had all of the material set up. We were trying, but Terry had his idea, John Cale has his, I had mine. To make a band you have to work out your common feelings and ideas, and it's just too much.

PC: Too much independence, yeah.

WDM: Oh, it's so hard. Anyway, since '68 when I made the ocean music, I've basically not played, unfortunately. I stopped playing and I haven't composed and I haven't played in any groups.

PC: Do you go to concerts ever or listen to jazz or the radio or records?

WDM: I think just on an average level with other people. The last really great performance I heard was the Rolling Stones in Europe on their last tour in '71 and I heard Jimi Hendricks two weeks before he died in Copenhagen; I heard him before he went to London. And before that the last great performer I'd heard was Coltrane. I mean this is a very interesting thing that you brought up. If you think about the major, like the major musical experiences you might have and you can date them, you know, you can say in that year I heard these three people that were really good. And so I would say that in '71 hearing the Rolling Stones in Cologne and hearing Hendricks in Copenhagen, it was the greatest musical experience I've had. I haven't had any since that. Hendricks was completely healthy; I don't know why he died. He had his original group, his original drummer, and he was great. He was just great.

PC: But don't you think the drug scene had a lot to do with what happened to some of the people?

WDM: Yeah, probably so.

PC: I know musicians who got into it and, you know, they're off in another world now.

WDM: Yeah, it sure takes its toll.

PC: Never gotten straight.

WDM: But I would enjoy playing with some good musicians but it's hard to find good musicians and then you have to have the like mind and when the last time I played . . . I played actually a couple of sessions last year and it turned out that everybody was playing still like John Coltrane. I mean it's what they call Free Jazz right now, like Ornette Coleman, Coltrane, you know, that whole school of playing. Basically I would say it's all basically followers of Ornette Coleman and Coltrane and I can play that style of drums very well, but I really feel I'm just playing somebody else's music and in actual fact that may have been the more serious crisis. Maybe the Rolling Stones being English and white could play black music and somehow do it. But I know who made it, you know, and I played some drums with Coltrane's drummer Rashette Ali who was the drummer who followed Alvin Jones, and I went to his loft in Brooklyn and we played and I could play what he plays. But that's his language. I can be an actor and I can play and I can feel it and I can play it, but not that way, not every day, it's not mine.

PC: How so not? I mean there seems to be an indication that you can do it but it doesn't really work.

WDM: Well, it's black music, you know, and you can learn the language and you can play it, but it's not for me to make the next step in the development of that. And they'll face their own crises now, the crises of that form in jazz and it's serious.

PC: Oh, they're in a lot of trouble with it now.

WDM: I mean the free style is very full right now; they're continuing to expand the free style. In fact I heard of one group where they had fifty or a hundred players all playing free-style and it must have been great but . . . .

PC: Who was that?

WDM: I don't know. I think it was just a special occasion and they got, you know, ten bands together or something. But rock is having it's own crises now. But anyway, I think we live just to the moment where everything is summed up. Like every year there might be less than six films that are really perfect of four hundred that are made in the world, and every year there might be a thousand albums made, a hundred new groups made but you're lucky if three or our are really fine, you know. So we just live to that, to the great experience which sums it all up.

[END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE TWO]
[SIDE THREE]

PC: Side Three and it's the 9th of October, 1972, Paul Cummings talking to Walter De Maria. We had gotten on the previous side up to about 1962 or '63, and I had you in New York, but you had gotten married somewhere along the line.

WDM: I got married in January of '61 to a girl I had met in San Francisco about six or nine months before. Then I came to New York and she came to New York and we got married here. She was a California girl and was studying art in San Francisco at the time.

PC: Did you meet her in school?

WDM: No, just met her in San Francisco in the North Beach section. We got divorced this year which is eleven and a half years later, although we've been separated for the last five years, since '66.

PC: Why did it take so long for the divorce?

WDM: Well, ah, I think there was a chance we would have gotten back together actually. But that was a very important part of my life from '61 to '66 because, going through the difficult part of being an artist, the first years, the struggle, the scrambling for jobs and studios and all the real difficulties of coping with New York, it was very nice to do it together and to discover New York at the same time. You know, discover the place, the people, go everywhere together and we were both close to Morris and Simone, to Whitman and Simone.

PC: What was her name, your wife?

WDM: Suzanne, and she now goes by the same Susannah. She has her own perfume company and she's sort of an underground star in a way. She was in the early Happenings; she was in some of the early underground movies, underground theatre. She was a model; she worked at the Museum of Modern Art for a short time and she is very beautiful and now has her own business. To some extent I may have, you know, eclipsed her own development, but anyway, six years and eleven years are pretty big numbers. So I don't know, that's like just the end of that chapter came this summer with a Nevada divorce.

PC: Well, did she intend to be an artist when she came here too?

WDM: No, no, not really. She was only in her second year of college. I mean she was only twenty and I was 25 when we got married. No, I think that she wanted to be a fashion model and she did appear in several magazines and then maybe she toyed with the idea of acting for a little while. But actually she in a way has been closer to the fashion world, I guess, like with the perfumes, part of the fashion world. When she went on her own in '67 she was very much a part of the downtown scene, the boutiques, and discotheques and the hippie situation, and she had had a very independent free spirit in San Francisco too. So she caught the waves of all the romantic movements from San Francisco to New York right in the center and, you know . . . .

PC: There it was.

WDM: Yeah, so I'm sure she'll be with the next wave too.

PC: What do you think the next one's going to be?

WDM: I don't know; I'll have to ask her.

PC: She keeps track of those?

WDM: She has a sense of that.

PC: Well, what did you do the first couple of years that you were here, say before the Paula Cooper show?

WDM: Well, the Paula Cooper show was in January of '65, and before that in January of '63 was the show with

Whitman.

PC: January seems to be an important month for you?

WDM: Yeah, it's a good way to start the year. Well, I worked at the New York Public Library three days a week, part-time job, in the American history room, the local history and the family history room, from '61 to '63. That brought in fifty dollars a week, enough to get by on and I was making these minimal conceptual rectangular wooden boxes, making a lot of notes, playing music with Lamont, and making invisible drawings.

PC: When did they start?

WDM: Well, they started probably in late '62, '63.

PC: What led into those?

WDM: Well, in '61, '62 I would draw every evening. You know, go to work in the library and come home and I would draw, have a lot of drawing paper and pencils.

PC: What kind of drawings were they?

WDM: Well, often of boxes and rectangles.

PC: Sculpture ideas or leading in that direction?

WDM: Well, yes, right. And then a few other subject matters, such as mountains, castles and cats.

PC: Did you have a cat?

WDM: Yeah, we were very much into cats. In fact we bred cats.

PC: Oh really. What kind?

WDM: Well, Burmese. You see, if you take a black cat and you breed it with a Siamese cat you get all black cats; you get an entire black cat litter, the black cat dominates. But then if you take two of the black cats from that litter and you breed them you can get brown cats, very rich coffee-colored cats which they call Burmese cats. It's a synthetic strain but it's a definite strain. Then you can interbreed the Burmese cats and evidently it's a relatively new thing. People have been trying it for only ten, twenty years or something. I liked the black cats. I liked Siamese cats but they have a bad temperament. But you breed them and get these cocoa brown, rich, black-brown Burmese cats, really nice. So we actually did that for four or five years, had several litters and I enjoyed drawing the cats. I admire cats, admire their personality, their temperament, very, very fine, you know, very intelligent.

PC: More so than dogs.

WDM: Yeah, I've come to appreciate dogs in the last few years. My interest in cats stopped four or five years ago and I have a lot more interest in dogs, but I've never had a dog. But anyway I'd draw the cats, draw these mountains, draw castles, and a lot of the boxes. The invisible drawings came from the realization that if you put the pencil on the page you could put it on very very lightly and if you're just concentrating on the page, you could pick up the drawing with an enormously light touch, just almost like a a think silver line, also the use of the entire paper with very few lines or possibly very few words and it wasn't necessary to have a big fistful of India ink and brushes and it wasn't necessary to have a thousand colors. It wasn't necessary to have a lot of brushstrokes to have a lot of expressionist action. Even with a ruler and one or two lines or just a very very few lines like the outline of the mountain it was possible to make a very fine drawing which was almost as much of an idea as it was a drawing. So this went on for several years and evolved into what I call the invisible drawings, the drawings in which what was put on the page was so light, it was just on the threshold of visibility and the interest there was in the way the idea of the drawing was as important as the drawing and the notion that you doubled your senses, you didn't know if it was there or wasn't there. In a way it was something like the land work in that it is there but no one can see it. The whole notion of invisibility has become more and more important to me.

PC: How did the drawings develop? By elimination almost? You never really did expressionist drawings, did you?

WDM: No, just a little bit in art school. I would say it came partly out of Suzanne's sensibility. I mean she was drawing also and she made drawings in a lighter style which actually influenced my style of drawing. She actually evolved a kind of almost child-like style of drawing which is very much in favor in the last three or four years in advertising drawing. You know, the kind of psychedelic drawing with rainbows and that kind of thing. She was drawing that way in '61 and '62 and so to some extent I would say that that was an influence. And the

other side would be certain things to smoke and things very sensitive.

PC: What about the selection of the words . . . ? I remember the various words, usually in the top third of the larger ones in the show.

WDM: Yeah, well the words are very important and, in fact, on those first 24 sculptures I did there were probably words on more than half of them, maybe three quarters, again with plain pencil, pencilled onto the plain wood. It's hard to say when the words came in. In a way I really don't know; it might have been from seeing some words used earlier. It could have been partly through the poets. I haven't really seen words used successfully in other paintings that I liked very much but certainly words hadn't been used on sculpture very much at all.

PC: Monuments on the bottom.

WDM: Right.

PC: But never on the figure itself.

WDM: No. And so I don't know where really I got the thought of putting quite a few words or instructions on the sculptures. But in any case, what finally was put down was what I had to do. I don't think I had seen that done before.

PC: Did you have any interest in concrete poetry along the line?

WDM: Well, I don't like it; I don't like it. It really seems something out of the Twenties, all that interest in graphics and shaping and the use of the typography is really out of the Bauhaus or something. I really have no interest in that. It had to be much more personal in a way.

PC: But your lettering in the invisible drawings is kind of box letters, square.

WDM: Yeah, like simple printing almost.

PC: Right angles.

WDM: The simplest way. The first way you were taught to print perhaps. I guess you associate printing with graphics with printed mechanically shaped things, the notion that somehow they would be box letters but still hand done. That edge between personal script, personal handwriting and lettered work is kind of interesting.

PC: How did you decide on those large sheets of paper?

WDM: Well, it has to do with the space. I think that this is only really culminating in the land work but it is that the real notion of an infinite space is perhaps one of the few thoughts that is worth thinking about more than once. And to some extent art seems to close in on itself. I mean like if you have an object, and the object is there and you look at the object, it is almost as if your eye collapses the object in, and the thought that if the work was very light and the idea was expansive and the work was not only the work but the idea of a larger situation to some extent that combination of the work and the lettering might be that it might create a vast spatial experience which is something like if you were to be breathing air off a sailboat in the middle in the ocean. A lot of oxygen is good for the head and so the notion of lines traveling out to infinite points from the sculpture but done in subliminal way is a hard, hard thing to do but it is possible to do it. So that the idea of minimalism, the idea of true minimalism, is I think what I was trying to develop in '61 and '62 and I think the idea of minimal art will be around with us for the next thirty years. For instance, think about surrealism and in surrealism you have the situation of the poets and the fantastic landscapes and objects and the juxtaposition of objects. Now when referring to theatre and film, strange happenings in politics and anything, people say that is a surrealistic situation. It stands for a basic point of view, you know what I mean; it stands for a whole point of view of the world. There is a way of describing the situation.

PC: It's a term that has become more widely known, too.

WDM: And just within the arts I think the same thing applies to minimal art. In fact, later in the Sixties the development of microcircuits which are superminiaturized electronics done through deduction by photographs and so forth, things like mini-skirts and various ideas of absolutely . . . you know, even the idea of the computer in a way, total efficiency, I think it also stands for, in some sense, an understanding of the atom, the idea that the thing could be reduced to its most essential points.

PC: They are always finding new parts to the atom.

WDM: Well, that's true, that's true. But I mean there's some relationship between being able to go smaller and smaller through the electron microscope and at the same time still not be able to see all the galaxies in outer

space. But I do think that in ten or twenty years somebody will say, well, that's a minimal situation, or that's a minimal or that's minimal art. I think that that will stand. The point was that in the development of these boxes and rectangles it wasn't just making another piece of geometric sculpture, because there's been a lot of geometric sculpture in the last fifty years, but of the relationship between this angle and that angle or this box and that box or even David Smith's last sculptures, you know, the boxes and cubes which in a way was a sort of three-dimensional cubism some sixty or seventy years later, fifty years later, or whatever. But, it was the idea that you could take a perfect cube, perfect rectangle such as the high energy bar, the perfect rectangle and, well, I'll show you a high energy bar in a moment, and the notion that its ideas and its lines were so perfect and so perfectly composed and self-contained that it was perfectly satisfying to look at that one object as a sculpture without having it confused with a lot of needless relationships. It was perfectly focused on itself and implied a lot more than it was.

PC: You still make those, don't you?

WDM: The high energy bars, yeah. I'll make those all my life.

PC: It's an open-ended multiple.

WDM: That's right, and I didn't like the word "multiple."

PC: Did you think of them in those terms?

WDM; Well, I would say when I started making them in '65, '66, the ideas of multiples was just growing about that time and I thought that if a person accepted the idea of a multiple that it should be open-ended, because why, if you have mass-produced technology, why should you limit it at fifty or a hundred or two hundred, because the technology is inexpensive to make . . . .

PC: You have to want that limitation.

WDM: Yeah, and so I sort of thought if I ever did that that probably multiples should be completely continuous.

PC: What do you think of the whole terminology that developed under the umbrella of the term "multiple," that whole critical activity that was going on in the late Sixties? Do you subscribe to that, or do you prefer a different definition?

WDM: Well . . . .

PC: Going back to the collected anthologies . . .?

WDM: Multiples?

PC: And minimal.

WDM: Minimal?

PC: Minimal, essays on minimal art.

WDM: Oh, well, you were talking about multiples. You meant minimal?

PC: Minimal, right.

WDM: Well, I think what happened was . . . that's interesting; I never heard that before.

[LOUD KNOCKING]

PC: Do you feel it was an accurate . . . .

WDM: His book and writings on and included anything which might be just called hard edge and the difference between the minimal sculpture and hard edge, geometric sculpture, is actually just pretty obvious, but I think there were very few minimal artists, truly.

PC: Who would you say?

WDM: Well, a lot of the Dwan artists' sensibilities were minimal, like Carl Andre, Sol Lewitt, Robert Ryman in painting, Morris may have been, and then went into very complicated baroque and expressionist stuff later, my own work, Agnes Martin in a way, but not Donald Judd. Actually his things I think were quite baroque and quite large and feeling, especially in the later ones now, with going into precious metals and bright painted situations actually. In fact, the brighter painted modular ones were more like hard edge, bright hard edge geometric. But

this distinction I think was brought out by Kynaston McShine in the '66 Primary Structure show where the upstairs room contained work closer to minimal art, the downstairs rooms contained the brightly painted reds, blues, yellows, hard edge geometric art and at that point even hard edge painting was trying to make a stand in the middle Sixties and, I don't know, sort of held a permanent place but only with the kind of sensibility of Kelly in a way distinguished itself. What I'm saying was that by '66 people couldn't tell the difference between minimal art and hard edge geometric abstract sculpture, but I think starting after that, you know, '67, '68, it sort of became clear. However, I think to be a true minimalist you should almost nearly be invisible yourself.

PC: You mean as a public personality?

WDM: As a person, yeah, because to be expressing yourself in too baroque, romantic a way might be to be imposing a lot more content on the world than is necessary. It's not necessary for the world to have that many prima donnas screeching around and sort of continuing the abstract expressionist temperament. So it's curious because, who knows, the very best minimal artists may have been seen at all.

PC: For example?

WDM: For example, we don't know. So I think that the interesting thing was to make boxes that are not painted at all, not even painted grey, you know, like the thought was that Jasper Johns made his paintings grey so certain sculptors enjoyed making their sculptures grey because they thought this was a kind of what they called non-color, the neutral non-color, but the notion of . . . .

PC: Would you prefer the inherent colors of the materials?

WDM: Well, certainly I've only worked with like aluminum and steel which are like white and grey, polished steel is basically white, grayish white, you know, light, it's the color of light; it's not even white, it's a very . . . .

PC: Well, it reflects.

WDM: Yeah, right, it's pure light in a way. So all I've used is aluminum, steel, a few other metals, but not using any paint or any coloring with them and to use the natural dirt. I like to use the color of a page, to use the color of natural wood. So, if you give up color, you eliminate a lot of problems.

PC: But many of the things you've made in metal were originally made in wood, weren't they?

WDM: Right.

PC: Were they made in wood just for economic reasons or as maquettes for eventual manufacturing in metal?

WDM: No, no, no.

PC: Because it would be a very different feeling one would get.

WDM: Right. Well, actually the commissioning of a few works in metal came at the suggestion of Scull. I met Scull in '65 after Paula's show; he saw one of the pieces that I had there made with wood. It was a four by six foot frame made of wood with silver paste, and there was a gold one too, a gold frame and silver frame.

PC: So they were how large?

WDM: They were four by six feet with a niche cut in the center so that you could like place an orange or a pack of cigarettes or flower or something in the niche. It was an enormous frame and a small niche, you know. It was really, truly, a frame isolating the reality inside, or non-reality. Most of the time there wasn't anything in the frame, not during the exhibition. So he saw that and he thought that, since it was a frame and metal frames were sort of being discovered at that time in the middle Sixties, there was quite a kick to go from wooden frames to metal frames; it would be interesting to make this in metal. So I took it on as a commission project and went to the metal shop and attempted to make this wooden piece in metal. But it turned out that there were enormous surface problems in getting such a large piece flat and the right reflective qualities, didn't look like a mirror, you know, and so we abandoned that project as being unrealizeable. But being in a metal shop I got more interested in metal and so then, when the idea that we try one or two of the wooden pieces in metal came up, it seemed like a good chance and they turned out very successfully and the fact that the lines on the metal sculpture are perfectly milled and so forth actually accentuates the linear qualities of the pieces, and the fact that they were white was good and the fact that you could engrave on them instead of putting in on with a pencil added a medium of inscription directly into the metal. And also I found that I could engrave with a very fine point and the engraving was nearly invisible so that this approximated the feel of the pencil point too. So it worked well and I stayed with that very strongly for '65, '66' 76, for those years, possibly one or two in '68 but it was basically those three years and then this year I've gone back and made a few more. Well, I did the Bed of Spikes in '68, so for those four years I was heavily involved in finding out what all the metals could do and how

to use all the machines and the metal shop, but it worked out as a very good way of composing because you could work directly off an idea, almost without a sketch at all.

PC: You mean with the machines in metal . . . ?

WDM: Yeah, right, by working in direct concert with the metal shop you found that you had specialists who could do everything better than you could do, although, say, you did buy a machine, maybe in several years you could do it, but why not use a specialist immediately. Then too, you didn't have to invest in 20 thousand dollars worth of metal shop equipment when you could just go there and use it. So this started part of the whole trend of people ordering their sculpture and everything. So I was doing that by '65, just working directly from the concept to the minimal sculpture. There's a terrific relationship between minimal art and conceptual art right at that point and this differs in some way from the sketch, or it differs in some way from the maquette or the drawing for the sculpture. You really tried to work directly off the pure idea; give the pure idea to the shop, theoretically go away for three months and the piece would magically appear. Actually you'd have to check with the shop on a lot of details, but the idea was to make it really clean, just really make it appear. I've still got sketches for about 20 pieces that I think are still very valid, some of them going back to '64, '65. I may even make them in metal.

PC: Well, let me ask you about Mr. Scull. What kind of relationship have you had with him over the years?

WDM: Well, it's too long to describe, but he did commission six or seven of my works in '65, '66, so with each of these six or seven works naturally there was a lot of opportunity to see him and in a way I don't know why he patronized so much of my work because it wasn't really in the pop tradition. But, you know, I can't elaborate; I mean, he's a unique character.

PC: Well, did he want to get involved in the making of these things, or did he leave you pretty much on your own? I know some artists have complained that he constantly got involved with their life, you know, wanted them for dinner or take them here or do all this kind of social thing. Did you find that, too?

WDM: Well, no, not that much. I saw a lot of him; I saw him a lot. I mean would see him once a week or so, see him a lot. But I didn't find that a drawback at all; he was a very interesting personality. Like I can remember going out, Susannah and I, going out to dinner with him one night in Chinatown the evening that he had bought the Rosenquist F 1-11, you know, and we picked up the Times and opened it up and there was his picture. "Scull buys F 1-11 for sixty thousand dollars," you know. And he was really pleased with himself and I mean that's really a neat experience, you know, being part of the history of the times. See, Scull was a . . . I suppose he had aspirations of being an artist at some time.

PC: He studied at the Art Student's League even.

WDM: Studied to be, well . . . and worked as an industrial designer, right. I mean you could tell stories about Scull all evening and I would say every story that's out about him is probably true. And the fact is that he understood his time and he understood what the Greene Gallery was. he understood what those artists were; he understood the relationship between the excitement of art and the excitement of the times, the Sixties. All of those things are true. I mean he can certainly talk to the artists about art. I don't know if there are many patrons that want to talk to artists about art, so why should that be a drawback? Not to mention the political side of the art world. That's not here nor there, the galleries and museums and curators and shows and magazines and so forth, that's all understood now. The fact that he understood it and . . . .

PC: Used it, really.

WDM: Right, that he absolutely was a realist and at the same time understanding what some of the artists' motives and other goals might have been. But I would say he was my patron in '65 and '66, commissioned six or eight works, maybe more, and I think all those works are really successful. The metal was often expensive to deal with; it was a way of expanding one's range of materials at that point and I would say that it was successful, that the work that came out of that period was very successful.

PC: Well, how did you get so involved with Paula Johnson, now Cooper?

WDM: Right. That came through a very strange contact of an art historian named Steven Pepper, who has now gotten his PhD. in baroque painting, teaches at Johns Hopkins University. Pepper was a guy like close to Red Grooms, close to the sort of very expressionist, realist painters in a way. He was responding to all of these kind of lower east side types and I may have met Pepper possibly at one of the Happenings and then met him a couple times later and then he got to know Paula and I think acted as a kind of an advisor to her on some of the people to bring into her gallery when she opened her first gallery in '65. He just recommended it to me and said, "This is a brand new place. It's absolutely brand new; they haven't even shown anyone. Maybe you'd like to show your work." I went there and I found her so unique and her gallery so unique (meaning this townhouse on

68th Street) that it had the qualities that I was later to choose in all my shows, to choose the person very carefully with whom I work, their whole architectural, spatial, the vibrations that their gallery gave off, to choose the timing of their moment and their place and see if that coincided with my moment, my place. At this particular moment, 1965, I would have liked to have shown in the Greene Gallery, but if that was not possible I didn't want to show anywhere but at Paula's, a gallery being so private. The only other good artist she showed in my opinion was a black artist named Bob Thompson; you know he died a few years ago.

PC: Drinking.

WDM: Drinking, yeah, right. And I think he did good work and she was showing his work. The other people she was showing I don't think were very good and that gallery only lasted one year with those people, that's all, just one season, that's all. I had one of the first shows there, or maybe third or fourth show, and it was a very, very beautiful place to show these invisible drawings and to create a sculptural situation of columns leading down this long hallway into this brightly lit chamber, almost an Egyptian situation, actually, descending to this dark passageway.

PC: Long hallway.

WDM: Yeah, very, very long. I made a film of that show, in fact.

PC: Oh, really!

WDM: And it very well shows the situation. So actually meeting her was actually a very strange situation, in fact, is interesting about the whole magic of New York. Because in a way meeting someone at a Happening like this art historian guy who I didn't know then and only see once every three years now that would lead to an introduction to a person to have a show because I needed a show. It was two years then since the last show, and in a very private controlled situation where I didn't have a lot of precedent or the tradition of the gallery, a new situation, a very fresh person, a very nice atmosphere and then to see Paula later here, you know, after her divorce, her remarriage and open a gallery here which also even at this point has a very special atmosphere about it of all of the SoHo galleries, really an atmosphere where a young artist could have a show in a way on his own terms. And so that spirit was very fine and it was just a very happy coincidence of fate that she was just opening a gallery and it was in the right place and seemed right for me.

PC: It all happened, and . . .?

WDM: Yeah, and of course an artist's first and second shows are concerned with maybe fifty or a hundred people coming to them, two hundred if you're lucky. So it was just an opportunity to have it there rather than somehow having these two hundred people coming to your studio which was a very difficult situation. So there was still a reason for it; there was a timing of it and then a certain number of people came. Like Alfonso Ossorio came, or Ossorio's brother or something, I never met him, bought one of the drawings.

PC: Oh, Roberto.

WDM: Right. I never met him but evidently he bought it and then Bellamy recommended that Scull come and Scull bought a drawing and then wanted to do this commission. So from that one show, in a sense, yes, and of course it's always cumulative. But I remember Whitman at that time wanted to have a show of his movie sculptures with Bellamy and for some reason it didn't work out. But at least I had a show that year, Whitman didn't. It was difficult in a sense that here I had a gallery but that gallery was to close so again I was without a gallery. But Paula had worked at the World House Gallery which was right across the street from 77th and Madison for Cordier and Ekstrom and she had worked there for two or three years or maybe longer, I don't know, and she was friendly with Ekstrom. So later, I think to some extent from this show, it was a lead to Ekstrom, although I never did ask Ekstrom exactly how he chose to have . . . .

PC: How did he find you?

WDM: Well, that I don't really know you see; I think it may have been partly through Paula. I'm almost certain of that.

PC: But did he find you or did you find him?

WDM: No, no, all of the people have always asked me. I've never solicited my work to galleries. So I would say that it ended up just about two years later, you know, October, November of '66, I was showing at Ekstrom which in a sense was the first real uptown show because, even though Paula's was uptown, in a way it was an underground show.

PC: Right.

WDM: So by that time I had this really successful show with Ekstrom with about fifteen metal sculptures and more invisible drawings. Ekstrom at that time had the penthouse of the Parke-Bernet building; now he has a different room which doesn't have as much light.

PC: No light.

WDM: No light, yes. There are no windows, all artificial light. Well, the upstairs penthouse was fantastic because there were so many windows in the penthouse foyer that the light streamed into that place and it was really beautiful, really like Corbusier. That was the place where the old French and Co. was, it was a very fine . . . good vibrations, very elegant, really fine. And in a lot of ways perhaps I should have stayed with the Ekstrom Gallery but at that time my marriage was breaking up in '66 and I was going through a lot of personal problems and it was hard for me to concentrate on my work. One thing led to another and a series of misunderstandings and I was out of Ekstrom gallery probably six months after I was in.

PC: How did you find him as a dealer during that time?

WDM: I think he's good, very professional, multi-lingual, and we sold nearly all of the work out of the show, say three-quarters of it, and of course I was getting a certain amount of notoriety at that time through certain Tom Wolfe articles, and articles around Scull and so that there was quite a bit of interest plus all of the underground interest in me. So actually the timing was right for the show and I think he would have done well, but I think his gallery perhaps had a very heavy surrealist bent which I would have had to fight later if I wanted to do, for instance, all of the dirt in the room in Munich, that never would have happened.

PC: He's too pristine for that.

WDM: So perhaps it was inevitable. I was in such a state of conflict that later, see, I could have gone on and making these pieces or, I say, I still have about twenty to make out of drawings of that period. But things were to get wilder, you know, into bringing in three tons of dirt into a gallery. These were things that were so out of control that actually even at this point almost no gallery can manage the new problems that I'm bringing to the situation.

PC: When did those things start?

WDM: What, the earth stuff?

PC: The earth things, yeah.

WDM: Well, I would say it started in '67 because, having had this successful . . . I mean having learned how to work with metal in '65, '66, you know, '67, I knew what I could do. I could go on making these things which were very successful using steel, aluminum but, starting in '67 I think I came to my crises with New York and my real thoughts were like going to Salt Mines in Canada or going to the North Pole and the South Pole, the idea of going to the Sahara Desert, the notion of experiencing space, even similar to what I imagine, to be in the West. It actually had to do with the true crises, my realization of crises of the cities in '67 which was just about not more than a couple years before everybody else realized that it was impossible and . . . .

PC: And yet everybody remains.

WDM: Yeah, but I would say that I started making these conceptual pieces like the three continent project, the idea of the mile long line in the Sahara, a mile long line in India, a mile square in the United States. That was done in '67, in the winter of '67, just . . . .

PC: The idea of that.

WDM: Yeah, the drawings and the writings to do this piece. In other words, to travel, to not do the sculpture in New York but to do it directly on the land and to do it in remote places, remote deserts.

PC: Why was that, again the space?

WDM: I think it was a real desire to have space and everything that goes with space, because you realize that the doing of your work in New York depended on the state of your studio and it depended on the state of your gallery. It meant that your work was to be judged within the context of the space of the gallery. I mean I liked Ekstrom's gallery because it was very good spatially but if you had to think of doing another show there and then another show and another show, always working with that space, it was a realization that it wasn't only your object, but it was the object in the context, in the social and spatial context it was given.

PC: But still you choose to go miles and miles away to the desert, rather than, say, New Jersey flatlands or upstate New York.

WDM: Right, well, that was an aesthetic choice, because the desert is the most aesthetic place in the world, outside of the ocean, maybe more than the ocean, and when you're in the middle of the Sahara desert you know that it's one of the most beautiful places in the world, that's all. There's no question. You don't have to explain it; it's just obvious. So the thought was that perhaps I had done almost as much as it was possible to do with refined, super-refined civilized metal sculpture. Although I hadn't exhausted it completely but I was coming close to the end of the limits of running through these changes that . . . .

PC: You were also moving outside which you hadn't done before.

WDM: That's true; I hadn't ever done that before. But I had drawings of things like, you know, take a mile-long rope and run it into the forest, and I had these drawings in '64. And I had all these drawings of mountains and deserts in '63, '64, so the ideas were I would say a continuation of the idea of the expansiveness of the idea, of like in a sense the drawing. The line in the invisible drawing is like the mirage line of a heat wave in the desert floor, I mean it's something that's there and it's not there, and the idea of a yard square piece of paper is an idea, a close approximation of the whole field of vision in a desert. But partially I think it was just instinct, just saying that aesthetically we can't do enough here in the city under this set of rituals and that the whole rules of the game have to be changed and that, if I go out and do this mile long piece, it's going to be a more powerful experience than just experiencing these few perfect sculptures in the gallery. Even though I think that that can be nearly perfect experience, it's very grim and very hard to do it. I hope Basel will be that way, you know, in a few weeks; I think it will be. But still, if you took the Basel experience, which is experiencing art inside the museum, inside four hundred years of experiencing art in the same place, and on the other side somebody takes several days to get out there to this place, to walk through this sculpture all day long . . . I think I described this on the first tape. It is that I just realized that it was going to be better; and it is, I think. I still haven't realized enough pieces; there's still so much to do along lines like that. So that what happened then from '68, I went to Europe; I saw my steel work in the Dokumenta. I realized it was good; it was perfect but that I didn't want to make any more steel works in galleries or museums. It was really clear. So in October I filled Friedrich's gallery with dirt, made this minimal flat horizontal earth sculpture in this gallery, then went to the Sahara in December, January of '68, '69, did the mile-long line, lost the photos and all that story, but realized that I was absolutely on the right track. Then it was a matter of fighting the Dwan Gallery to move Dwan in this direction which it was willing to do but, with so many people moving, that was terrific tension and a lot of in-fighting in the Dwan Gallery.

PC: How did you get involved with her then?

WDM: Again I don't really know. Several of her artists, like Sol Lewitt, Carl Andre, recommended to me and sort of invited me to join the Gallery. I don't know where these artists were. The Dwan Gallery was new; it'd only been in New York three or four years. They were constantly changing their people. And at that time the gallery artists had a lot of say in what went on in the Gallery and they were making recommendations. I think several of the gallery artists recommended that I join. I never really asked Carl or Sol but I recall the evening they spoke to me about it. I said is it really good and they said yes, it's good, etc. and etc. So I joined the Dwan gallery in the summer of '68, June of '68, and then my show was to be a year later, April of '69. There were a few landworks in '69 in Nevada, and then the stormy period of '70-'71 as the Gallery slowly started to be rocked with in-fighting and problems involved with the normal scale of the landworks, the enormous demands brought by the earth sculptures on the Gallery.

PC: But she kind of changed her whole attitude, didn't she? I mean something in her changed and that seemed to affect the whole Gallery.

WDM: Well, it's complicated. She has a complicated life; I think that she had a terrifically successful gallery. I mean if you consider her seven years in Los Angeles and four years here, that for eleven years she certainly showed the best work, even brought an enormous lot of good work out to the West coast that they had never seen, never would have seen. I think she was terrifically underrated and did a very fine job, and Dwan gallery became the force interposing itself against Castelli, Janis, Rubin, Emmerich; I mean it was just a fantastic minimal art gallery. And it was basically a sculpture gallery too. There was only one painter and that brought a lot of problems, you know, all the problems with sculptures. Later there were two painters, Ryman was one. But the thought that Flavin and Andre, Sol Lewitt, myself, Mike Heiser, meant that it was really a good gallery. I mean everybody was really quite creative in that period and the layout of the gallery was quite minimal -- grey rug, plain, sort of cold in a way, and even kind of non-commercial in its aspect. You know, the people were always hidden in their offices and it was just there. It was . . . it was like just her contribution to the art scene and actually, you know, everything has its time. I don't know whatever financial tax problems or whatever came up to make the Gallery close at the time it did. I think I really appreciate these correct anticipations of the moment, you know, because to close the Gallery right at the moment when a lot of people were questioning galleries, you know, was in a way good luck, although I think that there were other just pure fate things that . . . you know, certain financial reasons she had to close. But for me, maybe I should have left the Gallery a year sooner rather than put up with that kind of political in-fighting. Nevertheless, it was a good gallery. We made

films, made landworks, had the connection to all the major group shows at that time, like Amsterdam and Berne. There was a show called When Attitude Becomes Form; it was a major group show. All the Europeans had good connection with the Dwan Gallery, Sonnabend at that time being European, Sperroni (?), Friedrich, so forth, so it was a good contact place. All the Dwan artists tended to travel a lot; they were like semi-free agents. They would go to Holland, they would go to Germany, they would go to Italy, they would go to England. The Dwan artists were moving around and it was quite a place, personalities were strong, but I would guess those things are just as fiercely fought out in Castelli or Janis too.

PC: Well, how did you find that new attitude that was developing there, with the ability of the artist to move around and go to different countries to do exhibitions and organize things?

WDM: I think that was very healthy, and the difference was that I was, I was making most of my trips . . . . The good part about the Dwan Gallery was that you could charge up all your flights onto your tab; you could run up enormous debts. Later there were these bloodthirsty fights but, you know, we could run up 20, 30 thousand dollars worth of debts. That was terrific; I mean you could really invest in yourself.

PC: And that was charged against work or something?

WDM: It was charged against work and/or charged against future sales and this was later to become the argument. But I would be able to make dozens and dozens of trips to Nevada, would go out every three weeks, just go out for three weeks and come back, stay a couple of weeks and go out again, just constantly. And so it was terrifically healthy. And I think it was a very healthy contact between American art and European art that these nine Dwan artists were all over Europe and it was showing that the Americans were not only willing to send their work over there but they were willing to go over and meet everybody, spread their own vibrations, install their work, work out certain situations. I think this was terrifically healthy for Europe and also it was a big switch for an American artist to go directly to Europe bringing the art with him and not the American artist going to Paris to pick up the vibrations from Europe and become an artist, but to bring the vibrations over there, export them. So all of that was pretty healthy and in the last four years I've been to Europe or probably an average of at least four months a year, four or five months a year. Since '68, '69, '70, '71, I've been over there every year, and that's the reason that now I have a German dealer and that he's my primary international dealer because I actually went over and spent time there. I have met most of the European collectors and curators and there's a large interest in my work over there, which is satisfying because, after all, it's the whole western European art trip, you know. In fact, here's a story on my Olympic sculpture in Domus, an Italian magazine.

PC: How did you like the whole business of doing things in Europe? Do you find it easier there or more difficult than here?

WDM: Well, to tell you the truth, Paul . . . .

PC: Or is it just so different?

WDM: Well, to tell you the truth, it's taken me this whole four years to come to understand that. I mean I couldn't make a judgment on it in the first year or two. My first impression was that Europe was much slower and much more conservative, the galleries, you know, less salted.

[END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE THREE]
[TAPE TWO - SIDE FOUR]

PC: O.K., this is Side Four, you were saying . . . .

WDM: The possibilities of Europe.

PC: Right.

WDM: Well, I think that this so-called problem of comparing American art to European art which was fought so in such a hard way in the Forties and Fifties continued in the Sixties, and may continue in the kind of nationalist rivalry that's still in the world. We're moving toward a more international situation all the time, but we still haven't found it. I think that this idea of travel started to make people more European; I mean some of the people were actually, in a sense like myself, almost living over there. Almost adopting a duel citizenship and it sounds funny but I mean if I could have been able to learn German, who knows. I mean it's really a very hard language for me to learn. I can learn French or Italian but it's very hard for me to pronounce the German words. But anyway, what I was saying is that more of the European artists are coming over here now, too, but this is probably a trend that will continue with airplanes being what they are. Still, the psychological situations being what they are . . . . America was just lucky to go through the Second World War unbombed and unscathed. In Europe now, 27 years after the War, they're just about recovered. I mean, if you figure, you take another three years until you make thirty years, a whole generation, a whole other set of people. I mean all of the buildings

have been rebuilt, all of the plants have been rebuilt . . . .

PC: The economy is back.

WDM: The economy is back, the cars and refrigerators are being produced and people are working, well-fed, well-housed and financially recovered. Well, thirty years is a long time. I mean sure, it was recovered in ten or fifteen years, but in a strange way psychologically it was hard. You can feel this vibration still and, who knows, maybe it will really be forty years, you know. Maybe all the children who were born post-war would then have to have a set of children, you know. I mean maybe. But to come to the point, I found that I couldn't work in Europe actually. I couldn't draw; I couldn't conceive new sculptures except when I stayed in Germany and I worked on these large architectural commissions which was to some extent the equivalent of trying to do a large piece in the desert, like this piece of drilling the Olympic mountain. I had to stay in Munich. I had to walk around the town; I had to feel the site; I had to look at what was possible and I tried to do that. And I also developed a piece for a hundred elephants for the city of Hanover, Germany. There was an open competition for what they called art in the streets, street art. So I went and lived there or a week or two, went back several trips, conceived a plan of taking large sections of the town and having elephants given streets and roadways and sort of paths through the park, through the streets, so that these elephants would be able to walk through several miles of street, so that they actually would have a presence in the town, so that when you were walking in the park there might be miles of elephant walkways where they would be walking along too, you know, so that they would become like citizens of the town.

PC: How did you discover elephants?

WDM: Well, this was just a psychic flash. It actually came, this was in 1970, and I think I was sensing that the elephants of Africa were being decimated because the herds were too large and they were cutting these herds like from eight, ten thousand, down to six, four thousand because the civilization of farms were closing off the wild areas of Africa and they were going to actually have to weed out and kill like half of the elephants because there wasn't enough natural food for the elephants. They were starving and so forth. So I think I actually in some way picked up the vibration of this crisis and wanted . . . . and there's still time, even the next year or two, to go there to possibly rescue a hundred elephants before the kill and then like transport them to a city in which I would say this is a sculpture I have for a city. It's to use the land of the city in a certain configuration, the design is really not so important as if the walkways are extensive, to let the elephants more freely through this area so that they become an element of the city, because I realize that the city of Hanover and other cities were composed of nothing but buildings, people, and cars; that if you look at a city that's all it is. You think of city as really complicated, but it's not. It's only those things plus a lot of objects, like a lot of little stuff being sold in stores and food and chairs and tables.

PC: Traffic lights.

WDM: Right, every little object, shoes and shoe laces. But it's basically just buildings and cars and people. So I thought if you introduced a fourth major element, namely animals, you know, big ones, so that they would be huge masses of other life moving through the city, that this would change the whole psychological feel of the city in a way like in Venice, instead of automobiles you have waterways and boats. So that, in a sense, you would have huge animal sculpture paths and I would really like to do this. But to accomplish a sculpture like this you need an enormous organization. I found this in attacking the whole Olympic project; you need to be in constant contact with the press, you need to put out books, television shows, you have to meet the major industrial powers of the city, you have to go on the television, you have to be part of . . . .

PC: Become a politician almost.

WDM: Yes, you have to become a politician and you have to have your plan be planned within the structure of the city; you have to ask the city for enormous amounts of land because the elephants should not just be in the park, they should also have certain streets and other things, too. And so actually I developed this idea of the elephant sculpture and of the Olympic earth sculpture while I was in Germany, the idea of trying to impose sculptures of extensive scope and of mile-long dimensions, not in the desert but within an urban situation. I saw that the problems are enormous, you know, but yet I gave it a try. Maybe later in my life, this experience will come out, like hopefully that elephant sculpture but, not being able to do that, I find that the land is almost non-existent in Europe, I mean land is held within a family for hundreds of years, every square inch has been walked on, every square inch is known, who owns it, and so the idea of trying to pick up some empty land or even farm land is very expensive. And it's not even for sale; there isn't even land for sale in Europe. So that basically I was at a dead end and I would have to return to the west, which now I'm planning to do, which makes the difficulty of communicating from the west back to Germany to manage this operation.

PC: Well, I'm curious about one thing you just touched on and that was the difficulty you had in doing any drawings or new development in Europe. Why was that, do you think?

WDM: Well, I slightly amended that to say that I did create the elephant piece and the Olympic piece there. It was hard, but I did. I would say that the problem was language, the problem of being in a foreign country, the problem of living in hotels, of being in a very strange atmosphere. But also I think it was that America still gives me a lot of energy; I mean the struggle of everybody here, the whole crazy mystique of a society creating itself out of nothing. This is really still exciting, whereas Europe, the notion of still working at fighting those old buildings, the vibrations, the vibrations of the past, like the architecture or sculptural situation, you're walking through a European city, these successful artworks, trapped in a bunch of energy, but they also trapped the people in a set of ideas, they locked them. I mean the baroque spirit hangs over a lot of Europe because it's trapped in that architecture. And so consequently there's a lot less of the wide open spirit that exists here, and so it would be hard for me. I think that if I got to Europe I would tend to go into invisible drawings, into some kind of situation like that. Or possibly I might be able to try to keep fighting this situation but the bureaucracy like, say, of European museums, is even worse than American museums.

PC: It's been at it longer.

WDM: You know that some of the museum directors in Europe are appointed for life. So consequently the guy has absolutely no incentive to change, or to do a major show. Why should he in fact do anything that would impair his position? He's like the Supreme Court; he's appointed for life. An American museum director would tend to be more free-flowing and open to ideas.

PC: He's got more nervous trustees to worry about.

WDM: He has things to worry about too, but at least he has more reason to have a gambling spirit perhaps.

PC: You were in Dokumenta, right?

WDM: In '68. But not this year; I declined this year.

PC: That was, what? The first really big international show you were in? Did that have an effect on what you were doing?

WDM: Well, it was a crisis. For one thing, it was the reason for me to go to Europe for the first time. It was '68. What, that would have made me about 32, 33, and I never had been to Europe and never really had the desire to go to Europe. A certain curiosity, you know, to see Italy, to see France, Paris, but never the thought that Germany or any relationship with German art, German culture, German people, Germany art world, never entered my mind. So actually those people accomplished their purpose, I mean they are consciously working to make Germany part of the art scene, or European scene, and the Dokumenta with all of its flaws got me over there. But this was later to sour me on the art, or the idea of group shows, you know, out-of-control shows and shows that can't be properly administered because they are all out of control. In fact, I'm working on a satirical series of a group show right now.

PC: Wide open idea.

WDM: Yeah. I'll . . . think I'll finish it before the end of the year and have a private showing somewhere. But it was a crucial time. I mean I separated from my wife, had been without the Ekstrom Gallery, had just done a show earlier that year at Wilder's Gallery in Los Angeles. Now you see the bridge here should be made from having this fine Madison Avenue, Fifth Avenue feeling, 77th Street feeling, to having that collapse and then Bellamy arranged for me to meet Wilder. Wilder commissioned me to make ten new works for a show in Los Angeles in April of '68. So this gave me something, a new reason to work in '67. Not only to make these plans to do out on the land, it gave me a reason to make six or eight new metal sculptures and then to go to Los Angeles and do the show there. Wilder was at a very good point in that period himself, developing people like Nauman, Ren Davis. You know, the atmosphere of the young artist there was good, very alive, a very right-on-the-moment place. And the show was very successful. Prices at that time were net high for my work, under a thousand or two thousand dollars, and the metal work was quite expensive so we really didn't make much money. But it was a very successful show and gave me money to live through that year and it also got me to Los Angeles. I had never been to . . . .

PC: Right, because you're in Northern California.

WDM: That's right and, then I realize the good and the bad points of L.A. And then that brought me close to Las Vegas and to the desert, Mohave desert. So that was terrific.

PC: Was that your first move into the desert then?

WDM: Right.

PC: What prompted that?

WDM: Well, I drove across the country with Mike Heiser who I had been spending a lot of time with in '67. So we had this chance to have the great American Kerouac experience of driving, you know, drive, drive and it never stops and four or five days later you can make it if you drive night and day. When I had first driven the country in the summer of '63 from New York back to California, it was the most terrific experience of my life, experiencing the great plains and the Rockies, but especially the desert, you know. No, I would say the drive through Nevada in '63 was the first time I was in the desert. And that memory was to come back in the crisis. Where is the best place in the world? It's what I saw in Nevada. So it was a chance to go back to the desert for a second time and this time to start going out there often. We met flyers and we learned what it was like to fly small planes and drive trucks on these dry lakes and stuff.

PC: Where does Heiser come into all of this?

WDM: Well, that's a long story. I met him in the winter of '67, must have been the fall of '67, September, October; it would be just about five years ago and just met him by chance on some construction project in the studio. Then when I learned that he was from Berkeley and that he had gone to San Francisco Art School, I realized that we knew the common situation. We knew Berkeley, San Francisco, the whole Bay area, you know, motorcycles, the whole kind of Western atmosphere that was around there. We had a lot in common; we knew the whole situation so that gave us something to talk about and from that point it became interesting that he would change from shaped canvas painting to sculpture, and I was at the point of changing from steel sculpture into the land sculpture. So it was a move that we both wanted to make at the same time. We have both been developing the land sculpture simultaneously since that time, five years ago, just about until today. We're really starting the sixth year. I mean, you know, we did it. It's something that two people could do that one couldn't, really, create a movement, because if one person does it, it is almost an eccentricity, but if two people are doing it and then they influence two others or three. It takes no more than three or four or five people to make a movement and then those people of course can have a hundred or two hundred or five hundred or a thousand following them. But the key idea is to develop two or three people. But it's not necessary, sometimes three or four or five people could be working simultaneously. Like this guy Richard Long was working in England, walking around in the fields in '68 also. That was completely independent simultaneous development. In any case, we have both gone on; we have been in a lot of the same group shows. We've fought a lot of the same people; we've shared some of the same patrons, the same gallery like Dwan, Frederich for a while in Germany. Now he has another gallery. And all of our same problems remain, like to make earth art exist in the face of a lot of the same structural problems that still exist. Galleries are not set up to back major sculptures.

PC: Right.

WDM: There's nothing set up to sell major sculptures. Museums do not commission major sculptures, even though they go off and spend five million dollars on an old painting. And not only that, a lot of people don't believe that it really exists. There is still a lot of misconception that it exists only for the photograph and not for itself. It's so far away that maybe everyone in the art world knows about our sculpture but not even one thousandth of one percent of a person has ever seen one of the pieces with is a very interesting conceptual and visible aspect of something that is massive. So, with all of these confusions and contradictions still inherent in the work, one could see another five years of good problems and hopefully some good solutions coming up.

PC: Well, do you discuss problems in making things with Heiser? What kind of discussions do you have with him?

WDM: Say, like in '67, '68, '69, we would probably see each other every night. His loft is on Mercer Street, just four blocks away, so it was easy for me to maybe walk over after dinner and talk to Mike and Sharon about every conceivable problem in the world, like what did it mean aesthetically, how is it different from everything else, why was it better, to fantasize about all the great pieces that could be done, to talk about all of the practical problems of all of the people that we had to fight and the structure we were fighting. Actually, the discussions would run over eery conceivable aspect of every person, all of the basic aesthetic questions involved too on a really high theoretical level like, you know, this is doing this and this is doing that that nothing else is doing for this reason. You know, like really solving the problems, just like two scientists might solve some problem given a certain set of circumstances. And I think that that is the real excitement of being part of a movement where people are developing the thing simultaneously.

PC: Bounces back and forth.

WDM: It bounces back and one person is really truly happy when the other person makes a breakthrough, makes a good piece. This we know has been true of all of the movements, Cubism, Expressionism, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, when a group of people could get together. Even in the Dwan Gallery I'm really sorry in a way that I hadn't been closer to Carl or Sol or Flavin, although we're good friends, is that you could truly be happy when the other person made some good work. I think musicians pick this up a lot. If they are listening to

another musician, they're happy if the music is right. The unfortunate point about the art world is that the competitiveness of it is so hard.

PC: Well, it's more individual.

WDM: It's more individual so that you have a sense of a hundred people each fighting each other in a sort of free-for-all with everybody blindfolded and swinging knives instead of pillows, you know.

PC: I wanted to ask you a question, going back to the Sixties. You were curator of the Cornell photo . . . ?

WDM: The photo collection, right.

PC: Of Joseph Cornell. How did that happen and what was it?

WDM: Well, that came about through Suzanne. I think that she met him just as he was going in the bookstore at he Museum of Modern Art. I mean I think she said, "Aren't you Joseph Cornell," or something and I think he invited her out there or something like that. Although it could have come through Whitman in some way, who may have made contact with Cornell to borrow his films for our Nine Great Jones Street. I think Whitman may have contacted Cornell to borrow the films and we may have gone out to get the films and learned that he also owned this film still collection, and at that moment it was a very exciting collection to be sort of curator of because film itself was gaining its self consciousness. You know, in the Sixties the notion of the whole history of film, that there was film as an art form and even though the Museum of Modern Art had been talking about this, it was sort of reaching big public consciousness. So it was great to go through ten, twelve crates of stills and . . . .

PC: What did you do for him?

WDM: Well, this was Suzanne's thing; she was just there to catalogue the films, or the stills, and I don't think it worked out very successfully. And eventually when we moved from Walker Street he wanted to bring them all to some fire-proof warehouse so as not to worry that the loft would burn or something. Then there was a very interesting coincidence. I was making boxes before I'd heard of Cornell so that this was almost chilling when you run into these coincidences, you know. So it was kind of nice to eventually see that I was not going to continue making boxes and that my sensibilities were different.

PC: Do you think there was a relationship between the ones you made and his?

WDM: There was a coincidence because, as I say, I started back in '59 in San Francisco making the first boxes. Then when I came to New York and saw the assemblage show it was a great startling thing. I'd never heard of Cornell in art school so it was kind of a surprise to learn that he was doing that. But then I saw his things were so very much concerned with Surrealism that I saw that there was a great difference.

PC: Oh yeah, a whole world. You know, just going back to kind of cover some of these things, you made that series of signs, you know, like the cross, the swastika and now you're doing the star.

WDM: Right.

PC: What does the ball do there?

WDM: Well, I wanted to explain that. I think I probably already explained too much as it is and I'm going to read this tape and decide whether ever to release it to anybody because I think that any artist that explains his work is a fool. So I've probably already been foolish enough. And I'd give the same answer.

PC: Well, it's taped; you'd be safe. You did the, at Dwan, the spikes?

WDM: Yeah, the Spike Beds, right.

PC: Yeah, how did that develop? I mean in the Ekstrom show I remember there was that series of three, three, three, three.

WDM: Right, it formally probably came out of that; someone may have noted it. They were like spikes coming out of the floor but then I would take their observation literally and there's a relationship. By the way, both those pieces done in '66 and the spikes done in '68-'69 will now be shown in Basel this month. I'm happy they were able to borrow the eight now in Germany to go to Basel because now the Basel people will to some extent see the genealogy of the piece and not wonder why are these Spike Beds here, although that wouldn't bother me. But I would say that the Spike Beds, or serial piece, came out of a mathematical progression. But one can see the content in the Spike Bed piece well enough, you know. The danger of content is that will still be there in a hundred or two hundred years, so that the content is fixed no matter what we think about the form or style.

Whether the minimal art survives or not, that piece will survive. So it's somewhat comforting to know that if it's possible to make a piece so universal in its content that it would survive, because it's about the basic content of our imperfect state of civilization with the various strange meetings of Western steel and apparatus of Indian religions. But I think there might be other interpretations too, personal and social. I mean every good work should have at least ten meanings, I mean truly. If you have only one meaning . . . in fact I think that's probably where hard edge painting and hard edge sculpture failed. It seemed to have no more than two or three meanings. You've got to have ten meanings, I mean like think of the hard edge sculpture. You look at it, you get that plain red, yellow or blue, you get the plain geometric content, you get the combination of those two things and you get maybe the massiveness of it, maybe that's fur things, but that's only four. That's far short of being a successful work.

PC: And there's not much ambiguity in it.

WDM: There's not much, no, there's not much really playing. I mean I don't even think it gets the basic larger aspects of the strangeness of the meaning of geometry. So I would say that there's at least ten meanings in any one of my works. But certainly in the Spike Beds. Think of the basic nature of the art world itself and then think if the Spike Beds don't summarize that situation. I'm really happy that the Basel Museum is buying them, by the way.

PC: Oh, really?

WDM: Yeah, because they bought them as the whole five. When we had the show here I think that three people wanted to buy an individual piece within months after the show opened, so the other two may have been sold and then we would have had the five broken into five parts. But the fact is that the piece was saved and that we sold it for forty-five thousand dollars. If it was sold individually it probably would have been fifty to sixty thousand dollars, but I'm happier that it was sold in one piece. This interview is serving to warm me up to going to Basel. But see, I'm really afraid . . . I mean I don't really like the idea of going to openings. When I get over there, I have to get over there before January to see them installed, you know, but . . . .

PC: How many pieces will be in that show?

WDM: Well, there'll be the Four, Six, Eight series, which is all the variations of four, six and eight; eighteen parts. The Spike beds, those five. The Cross, the Museum Piece and the Star, and all the geometric set, the Circle, the Square and the Triangle in aluminum. So we have six of the ball symbol pieces, although I don't like the word symbol, but six of those pieces with the ball, five of the Spike Beds, but that's actually one. So that makes seven, the Four, Six, Eight, makes eight. They'll show my film, that makes nine and then we have forty-five drawings. So we have eight sculptures, the film and forty-five drawings. And the suicide pieces also, but it's not part of the show because I felt it was too heavy to include that much content. You should have a balance between the content and the form, say, on the libra in astrological games. And I truly felt that I looked for the balance in my life in a very simple-minded way, a balance between thought and action, a balance between emotion and thought, or between Europe and America, between the city and the west, you know, between everything. So that we shouldn't overload the content. I mean I think that art should have content, for there's no such thing as pure form, no such thing. Like there was always content to all of the abstract expressionist work no matter how much they claimed it was pure abstraction. There was content to Rothko, there was content to Newman, there was content to Smith, there was content to Still, there was content to any of the so-called pure high abstractionists. You know the fight of the Fifties was whether there should be literary content. We know that Pop art is loaded with content, while there used to be a fight in general in the art world between Romanticism and Classicism as the two poles and this fight will probably continue, but the thing is that those are false categories. I mean there could be a classical romanticist and there could be a romantic classicist, like in a sense the Sixties were a classic period and now with younger painters doing lyrical abstractions, it is somewhat like people going back to Fifties fashion. I mean it's a nostalgic romantic situation, even if it cannot be done totally romantically, partly consciously. What I was saying was that in my work the form is possibly very classical and the content might be something else.

PC: What about the mathematical progressions that appeared in the work?

WDM: Right. Well, I think that I started a thread there which I could have continued more stringently, like the notion of typing out these mathematical systems, but I think that the Four, Six, Eight was like one of the first successful serial sculptures done. Out of '66, there weren't a lot of people who, given a problem, ran through all the changes as if they were doing a number on them, which is actually a hooker's phrase.

PC: Language moves around like people.

WDM: Yeah, and it's true that the most dynamic stuff should rise to the surface and become part of the culture. But I think that it's basically only in the Four, Six, Eight and the Spike Beds that I worked with mathematical problems. I'm not interested in the relationship between mathematical problems and geometric sculpture; it's

just that at that point these things took on, I mean almost, mystic number qualities. I don't like that phrase; it's that just by working, by letting the numbers solve the problems. But in the For, Six, Eight it was even better because the numbers solved the problem of shape. You had four-sided, six-sided and eight-sided; you didn't have to choose the shape because the number chose the shape. So that that was a perfect conceptualist piece because, deciding to work with numbers, you also solved the problem of what the form of the piece would be. Actually in a way the Spike Beds had the same interesting thing. In the Spike Beds I decided here's the Spike Bed, it's a rectangle, and on the short side of the rectangle I would do all the odd numbers up to nine. So that means I would do one, three, five, seven and nine. So that determined there would be five beds. And then to determine how many spikes are put in each bed I decided to put the same number of . . . let's see how this worked. Well, the first one is eccentric, because you put one on each of the short sides, and then I just decided to put one in the middle. Actually that was arbitrary because I left one on the short side. No, it's not arbitrary, because it's the distance . . . like whether there would be three rows or five or, in one of them, up to seventeen rows, was determined by the distance from the edge to the next spike to the next spike. So in the thing with only one spike, from the edge to the first spike meant that there was . . . . I don't know, I see it was arbitrary in that sense because that distance which would have been half that distance was not quite half the distance in the middle, so I moved the one spike to the middle to make the one row, so that I moved for aesthetic reasons. But on the other four beds, like say, take one with three spikes, the next, the distance between this first spike and the second spike, then became the distance between the corner spike and the next row, so that each spike then would be equal distance apart into squares so that then that would determine how many rows would be in the bed. And it works out marvelously because the number of rows works out so that the proportion of the bed was chosen so that the rows would lay evenly. So if you take the next one with five, you see you have all the spikes closer together so that means that the distance between these two is sort of shortened. Then the next row would be closer in, that means of course you'll have more rows.

PC: Denser.

WDM: And then it turned out that some mathematical thing happened that I didn't now about but mathematicians knew about, that was that, given the situation that I had set up, you would always have almost twice the number of rows on the long side as you did on the short side, except it turned out that there was one less than double. But now I'll explain: like for instance on the one where you have nine on the short side as your odd number, instead of having eighteen rows, you have seventeen rows.

PC: Why is that?

WDM: I don't know.

PC: It just works out that way?

WDM: It just works out that way. And the other one where you have seven on the short side you have thirteen rows and the one with five you have nine rows and the one with three you have five rows. So that there's that kind of beauty, instead of exactly doubling there was one less than double. Then the interesting part is that they are very beautiful works for total looking in the round because the perspective in the files shift and when you're on the short side you see seven, six passageways, seven rows of spikes, then moving around the other way you see thirteen rows and then you see all of the spatial variations of these diagonal ranks that form too, so that spatially it's really a successful piece in reading it, in reading the sculpture in the total round, especially for an abstract piece. It's hard to make a piece in the total round because often a piece really has a good side or basically three quarters of a good side.

PC: David Smith had that problem a lot.

WDM: Sure, sure, so that he ended up with the cubic system, making basically flat two-sided pieces; I mean like they don't really read from three quarters around. The sides are non-existent or not much. One of the interesting parts about the land sculpture is that there isn't much more a possibility of dealing with a situation where actually part of the sculpture is behind your back, where you deal with it in a much larger set of possibilities. I'm sure enough possibilities probably to occupy my life, you know.

PC: Have you had any collectors besides Scull who have gathered up many works of yours?

WDM: There are a few of them in the last three or four years that have started to, like this collector Panza in Italy. That man has several, and another collector in Germany has four or five and they're collecting up to that point, although at this point Scull must have fifteen or twenty works.

PC: So he's kept on in a way?

WDM: Ah, pretty much, although a lot less up till '67, '68.

PC: Has he been involved in any commissions of the earth projects?

WDM: No, no, not since '68, no. But I've done very little; I mean a lot of the work has been theoretical since '68, not a lot of objects, not a lot of works.

PC: There isn't a great deal then for collectors or institutions to accumulate?

WDM: No, no, no, there hasn't been. So like this now, doing the Star in this geometric series I found that people were waiting for them actually for several years and they almost are all sold already. I've just finished them, you know. So I should be very happy and I guess I am, but still there's such uncertainty that it's hard to know what will be next, and the problems of the earth sculptures still remain, mostly financial, not aesthetic problems.

PC: Well, the costs are enormous.

WDM: Right, it's like producing a film. I really feel very close to the people that produce film now. When you have to raise, you know, fifty, a hundred, two hundred thousand dollars to do a sculpture, you start thinking a lot like a film producer who has to raise a million dollars to make a film. The difference is, of course, that the film world has its method of distribution where two million people each can pay a couple dollars to refinance the film, whereas in the art world, based on a relatively limited number of buyers most of whom don't mind paying over a hundred thousand dollars for the work of a dead artist but not for the work of living artists. I think that basically one of my jobs now is to change the basic structure of the art world so that it is possible for living artists to work in a much more expansive way and to in some ways change the whole political-economic structure of the art world so that these kinds of works can be accomplished. And I had several plans along those lines and I'm just developing them but it's still slow. I hope there'll be some kind of break-through this year.

PC: I was going to ask you about some other particular events. You were part of the New York theatre rally that Alan Solomon did in '65?

WDM: I was in Oldenburg's Happening, I think. Was that part of the theater rally? No, oh no, that was just Tricia Brown. Tricia Brown was a friend of Simone Morris and she asked me to be in one dance, which was like a form of a game or a set of rules. It had to do with people advancing along a grid of squares. It seemed appropriate to my work, and so forth, and only making certain moves under certain conditions so that the rules were given and then the dancers, instead of working out a choreography, interacted with each other according to a set of rules, you know. This was very typical of Judson type dance composition. So you could take a non-dancer like me and just say, O.K., you're walking on this line and you're crouching lower and lower to the ground as you get closer to the end of this maze, you see, so that people would start waking tall and then walk lower and lower and then you could pass another person depending on what his height was and so forth, like leap frog or whatever, this type of game situation. And I did it once in the Judson Church and once in the New York theatre rally in some television studio or empty theatre up on Broadway. But I found it not satisfying to me; I mean I didn't want to be a dancer. I didn't want to be a performer and it was part of something that I would leave behind just as being a performing musician. I mean I didn't want to appear before the public; I didn't get this. I didn't want this personal thing that the dancers have. I wasn't part of it at all so it was in a sense just an experiment on my part, but interesting in that it was appropriate that the dance you did was about line and squares and that kind of thing, you know, a geometric situation. So actually it was a nice bit of fate again. I'd do anything like that if it seems that fate coincides and hits. I would work with an amateur; I would work with a new gallery; I would work with a person I'd never met if it really seemed that the stars were colliding at that moment, if our interests really were the same and it was going to be part of the right feel of the moment, you know.

PC: When did you start making films and getting involved with cinema?

WDM: Well, I'm not heavily involved in film and I've only made two films and only one major film, Hard Core, which was made in the summer of '69. It was a commission of the Dilexi Foundation of San Francisco, Dilexi Foundation, the product of a guy named Jim Newman who ran the Dilexi Gallery in San Francisco for ten years. That was probably the best gallery in San Francisco for ten years. Then he gave up the gallery, got tired of the gallery or whatever. I think he came into some personal money and he decided to have this foundation and he worked closely with the television station KQED in San Francisco. He worked up a thing whereby he would provide I don't know how much money, but provide enough money to have twelve people come and each do a special show for television. This was nice because this was before a lot of the video tape and weird, you know, bad technology. It was nice to do a television piece that was professional, with professional camera men, all the professional technique of the television station, a director, prop men, sound men, cutters, everything. In a sense it was doing a television show, but it was like doing a film. Their idea was to get people from difference disciplines, like a couple of dancers, a couple of musicians, a couple of filmmakers, a couple of artists and then do a series. So they did that and they had people like Warhol, I think, for film, Frank Zappa and Terry Riley for music, Yvonne Rainer for dance, myself, I don't know who else in the arts. Anyway, it seemed like a fairly good group of people; it seemed like it would be an interesting series. You were completely open to do what you

wanted. They would give me five hundred dollars which of course didn't even pay for the rent on my loft. But I did it anyway, and had complete use of their facilities and so forth. So I wrote a script for this western shoot-out scene, but the shoot-out extended over half an hour and with a lot of landscape, controlled camera movements, so forth. And I used my own music for the ocean and drum music. So it was a chance to finally use my music in a sense, too, and so the music came first and I did the film second. Sound is very important in film; sound is possibly even as much as fifty percent of film. People don't realize it. Certainly anybody would realize it was at least a third of the validity of television.

PC: That's what Dmitri Tiompkin used to say; he said, "They come and offer me money to save their film."

WDM: Right, he is really a hack writer. But it's true, really. I saw Super Fly last week and it had a very good music and, if it didn't have good music, the film wouldn't have been so good. So anyway, a girl who was de Kooning's mistress called me and asked me if I wanted to be in this television series. She had I think broken up with de Kooning at that point. Her name was Susan Brockman. I only had met her once or twice before, at a dinner party, and she called me up and she said, "I'm helping to coordinate the New York side of this television thing and I'm in contact with Jim Newman." I didn't know Jim Newman, even though I was from San Francisco, and she said, "Would you like to do it?" And I said, "Let me think about it a couple of months." I phoned back and said, Yeah, I'd really like to do it." So we went to the Black Rock Desert in Northern Nevada, this fabulous, fantastic place. It was really a pleasure to do that film. It was hard, I mean working out the technical problems and not having worked with film. I had known Jack Smith; I'd been around Whitman, but I had not known a lot of filmmakers in New York.

PC: Did you find a great difference between what they were doing and what you did?

WDM: Yeah, because my film had all of the minimal aspects to it and was not involved with a lot of hand-held camera work, not involved with a lot of expressionism, not involved with camp, not involved with a lot of the things that the New York underground was involved with at all. Later I found that this guy Michael Snow was making films very similar to this in '69, but I didn't know Michael Snow at all, although I think that probably Hard Core is very similar to his movie Wavelength. I've never seen that movie; I think it was probably made at the same time. But the thing is that making a very controlled film was very much in the spirit of my sculpture and I felt it was really part of my work. The trouble is that film can become addictive because it's so rich. But it's like running in a jungle full of quicksand. I mean you have to be gathering so much equipment and people and money and problems that its . . . .

PC: Well, look what happened to Hollywood, so big it burst.

WDM: Well, that was a different problem, though. I mean if you start on your level it's so small that it's hard to do it. But now I just finished signing the contract to show this Hard Core on German television and I would like very much now to possibly get an agent and try to show it all over the world because it's made for half-hour television. It's in color and the advantage of showing it in European television is that it can be shown for the full 28 minutes, whereas here in American television . . . .

PC: You'd have all the commercials.

WDM: You could only show it on educational television; it would hardly get prime time because of the commercials every six minutes. But anyway, as to film I haven't done anything else since Hard Core in '69 and we've managed to sell it to a half a dozen museums. I made an edition of a hundred copies of this film; I limited it to a hundred because I just wanted to do it and not think about it anymore, although if I had to do it again I would make it unlimited. So now I'm trying to work out some kind of a distribution system in order to get this film in more people's hands. It played at the Edinburgh Film Festival and also played at the New York Film Festival in '69. September '69 was its first premiere here, actually before it showed on television in the West. And it showed on October 2nd back in San Francisco three years ago. It was really nice on television because it showed at eight-thirty in color and there they would show it at prime time and in San Francisco there aren't that many channels so there were quite a few viewers. It's beautifully photographed and it's like much more successful than landscape painting because it has all the qualities of landscape painting but it moves very slowly, the landscape keeps changing, and these three-hundred-and-sixty-degree circles so that the landscape just continuously goes by you until the thread of the narrative is picked up in sort of flash sequences. So I'm happy with it. I would be very surprised if I can make another film as good as that. It was just a lot of good things, like having that music, a lot of voices came together.

PC: What about Dick Bellamy who you've mentioned a few times here? Have you known him well; have you been involved with him on any projects?

WDM: Yes, Bellamy has been my unofficial dealer in between every falling out with other dealers I've had. He's been my dealer at least three or four times, and he is my dealer now in New York since the Dwan Gallery closed. He is my New York dealer but nobody knows it. It works because of the peculiar nature of Bellamy and in fact I'm

doing a conceptual piece in a book right now, of six photos of my six dealers. And you'll be able to buy this book, or I'll send you a copy, I hope they give me some, in about a week. It's published by Praeger and it's called . . . it has a terrible title, it's called The New Avant Garde. I mean they couldn't have thought of a worse title.

PC: Whose idea was that?

WDM: It's was Praeger's, I think.

PC: What editor?

WDM: The editor is Daniel Bell.

PC: David Bell.

WDM: David Bell and it was coordinated by a guy named Alferi that published Metro magazine in Italy. He's supposed to be difficult to work with and the photographer had terrific problems with him, finally ended up punching him out in Venice this summer, he did. But the point about Bellamy is that I have a photo of Bellamy, a photo of Paula Cooper, a photo of Ekstrom, a photo of Wilder, a photo of Heine Friedrich, a photo of Virginia Dwan and the premise of the book was that the photographer would follow you a round, take pictures of you in your studio, with your friends on the street, in the truck, driving out west, next to your work. It was supposed to be sort of an updated version of Ugo Mulas' New York artists, you know the book, I forget the title.

PC: Right, New York Art Scene.

WDM: Right. And so they took ten artists and then later they added a German and an Italian artist. Most of the artists agreed to it, I mean like photos of Serra, Nauman, etc. looking sensitive, and the idea is to make it like a personality book, you know. But I didn't want somebody following me around with a camera for several months, not even for a day, so I thought about it for a long time, of how I could successfully be in the book and not be in the book, and I realized that the dealer plays a strange role in the world of an artist. He is the artist's alter ego, he is the artist's representative, not only financially, but in some strange way in terms of his personality. So this really fine photographer, John Franco Gorgioni went to photograph the six dealers and with their different problems they consented eventually. I wanted them all at their desks so that there would be a common element, like maybe each dealer would have a different type desk, which in some way also expressed their personality, but they rebelled against that. So he took really fine facial portraits, really Vogue magazine quality, and I wrote an introduction explaining him, that in the ten years that I've been a professional artist I've been represented by these six dealers and that I would like to thank them because they had consented to represent me here in this book as well. Then I listed their names and then I also listed three qualities after each dealer, three adjectives which sort of described part of what they represent for me. So we have eighteen qualities, eighteen adjectives; I signed it. Then you turn the six pages and there they are. I mention that in detail because it's one of the three conceptual works I did this year which would appear in books. Not announced as work, I mean, just that's my contribution to the New York art world. I'm having no gallery show this year in New York, but my contributions are the photos of the six dealers, twelve photos of my loft which appeared in Avalanche this summer, and then my self-portrait and the cover of Arts magazine in which my name appeared on the cover and three photos appeared inside, called Conceptual Art. So, using the book or magazine as a media, using two magazines and a book, I presented three photo essays. The word "essay" is wrong, but three photo conceptual pieces to a mass audience, as opposed to taking the photo and tacking it to the wall and using a gallery. Actually using the mass possibilities of the photograph and of the magazine and book. And using the beautiful ritual of turning pages and everything connected with a conceptual piece. Making the point in the Arts magazine that conceptual art need not be dependent upon language, which is a little footnote in the title page, because so many conceptual artists sort of have dry hands from passing their fingers over so many dictionaries.

[END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE FOUR]

END OF INTERVIEW

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