



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Jon
Hendricks and Jean Toche, 1972
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Jon Hendricks & Jean Toche on December 13, 1972. The interview was conducted by Allen Schwartz for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

ALLEN SCHWARTZ: I'm Allen Schwartz, and today I'm interviewing Jon Hendricks and Jean Toche from The Guerrilla Art Action Group for the project, "The Art World in Transition."

JON HENDRICKS: Now I'd just like to say at the outset that we're happy to do this interview and hope that what we say can get out, but that we are doing it under protest. We feel that artists have gone through a niggerization process whereby they get interviewed, their paintings get reproduced, shit like that, and yet they don't receive any monetary return for it. So we're doing this interview- but under protest- and filing a request now for ten dollars payment for this interview as a symbolic payment for our services as artists. And the money is to be paid to the Attica Defense Fund here in New York City.

ALLEN SCHWARTZ: That's some way to kick it off. Let's begin with some of the more recent activities you've been involved with and work back from there.

JON HENDRICKS: We're always changing our thinking both about problems, and about approaches to problems, tactics- ways of approaching things. You'll see this later on in the interview when we get into some of the earlier actions and describe some of the earlier processes. The most recent process we're involved in is really a correspondence process that will be published and eventually made public that stemmed from our refusal to take part in Charlotte Moorman's Ninth Avant Garde Festival here in New York City last month down at the Alexander Hamilton South Street Seaport. In the invitation to participate in that festival, Charlotte said that there is not supposed to be any nudity or heavy politics. What we did was not participate in any way in it.

JEAN TOCHE: We refused to participate because, first of all, stating "no nudity, no heavy politics" created a chill on the potential of creativity. In other words, it's as damaging as laws which say that you cannot use the flag for whatever purpose except those described by law. We feel especially strongly about this at this time when there is more and more brutalization of all out freedoms by governments.

JON HENDRICKS: That's not just artists, mind you, that's everybody.

JEAN TOCHE: You know, like newspapermen who are arrested and put in jail because they choose to protect what they believe in, their freedom of expression. We felt it was important to make a stand and therefore refused to participate in the festival.

JON HENDRICKS: Toche has said very well why we refused to take part in the festival- nor would we take part in anything else that sets those conditions. As Toche says, that chilling effect is a clear violation of our First Amendment Rights. Anyway, back to the stand we took about the festival. We weren't interested in trying to stop the festival because that would be interfering in the rights of those artists who wanted and chose to participate. But shortly after the festival, we wrote a statement I will read to you in which we stated our reasons for not taking part in the festival. We sent that to Charlotte Moorman and to the press and to other people who were concerned about it. This is the statement, dated October 31, 1972:

"We did not participate in the Ninth Avant Garde Festival held aboard the Alexander Hamilton South Street Seaport Museum, New York, because: 1) the principle of freedom of expression is basic to the very existence and survival of art. As artists we do not accept any form of censorship be it imposed by federal or local government, private enterprise, "well-meaning" citizens or from our own community; 2) to require permission to function as an artist forces the artist to be subject to an arbitrary will whether permission is granted or not and therefore equates censorship; 3) now, of all times, when civil liberties and human rights

are being eroded and destroyed on all fronts in our society by the Nixon administration artists cannot afford to stick their heads in the sand or build sand castles on the beach. Each one of us as individuals can effect changes. Apathy is death. Refusal to face reality is suicide. Wake up!"

It was signed by the two of us.

JEAN TOCHE: I think I would like to rest this on a recent decision of Judge Warren Ferguson's in a case involving the arrest at an airport under the pretext of searching luggage for hijacking. The decision is a very good description of the overall process involved. This is what judge Warren Ferguson was saying: "In case involving areas of great public concern it is easy to succumb to the expediency of the moment and, contrary to the Constitution, adopt the principle that the end justifies the means. All reasonable men are aware that airport hijacking and traffic in narcotics have reached serious proportions. This problem, however, as all other great problems of the past and the future, must be solved in the context of our Constitution or else the principles upon which this nation was founded will have disappeared in a cloud of fear."

JON HENDRICKS: So, we sent out the statement Jean and I wrote to different people, including some of the organizers of the festival. One individual wrote back. He was rather disturbed about our letter. Then we sat down and wrote a long letter back to him explaining exactly what we meant by our statement, what the dangers were, and so on. He wrote back. We wrote back to him, and so on. It's a whole correspondence.

JEAN TOCHE: It's like a learning process.

JON HENDRICKS: It will be a learning process for the reader when it's published eventually and it was a learning process for this individual who wrote us, whose attitudes changed markedly from the first letter to beginning to concede certain points that, in fact, the conditions of the festival did have a chilling effect. So that when people will be able to see the whole process, they'll see it's a learning process. And that's very important in what we do. It's not just the doing of it. It's not just a nice time doing an action, or an ego trip, or something like that. It's so that through that activity, we, and others, come to realize certain problems.

JEAN TOCHE: It's an opening up and an extension of our actions.

JON HENDRICKS: And, also, that people reading that, seeing that, might be provoked to doing something themselves, to realizing that they can effect some changes rather than just sitting back and saying, "Oh, well, I can't do anything about it." Hopefully, they'll say, "Well, I'll try and do something. Maybe what I'll do won't change the whole thing. Maybe it's not going to end this particularly repressive thing that I'm concerned about. But at least I'll speak about it as an individual, as a group, whatever it might be." This has happened somewhat. In the art world I think there's generally- not just from us, but from many sources- more of an awareness of the problems, more of an unwillingness-

JEAN TOCHE: To continue to accept the niggerization process, and that separation of art and politics. In the art institutions, you find the same guilty people who are the murderers, who are the people who send the bombs to Vietnam, who are the manufacturers of weapons, who are oppressing people in this country like the Indians, black people, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Mexicans. So by dealing with those people, who are the Trustees, the directors and so forth, it's also getting back on a political level at those murderers.

JON HENDRICKS: Take, for example, the institution that's sponsoring this interview- the Smithsonian Institution. First of all, they are a semi-arm of the government. And I'm sure that, if they cared to, they could find some way of using this or other interviews to put forward a benevolent, benign face of the government as being humanistic, humanitarian, and so on. And yet at this very second that we're doing this interview- December 13, 1972, about twelve-thirty in the afternoon- there are people being murdered by American bombs in Vietnam. There are people being murdered in Greece, people being murdered in Cambodia, Laos, and God knows where else by our government.

JEAN TOCHE: We can go much further than that. There are all forms of oppression that the United States is doing all over the world; it's not just murdering. There are many ways of murdering. You can murder somebody on a cultural level or on an economic level.

JON HENDRICKS: And although the Smithsonian has been involved in preserving certain cultural heritages and so on, they're also guilty of destroying, of raping, of stealing cultural heritages. They're a great house of that. So we just put that out in context of this interview.

ALLEN SCHWARTZ: What are some of the actions that have been stimulated by Guerrilla Art Action? In this case it was a learning process that was initiated to an individual, and will be expanded to other people as they read it.

JON HENDRICKS: You can never tell what reaction to an action might be. When you drive your car to work in the morning you just drive down the road and you get to work, park your car and so on. But along the way, you're driving past a certain house at a certain time and a child, say, is in the street, sees the car, and jumps back out of the way of the car. That might have an effect on that child's life, which you might not even know. Anyone's actions, anyone's life is continually affecting other lives. Like our talking with you. We will all have changed in some small amount. Now, the Guerrilla Art Action Group's actions are directed actions. They're specific actions directed at specific problems and presumably with a specific purpose in mind. If, say, it's an action dealing with sexism, the purpose is to end sexism, say, in a cultural institution. And by "sexism" we mean that very clear, conscious, willful role the cultural institutions have been living since their inception of denying women equal access to and an equal role in the cultural life of our country; of repressing them, suppressing any creativity they might possess through a number of means, and so on. Obviously, doing one action dealing with sexism is not going to end the sexism that those institutions practice. But, again, it's a learning process, and if an institution or somebody connected with the institutions is open enough, they might begin to realize something that they didn't realize before: that, perhaps, they were involved in the process of discrimination. And if they should, then maybe their attitude will change slightly. This happened, like a correspondence actually does, with the English art magazine *Art and Artists*. I won't go into the whole action with the magazine, but the editor seems to have changed his attitude somewhat over the period of a year-and-a-half or two years because of that action. Now what repercussions that will have I don't know. Other times the individual or the institution will just be very rigid and not react at all. Sometimes it's a negative reaction. Sometimes they would, say, try to start legal action against us. That happened at the Museum of Modern Art. And that provoked a series of events within the structure of the Museum [of Modern Art]-hidden from the outside, nobody could see that- among the board of trustees, and involving the new director who was coming in. It ended that they're not proceeding with the legal actions against us.

ALLEN SCHWARTZ: You're responsible, then, to follow through with whatever comes out of the initial action?

JON HENDRICKS: It depends a lot. In that case we've done some provocative actions to provoke something in dealing with certain broad subjects.

JEAN TOCHE: It really varies according to what the problem is, how we deal with it, what we expect to happen. Also, you may learn the result of the action much later. Results usually never come to the surface. Except sometimes you learn, like Jon was saying, that at a much later date suddenly somebody who was one of the guilty parties suddenly opened up a little, changed slightly his mental attitude.

JON HENDRICKS: Also we do see ourselves more as provocateurs rather than, say, as reformers. We aren't a union. We aren't an incorporated organization whose purpose it is to do this, this, and this. We see a problem and we decide to deal with that problem in some particular way whatever it might be. And we'll provoke. Now how it's dealt with after that: we might decide to do another action that would perhaps direct it in some way, or maybe the course of the whole thing would continue on its own once it got started. It might trigger some sort of reaction which nobody can foresee.

JEAN TOCHE: Although we try to avoid that. We speak for other people, other groups. In other words, when we do, let's say, an action, we start something in order to open a door. At that moment, it's not necessary to jump in and say, "You should do this, you should do that." We try to induce them to open the door for those groups to speak for themselves.

ALLEN SCHWARTZ: These actions are coordinated with other groups?

JON HENDRICKS: Not necessarily. We aren't a performance group, although we've done

actions in the street that some people might misinterpret as, say, guerrilla theater, that sort of thing. We are not a theater group.

ALLEN SCHWARTZ: How does that differ from guerrilla theater?

JON HENDRICKS: Well, number one, it just happens that we sometimes choose tactics that look like guerrilla theater. But it is never meant to be theater, to have an audience. It's irrelevant whether it has an audience or doesn't have an audience, or people or no people. We're more concerned with issues than with a spectacle. And if an action calls to dramatize a problem in a certain way using "theater technique," that's not the same as theater.

JON HENDRICKS: So we've used that.

JEAN TOCHE: In fact, at one point we did a couple of actions which came out of our own background, which was destruction art, and we used techniques which were used at the time. Then we suddenly realized that people were expecting, from the couple of actions we did, that we could "perform" for them. At that moment we stopped doing that "theater process" because then it was becoming theater. You know, it would have continued and we would have fallen in a trap where people would be there waiting. At that point it becomes theater.

ALLEN SCHWARTZ: The applause would signify the end of the action rather than the action stimulating anything.

JON HENDRICKS: Right.

JEAN TOCHE: It became entertainment.

JON HENDRICKS: Sometimes people see an action on one level as theater and it can provoke something somewhere else. You know what I mean? Like the people who happened to see it applauded after the blood bath.

JEAN TOCHE: It made some people very angry. I remember one guy coming to us and saying, "You are disgusting."

JON HENDRICKS: This was an action that we did at the Museum of Modern Art relevant to several members of the Rockefeller family who were on the board of trustees or who serve in different functions in the operation of the Museum of Modern Art. We did an extensive research in some of their involvement in the manufacture of war material.

JEAN TOCHE: Chemical gas, napalm.

JON HENDRICKS: Jets and so on. We feel strongly that if art is humanist, a humanitarian endeavor, its antithesis is the destruction of human life. Now the Rockefeller family is getting large sums of money from the overt destruction of human life. And yet at the same time they are funding, sponsoring, encouraging the arts.

JEAN TOCHE: They're not only funding. They play an active role. One Rockefeller is the President of the Board of Trustees. The Governor is also playing a very important role in the running of the Museum of Modern Art as a trustee.

JON HENDRICKS: Which in turn determines taste, determines policy and so on. So we say, "Fuck off, Rockefellers! We don't want your dirty money, we don't want you. If that's the only way we can have art who needs art?" Right? Okay. Well, that was the reason that prompted our doing an action of this sort. Next we had a set of demands which were very simple and very direct: the immediate resignation of all Rockefeller family members from the board of trustees of the Museum of Modern Art.

JEAN TOCHE: We basically did a war scene inside the lobby of the Museum.

JON HENDRICKS: It was a visualization, a "theaterization" of a war scene.

ALLEN SCHWARTZ: Was it a spontaneous thing?

JON HENDRICKS: Well, obviously we had planned it before but no one knew about it. There were four of us: Poppy Johnson, Silviana [Goldsmith], Jean Toche, and myself [all members of the Guerrilla Art Action Group]. We had secreted under our clothing three or four gallons of

beef blood in plastic sacks and taped it on to our bodies. We went into the lobby of the Museum. I read a statement very briefly. We had a number of copies of the statement plus the research, the documentation, about the Rockefeller involvement in the war material, which we threw those on the floor and we began-

JEAN TOCHE: Attacking each other.

JON HENDRICKS: A brutalization of each other with a determination beforehand that the brutalization was aimed only at ourselves, not at anyone else: not at the guards, not at spectators, or whatever.

JEAN TOCHE: It was very brutal, very fast-

JON HENDRICKS: Very brief. We ripped at each other's clothes. The blood spurted out. The noise we used was screams, cries, with an occasional word "rape," but that was the only recognizable word. Finally when our clothes were all ripped and the blood was all spurted out, we dropped to the floor with moans. We just sort of dropped in a pile and lay there completely out for a while.

JEAN TOCHE: Then we got up and left the Museum. And by that time we were around the corner, and the police were arriving. One of the acting directors of the museum was screaming on the telephone hysterically, "Keep those maniacs out of here!" and so forth.

ALLEN SCHWARTZ: That was the most immediate reaction?

JON HENDRICKS: Well, the peoples' immediate reaction- as best we could see because we were concentrating on the action and not on everyone around us- was varied. Some were shocked. There was a round of applause.

JEAN TOCHE: Some were amused. Some applauded. Some were furious.

JON HENDRICKS: It was interesting that the guards were immobilized; they just stood and stood. Everyone was immobilized. It was a large crowd that gathered around but they didn't try to stop us or didn't try to do anything.

JEAN TOCHE: Except that somebody called the police.

JON HENDRICKS: But they didn't try to stop this apparent brutalization. Here were people hurting each other apparently. Then they broke down that initial question of whether it was actuality or unreality and viewed it as a form of theater. And that's what the people present saw. What they felt did and so on afterwards is hard to tell. Some people afterwards came up and thanked us.

JEAN TOCHE: Yes. We were trying to get a taxi and some people passed by and thanked us for what we did.

JON HENDRICKS: If you happen to be planning one of these actions be sure to plan your exits.

JEAN TOCHE: We were all covered with blood. We had someone at the door with coats that we threw over us, but our faces were covered.

JEAN TOCHE: In the middle of Fifth Avenue hailing taxis.

JON HENDRICKS: Yes, one taxi stopped and then drove off. Finally another one picked us up and took us. He was an off-duty cop. And we had a discussion with him about who, what, where, why. So that was actually the second action done at the Modern Museum.

JEAN TOCHE: The first dealt in a way with the same problem: what was the Museum doing during these critical times? It was a cool, minimal action with a set of demands we made to the museum. One demand was that the Museum close its doors until the end of the war. If it had taken place it would have been very effective. Of course, we realized the Museum would never do so.

JON HENDRICKS: It was a very real, positive suggestion. The normal interior functioning of the Museum would continue: that is, the guards and curators and secretaries would still be employed and educational things would still be working.

JEAN TOCHE: It would take away the added pleasure, the entertainment of people going to the Museum.

JON HENDRICKS: The Museum itself would be closed. You couldn't go in and look at the pictures. You couldn't go in and look at the movies. You couldn't go and have a good time. And that was to be an act of outrage against the human destruction in Vietnam. So the action that we did there involved just the two of us and a number of witnesses who had been told not what the action was but where to be at what time. We went in and removed from the wall Malevich's Suprematist composition *White on White* of 1917.

JEAN TOCHE: And we replaced it on the wall the statement of demands.

ALLEN SCHWARTZ: Was this the first action?

JON HENDRICKS: No, that was the first action at the Museum of Modern Art. We put the painting carefully on the floor- face up. And put on the wall where the painting had been this list of demands, as Toche said. Then we stood by the work. Immediately a guard came and ripped the demands off the wall. We took another copy out of our pocket and held the demands in front of us and demanded to speak with a representative of the Museum to present the demands formally.

JEAN TOCHE: All that was done in a way that was just the opposite of the second action, which was very bold, very rude. This was done in a very sober way, like some minimal low-speaking action.

JEAN TOCHE: Our intention wasn't to destroy, damage or hurt the work. But here was once meaningful revolutionary work- in more of an aesthetic sense- that had become purely a "valuable object." It was a relic. It's like when an archeologist goes into New Guinea and takes off the front of a house a totem that to that society had a very socio-religious meaning to the people in that community in that culture. Then they take it back and put it in Rockefeller's Museum of Primitive Art. And it becomes a curio or a beautiful aesthetic object.

JEAN TOCHE: People can't relate to that object in the wrong context. That's why we picked the Malevich.

JON HENDRICKS: And so, in a sense, we re-used it. Now that work has a new meaning. When people look at it, they associate it not just with white on white, with design, with shades of white laying on planes, but they might also associate it with the death of art. They might associate it with the oppressive role that the Museum [of Modern Art] plays that places that painting in such a situation. It's back to the learning process. I should say one other thing. We didn't know how they put paintings on the walls. We figured that if they really screwed paintings on the wall we weren't going to rip this painting off the wall just to do the action. So we brought a black cloth and if necessary we would cover the painting with it. But what happened was that we had broken through some invisible barrier of sanctification, a taboo, you see.

JEAN TOCHE: You can never touch a painting, you know. It is there. Everybody always thought like there was a door in front of it. It would be a sacrilege to take it away. After that moment that notion disappeared really.

JON HENDRICKS: And it also made the Museum very uptight. They were very vulnerable.

JEAN TOCHE: It shook a lot of people; a lot of people were involved, and we made a lot of protest, demands. It made not only that museum but every museum very, very vulnerable. Also, progressively, those actions were done by different groups, not just by us, but by the Art Workers' Coalition, by the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition. And progressively the Museum turned to what it really was: that is, a fortress, a military fortress. They started to replace the guards with professional musclers: you know, people expert in judo, people who beat you up and so on.

JON HENDRICKS: It points out the attitudes of Museums, and what museums really are about, which is property. The Brooklyn Museum is situated primarily in a black and Puerto Rican community. There are other ethnic groups but primarily it's black. Recently, for whatever reasons, larger numbers of people from the area are coming to the Brooklyn Museum. Now the reaction of the Museum was not, "Oh great, how can we make the Museum more relevant? How can we bring more people in?" Rather, it was immediately to close off a

certain number of galleries and to hire more guards to protect the paintings. Right? These people weren't coming in to put holes in the paintings. They were coming in to look at the pictures, to find out what it was all about. It's the business of art. The museum, the critic, the dealer, the gallery, the collector are all concerned with the business of art. Wow! A Velazquez is \$3,500,000.

JEAN TOCHE: I would say they are not concerned with the business of art; they're only concerned with the business of art. They're not at all concerned with the humanistic values of art. Nor are they concerned with the artists either.

JON HENDRICKS: Oh, artists are shit. Forget about artists.

JEAN TOCHE: They're concerned with two things really. They're concerned with business, and then with the aesthetics of business, or, a better word is the image-making.

JON HENDRICKS: Social prestige? Power and class.

JEAN TOCHE: It's more than that. It's to continue the cultural values of a certain elitist Western male society: "Perpetuate it at all costs, at all costs."

JON HENDRICKS: Human beings- you can forget them. When the man in Italy broke a toe off the Pieta, it's remarkable that they didn't shoot him dead on the spot. He's still in jail, by the way. The art structure is kind of like a microcosm of society. And that's why we as artists- and we are artists- who are concerned about these very great, very real social issues, feel that we have to work within our abilities as artists within our own community and to do what we can within that context.

ALLEN SCHWARTZ: Have you seen that loosening up any? Are museums responding more?

JON HENDRICKS: Well, that's the thing. The initial response from the Museum after our two actions, as we say, was to call the police, and perhaps to start legal action, to get an injunction against us and others who had also been involved. The initial action they took was to call a very eminent art critic, Lucy Lippard. They said, "Who are those maniacs who do these mysterious things?" Now we have always taken responsibility for our actions. We had signed the texts. We weren't anonymous. We weren't mysterious. We're human beings, and we're accessible.

JEAN TOCHE: Most of the time when we were engaged in these actions we were always dressed in our street clothes as you see us.

JON HENDRICKS: Ordinary people. We didn't have gory make-up on.

JEAN TOCHE: Probably one of the reasons it was more threatening was because they never knew which was the reality. You know, you have an open museum, and then people came in and start fighting each other.

JON HENDRICKS: So anyways we came in contact with the man who was more or less the Acting Director of the Museum, Arthur Drexler. He said some things. So we said, "We'd be very glad to come and talk with you about this. Our purpose is to try and deal with these problems, not have fun in the halls." So a meeting was arranged between Arthur Drexler and John Szarkowski, who is Director of the Department of Photography or Film, and Poppy Johnson, Toche, and myself of the Art Action Group. So we met. Well, first off, Drexler and Szarkowski, although they were sitting right next to Poppy Johnson, didn't happen to see her through the whole thing except to ask to pass an ash tray. They wanted to deal with men, right? They were used to dealing with men and that's how they wanted it. Well, Poppy Johnson was an equal partner and certainly could speak for the group as well as anyone else in the group. Anyway, we had prepared a series of responses to those two Actions which explained how a million dollars worth of paintings could be sold, why they should be sold, how they would naturally have to lose paintings and generate certain monies, the feasibility and advisability of closing the Museum, and a program that we worked out about communalization. I think we've revised this considerably since that time, but at that point with the information knowledge that we had available we would see what we could do. Anyway, the response of the trustees of the Museum initially, as I say, was to try to initiate an injunction against us and other individuals. Now what that would have meant was that if we had gone into the Museum and tripped on their expensive rug, they could have said it was in contempt of court. It then would not have been the Museum arresting us and

throwing us into jail. It would have been the court system.

JEAN TOCHE: That was tried I think by Columbia University. In order not to deal with the issues you get a court order and then whatever happened at that moment theoretically the university is not involved.

JON HENDRICKS: This seemingly removes it from the questions of the First Amendment to something else. It's a trick that's used frequently and sometimes successfully. A lot of times people can see through it. But anyway, what happened at that point is that the Museum was in the process of hiring a new director, John Hightower. Hightower got wind of what [William S.] Paley and Rockefeller were doing. [This is very much later.] He said- and this is to Hightower's credit- "If you do that to artists I want no part of your museum." So ultimately they backed down on this. It never was done publicly; they were in the process of drawing up the injunction.

JEAN TOCHE: Well, you get a court order and you choose to use it. I mean the Museum simply didn't use it.

JON HENDRICKS: We didn't see it. It wasn't a public announcement. Hightower told us about it. And there was a leak somewhere. But it was never released publicly. Well, that in itself was a learning process to some extent within the Museum. But also later on, about a year later, Hightower and the Museum tried to co-opt us. There had been a demand from Art Workers Coalition that all museums close for the day of Moratorium which was October 17, or something, 1970. We got a telegram from Hightower, or someone else through Hightower, asking if we, the Guerrilla Art Action Group, would be willing to do an action in the garden of the Museum on that day.

JEAN TOCHE: Nobody would know. They would pay for the materials. It would just be Guerrilla Art Action.

JON HENDRICKS: So we sent back a telegram to Hightower.

JEAN TOCHE: The telegram said, "Guerrilla Art Action to be performed by John Hightower, Director of the Museum of Modern Art of New York, on Moratorium Day at a specially called press conference in the lobby of the Museum. When all the press is assembled take a gallon of blood and while you pour the blood over your head repeat slowly ten times, "I am guilty. I am guilty. I am guilty. I am guilty."

JON HENDRICKS: But the "theater-type" guerrilla actions that we describe are only a small part of our over-all work. It takes many forms depending on the situation. It evolves; we learn as we go along.

JEAN TOCHE: We change sometimes. You know, at the beginning we were guilty of sexism. I mean we had to learn about it. And some of our actions were pervaded with these sexist attitudes.

JON HENDRICKS: This became very clear and very painful for Poppy Johnson who was working with us and as part of the Guerrilla Art Action Group. She felt at a certain point that she could just no longer work with us because of that attitude we had. So she left and formed her own group with two other woman, called the Ad Hoc Women's Group, which went on and did a number of a very, very important actions dealing with problems of sexism and discrimination against women in the museums and so on. Now that's part of a growth. We aren't trying to set ourselves up as the way. We aren't saying that all artists should give up painting as we've given up painting or sculpture or whatever it is to do these political actions. We feel strongly that art and politics are one and have to be one to have any strength or honesty.

JEAN TOCHE: But there's not just one way to do it.

JON HENDRICKS: If someone feels strongly that they can, say, through social realist paintings speak to people within their areas or communities and deal with problems of a certain type, great, more power to them. That's very important. Or if someone is compelled to do some very strong action, which might be taking over a museum- well, maybe the circumstances would lead them to that. We aren't about violence. We aren't for dumping a museum director or ripping up their paintings. But I understand, because of the oppressive repression that's perpetrated by the cultural institutions for so long, how people might be prompted to

do that.

JEAN TOCHE: And we would support them.

JON HENDRICKS: Well, I would support somebody bumping off a museum director. But I would support some very strong dramatic action that perhaps wouldn't be accepted in the norm of American behavior, but certainly is justifiable and acceptable in view of what's happened. I think that museums- no, it's not just museums- it's museums, museum trustees, museum directors, art magazines, publishers, critics, writers, collectors, gallery dealers, gallery runners, artists themselves, all the people within the art community must begin to learn that they can't just blindly go about repressing people, that they can't just be about that business of art because it does affect other people and it affects other lives. They really have a responsibility which so far they have been unwilling to accept.

JEAN TOCHE: Well, maybe it should be put in the perspective of a recent resolution at the U.N. which was the study the terrorism of Western powers towards the Third World and other nations and other peoples and other cultures. In other words, in the art world itself there is a certain group of people who have been guilty of terrorism of destroying culture, of destroying people. That must change. And our search is also a fight for change as justified. But they are the victims.

JON HENDRICKS: Now cultural institutions, artists, and everybody else have begun to see that and have begun to change themselves. And then maybe that will avert a great disaster. There won't be riots in their museums.

JEAN TOCHE: It's like a war of liberations.

ALLEN SCHWARTZ: Is that war becoming easier to fight?

JEAN TOCHE: It's never easy to fight.

ALLEN SCHWARTZ: Are the lines of communication opening up more?

JON HENDRICKS: Doubtful. We went to the Museum of Modern Art on some other matter the other day and we got thrown out on our ear. Not physically, but they wanted us to go. They didn't want to hear what we were there about. It was some assistant who didn't know who we were; they weren't interested.

ALLEN SCHWARTZ: Are there more alternatives opening if those systems are closed?

JON HENDRICKS: Yes, there are always several things going on. There are alternate structures, and that's fine too. People are saying, "We don't want any part of your dirty institutions. We've been excluded so long we're just going to make our own institutions, our own places."

JEAN TOCHE: That's one way. The other way would be to take away the power from those who have it now. You see, there's nothing wrong with the museum or the institution per se; it's the people who run them.

JON HENDRICKS: We aren't saying that it has to be one way or another way; not at all. There are people in this city who are organizing community museums or community art centers. There are people who are organizing women's inter-art centers, and things like that.

JEAN TOCHE: When we can force the museum people in power to open things up to other cultures, other people, then that's a victory.

JON HENDRICKS: And I can see that coming. I think it's inevitable. But either there's going to be a lot of suffering, a lot of hardship to achieve that, or else those institutions and individuals will give up some of that power.

JEAN TOCHE: There are victories that are positive, when you get tangible results. They are victories which are negative when you win because the others don't have what you've taken.

JON HENDRICKS: And another thing that I think is important is that just because the time is quiet, and they don't have crazy lunatics spurting blood in their museums doesn't mean that people aren't very, very much concerned about these problems, feeling these problems, and doing something about them. That's growing all the time.

JEAN TOCHE: There's more and more groups doing action all over the country, and the world.

JON HENDRICKS: We can see that.

JEAN TOCHE: People are speaking up.

JON HENDRICKS: Unfortunately, there's more and more repression by governments, but institutions and so on.

JEAN TOCHE: I think it's more necessary than ever that people wake up to the existing reality of oppression. Then they do something about it.

ALLEN SCHWARTZ: Do you see any change in the focus of your future art actions?

JON HENDRICKS: We're not interested in discussing that. That's our own privacy.

ALLEN SCHWARTZ: How did you first get together? You mentioned something about being into destruction art.

JEAN TOCHE: We were involved in an art that was political, but not enough. We were not satisfied, in other words, with what we were doing, how we were doing it, how far we could go with it.

JON HENDRICKS: There was too much of a separation between reality and unreality, in my opinion.

JEAN TOCHE: In a way what we were doing then was theater. When we became the Guerrilla Art Action Group, we stopped being theater. We decided we had to combine our art and our lives so we wouldn't be a lie.

JON HENDRICKS: Also, we were both involved in making objects as well as in this destruction theater. We were making objects that were valuable objects. We wanted to find an art that had no value, no money; we wanted to get rid of that shit. The reason why we asked for money to do this interview was because there are certain needs, and sometimes we can generate money to do something with it. And also because artists themselves have been niggerized through the oppressive system, and they have a right to live, too. We wanted to find an art that didn't have money value, that couldn't be co-opted. There is no value to our art. It's worthless. It's just ideas.

JEAN TOCHE: It's just concepts. Anybody can do it.

JON HENDRICKS: Anybody can use it. It's not ours, it's not "my property and you can't use." Use it. If you like it, use it. We don't care. It's everybody's. That's what we're doing. And that's why we both felt we had to stop making those valuable objects. We had to get into the street and get on with the business at hand.