



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

**Oral history interview with Mel Bochner, 1994
May**

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Mel Bochner in May 1994. The interview was conducted by Lizabeth Marano for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

LIZABETH MARANO: It's May 1994. This is an interview for the Archives of American Art with Mel Bochner and Lizbeth Marano.

We're going to start with your really basic, basic bio, background. Do you want to first give us a brief description? When you were born, where, that kind of information.

MEL BOCHNER: I was born August 23, 1940, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

LIZABETH MARANO: And your parents? Your father was a—?

MEL BOCHNER: My father's name was Meyer Bochner [ph] and he was a sign painter, and my mother's maiden name was Minnie Horowitz [ph] and she was a housewife, and I have one brother and one sister.

LIZABETH MARANO: And do you think that having a father who was a sign painter had any effect on you at all in determining what you became?

MEL BOCHNER: Yes, I think it did. I grew up in an atmosphere where paints and brushes and drawing and everything were around me all the time. In a sense, I had an apprenticeship, in the old-fashioned sense, because I always had to work for my father. So I learned all the techniques and tricks of the trade at a very early age. At the same time there was a certain sense of rebellion in that although I admired my father and was fascinated by what he did, I also didn't really want to do it myself. So in that sense there was always an attraction and a repulsion to all of the manual and craft aspects of art. Although my father wasn't an artist and didn't pretend to be, he was only a sign painter, and he thought of himself as a sign painter, he had once had the ambition to be an artist, but that was during the Depression when it was impossible. His idea of what it meant to be an artist, and the idea that he communicated to me had more to do with illustration and commercial art as opposed to sign painting, which he considered basically a manual art.

LIZABETH MARANO: So did you, right?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, so did I. That was probably what I had against it.

LIZABETH MARANO: Also, you didn't want the same life he had, right?

MEL BOCHNER: No, I didn't. My father worked very, very hard for very, very low pay. Sign painters were not particularly respected. The idea was that a real artist, somebody who did *Saturday Evening Post* covers for example, like Norman Rockwell, was somebody who was respected and was a real artist and—

LIZABETH MARANO: Free-lance in a different sort of way too.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, and I think that idea of free-lancing was always there too, you were always waiting. My father was always waiting to get the job, and there were very hard times when there was no work, and we felt it, we felt it as a family.

LIZABETH MARANO: You said that you had lucked into a really great early childhood education because of where you ended up living in Pittsburgh and had very small classes and great teachers and everything else. Do you feel that that was an incredible foundation that gave you an edge later on or—?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, by pure happenstance my parents found a house in 1940, which was still the Depression, that was in a neighborhood that was serviced by a very good public school. The level of teaching there was very, very high, and it was before all the baby booms so there weren't that many kids living in the neighborhood, and I did have very, very good teachers and I think that—of course, it's an advantage. Also the thing that was most interesting was in Pittsburgh they had this system of choosing from all of the elementary schools two students to represent the school at Saturday morning art classes at the museum, at the Carnegie Museum.

LIZABETH MARANO: Did they have to already show an interest in art, or was this a general—

MEL BOCHNER: No, you had to show an interest in art. I was always considered the class artist, so it was just natural that the art teacher would choose me.

LIZABETH MARANO: What age are you talking about?

MEL BOCHNER: Starting at eight years old. And it was a great adventure because you would go off on a Saturday morning with your lunch packed to the museum, and there would be a class and you would draw and they would give an assignment—something about the autumn, or you would go draw from the plaster casts or from, there is a wonderful room of architectural models at the Carnegie Museum.

LIZABETH MARANO: So you were actually looking at the collection of the museum too.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah.

LIZABETH MARANO: Was that the first time you really had any contact with that?

MEL BOCHNER: It was the first time I had any contact with art at all other than, like I said, *Saturday Evening Post* covers, or had any idea that there was anything beyond, you know, popular magazine illustration. And it was very exciting. I looked forward to those days, Saturdays, very, very much. And went from, I think it was, age eight to about age twelve or thirteen and then you graduated from the crayon drawing class which was called the Tam-o'-shanters—everything was in honor of Scotland and Andrew Carnegie—to what was called the Palette class where you got little cups of paint and then you did painting. Then from that you graduate in your senior year of high school.

LIZABETH MARANO: So from age eight through high school, every Saturday you did this?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, every Saturday, and then you graduated to go into, it was then called Carnegie Tech art classes on Saturday mornings for high school. I mean there was kind of a winnowing-out process, so it started with maybe almost a thousand students in these early Tam-o'-shanters classes from—

LIZABETH MARANO: Really?

MEL BOCHNER: Oh, it was enormous, yes, about a thousand students from—

LIZABETH MARANO: From all over Pittsburgh.

MEL BOCHNER: From all over Pittsburgh and the surrounding area, which was also great because you got to meet all kinds of different people which you didn't get to do—

LIZABETH MARANO: Was it an all-day thing?

MEL BOCHNER: No it was all morning, 'til about noon. Then afterwards I would get out and there was a very good library there, so I would go to the library. And then after the library there was a Y[MCA] nearby, and I would go and play basketball at the Y, so I was gone all day on Saturday on my own starting at noon.

LIZABETH MARANO: In your regular curriculum at school you obviously had art classes too.

MEL BOCHNER: There were also art classes and then I went on Wednesday afternoon, there was a community center that had art classes and I went to those art classes too, so it was every Wednesday afternoon, but that didn't start until junior high school.

LIZABETH MARANO: So is that the reason why you ended up choosing to go to an art school or actually to Carnegie Tech?

MEL BOCHNER: It's very hard to say. I had two interests when I was in school, in high school. I was very interested in math and science and I was interested in art. So the counselors always recommended that I go into architecture, but when I read about architecture and when I looked at the architecture department at Carnegie—which I thought I would probably go to, Carnegie—I really wasn't interested in the part of architecture where you had to work with a client. And I guess it was why I very quickly lost interest in commercial art. I didn't like the idea of having to solve other people's problems.

LIZABETH MARANO: But when you first were thinking of going to art school as a senior or junior in high school, whenever one makes that decision, weren't you thinking of going into it as a commercial artist?

MEL BOCHNER: Yes, I was definitely thinking of going into it as a commercial artist and all through my first year in art school.

LIZABETH MARANO: Even though while you were at the Saturday morning art classes in this sort of museum context, which was definitely not sort of commercially oriented, was it?

MEL BOCHNER: No, it wasn't, but what it meant to be an artist was beyond my imagination. I had no idea really that people became artists. It wasn't really until I was in art school that what it meant to be a painter had any meaning.

LIZABETH MARANO: So when did that actually happen?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, it happened in my first year of art school because I was really more or less signed up for the commercial art courses and I remember I very much admired some of the older students. And there was a show of freshman work and I had some of my drawings in that show, which were pen and ink drawings, that I was very proud of. And some of the seniors walked by while I was near there and they looked at my work and in a very sneering voice they said, "Oh, very

commercial." And so I got the clue that commercial was not looked on that highly. And I realized, what's wrong with being commercial? And what's the opposite? What else is there? And I discussed it with one of my instructors and he said, "Oh, I thought you were going to be a painter." And I asked him to explain what's the difference. He explained what a commercial artist did and what a painter did, and at age eighteen, the romance of being a painter was very attractive.

LIZABETH MARANO: You weren't thinking in terms at all of a career, that you could support yourself?

MEL BOCHNER: No, no. I very unrealistically was not. It just didn't occur to me.

LIZABETH MARANO: But prior to that, I mean, in terms of thinking about being a commercial artist, you had, right?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, even in terms of being a commercial artist I was a very unrealistic and dreamy kid. It just didn't occur to me that you were doing this for the money. You were doing this because it was interesting to you. There were certain commercial artists whose work I admired at that time. Or artists I didn't even know were commercial artists, like Ben Shahn, was an artist that I admired at that time. And I just liked their work, and then I saw it in magazines, so I thought that was what you did. There was nobody at that time to explain these things. I was just a young dreamy—

LIZABETH MARANO: Yes, but I don't think there really was anyway. At that point in time, it's not as if there were a lot of role models around for being an artist anyway. I mean, I assume you didn't know about the Abstract Expressionists or anything else.

MEL BOCHNER: No, no. I remember going to the library, I had this very, very wonderful teacher for freshman design and he said if you want to be an artist you have to go to the library and study all the history of painting and all of the artists. So, I went to the library, which of course was completely empty, and I looked through the books, and there were so many books, I didn't know where to begin. So I thought how can I tell where I should begin, who is the most interesting artist? So I decided whichever artist had the most books on their work, that they would have to be the best artist. And this is like the way my mind worked at that time. So I counted the books and there was roughly a tie between Picasso and Cezanne. So I decided to look at Cezanne first because there was a book on Cezanne called *Cezanne's Composition*, and I had this idea that composition, whatever that meant, was very important.

LIZABETH MARANO: It's a very hokey book!

MEL BOCHNER: It's a very hokey book, but it's a book that I studied because I thought that if this guy is good enough that he has a book just on his composition, then he must really be very, very good. So if I read this book and learned about composition then I would know something that was very important. So I did, I read the book from cover to cover. Years later Roy Lichtenstein satirized that book with some very wonderful, you know, painting. But to a young art student in 1958, that seemed to be something really interesting and important. So I started out being interested in Cezanne, not because I knew anything about art or not because I thought, you know, that this appealed to me personally but just that this was something credible and important.

LIZABETH MARANO: You know actually in a way you sort of satirized that book in *Theory of Painting*.

MEL BOCHNER: Absolutely.

LIZABETH MARANO: In the last section, in a funny way.

MEL BOCHNER: How to take a painting apart and put it back together. And what I started doing was working at night at home doing these absolutely terrible paintings in the manner of early Cezanne. There was portraits of Uncle Dominique—

LIZABETH MARANO: Independently, or—?

MEL BOCHNER: Independent of my class project because we didn't have painting the first year. The first year you just had design and drawing and art history. So I was doing these kind of crazy palette-knife self-portraits.

LIZABETH MARANO: [Laughs.] I see it! Which no longer exist.

MEL BOCHNER: Which now no longer exist, but which when I took in to my drawing teacher and his sort of sardonic comment, I mean he encouraged me to continue, but he said, "I would stay away from the peas and carrots complexion if I were you." Because, contrast, I read that you had to work in contrast, so I made all the lights in orange and all the shadows in green.

LIZABETH MARANO: So, while you were in art school, what other courses were you taking. I mean, were you taking any philosophy courses or what artists were you actually interested in? Was there a dialogue with other students about who the best artist was, you know, what the important book at that time was, blah, blah, blah?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, all right, that's about five questions. Yes, I did take philosophy courses starting my third year, I think, and there was a very good philosophy professor, a guy named Schwartz [ph], who was a German idealist kind of neo-Kantian who was very, very good and I learned a great deal from him and read a lot because of him.

LIZABETH MARANO: What? What were you reading?

MEL BOCHNER: Well. We read, you know, we had a number of courses. Mostly they were just reading your way through the history of philosophy starting with Plato and Aristotle and then we read Aquinas. Before that I had to write a paper on the Sophists. You know, we read Francis Bacon, the philosopher not the painter, and we read up to contemporary philosophy. There was another course where you chose a contemporary philosophy—

LIZABETH MARANO: Was this just for art students or for the entire university?

MEL BOCHNER: No, it was for the whole university and that is where I met a lot of people from the physics department and the math department and most of my friends were really outside of the painting department. There weren't that many students in the painting department that I was really able to relate to.

LIZABETH MARANO: There probably weren't that many students in the painting department taking philosophy courses, right?

MEL BOCHNER: No, none. I was basically the only one.

LIZABETH MARANO: Why had you elected to do that?

MEL BOCHNER: It interested me. I just wasn't satisfied with what I call the manual training aspects

of art and design and as I got more and more into it I thought that art was more and more about ideas. And there was one professor who I related to very much named Robert Lepper, who was also somebody that was also very influential in Andy Warhol's life. Warhol had been at Carnegie ten years before.

LIZABETH MARANO: He was a painting teacher?

MEL BOCHNER: He wasn't a painting teacher. He was a kind of oddball. He was between the industrial design department and the painting department, but he didn't teach studio courses, he taught kinds of idea seminars.

LIZABETH MARANO: Wasn't he a big influence on Jon Borofsky too?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I can't speak for Borofsky.

LIZABETH MARANO: You had mentioned that some of the class projects—

MEL BOCHNER: I don't know if Borofsky ever studied with him, but certainly some of the class projects, about working from your dreams, or working from, you know, making paintings or drawings or objects about your experience as a child certainly are in Borofsky. And in Warhol, the whole idea of taking, how can I put it, the social context, and by studying the social context, and signs, I mean literally signs, and signs as signifiers of relationships in this social context, comes out in Warhol's work later on.

LIZABETH MARANO: So how do you see it affecting your work later on? What aspects of it?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, Lepper broke art down into two kinds of general categories. The objective, which was this studying the sign and context of, you know, a social system, the way in which the world exists independent of the observer, was one idea. And then the other side, which was the subjective, which was the way in which the world exists, interior, or the interiority of existence, so using dreams, experience and memories for the subject matter of your work. And he actually formulated projects to deal with that. Then the senior year was called the "Symbols" course and it was about studying the development of the idea of the symbol, of how signs represented ideas and what the relationships were, both to art and to culture. And that was pretty sophisticated stuff for the 1950s, and it had to do a lot with his own background as an industrial designer. He had worked with Raymond Loewy, the guy who had designed the Coke Machine and the Studebaker and all that, and they had created the first industrial design department at Carnegie in the late 1930s. And he was somebody who read books and talked ideas. He was very involved in Buckminster Fuller. He was just involved with everything that was going on, architecture, painting, philosophy.

LIZABETH MARANO: So he was a—We started talking about him because you were sort of talking about philosophy—

MEL BOCHNER: Well, he sort of encouraged me, you know, if I was interested in ideas, to take some philosophy courses.

LIZABETH MARANO: So he was the one that kind of—

MEL BOCHNER: Well, he encouraged me, and other people had encouraged me, and I didn't really need a lot of encouragement because I'd just been interested in these things on my own. I'd started reading Freud as a freshman in art school because of the book on Leonardo da Vinci. I had thought it was a book on Leonardo da Vinci, and I thought it would be interesting to read a book on

Leonardo da Vinci, and I started reading it and I thought, "This is kind of amazing stuff, I never thought about any of this, I should know more about it." So I started reading all the books I could find and things would just drift, drift by. And also you have to remember it was that whole period, you know, when to be an art student, you were very immersed in this culture of the Beat Generation, and Existentialism and all of these things were going around, and those were the things that you would see people reading and so you would want to read them for yourself. That's how ideas—

LIZABETH MARANO: So was Sartre a big influence, for you, at that point in terms of philosophy?

MEL BOCHNER: Sartre was very important, yes, Sartre was very big. You know, I wasn't able to read *Being and Nothingness*, but I certainly read a lot of other things. I read a little bit of Nietzsche at that time, although I really didn't get it. It was kind of a mishmash of things that go into the development of—

LIZABETH MARANO: What about books, in terms of literature? Contemporary novels.

MEL BOCHNER: I wasn't very interested in literature at that point. I read mostly philosophy and art history. I wasn't, as I remember it, other than of course, Camus. Like everyone else I read a great deal of Camus and Beckett.

LIZABETH MARANO: But that's linked to French Existentialism anyway.

MEL BOCHNER: It's all linked to that same, you know, basic set of ideas, which had a very powerful grasp on American culture at that point.

LIZABETH MARANO: So by the time you were a senior at Carnegie Tech, what were your interests in vis a vis painting? Who were the important artists? What were you looking at?

MEL BOCHNER: Well to go back to part of the other question you were asking about what I was thinking about and looking at all along, the thing that was interesting about the education at Carnegie was, it really was a case, I would say of ontogeny recapitulates [valogeny ?] so that you really worked your way through the whole history of art. You began drawing realistically, you had to learn how to do shading and perspective and all the basic preliminary things and draw from plaster casts, and work your way up to the nude figure and then the clothed figure. That was one aspect of the curriculum, that was the remnants of the old Beaux Arts curriculum, then there were teachers who were teaching the Bauhaus curriculum, so you got all of the design fundamentals and color theory and all of that. Then you had a few kind of teachers who were Modernists who gave you Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian. There was very little that got to Abstract Expressionism.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, was someone like Andy Warhol already a known factor to the students?

MEL BOCHNER: No. There was one teacher who spoke about him, and who always talked about him as having been the best student that ever went to Carnegie. And at that time his name was Andy Warhola, and how this guy had gone to New York and was very successful, sort of like as a model for what one of our graduates could become.

LIZABETH MARANO: But he was successful as a commercial artist.

MEL BOCHNER: As a commercial artist.

LIZABETH MARANO: At that point.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, at that point he was only successful as a commercial artist.

LIZABETH MARANO: And what about Philip Pearlstein? Did he go there too?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, Philip Pearlstein was spoken about by a different professor, and always spoken about as the best painter who had ever gone there and was just beginning his career, and occasionally there would be a little review of Pearlstein's work in the magazines and he would cut it out and bring it in to us as, you know, an example of a very serious painter. But there weren't many models for—

LIZABETH MARANO: What about with the Carnegie International? Did any of the artists who participated in that, did they come to the art school?

MEL BOCHNER: No, unfortunately not. The Carnegie International was very separate from the art school. But it was a very exciting thing, and you know it happened every two or three years, I can't remember which. I think there were two of them while I was a student.

LIZABETH MARANO: That was probably the biggest deal exhibition at that point in time, wasn't it, just about?

MEL BOCHNER: It was, it was. It was the most important international art exhibition. It was a chance to see things from all over the world—and in Pittsburgh. The regular collection of the Carnegie wasn't that hot but suddenly all these things would come in and they would be there for a few months. I think it went on for two months or six weeks. And so you would get this immersion. And of course it was very hard as a kid to sort all this out because there were so many competing things to look at. But it was very exciting, and it was this sense that you could get there that there was real art in the world, even if you couldn't understand the slightest thing about it. And the teachers, actually, were actually threatened by the exhibition. Very little was ever said about it in the school. It was the students who would go on their own and look at it and debate it, and discuss it, and try to figure it out or piece it together. So it was like a labyrinth.

LIZABETH MARANO: So, I mean, the meantime you are doing your independent research the whole time, obviously you form some opinions on your own, so who, by your senior year, was doing the work that you considered to be the important work, that was affecting you?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I guess by my senior year I was very confused. I was looking at a lot of things and there was nothing specifically that I thought was the one and only direction. I was very, very influenced by de Kooning, I was very influenced by Franz Kline. The museum owned a Diebenkorn, and I was very taken by the Diebenkorn. At the same time, I was very fascinated by Mondrian. I didn't know how those things all went together.

LIZABETH MARANO: I was just going to say, because in terms of the Abstract Expressionists, what were you admiring, more the technique or just the space in the painting, devoid of actual ideas? I mean, did you think of them as having ideas?

MEL BOCHNER: I guess what I was most admiring about them was what I thought was the rebelliousness of them. What I saw as a young art student as these artists were breaking all the rules and they were making something that was new. In other words, I sort of subscribed to the *Art News* rhetoric of the time. I also loved the things themselves, I loved the painting in a de Kooning. Let me put it this way, it very easily could be seen as an extension of this whole history of art that I saw from Venetian painting through Impressionism. I could very quickly index de Kooning into that

because of the painterliness of it, and because of the light and because of the space. And those were the things that I found interesting. At the same time for Lepper's symbols class instead of doing a series of paintings or drawings about symbols as we were expected to do, I wrote a paper, I wrote what I considered at that time, a kind of philosophical speculation on the nature of time and communication.

LIZABETH MARANO: Do you still have a copy of that? [Laughs.]

MEL BOCHNER: Somewhere. It's terribly naive. But, you know, I was bringing in Einstein and space time, and all of these things.

LIZABETH MARANO: It would be funny to read, though.

MEL BOCHNER: It is funny. I actually came across a copy of it not long ago, I don't remember where it is now. But the point is that I created this great confrontation with him and with the department because I wouldn't do, and this was kind of like a thesis project, I wouldn't do anything visual for my thesis project. All I was going to turn in was this paper.

LIZABETH MARANO: So how did he react to it?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, at first he had a problem with it because no one had ever done anything like that before. You were supposed to submit things that the faculty could look at and all of that. But he was a very open-minded and curious person and he said, "Okay, go ahead and do it, and let's see what happens."

LIZABETH MARANO: Oh, you proposed it before you actually did it.

MEL BOCHNER: No, I didn't propose it. I said this is what I am going to do, I'm either going to do this or I am not going to do anything, because I couldn't see any other way than copying things to make something that had any symbolic signification. I said I'm just going to write this paper about how I see the relationship between symbols and experience and time and, like I said, it was very naive in what I wrote but the point is that I submitted a text instead of submitting paintings for my senior thesis. I also didn't have very much confidence in my paintings at that time. They weren't anywhere near what I wanted to do. I wasn't happy with what I was doing. I was bouncing back and forth between a variety of influences, and so I didn't really believe in what I was doing.

LIZABETH MARANO: So when you finished art school, what were you planning to do? How did you see your options?

MEL BOCHNER: Well again, I really didn't think about it. I graduated art school, and it's like they handed me the diploma and there I was. I didn't know what to do. So I got on a bus, I literally got on a bus, and I went to Provincetown for the summer, where I found that the only thing I could do was wash dishes, and not wanting to wash dishes, I got on another bus and went to California. So it was some idea of an odyssey.

LIZABETH MARANO: Why California?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, there had been an article in *Life* magazine, I guess my senior year of art school. *Life* magazine was doing features on art in those days. The article was about the difference between East Coast painting and West Coast painting.

LIZABETH MARANO: And what did you consider yourself?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, on the basis of that article I considered myself closer to being a West Coast painter than an East Coast painter. I mean, East Coast painting was represented by Alex Katz, and West Coast painting was represented by Diebenkorn, and I found Diebenkorn more interesting. So I decided that, I had to do something, I would go out to the West Coast and see what was doing there.

LIZABETH MARANO: What year are we talking about?

MEL BOCHNER: 1962. Summer of 1962.

LIZABETH MARANO: So in New York at that point, it's the beginning of Pop Art taking hold, or not really?

MEL BOCHNER: No, I didn't know, I guess it was, but I didn't know about it. One of the students while I was still a senior had told me that there was an artist in New York who had made a sculpture of a flashlight, and I had no idea what he was talking about. Obviously it was Jasper Johns. And I said, "What do you mean, he made a sculpture of a flashlight?" and he said, "He took a flashlight and he cast it bronze, and that was the sculpture." And I remember him telling me that and I remember it being virtually meaningless. I couldn't—

LIZABETH MARANO: None of this was in the art magazines of the time?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, there was very little, there was very little, you know. There was, you know, a little bit in *Art News*, but not really very much. Johns had had the cover, but who knew what it was? I didn't know what it was.

LIZABETH MARANO: But, so how did Alex Katz represent—how was he so much in the forefront? I thought he came much later.

MEL BOCHNER: I don't know. It was just in this article. It was more about figurative painting, you know, how Abstract Expressionism was over and now there was this new figurative painting. I think it was very much related to that show they had just had at the Modern called *New Images of Man*, which was some kind of "return to the figure" idea of painting. Giacometti and Dubuffet. The idea was that abstraction was dead and now the figure had returned using all of these devices of abstraction. And I guess I had seen a Johns painting, because the *White Numbers* was in the Carnegie International in 1961, but it hadn't made much of an impression. I might not have even seen that it was numbers. I just walked by and thought of it as an all-white painting. So anyway, I decided to go out to California, and that's what I did and I stayed in California for a little over a year.

LIZABETH MARANO: Painting?

MEL BOCHNER: Not very much. I had to get full-time jobs, and they were pretty crummy jobs.

LIZABETH MARANO: Did you know anyone when you were out there?

MEL BOCHNER: There was one guy who I had gone to art school with, who had left Carnegie and moved out to California, and who was studying actually with Diebenkorn and Lobdell at I think it was then called the California School of Fine Arts, then it became the Art Institute of San Francisco or something, I can't remember the name. But I went to a couple of his classes with them and I was singularly unimpressed by what the students were doing and by the kind of criticism Diebenkorn and Lobdell were giving and so I didn't have very much more contact.

LIZABETH MARANO: Wasn't there that other painter, David Park?

MEL BOCHNER: David Park was dead.

LIZABETH MARANO: Oh, he was dead already?

MEL BOCHNER: By that point.

LIZABETH MARANO: Was he an influence, was he still an influence?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, he was a very big influence on people like, oh, what's her name, she died not so long ago, I can't remember her name. I'll think of it in a little bit. Joan—

LIZABETH MARANO: Oh, Joan Brown.

MEL BOCHNER: Joan Brown. He was a very big influence on Joan Brown and people like that. But that didn't mean too much to me.

LIZABETH MARANO: Now, was she someone you knew about when you were there at that point in time?

MEL BOCHNER: She was teaching there and she was showing so I did see her painting around. But none of it really meant that much to me. I couldn't see myself in any of that and I just felt kind of stranded, with nothing much to relate to because I already felt that art had to have some kind of intellectual basis, that there had to be ideas. It had to be about ideas in some way, ideas and feelings, ideas and sensations, let's say.

LIZABETH MARANO: So, if you weren't painting at that point were, you reading, thinking, or what were you doing?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I was mostly working at the jobs that I had which were very hard jobs, and you know, trying to find myself in some way as a person, being in a new place.

LIZABETH MARANO: The beginning of hippiedom there too, no?

MEL BOCHNER: Hippiedom hadn't quite started yet. It was like the tail end of the Beat Generation in North Beach, but the hippie time really started in two years, although there were glimmerings of it, concerts in the park, and stuff like that. But I more or less just stopped working. I thought that I didn't know why I was doing what I was doing, and I didn't want to be influenced by anybody anymore, and I knew I could answer in some form or other all the questions that had been posed to me in art school. But I wasn't interested in those questions, so I thought I had to wait until I found some question that interested me. And I couldn't find it, you know, it took me a while, so, you know, I dabbled around a little bit.

LIZABETH MARANO: And then you went to Mexico?

MEL BOCHNER: Then after a little over a year, I went to—[tape ends]

[End side A, tape 1 of 3]

MEL BOCHNER: One point I want to make before I go on to the Mexico trip was that I also had, besides an aesthetic problem with what I was doing, a kind of political problem. I was very conscious of the fact of my working class background, and the fact that the background from which I came

had no art. That the highest form of art was magazine illustration, as I said before. And I felt a certain kind of alienation from the way I saw art used and incorporated and thought about. And I couldn't figure out how I related to that and that was part of the reason why when I went to San Francisco, and in a sense tried to lose myself in order to find myself in some other way. I wanted to work in jobs in factories and things. I wanted to get some sense of my identity as somebody from a working class kind of background. So it's not solely my inability to find my painting subject matter, it was also my inability to know at that point who I was and what my relationship to things was and what it *meant* to be an artist.

LIZABETH MARANO: But what about somebody like de Kooning? He clearly was from a working class background.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, that was part of my attraction to de Kooning. A) because he was clearly from a working class background, and B) because he always said that the greatest artists in America were the sign painters.

LIZABETH MARANO: Right, and he used those type brushes and—

MEL BOCHNER: He used all those brushes and he used those techniques and he made a kind of mystique out of sign painting. So beside the fact that I liked his paintings, there was something about them that I could relate to directly through my background.

LIZABETH MARANO: But none of those artists was from an astute background anyway. I mean they were all from sort of pretty much blue-collar backgrounds.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, the Abstract Expressionists were, but the students that I went to art school with weren't. The students that I went to art school with all came from middle class and above backgrounds.

LIZABETH MARANO: But they were the real artists, I mean in terms of—but did you consider them as a role model? The Abstract Expressionists? In any way.

MEL BOCHNER: Yes, I did. I considered them as a role model in a certain kind of bohemian lifestyle that one, you know, led. But I didn't have any specifics about it. In other words, I had never been to New York. I had never seen what was going on.

LIZABETH MARANO: It was too far removed.

MEL BOCHNER: It was very far removed. It was very distant. I didn't go to New York partially because I didn't know how to go to New York. It seemed easier for me to go to San Francisco. I don't know why that was true, but it was true.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, when you were applying to art schools, you got a scholarship to Pratt, and you went to New York to look at it, but you decided against going there.

MEL BOCHNER: I decided against going there because at age seventeen I didn't feel comfortable in New York. I didn't know how to relate to it. I'd never been on a subway before in my life. And I felt more comfortable, and I also had a scholarship to Carnegie, going to Carnegie. So that's what made that decision there, and I am very glad that I did that because the education at Carnegie, as I look back now, I think was very complete. So anyway, after San Francisco, and after not having done anything really for about a year and a half, I went to Mexico. And just hitchhiked around Mexico and looked at things in Mexico and actually was very impressed by the murals and the studio in

Guadalajara of—

LIZABETH MARANO: Orozco.

MEL BOCHNER: Orozco. And also some of the Siqueiros that I saw. And not only liked his work, but liked some of the political implications of it.

LIZABETH MARANO: Were you going there specifically to look at that? Had you known about it before? Or you stumbled on it there?

MEL BOCHNER: I sort of knew about it but I also just stumbled on it because it was a stop on the bus, you know, that I was on, and I got off at Guadalajara. And then I spent a lot of time there looking at it, and I was very taken with the wall painting. I mean the entire building that he did with the cupola, the man of fire, and kind of the social aspect of his work. At that age that really interested me. A lot. I could also see how Pollock had been so influenced by Orozco, which seemingly nobody ever makes a big fuss about but that there were drawings in the museum there of Orozco's house that you would think Pollock did them, and they pre-date Pollock by years. So anyway I spent the time in Mexico and then I was in a very confused state. I still didn't know what to do, and I had a very good friend who—

LIZABETH MARANO: How many months were you in Mexico?

MEL BOCHNER: Probably about three and a half or four months.

LIZABETH MARANO: So basically you stayed until your money ran out?

MEL BOCHNER: Stayed until my money ran out, and it really ran out. But, you know, things were very cheap then. There were hotels rooms for seventy-five cents, that kind of thing. So I then decided, I was invited by this friend of mine who lived in Chicago, Steve Bloom [ph], who had been a friend of mine since childhood and who was studying at Northwestern, to come and spend some time in Chicago and just cool out there.

LIZABETH MARANO: So he was studying for a Master's at Northwestern?

MEL BOCHNER: He was going for a Ph.D. He was so advanced that they awarded him his Master's without his even having to write a paper. They just gave it to him.

LIZABETH MARANO: And where had he gone for undergraduate?

MEL BOCHNER: He'd gone to the University of Pennsylvania, to Penn State. And to the University of Pittsburgh, but he'd gotten his undergraduate degree at Penn State and then he went to Northwestern.

LIZABETH MARANO: And you were in contact with him when you were at Carnegie?

MEL BOCHNER: Oh yeah, I was always in contact with him.

LIZABETH MARANO: And he was already studying philosophy at that time?

MEL BOCHNER: He was already studying philosophy, and that's probably, you know, if I think about it, part of the answer to your question, why did I take these philosophy classes. Because we had been friends since grade school and our conversation had gone on all that time. He was studying

philosophy and he was telling me about what he was doing and I was interested in it. And I also wanted to keep up my side of the conversation, in a sense. So he was studying there, and I was writing to him all the time and he was writing to me. He said, "Well, why don't you come and stay in Chicago for a while until you decide what you want to do." So that's what I did. I hitchhiked from Mexico City to Chicago.

LIZABETH MARANO: So you then started auditing philosophy courses.

MEL BOCHNER: No, at first I just hung around. The semester had already begun, so I stayed with him and just hung around, and went to some of his classes and started to meet some of his friends and the people who were around there and thought, well, maybe I should try this. Maybe this would be more interesting to do than to continue painting, because I hadn't painted in a long time. So I spoke to one of the professors, whose name was Elisho Bevest [ph], who was teaching an aesthetics course. And asked him if I could audit to see if I would decide to apply for school there, and he was a very good friend of Steve's and he let me do it.

LIZABETH MARANO: So this is 1964?

MEL BOCHNER: No, this is the end of '63. This is, I think, like October of '63. I stayed in his class for a while, and it became clear, first of all, that the other students who were all graduate students after all, were way ahead of me in terms of the reading and background that they had done and they were very, very, very smart. And so I couldn't really keep up on that. Then I had a big argument with Bevest. He proposed one day in class that there was no such thing as a work of art with an unethical content, and that a work of art had to have a moral basis. And I had just seen Leni Riefenstahl's film, *The Triumph of the Will*, which I thought was a remarkable work of art with a totally immoral content. So I proposed that to him as an alternative, and we had this terrible argument because he despised Leni Riefenstahl, of course he despised the Nazis, and he couldn't classify that as a work of art. The more he argued against it the more I argued in favor of it and so we came to this kind of loggerheads position and it was very hard for me to relate to that because I thought he was closed off in a certain way to any alternative in terms of thinking about art other than in a formal way, in terms of its relationships, and what maybe a more disjunctive relationship to content might be. Although I didn't have any of this clearly formulated at the time, these were things that were floating around in my mind. So that was it. I also because of my friendship with the other students and with Steve was able to see a lot of things in typescript that were being circulated because they were just finishing and doing and printing the first Merleau-Ponty thing. The whole graduate department of philosophy from Harvard at sometime in the late '50s or early '60s had moved en masse to Northwestern in protest to the drift at Harvard towards English language and towards basically analytic and Lichtensteinian philosophy. They represented continental philosophy, phenomenally, existentialism, and that was the basis of the Northwestern department, and they were doing all these translations. And of course the other important person there, and Steve was writing his Ph.D. on Heidegger so it was my first real contact with Heidegger, with *Being and Time* and all those ideas. It was a very exciting time to be there and, you know, it was very formative to my thinking.

LIZABETH MARANO: Were you taking a class structure in terms of reading about the phenomenology, so this was all done in an impromptu discussion, or—

MEL BOCHNER: It was done in an informal discussion way.

LIZABETH MARANO: But it's so new at that point, there wasn't that much available of Merleau-Ponty.

MEL BOCHNER: There was hardly anything.

LIZABETH MARANO: I mean, it was just beginning because it wasn't until 1964 that they actually translated it.

MEL BOCHNER: Then they were *published*. They were around for course work. Students were studying the typescripts.

LIZABETH MARANO: So how did that affect you? I mean, really in terms of his ideas about perception, and he was really the only one who was really dealing with aesthetics, and issues of art. I mean, did it make you reevaluate your way of thinking about art, vis a vis that?

MEL BOCHNER: At that point I didn't have any way of thinking about art. I had this education that I had in art school, all of my working the way through the history of art and ideas. And then I had this period then of really doing nothing except for a few small paintings on masonite, which I kept painting over and over and over and over, and I carried with me everywhere I traveled. But I didn't have any real thinking about art that had to change. I was just forming my thinking about art. I wasn't even thinking about the things that I was hearing discussed and that I was trying to discuss with Steve and his friends about Merleau-Ponty or Heidegger. I wasn't thinking of them in terms of art. I was thinking of them in terms of ideas and philosophy and thinking about these things, but what interested me about Merleau-Ponty as opposed to other philosophy was it was about trying to figure out some way in which experience entered thought.

LIZABETH MARANO: Right.

MEL BOCHNER: And how thought dealt with experience, as opposed to everything else I'd read and studied, which is about thought about thought.

LIZABETH MARANO: Or thought about being.

MEL BOCHNER: Or thought about being.

LIZABETH MARANO: But that's actually my question though, I mean, because it's so much more about perception, perception as a vehicle of experience. I mean, did you just really begin thinking profoundly about it then? Because it seems to me that that's such a key issue in all of your later work.

MEL BOCHNER: I think that it seeped into my mind in some way. I didn't jump from reading sections of *The Phenomenology of Perception* to thinking about how this would make an artwork. I couldn't.

LIZABETH MARANO: No, I realize that, but that's what you began to be preoccupied with at that point.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, what I began—somehow two things came together. As I drifted more and more away from Bevo's class and stopped going to class almost completely and realized that I couldn't even begin to think about enrolling for a Master's degree in philosophy. If I wanted to do this I had to start all the way back again as a freshman, and that was out of the question. I started taking the train from Evanston to Chicago and going to the Art Institute. And sort of reestablishing my interest in just looking at things. It's a very great collection. It was the first great collection I'd ever had access to, the first real encyclopedic collection of art. I just started working my way through that collection. They also had a room of Abstract Expressionists. They had a very big, late and very underrated Pollock called *Grayed Rainbow*. One of what I call the "mess" paintings. They

had de Kooning's *Excavation* and they had an all black Clyfford Still. Three big—and the Clyfford Still was really big, I'd never seen a painting that big before—paintings all in one room.

LIZABETH MARANO: Don't they have that Hans Hofmann there too? Or that didn't have any effect on you?

MEL BOCHNER: That didn't have any effect on me at that time. It was those three paintings and Matisse's *Bathers by the River*. That just made me start thinking about painting again and things that I didn't know about, and certainly you couldn't look at that all black Clyfford Still without beginning to think about how perception was a factor in painting in a way that, having come from a complete easel painting background, other than some intuition that the Orozcos were something quite special and important, it was just about finding different, as I look back on it now, finding different points that started connecting up to a larger figure.

LIZABETH MARANO: Those are, just scale-wise, this huge perceptual field.

MEL BOCHNER: The black Clyfford Still. Yeah.

LIZABETH MARANO: So these—that's a point in painting too, just working on that scale. Even you can say that about *The Bathers*.

MEL BOCHNER: Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely. It was something that extended the perceptual field to a boundary that was beyond, you know, the normal kind of—

LIZABETH MARANO: Easel painting.

MEL BOCHNER: Easel painting, but, you know, the normal field of vision. The normal cone, you know, Brunelleschi, cone of vision. So those things totally knocked me out and made me start thinking that I did want to do something again. I didn't know what, and I didn't know where to begin and I didn't know how, but I wanted to do something. And that philosophy wasn't the place where I would be able to express myself, that it had to be in painting.

LIZABETH MARANO: Did you see them as completely separate sort of modes of experience?

MEL BOCHNER: What, you mean philosophy and painting? I saw studying philosophy and being a painter as totally different modes of experience, but I didn't know how or where I could get the two to intersect. I didn't know, I had no idea. I had to start working again, I had to find some way to—

LIZABETH MARANO: But once you eliminated the idea of studying philosophy, which was a very short term idea anyway, it didn't mean that you actually stopped reading—

MEL BOCHNER: Oh, no, no, of course.

LIZABETH MARANO: You were still interested in and you were still following a dialogue with other people.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, I continued to read—again, not knowing what that input was, or where it was going to lead—but, thinking now and connecting it with that great de Kooning, *Excavation*, and the Pollock and the Still, that there was someplace that these ideas would have a kind of meaning, because I didn't know what the hell the Clyfford Still, the Pollock and the de Kooning.. Well, with de

Kooning I had some idea because it relates to Cubism, but the Pollock just looked like a big mess, like he just spilled some paint all over this thing. Because it's not a classic drip painting, it's not one of the very delicate ones. It's just splotches of paint, and the Clyfford Still, which was all black except for one little orange flame in the far corner, I mean, what did they mean? What did they have to do with anything? I was bewildered.

LIZABETH MARANO: Unvarnished, too.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, in those days it was unvarnished, whether he has since come and varnished it, I don't know. But that was my dilemma at that moment as a 24-year-old, how did all this fit together, what could I do with it, what did it mean, and who was I in relationship to this?

LIZABETH MARANO: So you decided to do what at that point?

MEL BOCHNER: Well at that point, I had no money. I was broke.

LIZABETH MARANO: You had no job.

MEL BOCHNER: I had no job. Since I wasn't going to school—see I had been thinking that I would get some kind of scholarship, because that was in the back of my mind, that they had paid Steve, my friend, to go to school, he had a big fellowship—that I would do that. That was out, so what could I do? I heard from a friend of mine that the board of education in Pittsburgh was hiring recent college graduates from Pittsburgh universities as substitute teachers in the public school system if they promised to take education courses and go on and get a Master's degree in education. And the pay for that time was very, very high, and so I decided to do that. So I went back. I got on a bus and went from Chicago to Pittsburgh.

LIZABETH MARANO: So how long were you in Chicago then, like half a year?

MEL BOCHNER: No, not that long, probably October, November, December.

LIZABETH MARANO: Oh.

MEL BOCHNER: I probably left right after Christmas. I'm not really clear about those days, but I wasn't there that long.

LIZABETH MARANO: So you went back to Pittsburgh for how long?

MEL BOCHNER: I went back to Pittsburgh, and I believe I started teaching in the public school system in the beginning of the second semester, and I taught there through that June, I taught there for one complete semester.

LIZABETH MARANO: Painting at that point, or just making money?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, mostly trying to save money and thinking that I wanted to go to New York. Now I sort of thought, "I want to go to New York." And starting to paint and thinking also of applying to graduate schools in painting. So I had—

LIZABETH MARANO: You didn't think of that when you graduated from art school?

MEL BOCHNER: No, I didn't think of that when I graduated from art school. That wasn't a big option in those days, there were very few graduate departments around the country, and I wanted to get

away from school, I was sick of school. So I had these little paintings on masonite that I had been dabbling on all along but not doing very much with and I decided to work on those and use those to

LIZABETH MARANO: Was that those monochrome all-gray paintings?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, those are the all-gray paintings.

LIZABETH MARANO: So are those really coming out after having looked at the paintings at the Art Institute?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah.

LIZABETH MARANO: And then why did you want to stay gray? Why were you making monochrome? I mean, you weren't interested in Ad Reinhardt, you hadn't seen Jasper Johns.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I guess it had something to do with the Clyfford Still and it had something to do with the fact that I couldn't think of what I wanted to paint. In other words, if you took an x-ray of those paintings you'd find hundreds of images in those paintings going all the way back to the bottom where they are pretty figurative. They mostly started out as portraits of people, myself and my friends, which I then kept changing and changing, and changing and adding and changing to an all over painting until my frustration with them ended up in these kind of monochromatic, sludge paintings.

LIZABETH MARANO: Sort of like that quote of Picasso's you mentioned the other day?

MEL BOCHNER: Oh, "Painting is the sum of its destructions." I hadn't thought about that, yeah, it was "Painting is the sum of destruction." Painting is the sum in my case of frustrations.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well it's, yeah—but it is a canceling out.

MEL BOCHNER: It's all about canceling and masking and then having nothing to hold on to.

LIZABETH MARANO: But in the end, I mean they ended up sort of just being about the gesture of the brush, in a way, on the paint, isn't it? The act of painting? Or it's not about—

MEL BOCHNER: No, they're not because what they are is these lumps of old paintings. It's like a skin over a kind of topographical eruption, with little mountains and valleys of old paintings, welts underneath dried.

LIZABETH MARANO: Something like Picabia, because Picabia is, but then he ended up making a painting on top of that.

MEL BOCHNER: He put an image, he put the dots or something, I couldn't even do that. I didn't know about Picabia at that time. No they're really not like anything, I mean—

LIZABETH MARANO: But why did you leave them, you know, as a canceled-out painting in a way?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, at the same time I thought they were canceled out, I thought they were very interesting. I guess I thought that they were the first thing that I had done, and because of my naivete about lots of things, like I didn't know about Yves Klein at that time, and I didn't know about Jasper Johns and I didn't know about a lot of things. I thought they were very interesting and, you

know, and somewhat my own voice coming through for the first time. They were the first things that I looked at that I didn't see a lot of precedents for.

LIZABETH MARANO: Did you think of them as being existential paintings, or—?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, yeah, I did, yeah. I absolutely did. Exactly what I thought of them.

LIZABETH MARANO: So in a sense, they are a kind of visual manifestation of a philosophical concept in a way.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, without—

LIZABETH MARANO: I mean without intentional—

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah intentionally—

LIZABETH MARANO: Without intentionally—Yeah, yeah. I understand that.

MEL BOCHNER: You know what they are? They are more about the mood of who I was at that point. They're really surrogates.

LIZABETH MARANO: So they are abstract expressionist in that way.

MEL BOCHNER: They are definitely abstract expressionist. They are Abstract Expressionist paintings, but there is no gesture, all the gestures cancel each other out.

LIZABETH MARANO: So you applied to graduate school with those paintings. They're small.

MEL BOCHNER: They are all around twelve to fourteen inches. So I applied to graduate school—

LIZABETH MARANO: On masonite.

MEL BOCHNER: On masonite.

LIZABETH MARANO: Was it just expediency in that you weren't making them out of canvas, that you were making them on just a flat support, or was there an intentional decision against making an art object?

MEL BOCHNER: Since I was working on them sporadically, and in the beginning when I started them, I started them in gouache and tempera. They weren't oil paintings until the end. It was an expedient thing because I could carry them in my suitcase wherever I was going, with a few tubes of gouache and a couple of brushes and I could work on them wherever I lived, wherever I went. And so being that size I could carry seven or eight of them anywhere and I could work on them all the time.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, it's also the surface that your father always worked on.

MEL BOCHNER: It's also the surface my father always worked on.

LIZABETH MARANO: But you never did anything like that when you were in art school, right?

MEL BOCHNER: Nothing.

LIZABETH MARANO: You were always on canvases.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I did some things on masonite but I didn't specifically limit myself in the way I did with these paintings I traveled around with and eventually became the monochromes because, you know, there weren't external forces like there were, you know, like if you want to travel, if you want to carry it with you, if you want to work on it all the time, you can't have a canvas.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, were you thinking of them serially or related in any way or were they all —?

MEL BOCHNER: No, it only looks that way now. Unfortunately when I applied to Yale and they asked to see the original work, when they sent them back to me, they tied them all up together with rope, and it still makes me cringe, and a couple of them were completely destroyed because the surfaces were still soft in those days, and they just flattened them completely and pressed the texture of the masonite into the paint.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, you'd have to [inaudible]. Retribution.

MEL BOCHNER: I've brought it up many times. So a couple of them were destroyed, I think there are only like four or five of them left. But they were like tiles, in a sense as I look back at them now, they were kind of like tiles, but I wasn't thinking of them serially, I had no way to think of them serially.

LIZABETH MARANO: How many did you make?

MEL BOCHNER: I think there were roughly ten or eleven, all in all.

LIZABETH MARANO: I mean you worked on them for—over a period of what?

MEL BOCHNER: A couple of years. On and off.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, if you were painting oil over tempera, wouldn't they sort of self-destruct anyway?

MEL BOCHNER: No, you can paint oil over tempera. Well anyway, that's what I did while I was living in Pittsburgh. I also took a printmaking workshop at the school and worked on some etchings.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, were you teaching art, or were you teaching reading, or what were you doing?

MEL BOCHNER: I was a substitute art teacher in elementary schools in a particularly dangerous inner-city school where they couldn't get anybody to teach art because they were afraid to pass out a pair of scissors.

LIZABETH MARANO: And you realized you didn't want to do that for very long.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I actually loved it. It was a great moment in my life because I had never had that kind of experience of finding myself in a situation where it was sink or swim as a person. It was a great moment of self-awareness, that I could do this thing, because the school that I finally wound up in had had eleven art teachers in the last year, and I took over this art class and made it function. I had the students working and drawing and painting and doing sculptures and working with scissors and knives and doing wonderful things. I actually loved it, but I realized that I couldn't give my life to that. I either would give my life to that or give my life to being an artist and it was clear to

me that I wanted to give my life to being an artist. By that time I couldn't, it was too exhausting, it was too paralyzing.

LIZABETH MARANO: So you did it for one semester.

MEL BOCHNER: I did it for one semester.

LIZABETH MARANO: And then you left for New York?

MEL BOCHNER: And I saved a thousand dollars and then I came to New York.

LIZABETH MARANO: Okay, why don't we start the next time we talk with New York.

[End of first interview session]

LIZABETH MARANO: Okay, May 11th, interview with Mel Bochner and Lizbeth Marano.

LIZABETH MARANO: The last thing we talked about was you about to come to New York City. So here you are in New York City—

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I got to New York in June of '64, and I stayed with a friend who lived uptown, and I started looking for a job. I had a great deal of difficulty in finding a job.

LIZABETH MARANO: What kinds of jobs were you looking for, anything?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I started out looking for a job in graphic design or layout or something and I didn't have a portfolio and I didn't have any background and people would just say, well, why don't you just go take a course at school in visual arts and learn how to do paste-ups and mechanicals. And I just wasn't interested in doing that. So I was pretty much at sixes and sevens, I didn't have a job and was running out of money. Someone who I had gone to art school with and I had shown the little gray paintings to said you know, you should go see this show at the Jewish Museum. It's by an artist named Jasper Johns, and he does all-gray paintings too. So I went up to the Jewish Museum, and I saw the Johns show, and I was completely stunned because it just seemed to me that everything that I had been thinking or had done was completely beside the point. That he had taken a lot of things that had been very unclear for me and clarified them and created a whole new context, a whole new ball game. Anyway, while I was there looking at the show, I ran into this guy who I had also gone to art school with, and he was working as a guard at the museum. And in conversation he told me that someone had just quit the day before. I later found out that it was Brice Marden. There was a job open, so I went downstairs to the building manager's office, and I applied for the job, got it, and the next day I was working as a guard at the Jewish Museum.

LIZABETH MARANO: So, during this time were you seeing a lot of exhibitions around New York and were you actually able to work on your own work?

MEL BOCHNER: In the beginning, no, I didn't work on my own work, at all.

LIZABETH MARANO: And you weren't looking around either?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I would go to the galleries that I knew about from the art magazines, like Sydney Janis, the larger ones. Although there were very few galleries at that time. It's hard to reconstruct how small the scene was. Two tiny galleries on one floor and one was Sydney Janis and one was Betty Parsons. That was on 57th Street, and then Green Gallery was on the west side of

57th Street. There wasn't much more than that to look at. Castelli was uptown on 77th Street.

LIZABETH MARANO: When did the Park Place Gallery open?

MEL BOCHNER: That was much later, that's much later. This is '64.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well wasn't it—it had to be by '65.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah probably late '65, middle of '65, something like that. Like I said, that's still a year away and no sign of that. I wasn't in touch with the downtown scene at all. I would go downtown to the Cedar Bar or something, and there was nothing happening, it was just a bunch of drunks.

LIZABETH MARANO: So where was Stella showing? Was [inaudible] there? Was it Castelli?

MEL BOCHNER: No, Stella was at Castelli.

LIZABETH MARANO: Uptown.

MEL BOCHNER: Uptown. So I was at the Jewish Museum and I would see the shows there and the shows that were at the Modern and things like that. And I slowly began to learn my way around the city and I found a place of my own which was also uptown on 1st Avenue and 74th Street, a little cold-water flat. And I then, I guess by the fall, I started working and I started working out of basically my response to the Johnses.

LIZABETH MARANO: Had you met any other artists at this point in New York?

MEL BOCHNER: The first person I met because he used to come to the Jewish Museum all the time and look at shows, and we just struck up conversations, was Robert Moskowitz.

LIZABETH MARANO: Bob Moskowitz.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, and he also lived uptown so we would get together. I went to his studio a number of times. He was just starting the all-gray corner, the bluish-gray corner pieces, which I was very impressed by. Other than that I didn't really know anyone. And I worked at the Jewish Museum for about a year, and it was kind of an amazing period in my life because it was really about being all alone, in a way, in the desert. I mean New York was really very empty in a way at that point. It's hard to describe it. There weren't many galleries. I wasn't in any scene. I did meet people and had friends who were not artists. One guy, whose name unfortunately I can't remember but his father was a major translator of Kafka, and that was our connection. I was reading a lot of Kafka at that time. And there were lots of interesting things to do—there was music to listen, to there were lots of movies, the Cinematech was down on Park Place then, and they were showing all the things like Ron Rice and Stan Brakhage, and the very earliest Warhol films. There was the New Yorker theater which had the [inaudible] and all of that, which was uptown in the 80s on the West Side. There were lots of things to do and it was great fun, but I was not very connected to the art scene, and the downtown gallery scene hadn't started yet. I remember walking around 10th Street and looking into some of the cooperative galleries that were there, but everything that they were showing was just the dregs of late, you know, by that time, third-generation Abstract Expressionism.

LIZABETH MARANO: So, you said you saw the Johns show and were doing paintings in response to them. What about Rauschenberg, had you seen much of his work at the same time?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, I did start to see Rauschenberg, there were a lot of Rauschenbergs around and I was very, very interested in his work. In some ways what I was doing had more to do with Rauschenberg than it did with Johns at that point, and I guess I felt very much tugged somehow between them. And I was incorporating objects and gluing photographs and really they were quite awful. But they were about trying to process all this information I was confronted with, moving to New York, and trying to stop being a student and start being an artist, and I just thought I had to work my way through all of these things. So I'm putting objects on the painting, like, I don't know, ladders and ironing boards and boxes and painting them and over-painting them. They were basically abstract. They didn't have any kind of Pop quality. By that time I certainly knew about Warhol and Lichtenstein, and that was not the direction that I wanted to take my work in.

LIZABETH MARANO: Were you reading art magazines at that point too?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, by that time, you know—well, the only art magazine then—

LIZABETH MARANO: *Arts*, right?

MEL BOCHNER: I don't think *Artforum* had come in, was *Arts*, which was still ultra-conservative, because Hilton Kramer was writing—

LIZABETH MARANO: Wasn't Judd writing for *Arts*?

MEL BOCHNER: Judd was writing for *Arts*, and I was definitely just starting to read Judd at that point. I actually read some of Judd's writings when I was living in California. I remember an article he did on Kandinsky which impressed me a great deal, where he said something to the effect of Kandinsky was a not very good artist who just had happened to change art history. Which was kind of an eye opening statement for me, because I knew how important Kandinsky was, but I had never really liked his paintings, and that just sort of said it so concisely. Anyway, I was reading Judd's writing but there wasn't really that much else to read. Greenberg wasn't publishing very much and it is hard for me to be specific about exactly when I saw things in that time, because, I mean it was thirty years ago and it's—

LIZABETH MARANO: So in a way, the gray paintings that you did were more developed to a certain point and then you kind of went back into experimentation because, like, you don't have any documentation of that period at all, do you?

MEL BOCHNER: No, when I moved out of the different apartments I would just throw the stuff all out. I didn't think very much of what I was—

[End side B, tape 1 of 3]

MEL BOCHNER: Well, it was still mostly about West Coast art, and no, I don't really remember who was writing in those days.

LIZABETH MARANO: Okay, just to go back to what we were talking about before. So you moved apartments, you destroyed most of that work. What was the sort of first body of work that you saved from that period?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I guess at a certain point I then was going to the galleries, I was looking around, I started to figure out what was happening, and I started seeing shows. There were a lot of group shows around at that time. I don't know exactly why, but there were just a lot of group shows. It was pretty clear that what was beginning to emerge was this new geometric, three-dimensional

work. You saw it in lots of different forms in lots of different places. And there were a lot of shows of English artists, too, when Feigen opened. Again, I'm not clear on dates of when all this things are. And Marlborough Gallery opened and they started showing a lot of English Pop, a lot of new English sculpture. Anyway, in my own work I started simplifying the objects and things I was putting on, and then I started making them myself, and I started by cutting the triangular forms out of Styrofoam and trying to cover them with fiber glass. I was working in this very tiny apartment and the fumes were awful and the sculptures were awful. But I started making some drawings of the triangles and doing little progressions of the triangles, and those started to interest me and those were basically the first things that I saved anything from. But that would have been probably the end of '65 or the beginning of '66. In the meantime—again the sequence of this is just not very fresh in my mind—I lost the job, I got fired at the Jewish Museum after I worked there about a year. And then I got a couple of jobs, working as studio assistants for people. And the first one that I had was for Motherwell and I worked for him for a few months but that didn't work out. Then through Hermine Ford, who was married to Bob Moskowitz and whose father was Jack Tworkov, I got a job working for Jack for a short time. That didn't work out, and I think it was through Jack, but I can't really remember, that I got Ruth Vollmer's name. And I worked for Ruth for a couple of months preparing some sculpture stands for her exhibition at Betty Parsons. Now that too, actually must have been—I can't really remember.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, besides Bob Moskowitz and Hermine Ford, who was the first artist that you actually met who you begin to have a dialogue with?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I would say it was probably Eva Hesse. And—

LIZABETH MARANO: And how did you meet Eva Hesse?

MEL BOCHNER: I met her at a party around Christmas, and I guess it was '65, it couldn't have been '64, so it had to have been Christmas of '65. And it was a party where there were a lot of people from the Park Place groups, so Park Place had opened at that point. And I talked to her at that party and—

LIZABETH MARANO: She had just come back from Germany at that point?

MEL BOCHNER: She was back from Germany for a couple of months. And she and her husband Tom Doyle had an argument, a sort of public argument, at this party, and she asked me to walk her home, so I walked her home. She lived on Bowery, and this was on East Broadway so it wasn't far away. And I said to her, "Well I'd like to see you or continue this conversation or whatever," and she said, "Are you in the telephone book?" and I said "Yes," and she said, "I'll give you a call." And I said, "Well, I live uptown." And she said, "Where?" And she said, "Well my shrink is near there. Maybe sometime after my shrink, I'll give you a call and we could have a cup of coffee or go see a museum or something." So I can't remember if it was a couple of weeks or a month later, I got a call from Eva Hesse and in the meantime—and again it's hard for me to remember the sequence—I think at that party she told me that she was going to be in a show at Graham Gallery. The so-called Stuffed Expressionism show, and I remember going to the opening, and you had to walk up the stairs and at the top of the stairs at the door was that piece, I can't remember what it is called now, but it has the breasts and the string hanging down onto the floor and it was all gray and it was shaded light to dark or dark to light and then *Hangup* was right—

LIZABETH MARANO: *Hangup* is shaded light to dark. I don't think the other one is, it's all gray.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, she had something else that was shaded light to—anyway everything was all

gray, and everything had that, you know, soft painterly surface to it. I remember going up to her and saying, "You're really interested in Jasper Johns." And she said, "Yes, I really am." That was sort of like the extent of the conversation.

LIZABETH MARANO: Who else was in that show?

MEL BOCHNER: The other person that was in that show was the person who was having the party that I met her at, who was a guy named Marc Morrel, and he was the one who did the first sculpture out of the flag and the gallery was busted and it went all the way to the Supreme Court and—

LIZABETH MARANO: That was in the Stuffed—

MEL BOCHNER: No, that was in a show about a couple of months later, at a gallery I can't remember the name of the gallery.

LIZABETH MARANO: But who were the other artists in that show?

MEL BOCHNER: So, well, Marc Morrel was in the show. Then there was a guy who was doing inflatable art, art made out of balloons, I can't remember his name. He then later made a company, and got out of art completely and produced these balloons which were kind of a rage in hippie days of hand-painted balloon kind of objects, but it was not among artists, among hippies. And Frank Lincoln Viner, who was making sculpture out of vinyl and—

LIZABETH MARANO: He was later in the Eccentric Abstraction show.

MEL BOCHNER: He was also in Lucy's [Lippard] Eccentric Abstraction show. That's really all that I can remember.

LIZABETH MARANO: All right, so go on.

MEL BOCHNER: So then, Eva would go to her shrink and afterwards we'd go out and have a cup of coffee or a Coke, or go to a museum and talk. And so she was the first artist that I met and that I had a dialogue with and who came over to my studio and who saw what I was doing.

LIZABETH MARANO: And who was exhibiting.

MEL BOCHNER: And who was already exhibiting and had people interested in her work and she said "Oh, you should really meet some people," and, "You should meet Sol LeWitt and you should really meet Robert Smithson."

LIZABETH MARANO: She already knew both. I mean, I knew she knew Sol, I didn't know she knew Smithson.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, she said, "There's this young artist named Smithson who is very interesting, I think you two would have a lot in common, and you should really meet him." Well, I was also at that same time working for Ruth Vollmer, who was showing at Betty Parson's, and Smithson was trying to get into Betty Parson's gallery, and knew Ruth. And Ruth was telling me, "Oh, there is this other young artist who I think you really should meet and who you'd really like and, da, da, da, and, you know, you two have so much in common. His name is Robert Smithson." So before Eva could introduce me to him, I met him through Ruth at the party for her show that I built all the sculpture stands for.

LIZABETH MARANO: Was Smithson showing yet at this point?

MEL BOCHNER: No. He was supposed to have had a show at the Daniels Gallery with Dan Graham but Dan Graham ran out of money and closed the gallery. I think he had had some pieces in group shows but not very much.

LIZABETH MARANO: What date are you talking about?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I think it's like spring of '66.

LIZABETH MARANO: Spring of '66. So Smithson is already a published writer by then.

MEL BOCHNER: No.

LIZABETH MARANO: Yeah, he wrote the piece on Judd.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, but that was—I mean, he's a published writer but I hadn't seen anything that he had written because the piece on Judd I think was in an obscure catalog from Philadelphia. It was obscure to me. I hadn't seen it.

LIZABETH MARANO: All right..

MEL BOCHNER: I didn't know anything about him when I met him at the party, and quite frankly, we did not hit it off. You know, I think it was kind of a question of, I mean he'd been told about me and I'd been told about him, and it was sort of like we were testing each other. It was very late, everybody else had gone home already. There were only three or four people sitting around, and he said to me—no, I said to him, "What are you working on?" or "What are you doing?" and he said, "I'm working on entropy." And I said, I guess I was being very contentious, and I said, "Well, that's ridiculous, how can you work on entropy?" And he said, it's sort of like two teenagers when I think about it, and he said, "Well, you probably don't even know what entropy is." And I said, "Of course I know what entropy is. It's the second law of thermodynamics." I said, "So it means, you know, no work, so how could you be working on no work?" And he said, "Well, that's what I'm working on and you don't know what I'm doing and that's what I'm doing and—" So somehow it just got more and more argumentative, and we wound up arguing about Mannerism, and about El Greco in particular. How we got to El Greco, [laughs] I can't really reconstruct.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, he always makes Mannerist references in all of his writing, so it would be logical—

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, and I was certainly very interested in Mannerism. And we got into an argument about whether El Greco was or wasn't a Mannerist. Now, of course, what's interesting is, you know, some art historians consider him a Mannerist and some art historians don't, so you can make a case for either side.

LIZABETH MARANO: So what was your position?

MEL BOCHNER: I don't remember what my position was, I think it was—

LIZABETH MARANO: [Laughs.] The opposite of—

MEL BOCHNER: Whatever position he took, I was certainly going to take the opposite, and whatever position I took, he was going to take the opposite. So we really got into this argument. We

were arguing about, you know, his relationship to Byzantine art, and then you know about what he thought about Michel[angelo]. It was a great argument, it was getting later and later, but there was no resolution to this. So finally Ruth just threw us out. There was another woman that was there that night, and I believe her name was Alice Mason, but I'm not sure of that. It was Alice something. And she was the editor, the quote unquote literary editor of *Harper's Bazaar*. And she, it turned out, had just thoroughly enjoyed this argument.

LIZABETH MARANO: But hadn't he already published "The Crystal Land" in *Harper's*?

MEL BOCHNER: He was just about to.

LIZABETH MARANO: Oh.

MEL BOCHNER: He was just about to, it hadn't come out yet. Of course, again, this I didn't know. So she thought that she should really get us together again, so she had a brunch the next week. And she invited us both to that brunch. And the sort of guest of honor at that brunch was Walker Evans, whose wife was the assistant editor of *Harper's Bazaar* at that point. He had married a very young woman. Well, Bob Moskowitz and I the year before had made our movie, *New York Windows*.

LIZABETH MARANO: As an homage.

MEL BOCHNER: Which was in homage to Walker Evans.

LIZABETH MARANO: And Bob had worked for Walker Evans.

MEL BOCHNER: Bob had worked for Walker Evans, and I had bought the first Walker Evans that was ever sold in a commercial gallery when Schoelkopf had the Walker Evans show in 1965. I bought—

LIZABETH MARANO: *Studio*.

MEL BOCHNER: —that photograph of the studio. So I was very thrilled to meet Walker, Bob was very thrilled to—

LIZABETH MARANO: Bob?

MEL BOCHNER: Bob Smithson was very thrilled, because Smithson was a great fan of James Agee's book and was coming at it through that kind of Greenwich Village poetry connection. And we also like, in very short order, realized we were both reading Borges at that point, so any differences that we had had in our argument over Mannerism or whatever were immediately put aside and we were just like good friends.

LIZABETH MARANO: You must have found the argument stimulating. It had gone on and on and on anyway so—

MEL BOCHNER: Oh, absolutely.

LIZABETH MARANO: So it wasn't about just being contentious with each other.

MEL BOCHNER: No, I was really—

LIZABETH MARANO: You were testing each other's limits of experience.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, what he knew, and he wanted to know what I knew, and so that's the best way to do it, to push somebody's buttons to the limit. No, when I went home and got up the next morning, I thought, God, that's the smartest guy that I've met since I've been in New York, that's the best argument. I mean the other artists mostly did not read books. They certainly didn't know what Mannerism was.

LIZABETH MARANO: Yeah, I can't imagine that—

MEL BOCHNER: And they couldn't have—

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, Judd certainly.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, Judd, but I hadn't met Judd yet.

LIZABETH MARANO: Right.

MEL BOCHNER: And, of course, when Smithson and I started talking about Judd, who he knew at that point, the first thing he said about Judd was, "Oh, you'd like Judd, he really knows his art history." So, I mean there was a common ground in a way in which you separated people out into artists who knew about art history and artists who even knew about philosophy, were different from all these other people who were artists.

LIZABETH MARANO: So what was Walker Evans like? I bet he didn't say a word, right?

MEL BOCHNER: No, no, no, no, no, no. He was a chatterbox.

LIZABETH MARANO: Oh!

MEL BOCHNER: We spent the whole afternoon. He was kind of a short guy, this was before he grew that long gray beard, he was very elegant, with a blue blazer, very Bostonian kind of presence. Drank like a fish, and we just spent the afternoon sort of asking him questions about going down to the South and taking the photographs, and what it was like traveling with Agee. And, you know, then when it got around to talking about art, we found that his idea of the most important American artist of the twentieth century was Ben Shahn.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, that makes perfect sense.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, it makes perfect sense, but there wasn't really very much for us to talk to him about in terms of our own work or—

LIZABETH MARANO: Why did he think that you would be so interested in him?

MEL BOCHNER: He had no idea. He was shocked that young people knew who he was. I mean he was really surprised. Because he had had the show at Schoelkopf, I don't think it was reviewed, according to him, it wasn't reviewed anywhere, and he was quite delighted that I was the person that had bought that photograph because he didn't know, I mean he didn't know who it was.

LIZABETH MARANO: Was that the first time he was selling, because he was basically a commercial, or a magazine editorial photographer.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, it was the first time he had a show in a commercial gallery. He had had a show at the Museum of Modern Art.

LIZABETH MARANO: Oh, right.

MEL BOCHNER: But it was the first show at a commercial gallery, and the photographs were a hundred dollars.

LIZABETH MARANO: Yeah, but the Museum of Modern Art puts them in a different context anyway. By having a show—

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, I considered him, you know, a classic, the way I would consider an important painter or sculptor at that time. I considered Walker Evans as part of historical—

LIZABETH MARANO: Not to digress too much, but was he the first photographer to be shown at the Museum of Modern Art in that kind of a context?

MEL BOCHNER: I don't know.

LIZABETH MARANO: Was it a downstairs show, or in the photography—

MEL BOCHNER: I wasn't in New York when it happened.

LIZABETH MARANO: Oh.

MEL BOCHNER: I bought the catalog secondhand somewhere. Anyway, where was I, so that's how Smithson and I—

LIZABETH MARANO: So you and Smithson spent the afternoon talking to Walker Evans.

MEL BOCHNER: And then, well, we said we should get together and da, da, da, and I lived uptown and he lived downtown, so we sort of figured out this way of having a rendezvous, which was I would take the 79th Street crosstown bus and he would take the A train up from the Village and we would meet at the Museum of Natural History. And we would have lunch there and go see some things at the museum. And it was from meeting there once or twice a week that we got the idea that we should do the article on the museum which was, of course, much later.

LIZABETH MARANO: Yeah, that's much later. I mean, to me what's interesting is in reading your, yeah, you were writing those short reviews, which predate having met him or not, or after?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, I started writing the reviews at the end of '65. I think like December '65. And I can't really remember whether I started teaching art history at the School of Visual Arts first and then got the writing job or it was the other way around. I really can't remember.

LIZABETH MARANO: Then we have to backtrack.

MEL BOCHNER: Okay.

LIZABETH MARANO: What led you to writing reviews?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I must have done it before I got the job at the School of Visual Arts, I needed money. I'd lost the job at the Jewish Museum, I didn't have a job, I couldn't find a job, I wanted something that—

LIZABETH MARANO: So you were writing these reviews while you were doing the studio assistant jobs too?

MEL BOCHNER: Partially, yeah. I think so. And I just presented myself at *Arts* magazine. And I thought, Judd's an artist, and he can write reviews, why can't I? And I told the guy that, I said, "I think I can write those reviews." So he gave me a tryout, and he sent me out. In those days it was very low key. They had *trouble* finding writers.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well they're not really reviews, they're three-sentence little—

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, they're notices, and they only paid two dollars and fifty cents.

LIZABETH MARANO: I wouldn't even call them notices, they're darts!

MEL BOCHNER: They're darts, yes.

LIZABETH MARANO: They are angry young men material. Anyway, getting back to Smithson. To me what's so interesting is, okay, Smithson had published the "The Crystal Land" and this piece on Judd in this catalog that you hadn't read and then his "Prescription for Cryosphere," I think it is, in the "Primary Structures." So simultaneously when you wrote the "Primary Structures" piece, which was June of '66, he's publishing the piece on entropy and monuments at the same time, and so many of the ideas are so similar, it's quite remarkable. And I do think he does have a more allegorical way of writing about the work and he is certainly using the work as a means to describe his ideas about entropy, however you still are both writing about the same artist and with the same concerns. I mean, with the same sort of intentionality of what art should be at that point in time or who were the important artists and what they were making, you know focus on Judd, Flavin, LeWitt, Smithson actually. And his base is quite a bit broader than yours at that point, because he's including a lot of other people, but it is really remarkable to see how similar on one level the thoughts are in your writing.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I think they are similar on one level, but they are very dissimilar.

LIZABETH MARANO: Yeah.

MEL BOCHNER: Smithson's writing is very metaphorical writing, and I think I stated very clearly that I was anti-metaphor. That I was anti the metaphorical approach to writing about art. I would say that if there was any real influence on my writing that it was Judd.

LIZABETH MARANO: Yeah, well that's clear, but upon both of you.

MEL BOCHNER: On both of us. But the thing that, you know that nobody talks about or nobody seems to write about anymore, that I think was the most influential text that came out, and that really formed both Smithson and myself, was Barbara Rose's "ABC Art" article.

LIZABETH MARANO: Oh.

MEL BOCHNER: Because the "ABC Art" article, which I still think, and I haven't read it in many years, was the first thing to open the flood gates of drawing associations between all of these people, and a sphere of intellectual and literary concern. I think it was, I mean I didn't hear about Borges first in that article, and I can't remember if she really even talks about Borges. But there were other things that I did hear about, you know for the first time, certain connections, John Cage. You know, I had heard of John Cage before but I had never placed what it was about in anything other than in relationship to Johns and Rauschenberg. She places it in other kinds of contexts. Anyway she developed a very large map of relationships, particularly of Stella and Reinhardt and Newman and Judd and Flavin. So I would say if anything really influenced the way in which I started grouping

artists and things together in my own mind, it would be the Barbara Rose article.

LIZABETH MARANO: But Judd was doing that same thing for quite a while, and certainly, I mean, in the "Specific Object" article he is bringing in, well, Johns and Rauschenberg and Duchamp and Yves Klein. And always Newman, I mean Newman is somebody he is always talking about and the flattening out of space and Stella certainly, and then putting it into the context with California artists, and Chamberlain and Oldenberg.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, but here's the difference. Barbara was taking a more literary and art historical point of view, putting it out as part of intellectual history. Now it's been a long time, as I said, since I read the article, but Judd was always taking a basically—even if he talked about Duchamp, Johns and Rauschenberg, who I know Judd did not like—he was looking at it formally. Now, Judd's not a formalist, but he is looking at art formally. He's looking at advances from painting to sculpture from two-dimensional to three-dimensional, you know, from the point of view of the history of form. The only point I am trying to make about the Barbara Rose article, and I was very interested in Judd, and I did read all of his things, and he did have a big effect on my thinking, the thing is that Barbara put it in with Samuel Beckett. She put Morris in with John Cage. It created another kind of thing that just sort of made me think, gee, this ties together with a lot of things that I am interested in and this is the visual art that is expressing these ideas. The other book, that either I heard of through Barbara's article and I can't remember, or I heard of through Ad Reinhardt's writing, was Kubler [George].

LIZABETH MARANO: *The Shape of Time*.

MEL BOCHNER: *The Shape of Time*. And that also had a very big influence on my thinking.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, both you and Smithson are quoting Roland Barthes at that point and time.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, Roland Barthes I had read very, very early. I had read Roland Barthes actually in the fifties in my quote unquote beatnik period because I was an avid reader of *The Evergreen Review*. And they published Roland Barthes'—I guess it was his introduction, I'm not sure, but it was an article on Robbe-Grillet, I think it was called "Objective Literature," and I didn't understand what it was about, but I remember puzzling over it, and trying to figure out what the hell this was about. Then I came across another article of his, I guess it was in '65 or something like that, that he had published in this magazine, I think Whittenborn [ph] was one of the publishers and I used to hang out at Whittenborn's a lot because it was right where I lived, it was on 78th Street and Madison. And he had this thing, it was coming out of Switzerland, he may have been a co-publisher, called *Art and Literature*, and there was a great Roland Barthes piece in that which had a huge influence on my thinking, which was called "The World as Object." And it was basically about Saenredam [17th century Dutch painter].

LIZABETH MARANO: Right, you quote it in one of the—

MEL BOCHNER: Right, and that essay for me was like a model for the way that I was looking at this art, and you know, in terms of myself, I was looking for a way to escape from my own education and background and way of thinking about art, and I saw that through this idea of objectification.

LIZABETH MARANO: But I still think that Judd is really setting the agenda for that, because if you go back and reread all of those early writings of Judd, even within all of the short reviews, not only in "Specific Objects" and other things, but he's very much making a case for something that is an

object, artwork as an object, the objectification and that it is a thing unto itself, which is something that both you and Smithson pick up on, and about the fact that it doesn't have to have a content and that it is antiformal, and it doesn't have to have a function, and it can be sort of dumb and, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And about its fabrication and its nonconformity to any tradition of craftsmanship, of handmade materials or anything like that, going to fabricators.

MEL BOCHNER: The "Primary Structures" article was a review of a show. I mean, Primary Structures was a show.

LIZABETH MARANO: *Yours*. I am talking about his "Specific Objects."

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, I know, but what I am saying is I was reviewing that show and so I was writing about those ideas. They weren't necessarily what I was doing in my own work. I mean, I never made minimal art per se.

LIZABETH MARANO: No, no, no. I am not talking about your work, I am talking about in terms of your writing.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, to me it is very important because of the way things are developing all over the critical landscape right now that I separate, in a way, what I was writing in certain pieces, which were, you know, it wasn't an assignment, I asked to review the show, but were about what other people were doing and how I was thinking critically about that for myself because, yes, Judd was stressing the object. For me, objectification didn't necessarily mean to make an object, it meant to subtract by personal gesture and individual experience from the process of making an artwork. It didn't mean it had to end up being an object, because I didn't like objects, I didn't want to make objects.

LIZABETH MARANO: No, no. Well, let's just look at your writings from '66. You talk about, I mean in a sense, you expand the idea of object. All I'm saying is that there is an initial, not exactly agenda, but almost sort of point of view, a feeling, whatever, that I feel that Judd set. You know, in the tone of his writing which is very flat, descriptive, and neutral, and the kind of work that he is also more or less saying is the best work of the time, this is good work, the way of describing things, kind of simplification, of stripping down, lack of emotionalism, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I think both you and Smithson, from that premise, from that beginning premise, take it into a completely different realm. I am not saying it's Judd's agenda, I am just saying that I feel that he really established the background for that. And I think that—

MEL BOCHNER: I couldn't agree more. I totally agree.

LIZABETH MARANO: And I think that both you and Smithson from literary, and for you philosophical, backgrounds extended it into something completely different. But even with this idea of the object, I mean I am looking through all of your writings, you consistently, you talk about— You are reviewing Smithson, I think, in the "Primary Structures" thing, you are talking about his invisibility as an object and then if you are talking about the artist working with fabricator you are saying that the artist is an object because they have removed themselves from the process. In "The Domain of the Great Bear," time becomes an actual object. So this idea of objectification obviously really took a strong hold on you in a bigger sense.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I would agree. I think though that even Judd's interest in the object has to be contextualized as going back to Frank Stella.

LIZABETH MARANO: Yes!

MEL BOCHNER: Frank Stella starts the ball rolling.

LIZABETH MARANO: Absolutely, absolutely.

MEL BOCHNER: Everything can be traced back, back, back, back. But to me, Stella makes the first statement of the artwork as non-metaphorical—

LIZABETH MARANO: What you see is what you see.

MEL BOCHNER: He called it "what you see is what you see." You, know it certainly comes from his reading of Jasper Johns, but he makes it the issue. Judd takes that as an issue and carries it a step further by removing what he considers the tainted European compositional values and whatever, and making it something that actually sits by itself on the floor, which you can't say anything more than "it's interesting" or "it's not interesting."

LIZABETH MARANO: Right. Well, also taking it away from being a painting.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, taking it out of anything that anything again is tainted by illusionism. But, again Stella sets up the possibility for Judd to make that move.

LIZABETH MARANO: Yeah, yeah.

MEL BOCHNER: Judd sets up the possibility for the younger guys to make a move.

LIZABETH MARANO: Yeah, one second. But at the same time, Judd is also stating Yves Klein is a precedent too.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, I never really understood Judd's connection to Yves Klein, other than the paintings are very physical. To me the fact that the Yves Kleins are very physical things has absolutely nothing to do with the argument about objectification, because I would contend—

LIZABETH MARANO: They were metaphysical.

MEL BOCHNER: —that they were metaphysical, and that they were intended to be metaphysical things, and there is nothing about that blue surface which isn't metaphorical about infinity and the sky and all of these arcane issues of Rosicrucianism, whatever. So his interest in that, I never quite got, but his interest was in a sculpture that had a certain kind of physicality, a certain kind of obdurate presence, what I called somewhere, an obstinate chunkiness. I mean they're chunks, Judd is chunky. If you, you know, in sort of a Dr. Johnson way, if you kicked it with your toe, you'd hurt your toe.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, for me the difference between Yves Klein and Stella is, Yves Klein is really expansionist in a way. It's like a field painting in that it is an infinite universe, and Stella is really about a reductivism, and Judd is picking up on that. I mean to me his sculptures are very implusive— I mean they might be chunky but they are beyond being self-contained, they seem to be imploding upon themselves in some way. [Interruption]

LIZABETH MARANO: Okay. Whew! So at this point in time, you're writing pieces for art magazines and your first important article was "Primary Structures," which I want to talk about a little later. But just to backtrack a bit, you have an ongoing dialogue with Smithson at this point. Have you met Sol

LeWitt yet? And are you seeing the sort of social circle expanding in any way?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, the social circle is definitely expanding. I had met Bob Mangold at the School of Visual Arts where we were both teaching and we started—

LIZABETH MARANO: So, in the meantime—give me the date that you started at the School of Visual Arts.

MEL BOCHNER: I think it was like November or December of '65.

LIZABETH MARANO: You could start in the middle of the year?

MEL BOCHNER: No, Hilton Kramer was the teacher and he quit, and I just applied off the street—

LIZABETH MARANO: [Laughs.] You took Hilton Kramer's—

MEL BOCHNER: I replaced Hilton Kramer when he went to work for the *New York Times* because they couldn't find anyone else who had a college degree. I mean artists did not have university degrees in those days.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, what about the all guys who went to, not guys, *people* who went to Yale and had graduate degrees?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, they weren't applying to The School of Visual Arts. They went through the applications that they had. They had my application, they called me up, I went in for an interview—

LIZABETH MARANO: Start tomorrow.

MEL BOCHNER: Start tomorrow. Can you start tomorrow? Yes, I can start tomorrow. Anyway, one of the people that I met there was Bob Mangold, and we became friendly.

LIZABETH MARANO: And he was teaching painting?

MEL BOCHNER: He was teaching painting there.

LIZABETH MARANO: And wasn't he already friendly with Eva Hesse?

MEL BOCHNER: He was friendly with Eva Hesse. He was very friendly with Sol, he was very friendly with Ryman who was in that building. He was very friendly with Frank Lincoln Viner who was also—

LIZABETH MARANO: Everyone is on the Bowery.

MEL BOCHNER: All of them were on the Bowery. I was still uptown. Eva introduced me to Sol, but it wasn't until after the "Primary Structures" article had come out. I don't really remember how I met Flavin. I think I met him at the opening of the Art and Process show at Finch College. Judd I didn't meet until much later, and I never had very much personal interaction with Judd at all. I met Dan Graham through Smithson.

LIZABETH MARANO: He had a gallery at that point?

MEL BOCHNER: No, the gallery was closed at that point. He was back out living with his parents in New Jersey.

LIZABETH MARANO: But he had already had a gallery.

MEL BOCHNER: He had already had a gallery. And so I guess starting around the summer of '66, this group kind of coalesced, which was Sol, Eva, Smithson and Dan Graham and myself. And we saw each other, you know, one or the other of us was seeing another everyday, we were getting together, we were going to the movies, we were visiting each other's studios, we were talking, we were going out for dinner, so there was a very intense exchange of ideas and—

LIZABETH MARANO: Okay, well then before we talk about that, let's talk about the "Primary Structures" because that came out in June of 1966. So really that was a published entity, and they knew you partly through what you had written about that show.

MEL BOCHNER: Right.

LIZABETH MARANO: And you didn't know Sol at that point, right?

MEL BOCHNER: No.

LIZABETH MARANO: And so in that show, to me what is interesting is again, what we were talking about in terms of a literary background, both you and Smithson always began—I mean "Primary Structures" is your first important piece of writing.

MEL BOCHNER: Right.

LIZABETH MARANO: Because the reviews were really just little—

MEL BOCHNER: Scribbles.

LIZABETH MARANO: Scribbles. So both you and Smithson began your writings with quotations from literary sources. In this case it was Robbe-Grillet from *For a New Novel*.

MEL BOCHNER: Does the Smithson begin with Robbe-Grillet?

LIZABETH MARANO: No, yours does.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, I know mine does but—

LIZABETH MARANO: Smithson has in the entropy article, it's—

MEL BOCHNER: Science fiction.

LIZABETH MARANO: Exactly. But then he had lots of quotes from Borges and other sources. In terms of what and who you wrote about, it's rather remarkable that you happened to write about *the* artists who then became the important figures at that time. Andre, Flavin, LeWitt, Judd, Morris, and Smithson. And you were specifically attracted to them for their sort of artifice, in a way. And in the fact that, when you use words like the work is "dumb" in the sense that it doesn't speak to you and it's "useless," and it's "subversive" in that it points out to the probable end of all Renaissance values, and then you sort of take some swipes at Abstract Expressionism, which had been very important to you before, when you said, "It eliminates the humanistic stammerings of Abstract—"
[Tape ends.]

[End of side A, tape 2 of 3]

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, the thing that seems to consistently interest you is the invisibility of the art. You bring in the idea of the New Math, and the idea of invisible things like mathematics, you said "made visible" but after you said implying concrete, and it's— And of course there are references to the phenomenological aspects of this work, so it seems that at this point in time you have really turned against your previous influences, like Abstract Expressionism, for something that is much more existential in a way, much more nihilistic, very neutral, you want it to be devoid of content. Its being is enough, but the fact that art can be about nothing. What were you yourself making at that point in time?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, first of all, the artists that I was writing about did not necessarily like what I was saying.

LIZABETH MARANO: Yeah, I was wondering about that.

MEL BOCHNER: Judd certainly didn't like it. Andre hated it.

LIZABETH MARANO: Did they talk to you about it?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, Andre went bananas when I met him. You know, "You don't understand my work. You don't know what my work is about. My work is the cry of dying babies in Vietnam." I mean, he had to put some kind of poetic, political twist to it. But he was a materialist, and he thought his materialism was kind of a philosophical penultimate. I didn't happen to agree with that. Sol, basically, I think went along with what I was saying about his work, but I don't think he had much interest really at that point in what I was saying, because his work wasn't that conceptual at that point. I think Smithson, because we were much closer in our thinking, liked what I had to say. And Morris I didn't know at all and I never really did know Morris. But Morris might of liked what I had to say better. Anyway, the point is that this was not a representation of what these artists thought about their work themselves. The reason I was trying to bring in Barbara Rose before is that I think that this attitude was somewhat closer to the literary and philosophical things that she was talking about in terms of "ABC Art," and, you know, I was trying to make a very strong statement. I was trying to put myself into this dialogue. I also believed, here again, you have to contextualize it, that I think the show opened in April, I can't remember. My article didn't come out until a couple of months after the show had been up. The initial writing about the show was very negative. Most of the reviews were against these things, and most of the articles were dealing with it as being cold and technological and antihuman and the end of art if any of this is what art is going to become, and it was more about industrial design than it was about art. And these were the things I was reading about it and hearing about it. My take on the show was very different. I saw a kind of intensity to this work. The philosophical intensity of this work was very apparent to me, and I saw it addressing—Let's stop here, I can't take the telephone anymore. [The telephone has been ringing in the background]

MEL BOCHNER: I saw it addressing issues that went back in my own experience to the things that I had been reading and thinking about when I was at Northwestern. It brought together a lot of loose ends. And when one walked through the show it was very clear that there were these kind of updated geometrized versions of, you know, Mark diSuvero and David Smith, and things done in snazzy colors and things, that, you know, were kind of irrelevant. And then there was these few things out of, I don't know, twenty-eight or twenty-nine or thirty artists in the show, that were really different and they just totally stood out. James Myers asked me about this, "Well, how could you tell which ones were the best?" Well, you could tell. You walked through the show, and the Judd stood out, the Morris stood out. The Smithson was right as you walked in the door. Now, I don't think now looking back that the Smithson was anywhere near the level of the other artists, but it did have

something, his *Cryosphere*, something that the other art in the show didn't. It was cooler, it was more reduced, it was more modular, it didn't go off in all directions.

LIZABETH MARANO: I also think his catalog entry probably had a bigger influence or effect on you too, because it is so reflected the kinds of things that you were thinking about. And just the idea that he said, "62 and 2/3 percent of the entire work was invisible."

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah.

LIZABETH MARANO: You know, and in that you cited, "You should allow your eyes to become an invention." I mean, it seems that, in terms of your own writing, is like the same sort of things that you were interested in, and—

MEL BOCHNER: I mean, looking back now, there were other artists that if I had had the perspective that I have now, that I could have been interested in. I mean, I had reviewed Larry Bell and liked his work very much. And I think that Larry Bell—

LIZABETH MARANO: He was in that show?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, he was in that show. I think he was in that show—if he wasn't, he certainly should have been. But I think his work of that period was very good, and could easily have been in that list of artists. I also am much more interested in Tony Smith now than I was.

LIZABETH MARANO: Oh, he was in that too?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, he was also in that show, but I didn't really quite understand what he was doing. His piece was outside, it wasn't indoors, and I sort of reacted negatively to the surface of it, which was this slopped-on black tar over plywood. And it had a kind of abstract expressionist ethos to it. When I later saw those things remade in steel, I liked them much more than I liked the earlier one.

LIZABETH MARANO: In a way though, I mean in terms of the fact that both you and Smithson picked up on the same artists, though he picked up on people like Will Insley and formed a much broader base—

MEL BOCHNER: He was interested in a lot of things that I was absolutely not interested in.

LIZABETH MARANO: But pretty much still focusing on that core group, and consistently going through your other writings which talk—and Eva Hesse, of course comes into it and other people—but the interest and the language and the descriptions remain consistent despite who you are really talking about. And it's not so different than Smithson, in terms of I see your writing as kind of a self-portrait of your interests and a definition of what you are going to become interested in and how your work is going to be seen. Smithson takes it in a much more, sort of an undertone, I mean using that work in order to find the exact specifics of what your work is going to become. Smithson is completely overt from the very beginning, you know, saying it's about entropy and his whole idea of entropy and blah, blah, blah blah, blah. But I think what you are doing is really defining the parameters of what is interesting to you in terms of your work.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, Bob was already coming at everything with a set of metaphors through which he filtered all of his experience. And whether it had something to do with the way he saw it, or it didn't have something to do with the way he saw it, he didn't really care. That's the way he saw it. My point of view was much more inductive. I was really looking at these things, and using them as

something to think about, and how to think about them. How to come to some kind of an understanding, because you know, at that point I felt this was the best work being done. This was the point that the best thinking about art had reached. Now I hadn't done that thinking, it wasn't my thinking. But what I wanted to do was to come to a point where I understood that and could take a step beyond this. So I thought of myself, you know, if I can use a metaphor, as kind of like sweating out minimalism. I was trying to work my way through these ideas, which I knew corresponded to very deep interests of my own, and find out where I could establish my identity in relation to this. And I think that's just a kind of, how can I put it, classical, traditional way in which artists relate to the art that they come across that they think is really very vital. It's the way the Abstract Expressionists had to deal with Cubism. You know, if you were coming along in the mid '60s, you had to deal with Minimalism. Minimalism was the Cubism of the '60s.

LIZABETH MARANO: What were you actually making at this point in time while you were writing?

MEL BOCHNER: I wasn't really making anything. I had stopped making those triangular things because they were really very bad, and I didn't like the fumes, even though I didn't know it was dangerous at that time. But I wasn't very good at making things. I didn't have a woodshop. So I was basically doing drawings, and I was doing drawings of numerical progressions. And these numerical progressions were an idea that you could manipulate some kind of visual structure beforehand through this language of numbers which was totally abstract, and because it wasn't personal, was completely objective. So in a sense it was in some ways more like, what I later became interested in, serial music. Or for that matter, any kind of music where there is a program which is then made into something, is performed in some way. When you write music, you don't determine the instruments as you are writing it. You might write it sitting at a piano, or you might hum it and write down the notes. Later on you orchestrate it, you figure out what instruments you want to play things. Or like with Bach, we don't even know what instruments he wanted to play certain of his pieces. They are transposed for different instruments.

LIZABETH MARANO: But is it the idea of seriality, or like a—

MEL BOCHNER: It wasn't so much seriality at that particular moment. While the Primary Structures show was going on, I was making these small cardboard pieces which I called models. But they weren't models to be made into sculpture. I was thinking of them more as thought models. Like models of a thought, or—

LIZABETH MARANO: Like scientific models in a way?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, in a funny way, like little kind of scientific models to almost—

LIZABETH MARANO: Find the idea?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, almost to demonstrate the idea the way you would demonstrate a theorem in geometry by making a little drawing and working it out. I wasn't clear about what I wanted to do, but I was clear that I didn't want to do minimalism. I wasn't interested in the object nature of art. I was interested in the philosophical nature of art. I didn't have—

LIZABETH MARANO: Which is really something that never comes up in your writing, in terms of writing about these people's work.

MEL BOCHNER: I think it does. I think in a general sense, not even a general sense, in quite a specific sense, if you look at the beginnings of, like, what's the next one after "Primary Structures"?

LIZABETH MARANO: It's "Art and Process."

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, I mean if you look, before I talk about any of the work there is some kind of philosophical musing, [reading from the text] "A more interesting aspect of recent art is the conscious avoidance of metaphor. The works themselves are objective assertions. The attempt is to avoid metaphysics. That is not entirely possible, though because the only way to avoid metaphysics completely would be not to do anything. But as a basic premise, an empiricism has been substituted for emotionalism. Searching for relationships—" I mean, those are philosophical questions.

LIZABETH MARANO: Yes, those are philosophical questions for *you*, but I don't think they were philosophical questions for the people making the work. Do you?

MEL BOCHNER: No, no, they weren't.

LIZABETH MARANO: Okay, because that's how I meant it.

MEL BOCHNER: Oh.

LIZABETH MARANO: I didn't mean—, no, because I think throughout, just in terms of the fact the quotations that you use to sort of set the tone for each piece clearly set a philosophical or literary—not just mood but—

MEL BOCHNER: I think it does set a mood, like a—

LIZABETH MARANO: —like a mood, like a premise.

MEL BOCHNER: Absolutely. I think it does set a mood.

LIZABETH MARANO: What I am saying is, I think that *you* are doing that, as again an overlay, but I don't think that that's really kind of, the content of that work. That's all.

MEL BOCHNER: I don't think that's what those artists were thinking about. In fact, I know it's not what they were thinking about, or at least they weren't thinking about it in the way in which I was thinking about it. I wanted to know how this work exists for thought. What could thought do with this? Then taking the phenomenological approach, how did this work exist for experience? How did the experience of this work exist for thought? It was like this constant feedback of these two possibilities. And that was the nature of the way in which I was addressing this work.

LIZABETH MARANO: We are going to have to quit for now.

MEL BOCHNER: Okay.

[End of this interview session]

LIZABETH MARANO: This is a continuation of an interview with Mel Bochner and Lizbeth Marano. It's May 24th.

LIZABETH MARANO: Now the last time that we spoke, you said that the biggest influence on your writing was Barbara Rose's "ABC Art," which I since have had a chance to reread. I can certainly see your point because she sets a very broad context for the art of that time, which I think was already named Minimalism by Richard Wolheim. And the artists that she is primarily interested in are Judd,

Andre, Flavin, Morris, and she uses lots and lots and lots of sources, quotes. She begins with a quote by Marshall McLuhan, Gertrude Stein, and she sets the precedent of Duchamp and Malevich as the two people who sort of changed the context, or mood of art, that these artists were later influenced by. Then she brings it into a broader context, talking about the Judson [Memorial Church Dance Theater, N.Y.] dancers and Yvonne Rainer and LaMonte Young and John Cage and Merce Cunningham and music. And anyway, I thought we would just bring that up now as a background that, yes, it did seem like it was unlike anything else that had been written and then she has this whole point in the back of the article where she use just uses quotations from different people, Gertrude Stein, Lichtenstein, Panofsky, Ad Reinhardt. And then she goes on to explain what their effect is on the art of that time and how the artist interacted with it, so—

MEL BOCHNER: Well, the only thing that I would say is that I don't remember it that clearly. I just remember it as something that I read a number of times and something that gave me certain clues as to what some sources were to look at, and what some things were to read, and how certain people were thinking about their work. I just want to clarify one thing that you said. It wasn't an influence on my writing as much as it was, because I didn't write like Barbara Rose, or address these issues the way that Barbara did, who was coming from a kind of art historical background and a journalistic background. But it was more or less like an introduction for me into a certain broader intellectual milieu that I had certain pieces of already but didn't have the connections between them. So I think that is how it functioned for me and as I remember that time, I think that is how it functioned for a lot of people. I think it was a big introductory text for a lot of people.

LIZABETH MARANO: Yeah, it was published in 1965 in *Art in America*, October.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah.

LIZABETH MARANO: Okay, the last piece that we had talked about of yours was the "Primary Structures." So after that you wrote "Art in Process," which was a review of the show at Finch College?

MEL BOCHNER: Yes.

LIZABETH MARANO: And you began that with a quote from Borges, "There is a labyrinth consisting of a single straight line," which is again, something you actually used later in "The Domain of the Great Bear." But in terms of this show you again just focused on Andre, Flavin, LeWitt, Judd, Morris, and Smithson, and in the last paragraph you mention that there were a lot of other artists in the show but you didn't think that their work was all that interesting, or the concerns of that work seem far more traditional than the artists that you mentioned.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, the idea of using the Borges quote was about the contradiction built into the notion that a straight line could be a labyrinth. That something so seemingly complex as a labyrinth could be something so seemingly simple as a straight line. I tried to use that to set the tone of what I was addressing in that article, which was that there was a tremendous amount of complexity to this work that was being presented as being very simple or very primary or very minimal. The way in which Wolheim uses the term Minimal Art, of course, was very different than the way in which these artists were being classified as Minimal. And I don't think that anybody liked that term very much but it has a certain ring to it and therefore it stuck, so it's now inescapable. But what I was trying to do was fight the notion that there was anything minimal to this work. As for the other artists, they needed a different spokesperson for what they were doing. The way I was addressing art, and what I was thinking about, was separate and aside from what they were doing, which was to me in a way carrying forward the more compositional ideas, and the more conventional ideas about sculpture

and objects in terms of the relational aspect, rather than dealing with newer ideas about wholeness, or newer ideas about illusion.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, in most of the work that you are talking about, in terms of Judd, LeWitt, Flavin, and Morris, there is a kind of similarity to it, but when you talk about Smithson's piece, his *Enantiomorphic Chambers*, it already seems, just clearly, that he is not dealing with the same concerns that they are at all. In fact, the other work seems, which is something you brought up in the interview before, and which you say in this article, there is a conscious avoidance of metaphor. Even in your description of that piece, it seems that it is extremely metaphorical.

MEL BOCHNER: I would say that's true. Smithson was not really part of that group. He was younger, he was the same age as I was, and his work was just developing at that point. He had inserted himself into the context of Minimalism, but his work was not really minimal. I think he would have liked it to have been more literal in a sense, but it wasn't within his nature. He didn't have the attitude toward the world that could have permitted that kind of literalism. His attitude was a much more literary attitude about sculpture and art, and so these were some of the things I was saying. Because I said earlier in the article, it's an attempt to avoid a metaphysical statement but in the end you can't avoid a metaphysical statement unless you do absolutely nothing. So anything you do has some kind of philosophical, i.e. metaphysical, aspect to it. I think with the Smithson, the metaphysics—which I think most of his life he fought against in one way and I think that was the tension in his work—were always very close to the surface. And in that piece *Enantiomorphic Chambers*, it's right there because he is dealing with the notion of how you see something, and using the mirror as kind of a plane of sight, and that that plane of sight, although it is attached to the wall, is constantly undermining itself. Well, that's a more literary and metaphorical, and even for that matter surrealist, idea. So I was including him, in a way, and I think I ended with him, of the five artists he was the last one.

LIZABETH MARANO: No. Morris.

MEL BOCHNER: Oh, I ended with Morris—well, who I always thought also had a surrealist aspect to his work.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, actually in terms of what you were saying about trying to—it's impossible not to be metaphysical in a certain way unless you do nothing, I mean it gets back to Barbara Rose's quoting Robbe-Grillet's contentless novels, and that basically by not having any content it is a statement of content in itself. And she was proposing that probably Robbe-Grillet had the biggest influence, or there was the greatest similarity between those artists at that point in time.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, everybody was reading Robbe-Grillet at that point. In particular his book *For a New Novel* had just come out. But I think that Robbe-Grillet was being taken only one way, and as Robbe-Grillet's own work later developed, I don't think he was writing contentless novels. I think that was an interpretation.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, right, no, she was saying that that's impossible, and he said it himself that it is impossible to do.

MEL BOCHNER: I mean, those books are basically, they're mystery stories. And these ideas were being bandied about, and what is interesting about this period, is that ideas were being tested, and debated through work as much as through writing. And I think that that is one thing that is lost in a lot of the writing on that period, that there was a kind of dialogue among the artists and there were

certain attitudes that shifted back and forth. You can't look at those Judds that are made out of that florescent plexiglass and not see them as being highly illusionistic. So on the one hand he is asserting that the work is completely literal and a specific object; on the other hand, there is a tremendous amount of illusionism.

LIZABETH MARANO: Or Morris' mirrored boxes.

MEL BOCHNER: Certainly Morris' mirrored boxes set a very important precedent in this area. I would say that Morris' mirrored boxes are one of the most important things of that period. For exactly raising those questions of where the literal, in other words, the anti-transcendental, and the philosophical or the metaphysical, where they intersect, and how they can't really be separated. How they are intertwined. But that, some attempt to separate these strands and to look at them and see where they lead, was a very important thing for art to be doing at that point. And that these ideas were distinctly, not antiformal but non-formal. They were not simply about the idea of form itself being the subject matter of the work. That there were subjects outside the work.

LIZABETH MARANO: Meaning that it was not a complete denial of sort of Greenbergian aesthetic, but it was another—

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I don't think at that point it was a complete denial of Greenbergian aesthetic. I mean, in a way there is a strong aspect of reductionism, or reductionist thinking, in Judd's sculpture. One could say that he, although Greenberg didn't welcome him into the fold, he's the last Greenbergian sculptor. He's the last sculptor who is interested in those particular issues. He might be minimizing the relationships between the parts in the sculpture, or doing them by mathematical progression, but nonetheless, there is a whole and the whole is composed of parts, and the parts are made out of metal and they're hollow, and the progressions are linear. And you know, they are painted bright colors, and they have all of the aspects of, let's say, what could come after Anthony Caro. I think a number of people, including myself, saw them in that light, but also saw that they led to something else.

LIZABETH MARANO: After the "Art in Process—Structures," you wrote a short review of Sol LeWitt in '66, and then you wrote a review of the Systemic Painting show which was published in November of 1966, again beginning it with a quote, this time from Nietzsche, "The rule to a system is a lack of integrity."

MEL BOCHNER: Well, that was a tongue-in-cheek quotation because that is the quotation that Tom Hess uses to open his first book on de Kooning. I didn't know Tom Hess but I still liked de Kooning, and I thought maybe Tom Hess would recognize that quote, if he ever read this article. And I liked the idea of taking this quote and putting it into a context that was so absolutely different from the context of its first usage within the New York art world; although it might have been used before Tom Hess, I tend to doubt it. I also wanted to bring Nietzsche in because of some of his philosophical attitudes and ideas that I thought were very interesting and gave another dimension to a discussion of systemic painting. Because Nietzsche did believe that there was no such thing as a system in philosophy and that trying to construct a philosophical system meant that you had to engage in some massive subterfuge, because the world didn't go together systematically. And so those are the things that I was just kind of implying by taking that as a sort of a tagline to the review of the show. And another thing was it was one of those very garbled exhibitions, where there were things that were very systemic, but—

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, the only people you write about are basically Stella, who you feel set the entire—he was in control of the entire situation, and you certainly put down any of his followers as

painters and basically felt that the only people that understood his work were the latter sculptors who came—and Jo Baer, and that was it.

MEL BOCHNER: You know, I can't remember anymore who all was in that show, but I know it was a very mixed bag, with everyone from Nicholas Krushenick to I don't know who all.

LIZABETH MARANO: You don't mention them.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, I don't remember who else was in that show. I would assume Mangold and Ryman, who I certainly could have written about, and if they were in the show I am surprised I didn't write about them.

LIZABETH MARANO: You mention Noland in passing.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, Noland, but most of the painters there was nothing systemic about their approach, so I was just trying to deal with some of the ideas and what it meant to look at art from that point of view. The Jo Baers I liked very much because of a certain kind of hardness that I felt at that point in her work and in her attitude towards being a painter, a certain kind of coolness, but at the same time a certain interest in the physicality and the opticality of painting. But by using these numerical systems that she had, a way of distancing that and making it nonpersonalistic or objectified in some way. Her later work went in a very different direction.

LIZABETH MARANO: Very. What you are saying that you think is positive about her work is that it is so brittle and resistant. You're saying even Ad Reinhardt had a seductiveness to his work so I think it was—

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, it was the hardness of those surfaces. There were a lot of other people who were painting frame paintings at that time but they weren't systemic. And maybe looking—

LIZABETH MARANO: Ralph Humphrey.

MEL BOCHNER: Looking back, I would say now that if I was comparing Jo Baer to Ralph Humphrey, I would prefer Ralph Humphrey's paintings to Jo Baer's paintings.

LIZABETH MARANO: And then you quote the Roland Barthes *The World Become Things* when he is talking about Saenredam. It says, [reading] "Lovingly—and exclusively—to paint surfaces which mean nothing at all amounts to an aesthetic of silence."

MEL BOCHNER: Those ideas really permeate through my work at that time, and it was all part of, I think, a youthful desire to sort of rub the slate clean. And as I read back through those writings I am sort of struck by that slight strain of nihilism that goes through all of that. Which I must say was not the general attitude of that period. There were a number of things that I had problematic with most of these artists work. One of them was that there was a certain, how can I put it, a certain kind of untroubled positivism to Judd. And a certain kind of unquestioningness. And what I was looking for was something that had more doubt involved in it. Something that wasn't aligned with a system as it stood. In a sense what I see that as is some kind of inchoate political idea that was beginning in my work of like, being against the culture as it was constituted that accepted this particular moment in art. It's hard to remember, this was like 1965, this was really like the go-go years. There was all this excitement and sort of trumped-up enthusiasm and bright colors and Pop Art.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, the next show that you reviewed, which was actually in 1966, it was November of 1966. It was the Eccentric Abstraction show, and in that show, the artists that you

singled out for attention were Frank Viner and then you mentioned, I think, Keith Sonnier and Gary Kuehn very briefly, but Nauman and the work you were interested in of Nauman's you said that you liked it because it was not work, it was a lot of rags thrown on the ground and draped on the wall, and it had no formal character or particular content. Then you said, quote, [reading] "The idea of making something really inconsequential seems to have possibilities." But you weren't sure that it was necessarily art.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, that Nauman really threw me for a loop because Nauman was really coming out of nowhere. I hadn't seen or even heard of him before.

LIZABETH MARANO: He was coming out of California.

MEL BOCHNER: He was coming from California, and it was funny, because he was coming from a background that was not dissimilar to my background. Because he was out there and William Wiley was his teacher, and I knew that kind of funk reality, let's say, that he was working out of. But that piece was a real oddball, and I thought about it a lot, and what interested me was that I didn't have any particular language to address it.

LIZABETH MARANO: It wasn't a scatter piece, was it?

MEL BOCHNER: No, it was just like a kind of pile, and as I look back at it now it was probably canvas that had been soaked in latex or something. It had been worked on, it wasn't just a pile of rags in a kind of Fluxus or Robert Whitman kind of sense.

LIZABETH MARANO: Yeah, because there were those performance pieces he did with old clothes.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, no, it wasn't like that. It was something that had been made and but then just like piled up on the floor in a little pyramid of limp cloth. Next to it was a Keith Sonnier which was made out of Formica that expanded and contracted and then a Gary Kuehn that was also made out of Formica. Everybody in that show was really trying very hard, and then here was the Nauman that wasn't trying to do anything, so I thought it was like not working. Well, it was kind of slothful, and that was really interesting.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, that was sort of more in keeping with what you were just saying.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, yeah, it was. And that's why—I didn't know where it was—I didn't really know what to say about it because I hadn't seen anything of his before. But I think my review sort of marks my interest in it. And I don't know if that was the first thing that was ever written about Nauman, if he was written about anywhere else before that.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, at the same time they had that Ten show. Was he in that as well or not?

MEL BOCHNER: No. The thing that was fascinating was that the Ten show opened a week before the Eccentric Abstraction show on the floor upstairs. So one gallery on the sixth floor, I think it was something like 11 West 57th Street, you had, you know, the really high style, ultra-cool Minimalist exhibition. It was Judd, LeWitt, Flavin, Andre, Smithson, Agnes Martin, and Ad Reinhardt, I can't remember who the Ten were.

LIZABETH MARANO: Which you did not review.

MEL BOCHNER: Which I did not review because I thought I'd written enough about that stuff

already. Then downstairs, suddenly opens up this thing that seems like the opposite of this.

LIZABETH MARANO: And more your generation.

MEL BOCHNER: Much more my generation and in some odd way closer to things that I was thinking off, although not doing anything like that, but in other words, trying to find some alternatives. Now at the same time in the Eccentric Abstraction show, Louise Bourgeois was in the show, and she was an artist of a much earlier generation.

LIZABETH MARANO: Who you didn't mention.

MEL BOCHNER: Who I didn't mention. I really didn't like what she was doing. They were these little latex molds, kind of like fingers and things. It seemed to me to be like a kind of surrealism that was very dated. I don't know if I saw it now how I would feel about it, but that's how I felt about it then.

LIZABETH MARANO: The work you liked the best in the show was Eva Hesse's which you wrote about at length, her *Metronomic Irregularity*. Was that the piece that you and Sol installed?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah.

LIZABETH MARANO: You installed it for that show?

MEL BOCHNER: We installed it for that show. Eva made the piece at the gallery, I think four by four foot pieces of— what's that Masonite that has the holes?

[End side B, tape 2 of 3]

LIZABETH MARANO: Tape 3, a continuation of an interview between Mel Bochner and Lizbeth Marano, talking about the Eccentric Abstraction show and Eva Hesse's *Metronomic Irregularity*.

MEL BOCHNER: I was saying that Eva made the sculpture at the gallery, at Fischbach Gallery, and it consisted of three Masonite boards in which she drilled holes, I think at a space of every one inch.

LIZABETH MARANO: She didn't buy it pre-made?

MEL BOCHNER: No, this has been a controversy that's been going on for the last couple of years about whether it was the Masonite with the holes already in, which was pegboard, or if it was something that she made. When I reread my review, I realized that I had said that she'd more or less made the thing at some point there.

LIZABETH MARANO: Yeah, you said they were drilled—

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, because you don't get the holes with one-inch centers in commercially prepared pegboard. So, I mean, that's the answer to me about that controversy. Anyway, she then put this very strange cloth-covered wire, I think the wire was copper, and it was covered with white cotton through the holes, almost like a switchboard operator connecting calls from city to city. Then asked Sol and I to hang it. I can't remember whether—

LIZABETH MARANO: The cords were already attached?

MEL BOCHNER: I can't remember whether the cords were attached or not. I think not, but if they weren't, then I don't know how she kept the cords in the board—

LIZABETH MARANO: Just pushed them in.

MEL BOCHNER: Maybe it was just the thickness of the thing. Anyway it is a very interesting and important piece because I think it was made for like a one-shot thing and nobody else had really started doing that yet. Made a piece just for the exhibition, that wasn't—basically an installation piece but it was an installational object. Neither Sol or I were particularly good—

LIZABETH MARANO: Installers.

MEL BOCHNER: Installation technicians. You know, it must have been before the wires were put in because I remember now, Fischbach had these walls that you could get around the back of and they were made out of two by fours and plaster board. So what we did was, we drilled through just with screws or something and we did put some kind of a cap on the screw when we put it in but we didn't realize that she was going to put all of that weight on these boards—

LIZABETH MARANO: There was probably a torque too.

MEL BOCHNER: I think there was a torque and I think there was a weight and I think it just simply stripped down though the gypsum board and fell down. Of course she was devastated. It happened late a night while she was there working and fortunately she was able to repair it and get it back up for the opening of the exhibition, although she didn't talk to either Sol or I for about three months after that, she was so distraught.

LIZABETH MARANO: [Laughs.] So was your review a kind of apology?

MEL BOCHNER: No, not really. I mean my feeling is I really believe, I believe that—

LIZABETH MARANO: You really believed it was the best work.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, I believed in her work, I mean I wouldn't—I mean if there is one thing that you know I hate to do it's anything that's involved with work like hanging a picture or stretching a canvas, so I had to really believe in her work before I would even volunteer to do something that I knew I was basically incompetent to do! I thought she was on to something really big.

LIZABETH MARANO: Now, you didn't consider her work minimalist either, in any capacity.

MEL BOCHNER: No, I didn't consider her work minimalist.

LIZABETH MARANO: Now, what context did you think of the work in? Did you think it shared anything with Smithson's work?

MEL BOCHNER: At that point, no. I think later on, when people began to realize how good Eva's work was, that it began to have an influence on other people. And part of the generosity of her work was that you could be influenced by it without doing something that looked like it.

LIZABETH MARANO: At that point in time.

MEL BOCHNER: At that point in time, yeah. It since seems to have changed because there is so much that is done now that looks exactly like Eva Hesse or a spin-off of Eva Hesse. But I think the idea of using a module, but making it a handmade thing, and the idea of letting materials, which were literally materials, fall or collapse of their own weight—

LIZABETH MARANO: Gravity.

MEL BOCHNER: The way in which she incorporated gravity, which I think she took from Andre. Having just recently seen the Morris show at the Guggenheim, and having not seen that Morris, the so-called Duchampian Morris pieces, when they came out—because they were shown before I arrived in New York, I think—I was very impressed with how much Eva had taken from Morris. That a certain kind of facture and quality of surface and scale and size in the Eva Hesse of this particular *Eccentric Abstraction* period is very related to Morris, and I didn't recognize it at that time.

LIZABETH MARANO: Don't you think they were both coming out of Jasper Johns too?

MEL BOCHNER: Yes. Eva was definitely very interested in Johns, and I would say Johns was one of the salient points of her development. And Johns is a point in which she also refers back to her interest in, I mean through Johns, is one of the points in which she refers back to her interest in Duchamp and particularly in Picabia, who she was very interested in.

LIZABETH MARANO: What's interesting to me is that her work is sort of very much against all the things that you are advocating in the work of the Minimalists. I mean you are talking about their work, the things that you liked about it, and from what you said about Jo Baer, the brittleness, the austerity, the lack of any kind of physical touch. You would certainly have to call Eva Hesse's work really metaphorical as well.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, what interested me, and I can't remember, what's the last line that I wrote about?

LIZABETH MARANO: "The work in sensibility is far in advance to the various categories it has been placed in."

MEL BOCHNER: There is something else I said—

LIZABETH MARANO: "Atrophied organs"?

MEL BOCHNER: [reading] "It's a fabrication of entanglement, a logical fiction, regular, remote and lifeless. Her other pieces, atrophied organs and private parts, encased in string and painted black, are not garish or horrifying. The shiny lacerated surfaces have a detached presence which feels authentic. Hesse's work has an awkwardness similar to that of reality which is equally empty of inherent meaning or simplistic contrasts." In a way I was trying to pull her into what I was interested in, in the sense that I thought her work didn't have to be looked at as, let's say, late organic abstraction. That in a way the string and the—

LIZABETH MARANO: Was there organic abstraction then?

MEL BOCHNER: Well there was organic abstraction but it wasn't being done on any level that was particularly interesting. But you know, this is contemporaneous, remember, with all the offshoots and sort of late decadence of abstract expressionism. And all of that is going on and like there was hard-edge organic abstraction, people like Nicholas Krushenick and— At that time there were so many different cross-pollinations of styles that were all going on at exactly the same time and being shown and promoted, that it was like this vast field of noise. What I was trying to do was like pull some things out of the background of this noise. And what I was saying, I guess, was that there was a coolness to Eva's approach and a detachment to presenting these sexual metaphors that made the work very interesting to me. It seemed like a new attitude. It wasn't a surrealist attitude. It wasn't a late Gorkyesque kind of attitude and it wasn't about like just laying one kind of style over

another. Although at that time I didn't know her drawings from the period directly before, which in a kind of way are taking Gorkyesque abstraction and doing them hard edge. But she had worked her way through that and had come out with something that was much more interesting. And I think she had worked her way through that, and what had helped her get through that was Jasper Johns and Minimalism. And that's how she arrived at a unique kind of statement.

LIZABETH MARANO: And Sol probably was a big influence.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, Sol was a big influence in helping her to cool her work down.

LIZABETH MARANO: Okay, now an enormous leap for you. From writings which were basically a review, you and Smithson collaborated on "The Domain of the Great Bear," which clearly isn't about anything other than what it's about. I mean it's a text unto itself. How did it come about?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, after the point where Smithson and I became very friendly, which happened quite quickly after we met, we would talk to each other a lot on the telephone. He lived very far downtown and I still lived uptown—

LIZABETH MARANO: You mentioned that before, that you met at the—

MEL BOCHNER: So we would meet at the Museum of Natural History and we would have lunch in that little joint across the street. And one of the things that we got around, we were talking about and reading Borges, I guess you would now call it the simulacrum of the artwork. And in talking about that story about the guy who rewrites Shakespeare or something and it is exactly the same but it means something different because it's done at a different time. We were also talking a lot about, you know, a certain McLuhan idea about the media and how the media has become the representation of things, and I can remember saying something like, "Well, there is no reason to do paintings or sculptures any more since the only things that anybody ever wants to see are your slides." Why not just do slides? I mean the slides are the artwork. You don't need anything else. Nobody would know that there wasn't anything else except for the slides. So we began sort of like thinking about since there wasn't very much interest in our work, particularly in mine there was no interest. And I don't think Bob had gotten into Dwan, or he had just gotten into Dwan Gallery when we started working on this. We thought how could we infiltrate the system with our ideas, in a way camouflage the artwork so people didn't realize that they were encountering an artwork, but they would have to come to this inescapable conclusion that it was an artwork. And we thought about infiltrating the media since we had both done some writing and we both had little reputations as writers and some access to editors. We thought what if we made an artwork that was a written artwork and put it into an art magazine, what would happen? How would this be received? What would change? It was done in, how can I say it, an attitude of confrontation with the system as it was set up at that time, where there was very little way for a younger artist to get their work seen or known. So—

LIZABETH MARANO: He was doing pretty well.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, he was getting things out. I certainly wasn't. But we were trying to capitalize on the fact that we had these reputations as writers, and access to the system of distribution. Only this system of distribution was always about something rather than being something in itself.

LIZABETH MARANO: Weren't you also changing it so that the text served you as opposed to serving somebody else?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I think that text always serves two masters in a sense. There is the thing that you're writing about, and there's the fact that you are writing it. The people that I was writing about never really liked what I was writing about their work. Let's say, they were happy to see their work being written about but they were very negative about the things that I was writing. Did I talk about this at an earlier point? Okay. So you are always, when you are writing something, writing about your ideas about that thing. So it's answering to two things. You try, at least I was trying, to keep in what I consider the expository thing, the things that weren't written as artwork, to be a response to the actual thing. But in this, what we came up with was the idea to make the magazine article into kind of a camouflaged artwork. So then we had to think of a subject matter, something to write about. What were we going to write about? Well, since we always met at the Museum of Natural History, and since one of the things that we were very interested in in a general sense, and I think a lot of people were at that time, was the idea of the city. New York City was like a setting, a place that had different areas, and one did different things in different areas and one saw these areas, let's say almost sociologically. Going to the movies on 42nd Street. Going downtown to see art exhibitions. Going to the Museum of Natural History. These were places, and these places had identities, and we were interested in these identities. Another article that we were planning to do and we didn't do together, Bob did something on it himself because we couldn't agree on a point of view, but was on the Radio City Music Hall, like that Art Deco kind of reality and we were interested in—

LIZABETH MARANO: He did something on that?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, he did something on *Ultramoderne*.

LIZABETH MARANO: Oh, right.

MEL BOCHNER: And then we were very interested in lower Manhattan, in the kind of WPA architectural style.

LIZABETH MARANO: Hadn't you already done those movies with Bob Moskowitz?

MEL BOCHNER: I had done those movies about different places—

LIZABETH MARANO: *New York Windows*.

MEL BOCHNER: *New York Windows* and—

LIZABETH MARANO: *Grand Central Station*.

MEL BOCHNER: *Grand Central Station*. So, it was the idea of New York as a group of sights and the identification of these sights and, you know, the history of the sights and the style of these sights and the way they interlocked.

LIZABETH MARANO: When did you do those movies with Bob Moskowitz?

MEL BOCHNER: 1965. So the idea of "The Domain of the Great Bear" was to take the Museum of Natural History and make it the ostensive subject of the thing, like we were doing a review of the museum as an object. And in a sense I guess it was one of the earliest collaborative works, too, because we were working on this together, jointly, and it wasn't the domination of one or the other person. So we sort of spent a lot of time walking around the planetarium and looking at it and getting certain ideas and talking about it. And then we got in touch with the publicity department of the Museum of Natural History, and they gave us access to the photo files that they had, which

was really an amazing experience. They had thousands and thousands and thousands of photographs. And we took the press releases and the handbooks and all of that, and we each decided to write something and then to do a kind of joint thing where we would just take quotations from the museum publications. And then when we presented the idea to Sam Edwards at *Arts* magazine, he loved the idea and he said you can have, I can't remember if it was eight or ten pages, I think it was eight pages. And we could do the whole layout. He said, "You can do the whole layout yourselves." So that's what we did. We did the layout, and we put together the writings and we worked it out.

LIZABETH MARANO: So when you first conceived of it, you weren't thinking of doing the layout, as a visual entity.

MEL BOCHNER: No, we wanted to do the layout, but we didn't think we would find anybody that would let us, because usually you had these art directors. But, no, we presented the idea to Sam, that we had the text and we had the photos, and we said we would like to put this thing together and make it like an entity, and the whole thing would be the article.

LIZABETH MARANO: So once he gave you that permission, subsequently you demanded that permission for later things as did Smithsonian, right?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, once we had it the first time, and I think, it was so successful—I mean, it was so unlike anything that was appearing in art magazines, and it was a really interesting thing. I think they saw it was to their advantage to let us do it because they were getting something really unique.

LIZABETH MARANO: They were getting an artwork.

MEL BOCHNER: They were getting an artwork. Plus, you know, *Arts* magazine was in competition with *Artforum* which had just moved to New York, so they wanted to be involved with something that was different or unusual or specific to them. So their thing then became these artists' things where the artists did the layout and did the writing.

LIZABETH MARANO: So did you each independently write things and then decide whose was going to begin it, or— The beginning is clearly yours, as you've said to me before, but did you both write some things and then decide what was going to be the beginning? What about just this initial quote on the very first page.

MEL BOCHNER: Which one?

LIZABETH MARANO: [reading] "Through sound infinity is the planetarium, a frozen world for the end of the world, a vast stricture of concentric circles, around whose borders one may find an interminable collection of ideas as objects, a repository of model universes. Here also is the domain of the Great Bear."

MEL BOCHNER: Well, we worked on that together, some of that I can hear Smithsonian talking and some of that I can hear me talking.

LIZABETH MARANO: Yeah, me too.

MEL BOCHNER: The thing that clicked the title was that photograph, which was the photograph of the domain of the great Bear. We liked the photograph, we liked the kind of minimalist quality of the images, the star map, the circular grid and the idea of the domain, the reserved area that belongs to

the Great Bear. There was something about that, that just had the ring, and it's such a powerful image. We didn't do that. That's an appropriated photograph. That's from a 1950s poster that they did. So—

LIZABETH MARANO: Wait. With the text too?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, the text, the whole thing. We just took the whole thing and reproduced it. I didn't ever know what happened to the photographs. I didn't know if they gave them back to us, if Smithsonian kept them, if I have them somewhere or if they stayed at *Arts* magazine. But, no, that whole thing was just picked up and put down, and so that gave us the title of the article. But then—

LIZABETH MARANO: So then the first quote is from Pascal, [reading] "Nature is a infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere."

MEL BOCHNER: No, that's a quote that Borges uses a lot from Pascal, so I took that and used that as the beginning and it also sort of made sense, you know, with the circularity of that first image and the image of the dome. I mean it was a lot about vicious circles, and going around in circles and being lost and the confusion of infinity in architecture. The idea of holding in this little building the infinite universe.

LIZABETH MARANO: And then you have these subcaptions.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, the captions come straight from the literature.

LIZABETH MARANO: Of the—

MEL BOCHNER: Of the planetarium. Everything that had come from the literature came from the literature.

LIZABETH MARANO: So, [reading] "In the center of the infinite—"

MEL BOCHNER: Is something from some—

LIZABETH MARANO: So you just appropriated little pieces and—

MEL BOCHNER: Little catch phrases. "Captive of the planets—"

LIZABETH MARANO: Right, and then you went on to start speaking of Borges using that same line that you had quoted before about the labyrinth as a straight line? So this whole first part of the text is yours?

MEL BOCHNER: The first two pages of text I wrote. And we decided to start with that because it seemed to have an introductory quality.

LIZABETH MARANO: And then what about the layout? That was done afterwards?

MEL BOCHNER: The layout was done afterwards.

LIZABETH MARANO: With pictures that you had taken from the archives.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah.

LIZABETH MARANO: So in—

MEL BOCHNER: We could have done another twenty pages, we had so many pictures.

LIZABETH MARANO: "In the center of the infinite" and the "captive of the planets" is yours. So the next thing is at the perimeter, which is that sort of parody of the Judd, it's talking about the Viking rocket display?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, well—

LIZABETH MARANO: It's hilarious. [reading] "Along its fifty-foot length are inset twenty plastic windows. Ten of these are clear and transparent, four are green, three are red, two are blue. The remaining one is of an indeterminate cast." And then it continues in that way. Now, that's collaboration between the two of you?

MEL BOCHNER: No I wrote that. I wrote that—

LIZABETH MARANO: But intentionally—

MEL BOCHNER: Intentionally to parody Judd. Both as an homage to Judd and as a declaration of freedom. That once, in a way, you are free to parody something you are free of its influence. That was like a farewell to all that.

LIZABETH MARANO: Then your next thing is "Beyond the Possibility Threshold," which is about that meteor and about the weight of it and then about the effect of that light on the people who were visiting, that's all yours too?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah.

LIZABETH MARANO: What about this image of the Astronomia?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, see, one of the things that I was trying to get out in what I was writing was the way in which the planetarium, which had been built during the Depression, was now being updated in the '60s and the '60s part of it was just being plugged in as these kind of packaged exhibition format, almost Disneyland like things. One of which was Astronomia, sponsored by IBM as you can see in the photograph. And that this was the world of plastic and Formica and press type and all of the kind of slick presentation of ideas, as opposed to the old planetarium which was made out of plaster and beaverboard and cement and marble and granite. That ideas have a location in time and a texture and that the museum was about, at this moment and time—I think it has since changed, the '60s became the '70s, the '70s became the '80s and most of the 1930s stuff is gone. But at that point it was sort of this confrontation between the dismal past and the bright future, and that was one of the things that I was trying to locate as a subject matter for this. As also a subject matter for so much, and in a way as an autobiographical subject matter for both Smithsonian and myself because it was something that we thought about and talked about. That in a way the old planetarium represented kind of the Depression, the '30s, Abstract Expressionism, a whole different idea about space and time, as opposed to this kind of neo-positivist, very slick, what they would now call simulacrum of space and time. And that this was something that we had both lived through. And that this was contemporaneous to our development as people and as artists.

LIZABETH MARANO: So did you pick this photo or was it joint—

MEL BOCHNER: Oh, that photo picked itself! It's such a great photo, you couldn't pass it up.

LIZABETH MARANO: Right. So then this is all clearly Smithsonian's, "Secrets of the ambulatories,

secrets of the domes?" This sort of—because he was doing this already.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, but it was things that we picked out together. We had the book, and we just underlined certain sentences.

LIZABETH MARANO: So it's appropriated, the—

MEL BOCHNER: Every sentence in there is appropriated from literature.

LIZABETH MARANO: What about the fact that you made them into different kinds of categories in boxes with numbers?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, first of all it was a parody of the kind of sculpture and drawings that we were both ourselves making at that time.

LIZABETH MARANO: The layout looks a little bit like those sculptures that you were making.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, it looks like the sculptures that we were both making at the time. One thing that I want to say about this is that it was really done in a great spirit of fun. We had a great time doing this. There were lots of in-jokes and laughs and things like the Judd thing that I wrote, but we were aware that we were doing something that was really unusual. And that also gave it a sense of, how can I put it, a kind of intellectual giddiness.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, were you trying to be outrageous, too?

MEL BOCHNER: Oh, yes, absolutely! We thought this was like the most outrageous and hilarious thing that had come along. So a lot of this—

LIZABETH MARANO: Was it sort of because you were sort of applying this minimalist seriousness to something that is a found object?

MEL BOCHNER: And hilarious and tongue-in-cheek. I mean, if you actually read this to find out the secrets of the domes, I mean, what are the secrets of the domes? There is no secret or the— what's the other one say? "The secrets of the ambulatories." I mean, it's very Borgesian, in the sense that Borges was always talking about literary fabrications, you know. Invented places, invented libraries, invented cultures.

LIZABETH MARANO: Which the planetarium is that kind of a place.

MEL BOCHNER: Exactly, the planetarium is a Borgesian place.

LIZABETH MARANO: Then this next page in "The Domain of the Great Bear," this is basically just the operation, the directions of the guide?

MEL BOCHNER: Yes, and then there are these things that Smithson wrote that which are the inserts. The last two pages are Smithson.

LIZABETH MARANO: Completely.

MEL BOCHNER: Completely.

LIZABETH MARANO: He put in all of the inserts. Was this page of the show settings and the operations, was this sort of a typed-out page of instructions for the operator of the light show?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, we got our hands on them.

LIZABETH MARANO: And then he was commenting on that with the inserts.

MEL BOCHNER: Right.

LIZABETH MARANO: And then the very last page, the "Illustrations of Catastrophe of Remote Times."

MEL BOCHNER: That's his.

LIZABETH MARANO: Yeah, and it is in a totally different tone of voice. You have a much more deadpan sort of descriptive dark side at the beginning and this has this sort of excited sci fi enthusiasm that is just sort of running all over the place, in the last page.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, and I think that was sort of the difference in our personalities, too!

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, if you had more pages, you could have just kept going on?

MEL BOCHNER: Oh, there was so much material, there were so many.

LIZABETH MARANO: So you actually had to edit it down, or not? Or you knew that you had that amount of pages, and so—?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, we knew that, at the point we knew we had that amount of pages, we made it fit that amount of pages. But in terms of the images and other things we might have been able to do, we could have done more. But it also seemed that it was right to close it off and make it this self-contained thing and not make it as if it were a whole book. The idea was to look at this thing and say, what the hell is it? What's it about? Why is it in an art magazine? What does it have to do with anything?

LIZABETH MARANO: What did you think it was at the time?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, we thought it was a work. It was a work done by the two of us. I mean, we didn't have any particular—

LIZABETH MARANO: I mean, but did you think of it as—I mean, because conceptual art hadn't surfaced as a term or a thought at that point and time. But I mean, in retrospect, did you think of it as a conceptual work?

MEL BOCHNER: As the term has come to be used, I guess it qualifies as a conceptual work. Since there is absolutely no material aspect to it other than what appears in the magazine. And since it totally takes its place within the media and it's totally a work without any aura whatsoever, then you could say that it could fulfill certain postulates of what came to be called conceptualism.

LIZABETH MARANO: Then you would also—

MEL BOCHNER: I would say it predicted conceptualism, rather than was conceptual. In other words, it signaled the possibility for a new attitude about how artists addressed the world.

LIZABETH MARANO: What was the response to it?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, all our friends loved it and nobody else said anything!

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, looking backwards again from our current perspective, could you think of it also in terms of an institutional critique in any way?

MEL BOCHNER: In the sense that the magazine was an institution that imposed its particular, albeit disorganized, viewpoints on what was considered art and what wasn't considered art. I think it was a subversion, an institutional subversion. The fact that we took a museum as the subject matter for what we were doing, I think is kind of interesting, from that point of view.

LIZABETH MARANO: The planetarium isn't exactly a museum.

MEL BOCHNER: No, it isn't, but it's part of the city's cultural makeup, cultural buildings. I mean, it is a building where you are going for kind of an aesthetized experience. It might be about science, but nonetheless it's something that's packaged, that's predetermined, that's—

LIZABETH MARANO: Educational.

MEL BOCHNER: Educational, in the way that all art museums later became educational. It's not as if, what we are also saying in this is, it's not as if the planetarium is presenting some absolute truth about science or astronomy, that these are constructions of truth. There is the 1930s construction, there is the 1960s construction. And that those have emotional correlatives as well as objective correlatives. So I don't think that we had any language. The language that exists now didn't exist then to describe these things. I think it was just an intuitional thing and we moved towards this.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, once that you had done it, and once it was published, what was your afterthought about it? Had it given you a kind of permission to then do other things? I mean, you then felt that it had begun a—Because after that the next thing that you publish is the "Less is Less (for Dan Flavin)," which is just a collection of quotations. And Smithson, I think, publishes his "Quasi-infinities," which has a similar format to "The Domain of the Great Bear." I mean, both of your writing then took off in a completely different direction, and you went on later to do the Beach Boys piece, which are clearly separate entities unto themselves, meant as a kind of an artwork as opposed to a text necessarily.

MEL BOCHNER: Or text as an artwork. Yeah, this opened up a lot of mental doors and trap doors. It seemed a way to do things that were very subversive, that some people might not even know were going on. And it was a possibility of a place to work in the public domain, where I didn't have any other place to work in the public domain. So, yeah, I would say my attitude towards what writing could do, while I was still interested in doing writing, shifted after "The Domain of the Great Bear." The Flavin thing, Flavin asked me to do something on his work—which, I think was the first article published on Flavin—*Art and Artists*, that English magazine, wanted something. The idea of quotations was around. It had been around for a while and was around outside an art world context.

LIZABETH MARANO: Sure, but not just only using quotations.

MEL BOCHNER: No, not just only using quotations. And it wasn't just that they were quotations, they were quotations that by their juxtaposition gave them another kind of twist.

LIZABETH MARANO: Some were completely relevant to Dan Flavin and some had absolutely nothing to do with him.

MEL BOCHNER: Or some had something to do with some thought that I had about Dan Flavin. There were things in there, that if you know Dan Flavin as a person it tells you something that only verifies what you know about him as a person. If you don't know him as a person, I'm fairly certain

that it would mean absolutely nothing to you.

LIZABETH MARANO: Did he like it?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, he did like it. He did like it. Now the thing about that Flavin thing was, that was the first time that I began to make up quotations too.

LIZABETH MARANO: Oh, I was going to ask you about that. Which quotations are made up?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, the most significant one that's made up is the last one, the Matisse.

LIZABETH MARANO: "Some day all art must come to light"?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, it seemed like a fitting way to end it. I wanted something to give Flavin some kind of cultural contextualization. It would be Flavin in relation to Matisse. And then the statement is so ambiguous and paradoxical that I decided to use it and I didn't think anybody would be the wiser.

[End side A, tape 3 of 3]

LIZABETH MARANO: Did you make up the quote about Sol LeWitt, "I like everything about Dan's work except the lights"? [Laughs.] Or did he actually say that?

MEL BOCHNER: No, that was the Sol LeWitt exclusion principle, I called it. He had a statement like that about every single artist.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, he never considered Smithson an artist. He always said, "I like his writing but his art is no good."

MEL BOCHNER: No, but he had a good one about Judd. I can't remember what he was. He said at the Judd exhibition, "Well, this exhibition firmly establishes Judd as our leading West Coast sculptor." There was always a kind of barb to a Sol LeWitt remark about another artist. But the thing that was interesting about that Matisse thing, and which taught me a very big lesson, was about three or four months later *Time* magazine did a big five or six page supplemental art thing on "Light Art." Artists using light. And of course Flavin was mentioned once. Barely mentioned. They liked the more high-tech things like Chryssa and Stephen Antonakos, things that Flavin used to call "winky blinkies," things that went on and off. And someone had obviously read this article, because they began their article with the Matisse quote. So this fabricated thing which I had entered into my article on Flavin, not thinking that it would ever go beyond that, but simply it satisfied my need for a strong ending to the article, must have gotten picked up by one of their researchers, and passed on to the guy who wrote the article. And I can't even remember who wrote it, and there it was now in the official literature, [laughs] as a quote from Matisse about light art. And it was a pretty big epiphany for me about how the media worked. That nobody checked anything, nobody cared. Ideas just got picked up and tossed around.

LIZABETH MARANO: Also, you put a name on something, on a quote you make up, and it gives it a certain authority.

MEL BOCHNER: And that was it, the notion of authority. Of course, later I came across some of the essays of Roland Barthes, his idea of the terrorism of the printed page. And it was something that I thought about a lot, after this Flavin thing had entered the language, as it were. Although I must say, I've never seen that quote used again, but it may have been. But it doesn't matter. That we

tend to believe whatever we see in print. And the way in which an image takes on a believability became one of the subjects, one of the questions, in my work.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, later when you did your speculations on photography, is that what it's called, "Ten Statements on Photography"?

MEL BOCHNER: "Ten Misunderstandings in the Theory of Photography."

LIZABETH MARANO: Which was done when?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, it was actually started at this point. It was going to be the next quotation piece after the Flavin. And it was called "Dead Ends and Vicious Circles," and I had about a hundred quotations and I offered them to a couple of publishers at a couple of magazines and nobody wanted them. Nobody was interested photography. [Laughs.] So then later on when Mary—

LIZABETH MARANO: Did images go with the text, or not?

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah.

LIZABETH MARANO: What sorts of images?

MEL BOCHNER: Oh, I don't know, it would have been lots of sorts of images. I proposed things like Muybridge and Man Ray, and there was a very early photograph by Duchamp of a kind of gauzy thing hanging down. Ed Ruscha's photographs, Walker Evans. I don't know. I had a whole list of things I wanted to use. Who's that guy at MIT, who did the strobe things like the drop of water coming down, or the bullet?

LIZABETH MARANO: Edgerton.

MEL BOCHNER: Edgerton. X-ray photographs, things like that. I wanted to break up the idea of photography equals truth. It's like a very popular thing now with digitalized photography, whole books coming out on it. But when I proposed these ideas in 1967, even Phil Leider didn't want it. He didn't see where it was relevant. "What is this relevant to? Take it to a photo magazine." Photo magazines weren't interested either because they wanted naturalistic photography. You know, they wanted snapshots. I thought Betsy Baker would be interested in it at *Art in America*, but she wasn't interested in it either. Anyway, then in '69 or '70, whatever it was, Marian Goodman came and asked me for something to publish at *Multiples* about photography. I took ten, actually nine, of those quotations that I thought were the best—

LIZABETH MARANO: Real quotations.

MEL BOCHNER: No, three of them were fakes.

LIZABETH MARANO: Oh.

MEL BOCHNER: Three of them were fakes, and I've never told anybody which three were fakes, although I tell everybody that three of them are fake. And the idea was to make that a kind of, how do I put it, a kind of correspondence to what I thought the truth of photography was. In other words, as there is a terrorism to the printed page, there is a terrorism to the photograph. We want to believe, we are forced to believe the photograph.

LIZABETH MARANO: And then they weren't even manipulated.

MEL BOCHNER: And that's before there was manipulated photography, right, that's what I mean. And now with digitalized photography, all of these things are sort of like lingua franca, everybody knows that you can't believe a picture. Back in 1967, everybody, seeing is believing, you believed a picture.

LIZABETH MARANO: *Life* magazine.

MEL BOCHNER: That's right. The idea was photographs don't lie. Lichtenstein said, "Language is a picture of reality." So I made up these three quotes so that any quote that you read in there, may or may not be true. It shifts the grounds of verification, just like I wanted the grounds of verification in photography to be shifted. And it's what I was doing in my photo pieces. I would shift the grounds of verification of how you see something, how you manipulate something.

LIZABETH MARANO: Why is it called "Ten Misunderstandings" if there are only nine quotes?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, because the tenth thing is an image, and it's a negative image of the measurement of my hand. The measurement piece of my hand. That's a misunderstanding, too, because it is framed as a Polaroid. And Polaroid, which was just very popular at that time, which is instant photography, doesn't have a negative. So by doing a negative Polaroid, that was also a misunderstanding of, like, that idea about photography. That there is a positive and a negative. In other words, that there is a like, a matrix in a print. The Polaroid ends that idea. And that to me was also a major thought change. Because in photography, photographers always said you are making the negative, you are shooting for the negative. The thing you make is the negative. Then somebody else prints a print. With a Polaroid, you suddenly have instant image. So it was like a play on that. So there are ten misunderstandings there, one of them being the misunderstanding of the image.

LIZABETH MARANO: Did you think of it as a language piece at that point in time?

MEL BOCHNER: I thought of it as a book, a language piece.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, it's not a book, because there are separate cards.

MEL BOCHNER: Well, it's a book in the sense that— Yeah, there are cards. Also that was like another level of misunderstanding. I had them reproduced to simulate notecards that I had written on by hand because I kept all these quotations as file cards. So it was like you were opening a manila envelope and you were getting these file cards that I had written on, so those were reproductions—

LIZABETH MARANO: Which were handwritten.

MEL BOCHNER: Which were handwritten rather than— I was trying to compound the complexity of this thing.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, before we start talking about that work, I think we should just stay with the writing a little while longer. I just wanted to go back for one second to "The Domain of the Great Bear," if we could, because I just read, and I know you read it recently too, that Craig Owens piece on *Smithson*, he calls it the "Earthwords." And actually he uses that Pascal quote a lot in it and he keeps referring to *Smithson's* writings as being about allegory and this whole idea of collaging and putting things together becomes a text and an allegory. You certainly weren't thinking in those sorts of terms at the time, right?

MEL BOCHNER: Well, I can't say what Smithson was thinking about because I wasn't inside his head. He couldn't say what I was thinking about. I can say that —

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, did you think of this as an allegory when you were doing it?

MEL BOCHNER: No, no, we were not—the word allegory did not come up. Now if he was thinking of it as an allegory, I don't know what he was thinking of it as an allegory for.

LIZABETH MARANO: Were you thinking of it as a metaphor for anything?

MEL BOCHNER: No, we were not thinking of it in metaphorical terms. We were thinking of it in terms of what it was. Now, the idea of paste and collage was certainly on our minds, but I mean but that seems to me to be a venerable, modernist strategy.

LIZABETH MARANO: Cubism.

MEL BOCHNER: Coming from Cubism or Surrealism or from anything.

LIZABETH MARANO: Plus, it's the layout of magazines.

MEL BOCHNER: It's also what you do when you are working on a magazine or you have any relationship to working on a magazine. To appropriate the word appropriation, we were appropriating the techniques of making something that went in a magazine. Let me put it this way. Now we see a lot of things, you know, artists' projects for magazines. *Artforum* has artists' projects. And everybody tries to do something that's a little different with the context, or come up with a new way of inserting something into a magazine, but it is always something that is in quotation marks, because you know you are coming to an artist's project. The idea of this, and that's why I mean it to be subversive or to camouflage, it was to bring the reader into it not knowing what the hell they were getting into. It looked like anything else in the magazine, it was done in the same way that the rest of the magazine was done in, only more so. So it wasn't in quotation marks, it was set right into the context. Putting it into the quotation marks segregates it from the flow. The only way you can disrupt the flow is to surprise the reader with whatever this is. Years later Donald Barthelme told us that us that "The Domain of the Great Bear" was something that he was very influenced by. And you know that that is what Donald Barthelme did. He doesn't seem to get very much credit, but to me he was the first of the postmodernist writers that I knew about, you know, the person who worked with irony around irony around irony. Taking the form and subverting the form by putting a different content in it.

LIZABETH MARANO: Well, would you consider this a postmodern piece?

MEL BOCHNER: I'm sort of—

LIZABETH MARANO: I mean, they're all terms.

MEL BOCHNER: Yeah, I'm sort of against the retrospective recasting of one's work to fit the current intellectual definitions of relevance. Whatever this thing is, it is, and whatever it was, it was part of that time. It was done within in the aesthetic and the understanding of that time. And the same with the Beach Boys piece and the same with my Goddard and my Flavin.

LIZABETH MARANO: What about the idea of taking this material that pre-existed as a kind of, I wouldn't say a found object but as a—appropriating it, actually you were appropriating it. I mean, what was the mind set behind that?

MEL BOCHNER: I think it was a mind set prepared by 75 years of art, or however— I guess it was only 65 then, of art since Cubism. I mean we were aware of Duchamp, we were aware of Surrealism

LIZABETH MARANO: Also Dada too.

MEL BOCHNER: We were aware of Dada, we were aware of Salvador Dali. I mean there were references to all of that, and we felt, it was around this time that Ad Reinhardt said to Smithson and I that every artist at some point had to choose between Duchamp and Malevich. That those were the two directions in art and you could only be one or the other. And I remember when we talked about that afterwards, we thought, well, why did that have to be? In a way they are both of one historical moment.

LIZABETH MARANO: Which is Barbara Rose's point.

MEL BOCHNER: I didn't remember that Barbara spoke about that.

LIZABETH MARANO: That's actually how she begins the "ABC Art," with the 1913 Duchamp's *Readymade* and Malevich's *Black Square* representing two different intentions but really that there was a lot of similarity in the two artists.

MEL BOCHNER: That's interesting. I didn't remember, that part of her article I didn't— Well, I said that was a very influential thing. But I think the ground was prepared for somebody to come along and do this and we were the ones that happened to do it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]