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*Archives of American Art*

**Oral history interview with Elaine Sturtevant,  
2007 July 25-26**

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Elaine Sturtevant on July 25 and 26, 2007. The interview took place in the New York City offices of the Archives of American Art, New York, and was conducted by Bruce Hainley and Michael Lobel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Bruce Hainley and Michael Lobel have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

BRUCE HAINLEY: This is Bruce Hainley –

MICHAEL LOBEL: And Michael Lobel.

MR. HAINLEY: – interviewing Elaine Sturtevant at the New York City offices of the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number one.

MR. LOBEL: Right.

MS. STURTEVANT: And you should say Sturtevant.

MR. HAINLEY: Sturtevant, sorry.

MS. STURTEVANT: Not Elaine.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MR. LOBEL: Okay, actually –

MR. HAINLEY: That's a good place to start.

MR. LOBEL: Maybe that's a good place to start because for the purpose of the interview, Elaine, since Bruce and I have both known you now for about six or seven years, is it okay for us to refer to you as Elaine or should we refer to you as Sturtevant throughout the whole interview?

[They laugh.]

MR. HAINLEY: Which I know I will trip up on but –

MS. STURTEVANT: No, you can call me Elaine.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MR. LOBEL: But should we put down on the tape for the purposes of posterity that your – professionally as an artist – your name is Sturtevant.

MS. STURTEVANT: Sturtevant. That's very good, Michael.

MR. LOBEL: And do you want to say anything about that? They can't hear you nod your head so you have to say yes – [Hainley laughs] – or no.

MR. HAINLEY: [Laughs] But that –

MR. LOBEL: Well, she's shaking her head no.

MR. HAINLEY: No, okay.

MR. LOBEL: Let's put that on the tape. [Sturtevant laughs.]

MR. HAINLEY: So I think we'd like to start with the show you did at Ropac [Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris], which I did not get to see so I'm going to turn things over to Michael–

MS. STURTEVANT: That's a good start.

MR. HAINLEY: – and I think that's a really good place to start.

MS. STURTEVANT: It's a good start.

MR. LOBEL: Well, sure. So what we're talking about is that this spring you had a show at Thaddaeus Ropac Gallery in Paris. The name of the show was *Sturtevant: Raw Power*. It contained a number of works including a large-scale installation and some video work – an independent video piece. Actually, you know what, I'll just start up polemically. The show contained elements of works from previous work that you had done. The [Robert] Gober –

MS. STURTEVANT: *Buried Sinks*.

MR. LOBEL: The *Gober [Partially] Buried Sinks*. But there were some new elements, and I just wanted to ask you: some people who saw that show have suggested that there is a kind of political message to –

MS. STURTEVANT: Kind of? [Laughs.]

MR. LOBEL: – to that show. And so I just wanted to know if you wanted to say anything about that?

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, kind of? [Laughs.] I don't know what they're looking at but – [they laugh] – it's more than *kind of*. Yes, indeed. Well, it's called *Raw Power* and raw power I would consider a very *big* force, with a lot of *negative* energy, which consists of hating or to hate. And I use the words *to hate* because when we're prejudiced, we say, "prejudiced" and it doesn't have the same force or power of hate. And prejudice is hate, as well as ignorance, but the element that is dynamic is the *hate*.

And then the hate engenders killing. So the second figure is *to kill* [*Hate Kill Falsity*, 2006]. And the third figure, which is a male sex doll, is our *falsity*, which brings in our truth as falsity. So those were the basic dynamics of the show. So if you have a show called *Raw Power* and it also has a four-camera video with this incredible – well, that's a little complex. But at any rate, yes, and you have two buried sinks and you have a soundtrack, this is *political*. This is very definitely political, and, of course, dangerous, because it's very hard to do a political work that works.

But more than political, because political is a kind of strategy, involves a kind of – this is more about

the power of presenting *Hate, Kill, and Falsity*. And the dynamics lie in our truth as falsity.

MR. LOBEL: Right. And when you talk about the three figures, just to be clear, as part of the installation in the main room, which was called – that installation is called –

MS. STURTEVANT: *Raw Power*.

MR. LOBEL: Well, I thought the whole show was called *Raw Power*.

MS. STURTEVANT: No, that is not – on the main floor of the Ropac –

MR. LOBEL: Yes.

MS. STURTEVANT: – that's called *Raw Power*.

MR. LOBEL: I see. And so that contained the four-channel video, the *Gober* –

MS. STURTEVANT: *Buried Sinks*.

MR. LOBEL: – *Buried Sinks* and then three figures. And those types of figures I really hadn't seen in your work previously. They were sort of –

MS. STURTEVANT: No, I made them for the show.

MR. LOBEL: And so from left to right, *Hate, Kill, and Falsity*.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes. And then the *Gober* and then the four-camera video.

MR. LOBEL: And the four-camera video included footage of a dog running and also some –

MS. STURTEVANT: I had a dog – well, talking about the image doesn't make it work does it? No, no. But it's about – [laughs] – it's about – well, the dog represents the power, the force, and how that is no longer, because then the last figure, which is an advertising dog puppet – is about denial and about our overload of communication, which is not communication, so it's just, "Blah, blah, blah."

And then the first camera is about a dog in which you see his eyes and that's suppose to represent reflection. It's supposed to be work – you know, basically, what I tried to do with that dog was I tried to get him to move his eyes, okay, so that he would be the reflection and watching. But the last thing you can do with a dog is put a camera in his face. [They laugh.]

I did it with three different dogs and then I realized that dogs just cannot – they just cannot stand that thing in front of their face. And also, they don't move their eyes when they hear something; they move their whole head. It took me a little while – [laughs] – to get this together. It's a very beautiful – what kind of dog is it? I forgot, but anyway, it's a very tranquil, strong dog. These great blue eyes. So it was four frames because the dog runs across all four cameras, all four monitors, and basically is the subject in the two middle cameras, third and fourth – third and second, yes.

MR. LOBEL: I mean, one of the interesting things for me, and it's something that we may talk about a little bit or return to during this interview – and Bruce and I have been talking about it a little bit, is that obviously we're doing this interview for the Archives of American Art, but you've lived in Paris for quite awhile. I personally had a kind of interpretation of the politics of that show that it felt to me like it was saying something about American power specifically.

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, yes. I think so, because America is the biggest example of excess and exhaustion and limitation. And yes, it's directly that. It's certainly the strong source of thinking that comes out of America.

And it's more blatant. Hate is – I mean, I don't know. I have never lived in – well, I had to live in many places but not for long periods of time. But to me, America – the prejudice is so blatant and so strong, which is *hate*, you know. I mean, "we're just Americans" – [whistle sound] – totally wild in terms of –

MR. HAINLEY: I'm interested though, one of the key terms, and maybe you see it embedded in the terms already – particularly when we talk about those three terms at this American moment – one of the terms equally at play, if not trumping all of them or some kind of cause of all them, is fear. Even more than ignorance, not that those two things are always separable. But I wonder: do you see fear as operable in all that or is fear – does it not work as a force in the same way?

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, no, no, no. I think, definitely. First the, you know, if you hate it comes back on yourself and it's very destructive to the self. If you kill, all these both contain elements of fear, and truth is falsity at some level, if not everybody, and certainly that's not true – but to be confronted with the idea that our truth is falsity, that gives me a lot of fear. So it's true. It's very big, the ground of fear – elements of fear – in all those three works. Yes, yes, definitely.

MR. LOBEL: Okay, so finally just about your Ropac show, the thing that strikes me is that most people would not necessarily think about your work in terms of politics or political art.

MS. STURTEVANT: Absolutely. That's absolutely true. So this show is so interesting for me because normally when I do a show it's very aggressive and it's very – you know, bang, bang, bang. But this show had a very silent kind of power, which even took me a while to realize where that power – you know, that the power was way down below, because it was a very quiet show, didn't you think?

So, yes, so that's good. But I would like to – I think I only use those figures, *to hate*, *to kill*, and *falsity*, because I really wanted to talk about our truth as falsity. But it's very – even with a conference – it's very hard to get people out of the classical mode of thinking about truth and this, of course, is not what I'm talking about at all. At all. So that was really the – I think maybe, okay, yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: Well, I wondered if you could – I wanted to talk about another recent show and how you would consider discussing it when you move from show to show. And that's the show at Anthony Reynolds [Gallery, London, *Cold Fear*, 2006], which is a very different kind of show in which there were two black *Warhol Marylins* and one *Duchamp Fresh Widow*. And then on the second floor, but roped off –

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes, because it was really basically not – basically that was just for him to show to collectors.

MR. HAINLEY: It was. Okay. So you did not consider it part of –

MS. STURTEVANT: No, no, not at all.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: In other words, he wanted to show it to collectors.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay, and that was the *Dillinger Running Series* [2000].

MS. STURTEVANT: Although I must say, I liked very much the shadow on the stairs.

MR. HAINLEY: Well, yes. Well, and I would think the sound would be nice too, no?

MS. STURTEVANT: No, no, not the sound, but the stairs, it was nice because it just kind of blanked out the dimensions, you know. But no, that [*Dillinger Running Series*] was not part of the show.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: But that wasn't really a different kind of – I mean, a different kind of show in terms of – I guess in terms of dynamics because it was called *Cold Fear*.

MR. HAINLEY: Yes.

MS. STURTEVANT: There you go –

MR. HAINLEY: Yes.

MS. STURTEVANT: – you're back to that.

MR. HAINLEY: Yes.

MS. STURTEVANT: And the *Marilyns* were right, *en face*, [from *Duchamp Fresh Widow*], opposite each other, and not in a very big room, so there was a lot of tension going between the two. And the room was also totally dark.

MR. HAINLEY: Right.

MS. STURTEVANT: So it was about touching an interior force inside you without doing much or saying much and with few objects. I liked that show; I considered that very successful. And the funny thing is this: [laughs] – Anthony Reynolds thought we would get a lot of reviews – [laughs]. We didn't get any. [They laugh.]

He said, "Oh, we just have so many people that want to review that show." [They laugh.] And we didn't get any reviews. Which is a mystery, because my work is quite well-known in London—within a small area, it's very well-known. So it seems a little strange that that wasn't reviewed. Anthony felt that it was too difficult and a couple of people agreed but I don't – you could – basically reviews are description, huh? So –

MR. HAINLEY: Well, sometimes. We hope there's a little more work involved but – [laughs].

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, a few of the brighter ones of you. [Hainley laughs.] But normally it's just description.

MR. HAINLEY: Yes, sure.

MS. STURTEVANT: But it doesn't matter except – but see those are all threads from show to show. See? So I would have liked that to carry it over to the Ropac show.

MR. HAINLEY: When you think about putting the show together, I know that a friend of a friend of mine, who was at the show, said the spots you were using to light the *Marilyns* were *very particular*

–  
MS. STURTEVANT: Spots.

MR. HAINLEY: – spots.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes.

MR. HAINLEY: And I wondered if you could talk about where in your thinking process the installation for a show comes in to how the show manifests its –

MS. STURTEVANT: It's called thinking.

MR. HAINLEY: Right. [Laughs.] No, no. I know that but this is something that –

MS. STURTEVANT: I'm not sure about what you're asking me is why I'm saying this.

MR. HAINLEY: Well, it seems to me that throughout your career, not only is it the works and how they are presented or what works are going to be presented but very much how they are presented or installed.

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, that comes with choosing – I think, let's see. It would have to be considered like it's a total concept. See, I don't choose the pieces and then hang them. It's like you have the pieces and you already know how they have to work in order to work. So it's really not a separate event, okay. So for that reason the Ropac show was extremely dicey for me because the Goyer comes in only partially into the gallery and it's very wide. So it's a very awkward dimension, okay. And then, because of how you wanted the relationship to work, the four-camera video had to come this way. It had to be on the wall and it had to be opposite the three figures – who had to be extended from the wall in order to make that a total unit.

So that was a little bit more, when you have the pieces and basically I had placed them, but how much can you put of the artificial grass? Where do you place these two items in relationship to each other and how far out should the figures come into the wall? Those are all items that are directly involved in the installation. But I knew where they were going to go.

MR. HAINLEY: And when you were working on that show, just to follow up on this and not to circumnavigate too much, but when you are working on a show that is a solo show and finite in its amount of space, where did – because your show with Udo Kittelmann at Frankfurt – at the MMK [*Brutal Truth*, 2004-2005], was the –

MR. LOBEL: MMK is the –

MR. HAINLEY: The Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt, Germany. Was so magnificently installed and presents many different kinds of problems. It's almost as if you have layers of that.

MS. STURTEVANT: Endless layers and layers of –

MR. HAINLEY: How much was that a conversation with Udo – differently than when you go in with Anthony? I think you have – you're not like in conversation with Anthony about what you're going to do. But I take it that for the MMK, Udo must have really been the force that allowed that to happen.

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, yes, yes. Oh, absolutely.

MR. HAINLEY: I wondered if you could talk about that conversation or how that worked.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes. Well, first we installed that show over a month.

MR. HAINLEY: Ah, okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: So firstly, you're talking about time. Firstly, before the show, before even the pieces were chosen by Udo. He did choose the pieces.

MR. HAINLEY: He did choose the pieces?

MS. STURTEVANT: He chose all the pieces.

MR. HAINLEY: He did, okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: Except I, for instance, wanted – I wanted the *America, Gonzalez-Torres [Untitled] (America)* in the front room.

MR. HAINLEY: Uh-huh, yes. The light piece.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes. So even before Udo had chosen the pieces, you're talking about – you have to understand that museum because you can go right, you can go left, you can go upstairs – you're basically used to where you're controlling where they can go so you can pull them in with different artworks as they move into the show. So the discussion basically was about how you had to weave that together by relationships of the objects, about the tonality, about how you can be upstairs and look at this piece, and/or you can be here and you could look across at this piece. So you have to have the tension between the pieces. So that was the groundwork, which was extremely difficult.

Secondly, Udo knows his museum like, you know. And thirdly, he's brilliant. He's absolutely brilliant. But we did work on it together and had a lot of fun because I'd say, No, no, no, no." [Laughs.] But he's absolutely impeccable in what he's doing and what he – how he knows how to make art work.

MR. HAINLEY: When in the thinking or the conversation with him did the idea of – there were two pieces that were not by you in that show and they were –

MS. STURTEVANT: What were they, again?

MR. HAINLEY: The *Gonzalez-Torres [Untitled] (Go-Go Dancing Platform)* [1995], because there were two of them. There was yours and the Felix Gonzalez-Torres [*Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)*, 1991].

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, no but that was my piece.

MR. HAINLEY: Not both of them.

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, you mean not both, right.

MR. HAINLEY: Not both of them.

MS. STURTEVANT: You mean duplications.



MR. HAINLEY: They were duplications.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes.

MR. HAINLEY: And the other one was the Duchamp *Boite en Valise*.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, but I didn't –

MR. HAINLEY: And you had never repeated that. But where in the thinking process did that come up?

MS. STURTEVANT: I don't know. You'd really have to ask Udo that.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: I must say that it worked very beautifully because you're looking at the one go-go dancer and then it was this open space and you could see the other go-go dancer too.

MR. HAINLEY: And they could see one another too.

MS. STURTEVANT: And they could see one another so that was a very, in terms of tension and dynamics and relationships, that was excellent. Yes, but I was absolutely for that because it's so powerful. I don't think I'll ever do a show as splendid as that.

MR. HAINLEY: No, it was a magnificent show.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes.

MR. HAINLEY: Yes.

MS. STURTEVANT: So I couldn't figure out why, after that show, I didn't get more offers from museums because a lot of people saw that show. And of course, then I found out later, most people said because they felt they could never duplicate the beauty and the power of the show. So that's kind of rotten, isn't it? [Laughs.] You do a great show and nobody else invites you to have another show. [Laughs.] It's a little perverse, I think. [Hainley laughs.]

MS. STURTEVANT: Do a rotten show and you get invited.

MR. HAINLEY: There you go. That explains a lot. [They laugh.]

MR. LOBEL: Well, I want to follow up on some of those ideas because I think what Bruce is thinking about or some of his earlier questions in part were thinking about is that your work seems or is really attuned to issues of what I would call presentation and display, right? So, how works of art are presented, how they're displayed, how they're staged. And it seems to me that if I was going to start looking back on your career a little bit, that seems to me to be a continual issue and concern in your work. So for instance, if we looked back to some of your earliest shows, like the Bianchini Gallery show in 1965. Where there's –

MS. STURTEVANT: Centuries ago.

MR. LOBEL: Or the Galerie J show in Paris in 1966. Look, well, we know – Bruce and I and you and people who know the literature on your work know full well that both at that time and even until the present, people think, oh, she's copying or this is – or this is camp. Right? We know that that's

oftentimes what people think and –

MS. STURTEVANT: It's diminishing a little bit. Tell me it's diminishing. Help me out here. [Laughs.]

MR. LOBEL: Well let me say this, that that was a way that certain people saw the work. But it seems to me when we really look closely at what's going on, and I wrote about this a little bit in *Parkett*, that what is really going on is thinking about these kinds of issues of framing – not literal framing, but framing, display, of strategically sort of rethinking presentation – how works of art are presented in particular spaces.

So this is what the Bianchini show was all about, you know, with the George Segal figure pulling the garment rack, or the Galerie J show, when the doors are locked. There is always this kind of move on your part. And the reason I'm saying this is that this seems to connect to what Bruce is saying about Anthony Reynolds. These spots, which are very technically sophisticated, that are supposed to do something very specific to how works of art operate visually within a space and in terms of display.

And it just seems to me that that's maybe a way of thinking about your work in a larger sense, not in terms of these issues, again, that I think are somewhat misrepresentative of or misrepresenting your work – of copying or repeating, but actually thinking about display and presentation and framing.

MS. STURTEVANT: The word “display” is a little weak. So yeah, it's about – in order for the work to work, you have to install it. You have to present it in the way that it works. So that means you have to do it in a way that it does work, okay? But I wouldn't use display. What you say is absolutely correct.

So you can't just have objects and put them in; they don't work. And especially with my work, that could be very dangerous, because it would look like individual pieces. So the power behind that is that it always has to be presented as a totality, not as individual pieces, otherwise, it wrecks; they're gone, you know? So it's the same way with – [I'm] practically never, ever, in group shows because it's just a piece hanging out.

And it's amazing how artists don't seem to know how to take care of their work. They just hang it and it looks terrible and it doesn't do anything. Particularly now, if you go to Gagosian with some of those big paintings, it's just painting, painting, painting; there's no dynamics going on, you know.

MR. HAINLEY: But I'm curious, both in the literature about you and – one could say – in your palpable absence in the literature about the topic, in the mid-'60s and throughout the late '60s and then the early '70s, there would be some artists who get categorized as doing a kind of institutional critique. And what interests me about this question, and starting with very recently the Ropac show, the Anthony Reynolds show, the MMK, but then, going back to the Bianchini show and the Galerie J and the Claude Givaudan shows – doing two of them, one year apart – same shows.

And you used the word “totality.” And one of the words that you use in the late '60s is “total structure.” And I'm wondering if that is a way to take the lens back away from not just the artwork hanging on the wall, not just the gallery itself as a site that will be worked, but then the entire dynamic structure of what allows this to be presented at a given moment.

MS. STURTEVANT: Absolutely. So “total structure” is pulling it away from “in your face,” and it's a way of trying to trigger thinking. So you're not seen as that specific, but you're seen as a total

structure. So that's really been an underlying constant factor in all the work, yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay, this is Bruce Hainley.

MR. LOBEL: And Michael Lobel.

MR. HAINLEY: At the New York City offices of the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, on the 25th of July 2007. And this is an interview with Sturtevant. And this is disc number two.

MR. LOBEL: Okay, so you know what, we've been talking about these issues of display.

MS. STURTEVANT: Not "display." Let's drop that.

MR. HAINLEY: Total structure.

MR. LOBEL: Is there a word that you would like to use besides display?

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, no, installation – let's see. Let's think about that. Installation, the dynamics; no, I don't know. Anyhow, let's just say installation, all right?

MR. LOBEL: Let's just say issues of installation. And for me, it would be calling attention to some kind of structure that the work is in or it's part of. But those are my words. But actually – so part of the point of the interview for Bruce and me is to get some of this information down and recorded. But also, because Bruce and I have both done a lot of research on your work, and we've come across –

MS. STURTEVANT: Indeed you have.

MR. LOBEL: And we've come across some things that we're very curious about and that we don't feel that there is much information on, and we're interested in. And one of the things that I've been really curious about again is this issue of the way in which, starting from early on, you call it installation – the staging of the work is very important, and that you call attention to the way works are installed, the ways they relate to each other. So I wanted to show you two images, which are of particular interest to me. Now, one of these images – the one on the right that we're looking at –

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, that funky thing.

MR. LOBEL: Is from a magazine called –

MR. HAINLEY: *Das Kunstwerk*. It's from –

MS. STURTEVANT: And that's from the Bianchini show.

MR. LOBEL: Okay, so the image that Sturtevant is looking at now is an image from *Das Kunstwerk*.

MR. HAINLEY: *Kunstwerk*, December 1976. It was an exposé of American art with many, many illustrations. The Sturtevant piece is juxtaposed to an H. C. Westermann piece. And the issue is initiated with a long interview with Robert Rauschenberg.

MR. LOBEL: And what we're looking at is a photograph of a Sturtevant work. And the reason that Bruce and I are interested in this is that we've never seen it reproduced anywhere else. Bruce, actually, I'll give him credit. He found this photograph. And what it is, is a Sturtevant work we've

never seen before, which is a – maybe you want to describe it. It looks like a Plexiglass or Lucite container that contains a whole array of elements and objects. And do you remember this – when it was made and for what?

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, so it was in the '65 show at Bianchini, so I guess it was made then. And I should tell you, it totally fell apart. [They laugh.] So this [Jasper] *Johns Flag* of course is the one that was sold to some collector just a couple of years ago. And that's about the only piece that survives. The [Claes] *Oldenburg Bra*, I don't have any more. The [Öyvind] *Fahlström* I don't have. No. So the [Roy] *Lichtenstein* I don't have. I don't have any of the works other than – and it did; it fell totally apart.

MR. LOBEL: And that's Rauschenberg and Arman in there as well, the stuffed animals.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes, I used to have a stuffed turkey, duck, chicken, something.

MR. HAINLEY: And then a Niki de Saint Phalle.

MR. LOBEL: And then Niki de Saint Phalle.

MS. STURTEVANT: What's the Niki de Saint Phalle? Where's that?

MR. HAINLEY: It says her name at the bottom. I'm just –

MR. LOBEL: In the caption.

MS. STURTEVANT: What does it say? I can't read it.

MR. LOBEL: Okay, I'll read it. Bruce, do you want to read the caption?

MR. HAINLEY: No, no, no, it's fine.

MR. LOBEL: I'll read the caption. The caption says, "Pop parody showcase with objects à la Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Fernandez Arman, Claes Oldenburg, and Niki de Saint Phalle."

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, I don't think I'd get a Niki de Saint Phalle. I'm quite sure I didn't, because she did those – she was doing those dolls and stuff, those figures.

MR. LOBEL: So the caption may be incorrect?

MS. STURTEVANT: I'm sure it's 100 percent incorrect – [laughs] – yes, it's incorrect.

MR. LOBEL: So this is the point of this interview. And actually Bruce and I were talking about this a little earlier. One of the issues for me as a historian is that for a lot of your early exhibitions, we only have *one* installation photograph. For Galerie J, for Bianchini, we only have one installation photograph. And so, our information about your work and your exhibition history is limited.

MS. STURTEVANT: But you see, I think that's very good, Michael, because then the one installation you have of that Bianchini show is very strong. So why do you want to see bad photographs of bad things? That's not cool.

MR. HAINLEY: Well, except that in terms of what that show was doing, I think there are reviews from the time period, which mention Niki de Saint Phalle. This isn't the only piece. I'm not saying it's correct, but they also mention Robert Morris as being in a show.

MS. STURTEVANT: Never used Robert Morris, never, never, never, never.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay. Never, never, never. Okay. And the one installation shot makes – in terms of the show – makes it much easier for people to see it in relationship to Pop or to take it as Pop, which it really is not.

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, but that's okay, because that's the frame of reference for most people, so then that would be part of your battle, to put in some sort of context that it starts changing the thinking. Yeah, so that's okay.

MR. LOBEL: Well, but for me, the point of this interview is to start opening up some of the discourse on your work, so that it's not grounded just in these simple terms – Pop, parody, appropriation.

MS. STURTEVANT: I think that's changing. And to go through, I think because the work has developed so dramatically – to go back and say, blah, blah, blah, is not interesting.

MR. LOBEL: And so, do you remember this piece that we're talking about – in this photograph – was it made out of Plexiglass?

MS. STURTEVANT: I wonder who did that. [They laugh.] Listen, I think the most dynamic thing we can say about this piece is it totally fell apart. [Hainley laughs.] That's the best thing you can say about it. And that the *Jasper Johns Flag* is incredible, absolutely superb piece of work.

MR. LOBEL: But this was in the Bianchini show.

MS. STURTEVANT: That was in the Bianchini show.

MR. LOBEL: And so in addition to that one installation shot, there were a lot of other components of that exhibition.

MS. STURTEVANT: No, there weren't a lot. No, there weren't a lot, Michael. No, see I think that if you get – I think one of my positions might be if you get – [phone ringing]

MR. HAINLEY: You were saying that your position would be –

MS. STURTEVANT: I think my position – I know my position would be that too many little things pull you away from total structures so talking about this is pulling away from the big force. So even though historically, that detail might be [something] someone wants to obsess on, but it's – in the total picture, it's totally and really digs out what is the power of the work. Okay?

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: Okay, kay, kay!

MR. LOBEL: Speaking of which – [they laugh] – so another of those details –

MR. HAINLEY: We won't harp on them, we just want to –

MR. LOBEL: We won't harp on them, but we're just trying to get things a little clearer. That Bruce also, fortunately, had a translation made of this article –

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, that was in my studio.

MR. LOBEL: – this article from –

MR. HAINLEY: *Bijutsu Techo* [Yoshiaki Tono, “Elaine Sturtevant: The Logic of Forged Paintings”].

MR. LOBEL: *Bijutsu Techo* – which is a Japanese magazine, and this article was 19 –

MR. HAINLEY: Sixty-seven.

MR. LOBEL: Nineteen sixty-seven. And the article suggests that this is actually a work.

MS. STURTEVANT: *No*. The article does, really?

MR. LOBEL: Yeah.

MS. STURTEVANT: No, this is a drawing. The Westermann and the –

MR. LOBEL: No just this side.

MS. STURTEVANT: No, no. This was in my studio and this was to put the works into it.

MR. LOBEL: So this is actually a studio shot that shows works in your studio.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah.

MR. LOBEL: Okay, so that’s clarified.

MR. HAINLEY: And, just in terms of one last – two last questions about the – Bianchini show that I’m interested in: Were there any of your drawings in the show? Or was it all sculpture, painting – like was there a Fahlström *Krazy Kat* or something?

MS. STURTEVANT: No, there wasn’t a Fahlström – I think it was one Rauschenberg, which I destroyed.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay. And was that – it was not the Warhol Rauschenberg that was in, say, the *Art in the Mirror* show?....

MS. STURTEVANT: No, it was a very large piece all by itself.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay. And the one article suggests that the [George] Segal figure was cast from Steve Paxton.

MS. STURTEVANT: True.

MR. LOBEL: Ah, Steve Paxton who was a dancer and –

MS. STURTEVANT: Who was a dancer with the Judson Group, yes.

MR. LOBEL: And you were friendly with him, and –

MS. STURTEVANT: Well those were – you know, that’s when Judson – that was Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs and all those people were performing – excuse me – and they were friends of Rauschenberg, and I was a friend of Rauschenberg. Yeah.

MR. LOBEL: So you were involved with that circle even –

MS. STURTEVANT: Not, not – I mean, I watched their dances; went to their performances; talked about dance with them. See a lot of these people came out of Merce Cunningham. I think Trisha – I'm not sure. I know Lucinda did and a couple of others came out of Merce Cunningham. And yeah, so I was sort of there. When I found Merce Cunningham, by that time, that was way past his really powerful time and I found him – I don't think I better say this publicly. [Hainley laughs.] Forget it.

MR. LOBEL: Another – I mean I had another question about Bianchini and then we can sort of, we can –

MS. STURTEVANT: Move on. Let's move on.

MR. LOBEL: We can move on, but I do have one other question because a lot of people do ask questions and are very interested in your process of making work, which I think is very important. I mean, it's an important part of your practice, to me.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes.

MR. LOBEL: And a lot of people ask questions about how much you involved the artists early on.

MS. STURTEVANT: Not at all; absolutely not at all. The only person I ever asked, which was under the [Galerie] Paul Maenz, was [Anselm] Kiefer, because I was doing the Kiefer plane, which is very big and very expensive to do, and Paul was very afraid he'd freak out and get the work destroyed – because he's a big figure in Germany and he'd have no problem doing that.

So he insisted that I go talk to Kiefer, and I didn't tell him what I was going to do, but I met him and said what I was thinking about. And then he said, "Of course you can do it," and then Paul and Gerd de Vries both said he doesn't think you're going to do it; that's the only – my not going to be able to do it – this is the only reason he said you could do it.

But he was very generous, because when I finished, he said "I would think that was my work, *except* for the nose of the plane" The very end of the nose! And I did that at least 12 times. I could never quite get it to *laisser tomber* [drop]." But so he was generous about it because that man is very, you know, that was very – that must have taken a lot of guts to say, "Okay, that's good." And he said, "I would have thought it was mine."

MR. HAINLEY: But you *did* talk to Andy about, at least, for the *Flower* stencil.

MS. STURTEVANT: No, but that's a very interesting question, because there's this girl in Germany who is writing her Ph.D., okay. No, no, it's another girl, another girl. She already has her Ph.D. and she does this work – she's into that terrible area of copy and law?

MR. HAINLEY: Copyright, yeah.

MS. STURTEVANT: Copyright law, and these people are just so rigid that you're wasting your time to talk to them. So normally, I would not have met with her if I had not – she did not reveal that that was her area. And then I was also very sick. I had just come from the doctor and I was full of medicine, so I said, "I really can't do this interview with you, but I'll give you 15 minutes."

This interview, this 15-minute interview, was so interesting because if I did not give her the answer she wanted, she'd move to an area that insisted in a different way that this is what I did. It was *incredible*. So she kept saying things like – she would not – she kept saying, like, you must have had the artist's permission, and then, you know, initially, I explained.

And then she put it a different way and a different way and she kept saying – Andy Warhol, he must have known what you were doing. And do you know that I don't actually remember? I'm not sure – my premise is that I think Andy knew what I was doing, and I just said, "I want your *Marilyn*, or the *Flower*," initially, and he said, "Sure," you know. But I didn't say I was going to do it, and I didn't say what I was doing. And I think, *vaguely*, that was not known at that point. I can't remember as doing this. So I don't really correctly remember.

MR. HAINLEY: As part of the process and looking, in terms of how you think about things, was it – I mean, were there particular galleries that, in the '60s and moving from the '60s to the '70s, where if you were in the art world working as a serious artist in New York, you had to see certain shows? And in terms of the relationship to the Bianchini show or later shows in terms of how... Because one of the things that ties into this is that the Bianchini show and the shows that come out of it – the Ropac show too – it's a response to a particular moment, and then the reverberations of that go both forward and backward.

But that – the Ropac show is – I mean, I think one of the reasons that Michael suggested its relationship to American power specifically is because so many of the recent images of atrocity are from Abu Ghraib and the debacle in Iraq.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: And I just wonder, in terms of process, as something that goes on in addition to the physical process of making a work, how would you talk about the scene, the moment –

MS. STURTEVANT: You mean what was going on around us?

MR. HAINLEY: Exactly, as part of process or concept.

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, firstly process because it's part of the creative process, so it's very important. Then, yeah, because that must have been – at that time, things were really shifting from interior to exterior, or at that time, you would call it up to the surface. And so – and then all the mass – all the images were from mass society. Mass – what do I want to say?

MR. LOBEL: Mass media?

MS. STURTEVANT: Mass media, or mass –

MR. LOBEL: Or mass culture?

MS. STURTEVANT: Messy mass. [They laugh.] So this is very surface. You're really going to the outside, and then all the collectors were very much into that, so then you had all those artists that were involved with the outside. And so the work became – it was still about beauty, but it was not about anything very profound other than, which is profound, a reflection of the society that we were surrounded by.

MR. LOBEL: Speaking of which, can you say anything about the title of the Galerie J show in 1966, which was *America, America*? Because I – you know, when I saw the Ropac show, which was in Paris, and thinking about the current moment and then thinking about 1966, just around four decades earlier – the show that you have in Paris, it's a year after Bianchini, you're really thinking through the kind of, for me, the possibilities of this kind of process and practice. And to have it in



Paris and call it *America, America* – it seems significant to me.

MS. STURTEVANT: Well that's because it was all the works. I had Oldenburg; I had Lichtenstein –

MR. HAINLEY: Wesselmann.

MS. STURTEVANT: Wesselmann, and George Segal and [Frank] Stella. That's America, baby. [Laughs.] I did all that work when I was down in the south of France. I had a studio in the south of France, and so it was on the street level in an old part of Antibes and there was a – it had a big window and because it was open, some guy – [laughs] – I'm sure I told you this story. So some guy stops by and he says are you Jasper Johns? [Hainley and Lobel laugh.] Because I was working on the *Flag*, and I said, "Yes" – [Hainley and Lobel laugh]. He said, "Oh." "Here I am." So I told that story to Jasper and he *hated* it. [They laugh.] He *hated* that story.

MR. LOBEL: By that time, had you spent a good deal of time in France already? I mean –

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh sure, sure. Yeah. Yeah, we used to go to France every summer. Yes. Those were the days – when you had three months and you just swam and did all sorts of great things and – not anymore, just all work, work, work, with probably very little thinking. [Laughs.]

MR. HAINLEY: Picture time? [Referring to pictures that he and Michael brought to the interview.]

MR. LOBEL: Paxton?

MR. HAINLEY: Yeah.

MR. LOBEL: Sure. We have a lot of pictures to show you, Elaine.

MS. STURTEVANT: That's good.

MR. LOBEL: This is a photograph that I came across in a catalog. Who was the – is this the *JFK and Art* catalog?

MR. HAINLEY: No, it's a television catalog.

MR. LOBEL: Oh, the art and television catalog [John Alan Farmer, *The New Frontier: Art and Television 1960-65*] and I think this is a really interesting photograph. The photograph says that this is a photograph from 1965 of Robert Rauschenberg with Elaine Sturtevant in his studio in New York City, while Steve Paxton and Rauschenberg's son Christopher watch television.

MS. STURTEVANT: That's not Elaine Sturtevant.

MR. LOBEL: It absolutely is. It's you with a bandanna on your head.

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, I have a thing on my head. Oh, I don't remember that at all. That looks very kind of dumb. [They laugh.] Doesn't it? It's so kind of –

MR. LOBEL: It's so what? You think the photograph looks a little staged, or – ?

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes, I think that would be an understatement. [They laugh.] Where was this thing?

MR. LOBEL: It's in Rauschenberg's studio.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, but where, I mean, where was this –

MR. LOBEL: Oh, it's in a catalog on art and television. We'll send you – we can get you a copy of the image –

MS. STURTEVANT: No, no, I don't really want it.

MR. LOBEL: But what this does to me is very interesting, because again, that's 1965. Obviously that's around the time of Bianchini, there's you with Rauschenberg, and obviously, you're looking at his work with him, which suggests that you two had a pretty close –

MS. STURTEVANT: Relationship, yeah.

MR. LOBEL: Relationship, and also there's Steve Paxton who you used in – you know, to model the George Segal figure. So I was just, you know, out of my own curiosity, I thought that was a particularly –

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, I loved – I love Rauschenberg. He's great. He is absolutely a super guy, so yeah, I used to hang out with him until he went to Captiva much, much later, and I used to go down to Captiva once a month. And then he was with somebody, whose name I will not mention, who really sealed him off, and I'd call and he'd say, "I'll see if he's here," and I'd say, "Don't break your eyeballs," because all you have to do is look around the room, you know?

So he really sealed him off and he lost a couple – Bob lost a couple of his assistants that he was very close to. So he was very angry about that, and you can't be angry about that. I said, "The reason they were so good is they're talented, so they're going to leave you." But that's when he really started to get closed off and yeah. But I loved Bob, he was a very special person.

MR. LOBEL: And so when you did, for instance, the Bianchini show, did you talk to him about doing the Rauschenberg drawing, or –

MS. STURTEVANT: No, I didn't talk to anybody about what I was doing. No, it was – because firstly, it was so – it's still a process of learning, of trying to figure out what you're doing, so I didn't talk to him. But I wrote a poem just maybe a couple of years ago for Rauschenberg about lime pie – [they laugh] – key lime pie.

MR. LOBEL: Did you send the poem to him?

MS. STURTEVANT: No.

MR. LOBEL: Oh.

MS. STURTEVANT: But it's in my computer. [They laugh.] Under key lime pie.

MR. LOBEL: You had known Johns and Rauschenberg since the 1950s, yes?

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes. Yeah, probably the late '50s, yeah.

[Pause.]

[They laugh.]

MR. HAINLEY: I'm trying to think of where to go next. Well, in terms of support, Rauschenberg is –

you did *TheStore* in '67, and I wanted to ask you both –

MR. LOBEL: The *Oldenburg Store*.

MR. HAINLEY: *The Store of Claes Oldenburg* in '67, and I wanted to ask you, because I find your drawings, all throughout the years but especially the early ones, such a key way to understanding how someone can think about your work.

MS. STURTEVANT: I think you're right, yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: It gets at horizontal thinking; it gets at "total structures." And I was wondering if in terms of – '67 for me becomes a really interesting year because it's so stark. You do in the late spring, early summer the *Oldenburg Store*, and in the fall you do *Relâche* and those two pieces seem to make quite a statement.

MS. STURTEVANT: That's true, Bruce, yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: That it works almost like one of your drawings works.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes, that's true.

MR. HAINLEY: Like you could stack those.

MS. STURTEVANT: That's very good.

MR. HAINLEY: And I wondered if you would talk about the *Oldenburg Store* and then *Relâche* and how that comes about.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, well I'd like to go back to the drawings, because I spent a year – a little less or more – drawing, and that's when I'm still trying to figure out what I'm doing, how this work functions, and what the dynamics are. So drawing, of course, is very tranquil, very intense, and very engendering of thinking. So this and those drawings, I think, reflect that.

MR. LOBEL: When you say you spent a year doing that, you mean at that time?

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes, I went to my studio for almost a year and all I did was draw. But at that time I'm still thinking about how this work works and what it means. And then in terms of the *Oldenburg Store*, because I had done the Bianchini show, I wanted to bring it into a more forceful kind of area, and so the *Oldenburg Store* seemed perfect to do it. And so I did it, yeah.

But that was – and that, of course, was a different experience because also I was doing a lot of work in the store as Oldenburg had done, and then – but practically no one ever came except people like, you know, that happened to know me and whatever. And then because Claes was absolutely furious, like out of his skull, and he had been a very big supporter of my work. Intellectually, Claes was very close to really understanding the work.

So I said, "Claes, you can't do that. You can't just dish all that," and he says, "I can and I will and I have." [Laughs.] So I sort of lost him as a friend, but yeah, it was kind of very brutal. Doing *TheStore* was brutal, so I think I wanted that kind of brutality, because then the Bianchini show had been – this is when we were also very involved in the dialogue of copy.

So I could articulate why it was not copy, but people were not interested, or it was just too difficult

to understand, because it wasn't a frame of references that anybody had – so it was very difficult for them to – plus they like to trap you, you know.

Recently in Basel, when I was interviewed by Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Beatrix Ruf, so while we were getting all these questions that I said I can't answer. So I said, "Can I give you my bitch list?" [Laughs.] Which I always thought was great, you know? So – now I forgot what's the point of this. I was talking about Oldenburg? Oh shit, I totally forgot what the point was.

MR. HAINLEY: "Can I give you my bitch list?" [Reminding her of what she was saying.]

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah but no, when I was talking about Oldenburg, there was something I was going to get to. Oh, copy. And the bitch list was very nice because it was very short, it was done with great humor, and yet it made the point. For instance, I said I wasn't a feminist, because – not that I would object to being identified as a feminist, but because of what it meant, and then I'm talking about the dynamics of how it's not about being a feminist. It is about finding the self and the interior, blah, blah, blah. So it's always had this little skip that brought you to what I considered dynamic. So, I lost the point again. [They laugh.]

MR. LOBEL: Copy.

MS. STURTEVANT: Copy. So the other thing is, after all this time, and I've written so many papers and I know what I'm talking about, you know? And everyone calls it – it's decreased very much. I said, "The idea that people would call it copy when they know absolutely nothing about copy." How can you say it's copy if you don't know anything about copy? One of the dynamics of copy is that it has to have interior resemblance, and this is one of the factors of repetition, and you don't know that. And if you don't know that, you know – so this, it's very short, but then it gave – and it's true. They don't know what copy is, but they insist on calling it copy, and so that's a closing of the mind.

Oh, you know the great subway here in New York where it says, "Watch out for the closing doors?" I want to record that. Maybe I can get somebody to do it while I'm here. I want it for the beginning of a lecture. I want to say, "Watch out for the closing minds." [Hainley and Lobel laugh.] It'd be great, wouldn't it? For an opening of a lecture?

MR. HAINLEY: Yes.

MR. LOBEL: But this brings up something that I feel is important for us to discuss, which is that I think that a lot of times you have spoken a lot and written a lot about these issues. So first of all, what I was struck by when you and I had dinner on Monday a couple of nights ago and we were talking, I'm always reminded of this – that you're intensely engaged with thinking and philosophical discourse. We were talking about Spinoza and Foucault. I'm just curious if you want – or I'm actually curious just for myself – about, for instance, your philosophical, theoretical, conceptual, whatever you want to call it, engagement with these issues, let's say copy just to begin. Where did that come from?

MS. STURTEVANT: Well because that's, you know, that goes way back, copy.

MR. LOBEL: To what?

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, it goes back to the Greeks. Probably even beyond that, you know? So there's this very established thing about copy. Copy was not always demeaned; copy was, at some point, at a very high level. And yes, that would be the beginning, but copy then, however – I don't know – it's about copies and anything you copy. So people are not involved with the – firstly, copy

doesn't have any dynamics, okay? So that's number one.

MR. LOBEL: But how did you come to this? I mean here you were, was it – did it come out of your particular reading? Did it come out of your engagement with art at that time? Or a combination of the two?

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, it's a very long time thinking. See, for instance, when I'm doing those drawings, I'm figuring it out, because I had not – firstly, it was terribly, terribly frightening, not because you're going to do the work but that concept which is so simple would really, really work. I mean you have to. You know, you step back and you'll say, "No way." So this is long-term thinking, and then I realized because it absolutely did work and because that's what helped me to fight all that nonsense that I encountered, because actually someone I guess last year said, "How did you hold up under all that abuse and all that hostility?" I said, "It's because I knew what I was doing," you know?

So this one guy – [laughs] – this one critic kept saying yes, yes, but what else? I said, "Have you ever never met a strong, sexy woman?" [They laugh.]

MR. HAINLEY: But who was part of the support structure? Because I see part of what you were doing as – and certainly I'm interested in what you were reading and things like that, also what you're very much thinking about – but I would say that I'm also interested in how much you were in conversation, not about permission, but about art. I see your work as really being this intense gaze of what changes from Abstract Expressionism, particularly through the filter or the conversation of Johns and Rauschenberg, and to Pop's arriving.

Your work is the best philosophy of what that shift is about, and that the work has continued to go on to bigger shifts, but that that was a major turn that we're still theorizing. I see so much of your work – because of how it activates itself, looking like something else – being the meditation that the work was many, many years away from receiving, and yet you were doing it in the moment. I would think that part of the support system would be being around and in conversation, to some degree, with someone like Rauschenberg or Johns at the moment, because that's when they were also at their kind of –

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, but it really – no –

MR. HAINLEY: No, okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: Which is interesting. Firstly, Johns would never, you know – Johns really doesn't articulate about – but then in terms of Rauschenberg, I mean, he was a very, you know, he had some elements like Warhol, okay? He likes you, he trusts you, so it has to be working, and that's about it. But no, I had no dialogue –

MR. HAINLEY: No, okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: You know, other than when people confronted me after the Bianchini show and they'd be so insistent, because it went both ways – one way that, you know, is disgraceful, it was copy, it was la, la, la, la. I could answer that very well, so that only made it worse. If you could really respond to these people and with very valid answers and positions, it just made it worse, because they wanted it to be copy, you know?

So then what's good with students is that, for instance, they think that's so great that you made copy. So then when it was reviewed as mega-copy or something, and you could have made a lot of

money at that moment. But I explained it. I wouldn't be around. If it were identified – which a lot of people tried to do, which is why I had to really fight – if it were identified as mega-copy, it makes the money and then you're dead. You know, it's not so – that was part of the battle, or that gave me force to fight it because I didn't want it. I refused to let it go into that. But it did for a long while, didn't it?

MR. HAINLEY: But I would – just to get – not to harp on this, but I am interested. Even if the artist were not in dialogue, weren't you seeing in something like the *Flag* or something like *Factum*, Rauschenberg's *Factum [I and II]* or the kind of a turn, like this turn from Ab Ex to the thing in the world becoming the painting? Not that it's such a linear progression – but there seems to be something in those works themselves which was the clearest articulation of this shift from interior to surface.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: And you seem the person that commented on this first, and I just wondered, even if they were not, the work itself seems to be presenting –

MS. STURTEVANT: There had to be an element of what brought – as a matter of fact, I'll say, if I had not been brought, surrounded by Pop and by Abstract Expressionism, I would not have been able to conceive this philosophical concept.

MR. LOBEL: Which raises a couple – I mean there are a number –

MS. STURTEVANT: Which answers your question, too. Excuse me.

MR. LOBEL: That's okay. There are a number of things that I would want to jump off here from, but one of them is that just to go back, you know, absolutely – when you were talking about the long philosophical history of the idea of copy. I mean, you know, art history – there's a long – I mean art and art history are based on discussions around imitation and resemblance, right, and copy. So I'm just wondering, in terms of what Bruce is asking you about, how this came about, so it may have been in part what was going on. Were you also reading certain philosophical texts at the time?

MS. STURTEVANT: No, not really. No that – you know what came out? The reason I found – see I can't remember how many years, and no matter what I said, it just somehow didn't work, you know, and then I kept thinking a critic would come along that could write about it. So then because my ground basically was Nietzsche and Spinoza – *not* Spinoza, I read Spinoza but he was certainly – [laughs] – translatable as far as I was concerned. But let's see, Nietzsche and then Hegel and Kant, people like that.

So when I had to start writing, when no one came forth, then I started reading Foucault and Deleuze and found the answers there. I mean, they're a perfect support for my work, so – that is not why I was reading them. I read them and then found that they provided a ground for me to work on and to talk about it.

MR. LOBEL: But do you think –

MS. STURTEVANT: At a different level, yeah.

MR. LOBEL: Did your –

MS. STURTEVANT: I think.

MR. LOBEL: Were you reading Nietzsche and Hegel, et cetera, and Kant prior to this time?

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh way before, sure.

MR. LOBEL: Like by the '50s?

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, I wasn't reading Nietzsche in the '50s. I may go back to him once in a while. Frankly, I don't think I was reading. I think I was really trying to work it through up here, you know, in the head. No, no, no. I'm talking about – I don't know what I was reading. Probably trashy novels. [Laughs.]

MR. HAINLEY: And I have two questions. One, in terms of those – before you get to the high culture of trashy novels – was Emerson or any of the Americans ever –

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh I couldn't *stand* those people.

MR. HAINLEY: You couldn't.

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh no. Emerson, even, you know, Bertrand Russell and even the, you know, Heidegger, Kierkegaard – whoa, go away. No, no. No, no – almost immediately.

MR. HAINLEY: And how about in the '60s – like, were you at all interested in the *nouveau roman*? Robbe-Grillet and Duras and – Nathalie Sarraute in terms of a –

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, well, I read, you know, I read – Robbe-Grillet. When we used to go to Ibiza for the summers and I took a dictionary and his book and read it, which is not a good way to read a book. [They laugh.] Or this is like I read Deleuze's *Repetition* [*Différence et répétition*] and – what is it –

MR. LOBEL: Difference.

MS. STURTEVANT: Difference, yeah [*Difference & Repetition*]. And so I couldn't find it. It hadn't been translated yet, so I took the French and, you know, I spent a summer reading it. Then the English came out and I said, "Whoa – this is a whole different book!" [They laugh.]

MR. LOBEL: You know Bruce was talking about this hinge between Abstract Expressionism and Pop, and – or between Abstract Expressionism and Johns and Rauschenberg. Just to – and I think we can probably start moving on, but just to push back a little further to talk about Abstract Expressionism. Do you – since we're having a conversation here on the record, Elaine – do you –

MS. STURTEVANT: You think you're going to trap me, don't you? [They laugh.]

MR. LOBEL: There are no traps here. Do you want to say anything about the type of art that you were making prior to the Bianchini period and prior to those drawings that we've been talking about?

MS. STURTEVANT: First, let's talk about Abstract Expressionism, because that was the first step to the surface, to the outside, because that was all about emotion, okay. And then Pop was also the outside, so that, of course, was a very big trigger in terms of thinking. Is art all exterior now? Is art as, you know, blah, blah, blah, blah, it triggered thinking. And you can still ask that today, because it progressed very rapidly, and that show I did at [Galerie] Hans Mayer [Düsseldorf] I don't know when, called –

MR. HAINLEY: *Powerful Reversals*.

MS. STURTEVANT: – *Powerful Reversals* was about that. Thank you, Bruce. It was about how very dramatically art had made this – and it was preceded by other examples – had made this very sharp turn. For instance, Gonzalez-Torres, you really had to know what his intentions were, otherwise you'd think it was about consumption, okay, about consumerism and stuff like that – with who else – Goyer; okay, Goyer, you know, this would – it would appear that it was about the exterior. It didn't seem to be saying anything, and it probably wasn't, okay, and then Mel Ramos, who was "done" by [Bernard] Bazile [as a live performance in Bazile's 1993 exhibition *It's O.K. to Say No!* at the Centre Pompidou, Paris], okay. That's exterior again, and then what's his name – that French artist. I had him in the show. He did the two boys with the video – with the instamatic cameras [Pierre Joseph, *Les Voleurs de couleurs (Personnages à réactiver)*, 1992].

MR. HAINLEY: Oh.

MS. STURTEVANT: Parreno [ph]? No, no it's – what is his name? Anyway, so he is also talking. Now he was the one that was closer to being really touching one something.

MR. HAINLEY: This piece, right?

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, who is that again?

MR. HAINLEY: That's a really good question.

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, it must be in the title.

MR. HAINLEY: Joseph, *Les Voleurs de couleurs*?

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, it's Joseph. I forget his first name. Joseph. So he was very close to talking about, which none of the other French were, talking about this transformation from duration of time to infinitesimal. Time was cut infinitesimal. Also he was talking about the idea that – way before people were talking about it, before we had mobiles – about how the camera was giving you distance, so you were missing the experience; you were not experience – you're creating distance. So he was very good.

And interestingly enough, I just – Air de Paris, or no, some critic asked me to meet with him, because they are doing a catalogue on him. So I was talking about what he did, and he's looking at me like well, that's great huh – [Laughs.] But it was. It was very good. Very good. So what was the question?

MR. HAINLEY: It was about the hinge.

MR. LOBEL: Oh, about your work prior to –

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, but it was student work, Michael. It was. It was student work.

MR. LOBEL: But you did – so you did show at Betty Parsons?

MS. STURTEVANT: I showed in a group show, yeah.

MR. LOBEL: In 1960.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, and very beautiful Greek landscapes.



MR. LOBEL: When you say Greek landscapes –

MS. STURTEVANT: Means landscapes after having seen – been to Greece. [They laugh.] Very beautiful, very muted, very nice.

MR. LOBEL: And as I understand it from what Bruce says –

MR. HAINLEY: Well Jasper Johns says he owns two of your paintings from that period.

MS. STURTEVANT: He what?

MR. HAINLEY: He owns two of your paintings from that period.

MS. STURTEVANT: Does he *really*?

MR. HAINLEY: That's what he told me.

MS. STURTEVANT: He owns some of the Greek landscapes?....

MR. HAINLEY: He says he owns two works from the Betty Parsons period. But he and – I asked him about you and your work, and he said, "Well, I knew Elaine quite well in the late '50s and I own two of her works from that period, and I still have them." And he said – he also said that he owns some of your Oldenburg work and –

MS. STURTEVANT: He owns my Oldenburg?

MR. HAINLEY: He said he has at least one or two Oldenburgs.

MS. STURTEVANT: I wonder where he got them. Wow.

MR. HAINLEY: So – and I just – he referred to them – I think his description of them was abstract, and so I'm just interested in that.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, that must have been the Greek landscapes, yeah. Must have been the Greek landscapes, probably, probably. They're quite beautiful. But all that early work was really – my first mature work was my show at Bianchini. You know, like seagulls, you know, and the beach and the bright sunshine shimmering, shivery – [they laugh.]

MR. LOBEL: Well that's funny because one of the paintings on the garment rack in the Bianchini photo that I've never been able to identify has seagulls in it, but it's not –

MS. STURTEVANT: No, no, it's a Lichtenstein.

MR. LOBEL: It's not any Lichtenstein I know, but –

MS. STURTEVANT: No, but it's a Lichtenstein. [They laugh.]

MR. LOBEL: Okay. And speaking of –

MS. STURTEVANT: He just hadn't done it yet. [They laugh.]

MR. LOBEL: Well, I mean –

MR. HAINLEY: There you go.

MR. LOBEL: Well then we could go on to talk about the Beuys show, but before that, just really quickly, because we've been talking around this stuff. What's been your general experience with artists when you've seen them after you've done their work? I mean has their –

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, basically, I don't think I have any other than Oldenburg. I mean I don't think I, you know – I can't recall –

MR. HAINLEY: Is that as much a response, Elaine? Because in terms of tracking down information, I was really interested – your *Oldenburg Store* opens a few days before he has a major show –

MS. STURTEVANT: Did it really? I didn't even know.

MR. HAINLEY: At Sidney Janis. And also, what's *beautiful*, what I love, is in *The New York Times*, the first announcement for your show has no artist, just "The Store of Claes Oldenburg" and the address. And then three weeks later, it says Sturtevant. "The Store of Claes Oldenburg by Sturtevant."

MS. STURTEVANT: Where was this, in *The New York Times*?

MR. HAINLEY: In *The New York Times* in their arts listings.

MS. STURTEVANT: Because the announcement is a copy of his Ray Gun announcement –

MR. HAINLEY: No, exactly. Exactly –

MS. STURTEVANT: But it just said –

MR. HAINLEY: It just said: "The Store of Claes Oldenburg," and I was – I laughed really hard about that.

MS. STURTEVANT: That is very funny.

MR. HAINLEY: And I wonder if – I also wonder, there is a contemporaneous account where you – I was really interested and struck, because it comes up later in your work, too, in terms of what the brutal truth – we use the word, oh that Oldenburg show was a brutal show. And there is an account of –

MS. STURTEVANT: I don't mean the show was brutal, but the doing it –

MR. HAINLEY: Doing it.

MS. STURTEVANT: And not making it, but the idea that you were putting it and you were giving it – whatever, you know what I'm talking about.

MR. HAINLEY: But there is an account, a kind of contemporaneous account, that the day before the opening of the show, you were – there was this kind of episode of violence around you, and –

MS. STURTEVANT: Not the day before. Shortly after *TheStore* opened.

MR. HAINLEY: Shortly after *TheStore* opened.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: Because I wonder – I mean, Michael's asking you – and I think it's related – about what how artists have responded, but also, what is the kind of, do you think at times, the psychotic effect of your work – like, what it triggers?

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh boy, it's supposed to trigger thinking, not craziness. [Laughs.] Yes, no, no. But you see, there's something – there are a lot of factors here. One of which – people are very resistant to change, and that's a very heavy-duty thing to try and move. So I think that's one of the strongest forces that keeps it locked into this persistent idea.

So – and secondly, if there are no frames of reference, it's hard to get hold of, and at that time that I was doing it for many years afterwards, there was no reference. So that's – which we've talked about – where the Appropriationists were so important for me because it gave a frame of reference and you could give negative description and that was very crucial and very great. Yeah – which I must tell you, in the Palais [de] Tokyo [Paris], in the [Steven] Parrino show – so they have four of my very large black Stellas, because the director said that I was one of the people that influenced him. So then later I said to him, "Are you sure about that?" Because I don't think I did. [They laugh.]

Anyway, so it's in a room with Warhol on one wall, Stella on one wall, and me on the third wall.

MR. LOBEL: Wow.

MS. STURTEVANT: So it's the first time I've ever been placed with icons, okay. So it's very strong. Outside – we went to the show with Udo Kittelmann, who came to Paris, so just next to the entrance they have this big wall of writing, okay. I never read these things. So Udo caught up and he said, "Elaine, go back there and read that." So it says about Warhol and it says about Stella and then it says, "Sturtevant, who is a Reappropriationist." *That's incredible.* [Laughs.] *That is so remarkable.* I love it. I just absolutely love it. Imagine you've gone from precursor to someone who is now redoing appropriation. Can you believe that?

MR. LOBEL: And can I just clarify? When you say that's incredible, you're not happy about that.

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh no, no. I think it's incredible, because you're always talking about what the phenomena are that is going around you and how people place things, so I mean why – if I influence this guy, you say, "Sturtevant, blah, blah, blah." You don't have to say Reappropriation. [Laughs.] And then, of course, a student is there taking notes on my paintings and then she's outside, so she's going to think about me as someone who – and then it says the date of the paintings, 1989 and '90, when I did the black Stellas – so she's going to say Sturtevant is someone who redid – not redid – someone who did the appropriation just years after they started. I mean, God, this is incredible in terms of how they place you.

MR. LOBEL: But this gets at something, I think. One of the reasons I'm really fascinated and engaged with your work is that your work seems to consistently raise problems of definition and language. Right, labeling – what do we call this? What is this? It's very interesting because very early on, soon after the first time that Bruce and I met you in person at the Getty–

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, I remember that.

MR. LOBEL: – in 2001.

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, that was so great. We had that great bar. [Laughs.]

MR. LOBEL: We had a great time. Soon after that, when I started becoming really interested in your work, I emailed Dorothy Lichtenstein, who had worked at the Bianchini Gallery, and I asked her, you know, what are your memories of this? She said something really interesting, which is that she said no one really knew what to do with this work, how to understand it. Some people thought it was camp, some people thought it was Pop after Pop. And it seems to me that one of the reasons that people have a hard time with your work is that it raises these really –

MS. STURTEVANT: Issues.

MR. LOBEL: – difficult issues. What do we call this?

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, we call that fantastic. That's what we call it. Yeah. That's the whole point of the work is to trigger thinking, so – and if it brings up questions, then you'll have to try to seek to find an answer. Yeah, no, I find it quite remarkable.

MR. HAINLEY: But isn't it also – I mean it's a question of language, but it also seems to me – especially when a term like Reappropriationist, which is just – first of all, I don't – I mean I know what that means, but on some level it's like, wow, I don't know what that means.

MS. STURTEVANT: It doesn't mean anything! [Laughs.]

MR. HAINLEY: Yeah, exactly. But I wonder, in terms of the resistance, too, there is at least a doubling of this language of definition, but also a troubling or interrogation of history itself and how time operates. And I wonder if you could talk about the rupture of what – part of I would think the fear, or not the fear, but – we were talking about the drawings and figuring out what was going to do if you did this, what was going to occur if you did this.

One of the things was that this really complicates the notion people – especially historians, and this is a dialogue that Michael and I have had – have this idea of how things progress, and what leads to what and where a period begins and ends, and your work really ruptures this today. And I mean, when you say, "We call this fantastic," this whole notion that someone could look at these paintings now and go like right, she was working in the late '80s after the Appropriationists – that seems to be a powerful consequence of the work itself. It wants to set up that rupture.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes. Yes, and that's good. See but I think they knew – I mean they know what my work is, but I think that work always – somehow there's this emphasis to always place it somewhere else, which then raises other issues and questions. So that's why the work – I mean, my first show was in '65. Isn't that incredible, that the work is still working, functioning? Wow. That, you know, anyone – whoa, that's super, huh?

MR. LOBEL: But you sort of suggested that – I'm kind of interested in this also, because obviously it seems that when this sort of category of Appropriation art gets invented or identified in the early 1980s around people like Sherrie Levine and Richard Prince, it starts giving people a way to return to your work.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes, yes.

MR. LOBEL: But at the same time, it seems to open up a kind of avenue for people to misidentify your work. So I'm sort of curious what it felt like at the time, like you know, was it great to have people revisiting, or was it frustrating to have this mislabeling, or both?

MS. STURTEVANT: No, no, no no. This is one of the – I always knew what I was doing, and I

always knew that it would work. I always knew eventually this work would work, so I could go through a lot of really bad stuff and it was like I was here – it's okay, it'll work eventually, blah, blah, blah. And using all sorts of terms of mental retards – [laughs] – brain-damaged people. [They laugh.] So, yeah, that gave me a great deal of power in terms of maintaining the strength to continue working and – so no, so it never bothered me. I never felt abused. I never felt that these people were, you know – no. So that was good, see, because it kept me very clean to work instead of being embedded in, you know – so it was okay.

MR. LOBEL: Instead of being embedded in what?

MS. STURTEVANT: Embedded in all this hostility and misinterpretation, because I'd say, "Blah, blah, blah, blah," and they didn't understand, and it's okay. I know sooner or later it would work. And it is, so yeah.

MR. LOBEL: Yeah, I mean for me, one of the very important things about your career is – particularly now, at a time when so many young artists seem in art or in the game because they want to sell work or make money – that kind of sense that you had this longstanding commitment in the face of a lot of misunderstanding – that, I think, is really important to me.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes, and of course, you know, how does it happen, okay? It's something – I don't think these professors teach these kids anything, you know? And so if you're not taught, you're not going to know, are you? But it's not any of that. I think a very, very big factor is our cybernetic society. It is really about – for instance, those people that do, the groups that do "the meaning is producing, and consumption is the use." It's a very important factor, and this is art that's being sold. And if you've talked to these guys, you know, they get really confused if you start talking to them.

So this is not about – it's about how we live and what they're surrounded with and the dialogue they use and what they look at. So it's a really perfect, perfect example of our society. So if you start talking about art and how, this moaning and groaning about how it's down the tube and so forth and so on, it's – what you have to question is how did that engender itself, and it engenders itself by our digital world. So this is always what I'm trying to get at. It's not important that they are bad artists. It's interesting, though, because then it's – nice, you can say, that's a bad artist but important.

[End of disc]

MR. HAINLEY: This is Bruce Hainley and –

MR. LOBEL: Michael Lobel.

MR. HAINLEY: Interviewing Sturtevant at the New York City offices of the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, on July 25, 2007. This is disc number three.

MR. LOBEL: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: Okay. Okay, kay, kay.

MR. LOBEL: Well, interestingly enough, something we – something or someone we haven't talked about a lot – much at all – who seems to have been important to your work from pretty early on is Duchamp. And you know, we talked about this idea of the moment between Abstract Expressionism and Pop or Rauschenberg and Johns and Pop, and I'm wondering – and I think

because of your engagement with Duchamp's work, a lot of people might have questions about when you first became aware of Duchamp and/or when his work first became important to you. Do you have a sense of that?

MS. STURTEVANT: Well – [laughs] – yes, of course I do. No, let's see, no, yes; no, yes. Well, Duchamp was sort of, like, always known. I mean, he isn't something you didn't know, basically. And then, at some point in America in New York, he became kind of a figure for Rauschenberg and Johns – [whispering] oh, I can't say this – anyway, so then – [laughs] –

MR. LOBEL: You can't say what?

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, you'd have to turn off the recording.

MR. LOBEL: Okay.

MR. HAINLEY: Turn it off! [Laughs. Recorder left on.]

MS. STURTEVANT: So then –

MR. HAINLEY: I want to know!

MS. STURTEVANT: So then, so then, so then. What was interesting for me with Duchamp was not what he did but what he didn't do, okay? So that's what got me, because his work – well, I've written that essay; I'll send it to you – “The Reluctant Indifference of Marcel Duchamp.” So that's very important. That says it all. I'm not going to read that to you; I'm not going to explain it.

MR. LOBEL: But so you feel that that essay that you wrote says a good deal about what you were thinking about Duchamp –

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, I think basically, when I say it isn't what he did but what he didn't do that I found interesting, so it's not about the objects, okay?

MR. LOBEL: What I'm curious about is that you said, well, Duchamp was sort of always around, but there really, I mean, my sense, sort of looking back – and I wasn't around so I don't know this – but that there was certainly a moment when, probably in the late '50s, when he suddenly got more –

MS. STURTEVANT: In New York, yeah.

MR. LOBEL: In New York.

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, when they did that L.A. show, too.

MR. HAINLEY: Mm-hmm, yes.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes, absolutely.

MR. LOBEL: Which was in '60–

MR. HAINLEY: Three [1963].

MR. LOBEL: – three.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah.

MR. LOBEL: But even by the late 1950s, Johns and Rauschenberg and Cage, actually – John Cage seemed to be really engaging with his work. I think in 1959, is that when the Robert Lebel monograph [*Marcel Duchamp*] comes out? And were you in, I mean, were you engaged enough with the art scene at the time that you were aware of Duchamp and –

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, always, sure. That's actually what I'm trying to say, like you're always – like he's always there, and of course I'm aware of the fact that they're having a show in L.A., but that didn't make any – change my mind, whatever that mind was. I mean, it didn't have anything to do with the thinking.

MR. LOBEL: And he was also in New York at the time. I mean, did you – would you run into him? Did you know him?

MS. STURTEVANT: No, no. Because it was David Hayes, a great guy. He did the *Relâche* photo.

MR. HAINLEY: Right. Is he still alive, Elaine?

MS. STURTEVANT: No.

MR. HAINLEY: No.

MS. STURTEVANT: He committed suicide.

MR. HAINLEY: Oh.

MS. STURTEVANT: A long time ago. He did the *Relâche* photo and he did the Duchamp-shaving-cream [referring to Sturtevant's *Duchamp Man Ray Portrait*], and he did the Marcel – no, that was, that was somebody else that did that, but any rate, he was a very – pity, he was a very brilliant guy. And he bought very early Rauschenbergs and Johns and Jim Dine. He had some of the best Jim Dine because there weren't very many of them. But so he said – I guess that's when I had, by that time, I had done the film.

MR. LOBEL: Which film?

MR. HAINLEY: The –

MS. STURTEVANT: Duchamp.

MR. HAINLEY: The Hans Richter.

MS. STURTEVANT: *Duchamp Nu descendant un escalier* and then was doing the – yeah, and I guess I had also done the *Relâche* photo and the other photos. So when I did the – what photo was it? – so he said, "I'd like you to come and meet Marcel, and I'd like you to show him your *Relâche* photo, okay?" So I said, "Sure, that sounds like fun."

So Marcel, of course, was so extraordinary because I showed him the photo, and when he looked at it, he said, "Where did you get that?" So you never knew, did he realize that was not his photo, yeah, or did he really think it was his photo? And so then that's a very interesting mind, isn't it? Yeah.

MR. LOBEL: And the *Relâche* photo is you and Rauschenberg.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, yeah. And then, I don't know, I guess he invited me – oh, I guess he

invited me when he was – when I was in Paris. He said, “Oh, come visit Teeny [Duchamp’s wife] and I,” because they lived outside of Paris at the – what is that place – Versailles. No – some place other than that. And so he wanted to – I guess when I came, I gave him a Duchamp DADA bracelet, which he had at one point wanted to do, so I made it just for him. Also, this was in terms of thinking. It wasn’t –

MR. HAINLEY: And is that DADA bracelet, does that appear in the green notes? Like where does that Dada –

MS. STURTEVANT: No, it’s just something he wanted to do.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: I don’t know. It’s in one of his notes, okay? So this is still when I’m thinking, you know, how does this work, and so far and so on? So I made several DADA bracelets, so I gave him one, and he loved it, and I guess it was, you know, that it would fall off and it was very cheaply gold-plated. I mean, it’s a work. It’s a study. This is not, I’m not – I’m just doing this for my own head. So he had it gold-plated and he had it soldered and he loved it. And then, when I – this was in Paris – he said, “Could you bring one for Teeny?” So I did. Yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: And he shows up for the *Relâche* –

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, that –

MR. HAINLEY: The performance.

MS. STURTEVANT: At Visual Arts, yeah [Sturtevant’s *Picabia’s Ballet Relâche* at the School of the Visual Arts, 1967]. No, what is the name of that place?

MR. HAINLEY: School of Visual Arts.

MS. STURTEVANT: School of Visual Arts.

MR. HAINLEY: SVA.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, yeah, and kept the taxi waiting, so it was great. That was very nice of him, wasn’t it?

MR. HAINLEY: And a DADA bracelet gets shown in a Dwan [Gallery] show, a Dwan summer show, *Language II*.

MS. STURTEVANT: No.

MR. HAINLEY: According to the archives, it did.

MS. STURTEVANT: To whose archives?

MR. HAINLEY: Dwan’s.

MS. STURTEVANT: Really?

MR. LOBEL: Was it on a checklist? Bruce has done a lot of research, Elaine.



MS. STURTEVANT: I guess – [Hainley laughs] – so. Really? So she has a DADA bracelet? I probably gave it to her as a friend, and then she puts it in as art. Should not be really classified as a work of art.

MR. HAINLEY: Oh. Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: It should be really classified as a piece of thinking. Yeah. Not as a – yeah. Hmm. God knows what's going to pop up. [They laugh.]

MR. LOBEL: So this was just a bracelet with the word Dada?

MS. STURTEVANT: It just – D-A-D-A, but I made different ones. I made it with square letters, I made it with funky letters, yeah.

MR. LOBEL: And, you know, it's interesting talking about *Relâche* because –you're talking about Duchamp's importance as what he didn't do, and Bruce and I have talked about, in the past, one of the logics or generating forces of your work being about – I don't want to say negation because I think that's the wrong word, but maybe absence or something not happening, and that's true of *Relâche*, the actual *Relâche* performance, right?

MS. STURTEVANT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. LOBEL: Where the doors are locked. It's true of the Galerie J show, where the doors are also locked – actually, that's a year apart – so this kind of – or maybe, I might call a kind of refusal; but I also think what's very interesting, I don't know if you would go with this, but I think what's very beautiful is that – and Bruce may want to talk about this a little bit more – you actually did research around making a [Michael] Heizer *Double Negative*.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes.

MR. LOBEL: That was never realized. So it's –

MS. STURTEVANT: Ran out of money. I wish I had done that. I wish they hadn't run out of money. That would have been such a big high.

MR. LOBEL: So what were the circumstances around it? Who ran out of money?

MS. STURTEVANT: Reese Palley [Gallery].

MR. HAINLEY: Reese Palley.

MS. STURTEVANT: But Reese Palley's lawyer's the one that said, "Forget it, you don't have the money to do this." So.

MR. LOBEL: And so you actually did work around see –

MS. STURTEVANT: Well I had, I had located the land that would work, yeah, yeah. And I had the land plot. And yeah, no – and I had contracted the Caterpillar people and – pity. But you know then, also, you have to totally maintain those things, and I wouldn't have had the money to do that anyhow. They have to be maintained because they get filled again. But that piece is so strong, that *Double Negative*.

And talking about negatives, see, negative is a very strong force. I – phew – I think it's very

powerful, and it's not powerful because it's negative; it's powerful because of what its force is. Yeah. So it's very different. Yeah, that can be very strong.

MR. LOBEL: Yeah, and the funny thing is that your work is fundamentally not about negation in a lot of ways because you're remaking, you're repeating things. You are creating something, but so many people see it as a kind of negation.

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, yeah. I mean, try to imagine if you don't know anything. It would be very hard for you to do, very hard for both of you to do. Just try to imagine if you know nothing, okay? Maybe a little something, but close to nothing, and someone says, "This work is very strong and very powerful," and about the dynamics of repetition and throwing out representation, what would you say? [Laughs.] What would you say? You'd say, "Fuck, man." [Laughs.]

Yeah. No, I understand that. It's totally forgivable, you know, and I don't expect – I don't expect, nor does it interest me, that everyone understand the work. Where the force lies is that it works. So, yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: But this – that creativity in the creation and negativity gets – or the *Double Negative* – around that time, the Reese Palley show [*Sturtevant: Studies for De Maria's New York Shit*, 1971] comes after you're doubling – I mean, I think there's this really beautiful sequence when we go from the *Relâche* performance to the first Givaudan show [*Huit Tableaux et un prototype*, 1969 and 1970] –

MR. LOBEL: Which is in what year?

MR. HAINLEY: Sixty-nine – to the second Givaudan show, which repeats.

MS. STURTEVANT: Repeated –

MR. HAINLEY: Exactly.

MS. STURTEVANT: The same show.

MR. LOBEL: Is that one year after the other?

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes.

MR. HAINLEY: Yes.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes.

MR. HAINLEY: Sixty-nine and '70.

MR. LOBEL: So it's the same show –

MS. STURTEVANT: Exactly the same show.

MR. LOBEL: – the following year. [Laughs.]

MS. STURTEVANT: The following year, yes. [They laugh.] Yes, very strong show.

MR. HAINLEY: Strong, and it's so strong, you can do it twice. [They laugh.]

MS. STURTEVANT: You can do it twice, yes. Well, it was a very good way to demonstrate the power of repetition, you know, in a very simplistic way.

MR. LOBEL: How did you get the gallery to go along with that?

MS. STURTEVANT: Well Givaudan had a very open mind. He was a very interesting man. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Besides, he sold out, you know, so this was a powerful factor. [Laughs.] Yeah, yeah, he totally sold the show out, so – but all those pieces, one of those pieces showed up at an auction in Paris, and they called me and said, Would you come look at it? And I said, It's totally – this piece is totally *raté*. You can't sell this piece.

MR. LOBEL: Wait, it's totally what?

MS. STURTEVANT: *Raté*. It means finished, no possibility, because the hair is *flocage*.

MR. LOBEL: *Flocage*?

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, you know, and so part of that is very thin. The fluorescent is sort of rubbed off at places, and I mean, it's a total mess. They sold it.

MR. LOBEL: This is one of the Martial Raysses?

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah – *Attention* – yeah. They sold it, so, yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: And then you moved to the Reese Palley show, the [Walter] De Maria drawing show, and I'm interested in that because it brings up this other issue, which leads to the Beuys work in some way. To the best of my knowledge, you're showing works that people would not have seen. They might recognize them as De Maria but De Maria never did this show.

MS. STURTEVANT: He never did the show but he did the works.

MR. HAINLEY: Yes, no, no, no, no, absolutely.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, but he never did a show, yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: But that changes a certain kind of dynamic –

MS. STURTEVANT: It does, doesn't it–

MR. HAINLEY: – for your work, which I think is thrilling, and coming off the Givaudan show, where you're just, I mean, it just seems! I wonder if you could – yeah, I mean, talk about that, because it's also your first New York show in a while, in terms of there not having been –

MS. STURTEVANT: No, it's true.

MR. HAINLEY: – a gallery show for you. It's '65.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: Because you have to produce. And I think this is an important... This opens up – not that it's your interest – but part of the total structure you throw a bright light on is economic. You had to produce your *Oldenburg Store*. It was not the Green Gallery that was producing the *Oldenburg Store*. You produced the *Relâche*. And so if we think about it in sequence, you appear

in Gene Swenson's *The Other Tradition* show at ICA in '66 –

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, yeah, that was fun.

MR. HAINLEY: – and you appear in the *Art in the Mirror* show, also by Gene Swenson, and that's also 1966, it opens late. But if we think about gallery representation, it really is the Bianchini to Reese Palley, and so it's a dramatic kind of shift in your thinking in terms of how this work catalyzes things.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah. Well, I think that had to be because, see, that's still a period where you're trying to figure out how this work works or what is the best way to make this work, so you would have very radical or very big leaps because it was trying to push it, try to articulate it in a clearer or stronger way. Yes, so that would account for all those funny leaps, yeah.

MR. LOBEL: One of the things I'm thinking about as we're talking is that, I mean, obviously I've thought about and engaged with your work a lot over the years, but what's coming out for me is – and in some ways it's self-evident, but aspects of it, facets of it that I haven't thought about before are coming out, which is the way in which you seem to have really strategically and very carefully thought through all these different types and facets of repetition, right? So the Givaudan show is, what happens if I do the same exhibition in the same place but twice, one year after another?

For me, as I wrote about in that *Parkett* piece, the meaning of the Galerie J show is first, what does it mean to show these American works, these works that are so identified with America, in Paris, across the water or across the ocean? And second, as I pointed out in that article, my understanding is that you shifted the medium of almost all the pieces in there so that a Lichtenstein print becomes a painting, a Rosenquist print becomes a painting, an Oldenburg stuffed hamburger becomes paper mâché, that all of these things are – that the Lichtenstein image is on its side. What I'm coming back to, in what I feel is my role as someone who's curious about your work and wants to communicate its importance to other people, is that to get away from what we would all agree is this very simplistic view of your work as copy or repetition or whatever, that you're really exploring, in this very careful way, all these different ways of getting at – I mean, I see someone looking at a particular thing from all these different sides and really exploring its outlines and its properties.

MS. STURTEVANT: So that's trying to trigger thinking, again, so it's always trying to make the work function at a very high level, at a higher level, or to articulate, which is interesting to me because now the videos that I'm doing are really about articulation of visibility, very strongly, so it's a continuation in a different way.

MR. LOBEL: And when you say articulation of visibility –

MS. STURTEVANT: So you're trying to get it so that the visibilities become thought or can be representative of thought, okay? Means – not means – yeah, they articulate visibility, yeah, looking, seeing, but seeing, not so – then seeing becomes thought.

MR. LOBEL: Which is so – which is really interesting, and again, important to me and something that I wanted to write about, and I mentioned very briefly in that *Parkett* piece that a lot of people, because of this idea of appropriation, would claim that your work is totally what Duchamp would call anti-retinal, that it's not visual at all, and I think – I personally think that's a misreading of your work.

MS. STURTEVANT: That's a very big misreading because if you take it from the very first works, you know, then, I mean, you can just trace it all the way through to the present, and then it is, very definitely. But retinal is "to see," not seeing, or vice versa. It's not visibility. It's about visible, which is very different. So that show that I did at Ropac called *Interior Exterior – Interior Exterior Visibilities [Int/Ext Visibilities]* is – which you did not actually see the photos because it was all photographic. What you saw was projection of the photos. So that's trying to remove seeing, okay? So, yeah, no, that – and I think when he's talking about retinal or any of those people are talking about retinal, they're just talking about "looking at," you know. Something funky like that, maybe.

MR. HAINLEY: Would you say, I mean, following up on what Michael was saying, there is a question of materialization too, of visibility?

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, if visibility means that you, to quote, "it contains an element of thinking or thought." So all the videos really, like in *TheDark Threat of Absence* but not [*TheDark Threat of Absence -] Fragmented and Sliced* – did you ever see that one with the two screen?

MR. HAINLEY: No, I never saw those.

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, you have to see them, because that – the *Fragmented and Sliced* came out of that. And then, because we had problems – they hadn't done the technical work at Ropac – I had to somehow make that piece work with a lot of light – a lot of light. So this is how I came into *Fragmented and Sliced*, which is really, for me, much more powerful than the first. But the first is very definitely two screens, like this, you know. And then this screen is all movement and this screen is stillness. So I use the still as interior thought, and the first camera as interior thought – exterior motion as interior action. So it's very dynamic and it's very strong. And it's also very funny. It's very funny.

MR. HAINLEY: Well, this is the question – to go back. How do you see humor as a catalyst from the beginning? Because a lot of people I've talked to about your work say, Well, the thing you had to remember is Elaine's shows were so much fun in the '60s. I mean, it was really fun and they were beautiful. And someone told me – there are two things that come out. He said, "Well, you have to understand that the shift from the '60s to the '70s was the shift of people who were fun and beautiful and then they became ugly." And he said, "And also, never doubt Elaine's work; she's a great artist. Why is she a great artist? She made great work."

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, that's good. That's great.

MR. HAINLEY: And I thought that was a very –

MS. STURTEVANT: Who was that?

MR. HAINLEY: I'm not going to say. I have secrets of my own too. But I thought that had a clarity, because it gets at this question of – and I think this goes to Michael's point too, I mean, part of doing this interview is a kind of hopeful clarification that this work is not copy and it is not appropriation. It is the work you made. Just like the work that gets made by others. And I think that notion – that's why I love the definition: you made great work. That folds in everything. And it's like, of course. How obvious do we have to make it? And I think that gets at this –

MS. STURTEVANT: There's an underlying, which is a good way to get people too. But someone said to me, a million years ago, something about, oh, so your work is full of humor? And I said, "No, this work is deadly serious." For me, it's very profound work. It's not funny. But it does – it has a

level, which makes it – when you have something that heavy, it's a way of bringing it up somehow, so it's available a little bit more. But it hasn't worked very well, has it? [Laughs.]

MR. HAINLEY: Well, I don't know. I think a lot of your work, I mean, I think it is deadly serious, but I think when I think about it, I laugh a lot of the time. I mean, I think the idea of making these De Maria shit drawings before he ever showed them is hysterically funny. I mean, I think it's really profound. I also think it's really funny.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, well, it's true. As long as the profundity is not missed, okay? This is like, it's some guy at Basel, when I had this interview with Hans Obrist and Beatrix Ruf. So some guy came up to me later, and he says, I just love your character, your personality. And I said, "Well, I would be more interested if you loved what I said." [They laugh.] And it's true. Never mind what's going on outside there.

MR. LOBEL: You know, Bruce mentioned part of the idea behind this interview is to clarify things. And one of the things I want to put on the record, because I think it's something I had totally missed until Bruce pointed it out to me, and it gets back to the issue of copy, although in a much more pointed, technical way, is the catalog to your 1973 Everson show, which, when I saw it originally, I saw it as a photocopy, and I thought, oh, someone Xeroxed this very poorly. And then, Bruce corrected me and said, "No, the catalog was actually printed." Am I getting this right? The catalog was –

MR. HAINLEY: Printed to look like a Xerox copy.

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, it was a Xerox copy that I absolutely insisted had to be printed. I got into a lot, a lot, a lot of trouble about that.

MR. LOBEL: And you got into a lot of trouble?

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, because they wanted to photocopy it. I said, "No, no, you have to print this. You cannot" – oh it was a real feud, oh, man.

MR. LOBEL: And why were you so insistent?

MS. STURTEVANT: That should be obvious with a big brain like yours!

MR. LOBEL: The tape doesn't have a brain. [They laugh.]

MS. STURTEVANT: That's not – no, that's not – yeah, no, I'm not going to say why. Something about validity, Michael.

MR. LOBEL: But I did want to at least get this down. I mean, this is, for me, when Bruce told me that, there was something about that that totally sort of caught me, which is the thinking behind that and the insistence, and also the engagement. So now we've been talking a lot around all of your thinking about copy, resemblance, imitation, visibility, et cetera. And it's clear that your work for a while up until that point had been thinking around all of these issues. And now, you're engaging with that on a very technical level, within the kind of technical discourse around copies in society or at that time about what does a copy actually look like in certain ways, and then wanting that to be related to your work and related to –

MS. STURTEVANT: I can't say that. No, no, I was never trying to do the work so that it could be called other than copy, if that's what you're saying.

MR. LOBEL: No, no. I'm just saying that it was another way of thinking about this discourse around copy.

MS. STURTEVANT: Copy? What was another way?

MR. LOBEL: Making the catalog like –

MR. HAINLEY: Printing it rather than allowing it –

MS. STURTEVANT: No, no, no, because I don't think trying – no, I don't think that was based on copy at all. This is because this was based on the dynamics of repetition, which is nothing to do with copy. And so, repetition is – you have to – repetition is displacement; repetition is difference; repetition is – what else is repetition? Repetition is pushing the limits of resemblance and limitation – repetition is – it has some other factors or dynamics. So it's not like – it's not like saying you repeat. See, the interesting thing is, for instance, Andy Warhol repeated, but he did not do repetition. And his brilliance really lies in the fact that he was – because repeat is surface. You're just talking about the surface. He managed to take repeat and make it into a very, very dynamic thing. So I mean, for me, that's where his brilliance lies. But repetition has nothing to do with repeating. So I think that's a basic premise that people do not –

But I'd like to get off this copy nonsense, if we could, because for me, that's really a finished subject. And I don't care whether they think it's copy or not. You know, we're moving ahead anyhow.

MR. HAINLEY: Can I ask you about – and maybe this – since we are at the Everson show, I can ask about that. In terms of the title for that show, it's *Studies for Warhol's Marylins, Duchamps, et cetera*. And I wonder at that time and in terms of definitions and vocabulary, there is a lot of contradictory meaning in terms of time combined in the phrase *Study for*. It's both something that could come before and that also comes after. And I wonder, it seems to be at that moment, especially for that show, a way of allowing people to enter into the thinking that goes on. But that also seems to drop away. And I wonder if you could talk about that.

MS. STURTEVANT: I doubt it. [Laughs.]

MR. HAINLEY: Okay, all right, fine.

MS. STURTEVANT: No, but it's – first, the minute that you have a study, it should in some ways open the mind. It gives you permission to be at ease. You're not saying this is something you have to – blah, blah, blah, blah. Then, because it was the Warhol *Marylins*, the three films, *Warhol Empire*, the Beuys *Various Actions*, and the *Duchamp Nude Descending the Staircase*, and the third room was the *Duchamp 1200 Coal Bags*. So that was the total show. So that has a very huge intensity, because that really did. I mean, they were all – the threads were just all in a place. So you want to clip it a little bit; so then, saying "Studies for Warhol, Beuys, Duchamp," is very nice. And then, did I put Etc.? No, yeah. So yeah, that show was – of course, nobody saw the show. But that's okay.

MR. LOBEL: Do you remember how that show came about?

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, Jim Harithas was a very big supporter of the work, very big. And actually that was very brave of him at the time, because that work was still not... So that was very brave of him to do that. Practically no one came. And this is when I decided to pull back and wait until, you know, my famous quote. "You had trouble doing that. You had trouble doing that? Well, until the mental retards catch up, I'm taking my head and getting out of here." [They laugh.]

MR. HAINLEY: That's a good place to end for the day.

[END MD 03.]

MR. HAINLEY: This is Bruce Hainley.

MR. LOBEL: And Michael Lobel.

MR. HAINLEY: At the Archives of American Art, the New York City offices of the Smithsonian Institution, interviewing Sturtevant. It is Thursday, July 26, and this is disc number three on day two.

MR. LOBEL: Disc number three – or is it actually four?

MR. HAINLEY: Four, it's disc number four, yes. Day two.

MR. LOBEL: On day two. Okay. So –

MS. STURTEVANT: Okay.

MR. LOBEL: – we're back for a second day, probably just a short session, to touch on some things that we may have overlooked or may want to –

MS. STURTEVANT: Didn't get to.

MR. LOBEL: Or we didn't get to yesterday. One of the things that we did sort of mention a little bit, but I wanted to return to a little bit, we touched on various points about your work in relation to Europe and America and reception in both those places, and we talked about from both more recently the MMK show and then, less recently, Galerie J, where you call your show *America, America*, so this is kind of an issue. And I sort of just wanted to get your sense of it because my sense is that, to a certain extent, your work has been more readily embraced and celebrated in Europe than in the United States, and I just wanted to know if you thought that was an accurate assessment, and if so, why you think that is.

MS. STURTEVANT: [Laughs.] It's more than accurate. [They laugh.] Seeing as I have nothing going in America, anything I would do in Europe would be beyond that, but of course, but it's very simple. It's quite simple. America has always been anti-intellectual, except for the East and West Coast, and now that's dimming, and France is intellectual. You find people that you can have discourse with, and so it's very simple. They understood the work, if not totally, they understood it, and so they gave me shows and were interested in discourse. Yeah. It's quite simple.

MR. HAINLEY: Was Paul – the Paul Maenz show [*Sturtevant: Werke aus 25 Jahren*] an important –

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, it was the trigger.

MR. HAINLEY: – electrical charge?

MS. STURTEVANT: It was the trigger, yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: Yeah?

MS. STURTEVANT: Absolutely. Paul really – that show he gave me in Cologne, really, it brought it up to the top and brought it into – so that it was a lot of polemics so yes, I owe that to Paul Maenz, very definitely.



MR. LOBEL: When was that?

MS. STURTEVANT: No idea. I have no idea.

MR. HAINLEY: Yeah. I want to say '89.

MS. STURTEVANT: That sounds right.

MR. HAINLEY: Eighty-seven, '89.

MS. STURTEVANT: Something like that.

MR. LOBEL: So it was in the late '80s.

MR. HAINLEY: It's in the late '80s.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah.

MR. LOBEL: And, I'm just curious to go back because I'm actually not that familiar with that show. What about it did you feel really sort of got things going, triggered things?

MS. STURTEVANT: The show. [Laughs.] I mean, you can't say specific – you're talking about which object? No.

MR. LOBEL: No, no, no, not which objects, but did you get a sense, then, that people were – that there was suddenly this really big interest in your –

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, but Paul Maenz was a master, you know, as a gallerist he was absolutely a master, so that, actually it was very funny, when I came back to New York, every once in awhile, people would say, "Well what would you consider an ideal dealer?" And I said, "Paul Maenz," and then as I listed all the things he – [laughs] – they start getting more and more uneasy. [They laugh.] You know, and like, oh, okay, that's enough. No, he's a superb dealer, so he knew how to take care of the press, and he was very prestigious also.

MR. LOBEL: And how did you get – how did, initially, you sort of get into the gallery?

MS. STURTEVANT: Because I wanted a show – I forget what my show was before that – because I think – I forget who got him for me or introduced my work to him, but I wouldn't show with anybody else. I said, "If it's Cologne, then the only person I'll show with is Paul Maenz." And so whoever did that for me, then, it worked, yeah. And he closed shortly after that, you know. He closed shortly after that, and he said, this work has totally reenergized me, because he really felt that at that time, art was getting –

MR. HAINLEY: And had he come to see the White Columns show, or did he know your work from the '70s? Because before the White Columns show, you would not have been in –

MS. STURTEVANT: No.

MR. HAINLEY: – had a show in Europe in many years.

MS. STURTEVANT: No, I think he – no, but he must have seen some of my work in Europe –

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: – some of my European shows, and then he came to New York and looked at the work in the storage.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: We pulled things out for him to look at.

MR. HAINLEY: Could we – I wanted to ask just a question about the White Columns show. I did not know, at least: it's credited that it was curated by Eugene Schwartz and Douglas Davis –

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes.

MR. HAINLEY: – and I wondered if you'd say a little bit about how you decided, since it really is the kind of full-scale return of you and your work onto the art scene. I mean, you had done the [Bob Nickas curated] *Production Re: Production*, and you'd done the group show, Elizabeth Ferrer's *Art of Appropriation* show, but that was it. The White Columns show was, you know, a big solo show.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes. It was the definitive statement. I don't remember how that happened. I think Gene Schwartz and Doug Davis decided I should have a show and approached Bill Arning, and *voilà*.

MR. HAINLEY: And did you know both of them from the '70s, Elaine?

MS. STURTEVANT: Who? Gene and –

MR. HAINLEY: Gene and, yeah, and –

MS. STURTEVANT: I can't – no, I don't think I knew Gene. When did I do the *Store*?

MR. HAINLEY: The *Store*, '67.

MS. STURTEVANT: Sixty-seven.

MR. LOBEL: Sixty-seven.

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, I knew Gene then.

MR. HAINLEY: Oh, you did. Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: Not very well – excuse me – that may have been when I met him.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: He came and he bought one piece.

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

MS. STURTEVANT: And he bought – actually, he bought the pie case.

MR. HAINLEY: Oh, wow. Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah.

MR. LOBEL: Going back to the question of reception in Europe versus America, let's not totally

exaggerate – in the past few years, there has been reception of your work in the States. There was the –

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, more than that, Michael. I really, basically, you know, when I give lectures, I don't talk about copy.

MR. LOBEL: Right.

MS. STURTEVANT: I mean, more than four or five years ago, it was about re-shoot and redo, and I don't talk about that anymore. All those are – I mean, you don't talk about double. Everything is really finished, and that's totally not interesting. I couldn't care less what they call it, frankly, as long as it works and as long as it's working in some area, but oh, yeah, the work is a totally different place, totally, because even people that don't understand it know that it has some power at some level.

MR. LOBEL: Right.

MS. STURTEVANT: Don't you think that's correct?

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

MS. STURTEVANT: Bruce? Yeah. I think so.

MR. LOBEL: And speaking of which, in speaking about this idea of people getting the work or how they get it, I'm a little mixed because on the one hand, I do want to raise the gender issue because I sort of feel like we should get it on tape. I know that you've talked about it a lot in the last few years – and, you know, I don't even feel like we necessarily need to raise it directly. One of the things that I'm curious about, though, is obviously you agreed to be in Connie Butler's *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* show, and you –

MS. STURTEVANT: I wonder who pushed that. [Laughs.]

MR. HAINLEY: I wonder.

MS. STURTEVANT: I wonder who pushed that.

MR. LOBEL: You made the decision, right? – [Sturtevant laughs] – to do that, so obviously you were – and that show contextualized your work within the framework of art made by women. So what I'm curious about, because this tape is a way for us to get things down, is if you do want to make a statement about that in general. But I'm also interested in a kind of corollary issue, which is how open you are; I'm very curious about how artists in general are open to interpretations of their work that weren't necessarily their own or the original so –

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, you mean, when it's put into slots.

MR. LOBEL: Yes.

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, firstly, I don't feel that, if you talk about shows about women artists, that's only a bad fault line because I don't see, if you start distinguishing, I mean, do they give a show called "Art by Men?" [Laughs.] I don't think so. So once you start –

MR. HAINLEY: That's just a given, isn't it?

MS. STURTEVANT: Huh? [Hainley laughs.] That's just a –

MR. HAINLEY: That's just a given.

MS. STURTEVANT: That's a given, see? So once you start talking about women artists, you're already putting a barrier. You're already creating – there's some closure in there that's not good. And it should be – let's see, all sorts of things are driving through my head here. For instance, one – yeah, and it's so implanted. People – I use the name “Sturtevant” because it's a strong name, okay? So people write about I use Sturtevant because I don't want them to know I'm female. This is totally, totally incorrect. I mean, firstly, I don't even think that way, okay? And so that's also a distortion.

So there are all these issues that come in and push, and in terms of the *WACK!* show, with the push and shove of several of my friends and Connie, I decided to be in the show, but then, what was chosen to be shown, because she wanted very much the [Eadweard] Muybridge, so all you need is me nude walking in front of paintings, and I'm – whoa, I'm really stuck into that category. So we compromised with the [1968 film *Duchamp*] *Nu descendant un escalier*, which I think works very well. And it isn't that – it isn't that I'm anti-feminist. It's just that it's a different take on how women should develop their sense of self and their strength and their courage, and it has nothing to do with opposition to men. Yeah. So that's very important for me.

MR. HAINLEY: Could I ask just one question, specifically, about that piece? When did you decide, because that piece first, you screen it at an evening called the Spring Gallery in 1968 at Bert Stern's studio, and a Rauschenberg piece, an adaptation of *Linoleum*, opens it, and then there's, I think, a Simone Whitman piece before that –

MS. STURTEVANT: And where is this show?

MR. HAINLEY: It's part of an evening of performances –

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh.

MR. HAINLEY: – at Bert Stern's.

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh.

MR. HAINLEY: And then after the intermission, you show the film and you play a recorded piano music with the pianist Lorin Hollander, and at that point it's called *Hans Richter's Duchamp segment of "Dreams Money Can Buy"*.

MS. STURTEVANT: Which it is.

MR. HAINLEY: Yes.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: But I'm interested in the decision to re-title that work.

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, I didn't really re-title it.

MR. HAINLEY: You didn't? Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: Because within the Hans Richter, it is called *Relâche* – I mean, it's called *Nu*

*Descendant un Escalier.*

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: So it's whether you want the total frame or inside the frame.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: So it's the, seeing as I'm doing the Duchamp, it's better to call it. I don't know. Anyhow, I really hate talking about all these old things because it's so, I mean, it's okay, but let me –

MR. HAINLEY: No, no, no, but it's – that piece, I mean, I would say, for many people in America, certainly for people in Los Angeles, that's the first time they're encountering your piece, so for them, it's not an old piece.

MS. STURTEVANT: No, no.

MR. HAINLEY: It's a brand new piece.

MS. STURTEVANT: No, no. Yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: And that's the only reason. I don't want to dwell on it. I just – I'm just –

MS. STURTEVANT: But isn't that incredible?

MR. HAINLEY: Yes, yes.

MS. STURTEVANT: That piece was done in 1967 or – yeah, '67 – and it's 2007 – [laughs] – and it's the first time they saw it.

MR. LOBEL: But that sort of gets back to the question I was asking you, which art historians call reception, right? And this idea that – and I'm actually very curious about this because I feel like there's a kind of tension between what people like Bruce and I do and what artists do, which is, you make work and it goes out into the world, and it can have uses –

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

MR. LOBEL: That you could never have imagined.

MS. STURTEVANT: No, that have – yes, absolutely, and that, of course, that's part of what makes it very vibrant, that it can take on different interpretations. Yeah.

MR. LOBEL: So on the one hand, you – we both know that you have some kind of hesitation about revisiting what you see as very old work, but on another level, do you see – is there a part of you, as an artist, who sees – has some interest in the uses and reuses of your work?

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes, of course. That's very important. But no, it's – my head is so, like, now, okay, that it's really a little painful to – I mean, it's very hard for me to think about it. It isn't that – because I know that's important for both of you, you know, in terms of – or anyone who's delving in a little bit, but it's almost painful, and it's like I can't get there, you know? It seems that, you know, because I'm so *now*, so.

MR. LOBEL: I think my experience is that's true of most artists.

MR. HAINLEY: Yes. Absolutely.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah? That they really don't like to?

MR. HAINLEY: No, it's always about what they're doing –

MS. STURTEVANT: Now.

MR. HAINLEY: – what they're doing right now, yeah.

MR. LOBEL: And I resonate with that because I don't really want to talk about what I wrote 10 years ago.

MS. STURTEVANT: Good. I don't want to read it either! [They laugh.] Although we could talk about Bruce's "Erase and Rewind." Superb piece, absolutely superb. Very hard to surpass that in terms of total understanding, taking the work as a whole and bringing it down, and yeah. Beautiful piece, Bruce.

MR. LOBEL: And that piece came out in *Frieze* –

MR. HAINLEY: In *Frieze* in 2000, I think.

MS. STURTEVANT: 2000. I was at Harvard then.

MR. HAINLEY: Yeah.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah.

MR. LOBEL: And it seems to me like that was an important moment where –

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, that started to break – this funny article you gave me with this funny guy – [laughs] – did you get a chance to read –

MR. HAINLEY: I have not, no. I have not had a chance to read it yet.

MR. LOBEL: It's this piece by Kevin Killian.

MR. HAINLEY: Yeah.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah. It's going in and out of my head like that – [Hainley laughs.]

MR. LOBEL: That's okay. I mean, I know you wanted to talk a little bit about psychology.

MS. STURTEVANT: About who? About what? [They laugh.]

MR. HAINLEY: Well, I'm interested – I want to talk about – just a question. In the *Art of Appropriation* catalog where you showed *Happy Tears* and –

MS. STURTEVANT: *Gold Marilyn*.

MR. HAINLEY: The *20 Marylins*, yeah.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: It says that you got an M.A. in 1975, and I wondered what that was.

MS. STURTEVANT: What the M.A. was?

MR. HAINLEY: Yeah.

MS. STURTEVANT: I'm not going to tell you.

MR. HAINLEY: What if I know? Can I ask about it?

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, you can call Columbia [University].

MR. HAINLEY: I did.

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, you did? [They laugh.] Little brat!

MR. HAINLEY: But I wonder about, I mean, they said that it was – you got your Master's in psychology.

MS. STURTEVANT: No, it was in child development, which was language.

MR. HAINLEY: Ah.

MS. STURTEVANT: So it was probably in the –

MR. HAINLEY: Psychology department.

MS. STURTEVANT: – Psychology department, but it was language. I was very much into language, and there was one psychoanalyst who had done computer content analysis, which was this attempt to always, by analysis, psychoanalysis, to make it scientific. Basically you could run the session through a software program that was about words, and what words came out as predominant, could give you a very good idea what the session was about.

So, and then – yeah, so it was about language, basically. I was very interested in that. So, for instance, if you – which now I am so blah, blah, blah like everyone else – if you listen very carefully to people, you can tell what their immediate concerns are, what is disturbing them at the moment, and so on and so on. So at that time, when I was very much into it and certain people who knew I was doing that would say, “I'm not going to talk to you, Sturtevant – [laughs] – I don't want you to know what I'm” – so it's, yeah, it's very dynamic. Yeah.

MR. LOBEL: Do you think that those studies made their way into your thinking about art at all?

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, if you're talking about language then I'm talking about thinking, and thinking is language, it's the double of language, so writing and talking, so yes, of course. Yeah, yeah, because it's all interior. It's all interior, and that's very crucial, too, if you're trying to – if you're trying to trigger thinking, you have to know, theoretically, you have to know a lot about thinking and you have to know a lot about language. Yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: And was that, I mean, just in terms of curiosity, was that [D. W.] Winnicott? Was that Melanie Klein? Was it either one or both of those?

MS. STURTEVANT: Melanie Klein was, of course, very important.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah. Yeah. She was, and what's his name? The Swiss name.

MR. LOBEL: Not [Jean] Piaget.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, Piaget. All those people were very crucial, but that was a base to really come out of to try to understand language.

MR. HAINLEY: And were you, at that time, it would have been the early reception of [Jacques] Lacan. Were you interested in that at all?

MS. STURTEVANT: I didn't like Lacan so much.

MR. HAINLEY: You didn't? Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: I didn't know that much – it was one of those things, it's like, my husband would say, well, we're going to have – let's try this for dinner, and I'd say, no I don't like it, and he says, have you ever eaten it? And I said, "No." [They laugh.] So it's a little bit like that.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay. Okay. But that makes it very interesting because last night you were talking about, you had – I think it was last night – you had picked up this conversation between Foucault and [Noam] Chomsky –

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, yes.

MR. HAINLEY: – and you saw it, oh this will be interesting now, but it was a very old, it was like from '71 –

MS. STURTEVANT: Seventy-one.

MR. HAINLEY: – and you just said that, you know, very elegantly but that Chomsky is a language theorist, was he a part of your reading, then, too? Would you have –

MS. STURTEVANT: No. No, not at all.

MR. HAINLEY: No? Okay. Not at all.

MS. STURTEVANT: I've never been a fan of Chomsky. One of the incredible things, especially if you get it that close, where Chomsky is talking and Foucault is talking, American, [Richard] Rorty, all those guys, they're always saying, I think or this is my idea. When European thinkers, like Foucault, he's not saying, "I think," or "This is my," he's talking about the core, so you're not talking about what it is to you. You're talking about [what] you know. So it's – no, and Chomsky is, no, okay. It's very interesting to see the difference because Foucault is really into very broad, broad thinking, and America people are – philosophers – are very into very kind of tiny little areas, what I consider tiny.

MR. HAINLEY: Can – I have one question, then, about that, in terms of interest in language. I've never heard you talk about – because he's neither American nor, well, French – but you've never talked about Wittgenstein, but since you were interested in language at that point, was Wittgenstein ever a philosopher who really interested you?

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, I read him –



MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: – Of course, yeah, but he's totally mad, you know, and so if you – I think maybe it's, he's one of those people you have to be a fan –

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: – You know, because he's so complex. I'm sure he's very brilliant, but it doesn't trigger thinking –

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: – Or it doesn't trigger thinking from me, and that's a very big gap, okay, where as Foucault and Deleuze and some of those people, Nietzsche, they trigger thinking in you, you know, or engender. Yeah.

MR. LOBEL: Did you have – what I'm thinking about, just because Bruce cited Wittgenstein and then I think about Johns and his interest in Wittgenstein, did you feel like you had any sort of interlocutors among other artists who –

MS. STURTEVANT: Absolutely none, Michael, none whatsoever. None whatsoever. If you're talking about the early work, then that was – I think the best way to condense that is, there were no references, and if you don't have references, you cannot connect. And then later, now, it's really into – it's basically all about discourse and dialogue now, and so those people are not, and I don't think they should be, particularly, you know. Yeah.

MR. LOBEL: I have a very specific question, and it goes back to the past, but it's a question that I've always wondered about. It's just about one image which I've always been curious about, which is this – which is in your catalogue raisonné, the scale model for the *Objet-dard* –

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes.

MR. LOBEL: – and what it shows, I guess that's like sort of a photomontage or something –

MS. STURTEVANT: Mm-hmm, it is.

MR. LOBEL: – of the *Objet-dard* in some kind of –

MS. STURTEVANT: Seagram's Building.

MR. LOBEL: In the Seagram's Building.

MS. STURTEVANT: Lobby.

MR. LOBEL: In the Seagram's Building lobby, and I always was kind of curious about it because it doesn't seem to me that it relates to your work in ways that I'm familiar with and –

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, there you are. Now you have something unfamiliar. [They laugh.] You can think about it. Yes, and then there's the one outside of the Seagram's Building with the cars –

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

MS. STURTEVANT: Which is very beautiful, yeah. And then, that was in a show at the – oh, this is

good; this is bitch time.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: That was a show at John Gibson and he didn't return it to me, and then I said, "John, I want that" – this is years later – and he said, "Oh, it's all broken and everything." I said, "Great, would you give me the pieces please?" And then, not so long ago, I saw him, and I guess he's – at any rate, no, so because it was very beautiful. It was a scale model like this in white plaster. It was gorgeous.

MR. HAINLEY: Oh, it's a sculptural piece?

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes. It's a sculptural piece. It's about this big, a scale model of this in plaster, and it's so beautiful, and I guess it's gone.

MR. HAINLEY: So when did you show that, Elaine? I don't, I don't –

MS. STURTEVANT: At Gibson's. Oh, gosh, I'm so bad. I don't know.

MR. HAINLEY: But like, in the '80s or in the '70s or –

MS. STURTEVANT: I'm sorry, Bruce.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay. Okay, just wondering.

MS. STURTEVANT: I really don't know.

MR. HAINLEY: I had no idea. I always thought it was the photomontage.

MR. LOBEL: So then you –

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, no, no. It's a photomontage in that I took a photo of that object and then put it onto the photo.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay. Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: That's why it's a photomontage.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay. Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: And then, the one that's outside of the Seagram Building. I had to get a photographer because it's across from some men's club, and they would not let me in the men's club. So he had to go in and then go up to some floor and take the Seagram's Building from whatever perspective I wanted.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: But I really feel very badly about that because it was beautiful. It was so beautiful to look at, in white plaster. Whoa.

MR. HAINLEY: So – and that's –

MS. STURTEVANT: Coming out of space, you know.

MR. LOBEL: That's – so that's separate from the Duchamp *Objet-dard* –

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes.

MR. LOBEL: – which is, which was in sculpmetal.

MS. STURTEVANT: This is – no, I don't think so. It's not sculpmetal. Yes, this is the correct size. This is the size of the original of the source.

MR. LOBEL: Oh, so the plaster version –

MS. STURTEVANT: The plaster is –

MR. HAINLEY: It was larger.

MS. STURTEVANT: I scaled it up.

MR. LOBEL: Wow.

MS. STURTEVANT: So it's like this. It's just gorgeous. I used to have it on my dining room table on 50th Street in the brownstone. Whoa. Anyway, those things happen. I would like to have the pieces because I could put them together. Why don't you talk to John?

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah. Okay.

MR. HAINLEY: Well, I had a question, because we were – you left us hanging. There was a cliffhanger, and it goes to the past, and then we'll – but –

MS. STURTEVANT: That's good, that's good.

MR. HAINLEY: You said, now what's interesting, I think if I'm remembering, "What's interesting about the Yvonne Rainer piece is why I did it."

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes, not that I did it.

MR. HAINLEY: Yes. And I wondered if you'd say what you did.

MS. STURTEVANT: No, I think that's – I think that's enough. I think that's enough.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MR. LOBEL: Just for my clarification, so what is or was the Yvonne Rainer piece?

MS. STURTEVANT: I did a Yvonne Rainer dance, and I forget who else was at some program. Bruce probably knows.

MR. HAINLEY: No, I honestly don't.

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh.

MR. HAINLEY: That's why I'm – that's why I'm asking – I'm not being –

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: I'm not usually coy, so it's not a trait –

MS. STURTEVANT: That might be in my archives somewhere.

MR. LOBEL: And this was in the '60s?

MS. STURTEVANT: Michael, I'm very bad at dates. [Hainley laughs.] Really bad at dates. Sixties, '70s, '80s, '90s – no. I don't remember. I'm sorry.

MR. HAINLEY: Elaine, when you started to work in video, the first videos are mid-'90s? Or are they not until the 2000s?

MS. STURTEVANT: You're talking about after the film of Beuys and all those other ones?

MR. HAINLEY: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, after the *Warhol Empire* and all that. Had to be –

MR. HAINLEY: Because you were not making – when you started showing again in the '80s –

MS. STURTEVANT: I was not doing film.

MR. HAINLEY: – in the ['80s] – you were not – no.

MS. STURTEVANT: Absolutely not.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: No, absolutely not. That only – that came about because I really needed to – I really needed to – I needed the action, to talk about the articulation of visibilities, which we talked about yesterday, and then, yes, I really needed that film and all those wonderful elements you can use, like displacement, see, and that's very powerful.

So I really had to have the movement, and then you could use – I always started out with mostly two camera, so then you get – you can really work on – yes, I guess it must have been – I don't really remember – it was – when was my – do we – oh, we did – do they do the video in this?

MR. HAINLEY: They do the videos at the end, maybe. Maybe, is the *Greening of America*, that's early, yes?

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes. That was one of the first, *Greening of America*, with the two cameras.

MR. LOBEL: What about *Ca Va Aller*?

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, my great *Ca Va Aller*. Should we play that again? [They laugh.]

MR. LOBEL: That was 1998.

MS. STURTEVANT: Okay, so that was probably one of – and the *Greening of America*? Do we have that?

MR. LOBEL: I'm not seeing it. I'm looking at the catalogue raisonné but I'm not seeing it. Oh, that's 2000.

MS. STURTEVANT: Okay, so I guess it was '98 when I started to work that way. Yeah. Mm-hmm. That's funny. *Greening of America* is 1998?

MR. LOBEL: No.

MR. HAINLEY: No, 2000.

MR. LOBEL: Two-thousand.

MS. STURTEVANT: And what's the other one?

MR. LOBEL: *Greening of America* is 2000, 2001.

MS. STURTEVANT: But I did another one. I think I did one earlier. There are two *Greening* –

MR. LOBEL: Well, *Ca Va Aller*.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, but there's *Greening* – and another *Greening of America*.

MR. LOBEL: *Copy without Origins, Self as Disappearance* is '99.

MS. STURTEVANT: Where's that other *Greening of America*? Oh, here it is. No, that is 2001. Okay. I won't give them the date because that is a different date. But anyway, it's somewhere around there, somewhere around there.

MR. HAINLEY: And just for clarification – I can't remember if you said this in the session yesterday, or whether again it was whether we were talking at dinner – and I may have gotten this completely wrong, but you just use the terms – I asked a question about video and you just said about displacement. And when you talked about your Thaddeaus Ropac show, where Paul McCartney writes the essay at the back. And it sounded as if they were photographs which you projected on the wall; they were not the photographs –

MS. STURTEVANT: What piece?

MR. HAINLEY: I guess the *Int./Ext. Visibilities* show.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes, the Ropac.

MR. HAINLEY: So they were not – because in the catalog it looks like they could have been photographs, but they were not.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes, they it's – it was – in order to avoid just “to see” as opposed to visibilities, all of those works were projected – photographs were projected with two projectors facing each other on the wall. You did not see the photographs.

MR. HAINLEY: You did not.

MS. STURTEVANT: You did not see the photographs, which of course did not make the gallery very happy because – [they laugh] – but it was very effective to have both of them full wall, okay, so they could have the *Coin de Chasteté* full wall – wow – and then they were facing each other. And

it's not – the room was probably as big as this.

MR. HAINLEY: So they had been – they – they were photographic works which you then turned into slides to project on the sides of the wall –

MS. STURTEVANT: On the two opposite walls.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay, because I have never understood that.

MS. STURTEVANT: And then I had on the back wall – okay, if you enter the back wall, and this is a projection and this wall and this wall. On the back wall, I had – who did I have? I had Superman upside down.

MR. HAINLEY: Batman, right?

MS. STURTEVANT: No, no, Superman, upside down, and it was called *Clone Raid* with all of these things coming down. So it's was a very nice installation.

MR. HAINLEY: And that is a painting on steel or aluminum?

MS. STURTEVANT: I just painted it on the wall.

MR. HAINLEY: On the wall, okay.

MR. LOBEL: Actually, I wanted to talk about something on the cover of that, and this, and which connects up with all of your work, which – I mean, it's something which I have thought about in your work a lot, from Muybridge, to *Dillinger Running*, to the most recent work, to *Rerun*, which is this repeated motif of forward motion. And yet oftentimes, you use formal devices or techniques like, for instance, putting the projector on a rotating platform that turns the forward motion into circular motion.

MS. STURTEVANT: Uh-huh, right. What about it? [Laughs.] Yes. What are you – I'm sorry, Michael, how are you asking me here? How that works or how that ties?

MR. LOBEL: Is that something you would want to talk about explicitly as a motif in your work? Because obviously you had a say in – we're looking at the two volumes of the catalogue raisonné – you had a say, I would assume, knowing you, in choosing the cover images.

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, well, that, that – yes, we did a lot of covers. I did a lot of covers, and Udo threw away lot of covers. [Laughs.] You know, it was getting a little endless. No, that was basically Udo's choice.

MR. LOBEL: Oh, that was Udo's choice, huh.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, that is basically Udo's choice. And then – see, this was first, so this basically – which is the – is the catalogue raisonné, or is the –

MR. LOBEL: No, this is the catalogue raisonné.

MS. STURTEVANT: Okay, so which did we – oh, so this first one, I was – this was done first. I did this basically, although I tell you, it seemed – when the thing we have – concept in design. So when Udo was in Paris many times, and we were talking about this before installing it. So I had gotten all of this stuff out, so he said, "Use that as a catalogue." So when we were doing the proofs, the only

thing he – he points to it, and it says “Concept and Design, Sturtevant.” So he points at it, and he said, “I just couldn’t bring myself to put your name in there.” [They laugh.]

So I really don’t – I really don’t know how to talk about that. I think the push and shove was really – was to make objects a subject of language, okay, which I talk about in this *Dark Threat of Absence*. So this is also where film would be so dynamic. Let’s see what – yes, so the non-action, which is camera two, is the time image, as in Deleuze, and then movement becomes slow – so that is – that is a whole big seminar, isn’t it.

So here, it talks about – so there are – I’m talking about the film – and this film was reduced from a two camera to one camera because I – guess talked that about yesterday because –

MR. HAINLEY: No, no.

MS. STURTEVANT: Because we had a technical problem, and I came back from – from New York or Cambridge. I think it was at Cambridge. And the technician at Ropac had done nothing about all of the techno.

MR. HAINLEY: Oh, the *Slice and Diced*, you did talk a little bit about that.

MS. STURTEVANT: We did.

MR. HAINLEY: Yeah, yeah.

MS. STURTEVANT: Okay. So but talking about repetition, so I’m talking because in this film, *Fragmented and Sliced*, there are ruptures and leaps, okay, very, very brutal kind of ruptures and leaps – tensions and intensities and strident repetitions that bring to full force the blatant exterior, the outside brutally dismissing the interior. Now, I know a lot of people are saying what is this interior, exterior. So firstly at a more, a deeper level, it’s about Foucault and Deleuze talking about sense of self, sort of like now, basically because you only have an exterior, you’re self-referential, and you are almost the same as the other, whereas, that is supposed to be your ability to have an interior.

Yeah, so that is how film and repetition and language all came together then at that time within the – by doing video. Like, I did one like – the earlier two-camera like *Terminator and Terminated*. It’s very strong. And then also then *Trilogy of Transgression*. So basically that is when it started to be really very forceful.

And you saw *Plato’s Dual Action of Same*.

MR. HAINLEY: I certainly did. I certainly did.

MS. STURTEVANT: Bruce and –

MR. HAINLEY: And Stuart [Comer].

MS. STURTEVANT: Stuart was saying, what is that? [Hainley laughs.] I said, well, I can really talk about it. And they said, you can.

MR. LOBEL: Wait, what film is this, or video?

MS. STURTEVANT: *Plato’s Dual Action of Same*.

MR. LOBEL: *Plato's Dual Action of Same.*

MS. STURTEVANT: Because it's Plato's dual action of idea, and I changed it to same, so I'm not talking about having, everything is becoming the same. Okay, it's no longer any differentiation.

MR. HAINLEY: I wanted to ask a question, though, because you're – we talked a little bit I think, I think on tape, about – maybe not – but about preparing a book of essays. And I wanted to know, that is something that has happened – a lot of your writing, at least your publishing or giving lectures or participating in conferences is a recent thing. There are no – there are not a lot of essays or statements – until Bill Arning's interview, there is really very little that you published.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes, yeah. Well, no, practically none of it has been published.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay, none of it.

MS. STURTEVANT: You know, but in terms of lectures, it's the same sort of –

MR. HAINLEY: But I wonder, what was the deciding factor? Was it – was it, say, the Magritte show [*Magritte* Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, Canada. 1996], and publishing, "Interior Visibilities," the essay, and that you were just tired of being asked the same questions, and it was the necessity of trying to explicate that yourself.

MS. STURTEVANT: Absolutely. Absolutely. Trying – yes, in a very rigorous way, giving the work its means of being understood, or what the dynamics are and the thinking. Yes, very much so.

MR. HAINLEY: Just out of curiosity, because I have the catalog for the show, but were you – what was your response when you were asked to be in the Magritte show?

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, that was so strange.

MR. HAINLEY: Yeah, well, that is why I'm asking.

MS. STURTEVANT: It was so strange. [Laughs.] Yes, that was incredible. Well, because that – let's see, that was that who was at [Centre] Pompidou [Paris].

MR. HAINLEY: Yeah, yeah.

MS. STURTEVANT: Do you remember his name?

MR. LOBEL: I don't remember his name.

MS. STURTEVANT: But anyway, so he said, I want you to be in this show, and so I assumed it had some logical frame of reference within his own mind. So I said, yeah, sure, that would be great. And then, did I write an essay for the catalogue?

MR. HAINLEY: That is where the "Interior Visibilities" first appears.

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, okay, so –

MR. HAINLEY: And you show [your] *Johns Light Bulbs*, at least that is what is reproduced in the catalog.

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, that must have been what I showed.



MR. HAINLEY: Okay. But it just seems – I have never – the joining of you to Magritte was a very odd one for me.

MS. STURTEVANT: [Laughs.] Someone says, well, how do you and [Joseph] Kosuth work in this show, and I said, “Beats me; I have no idea.” [They laugh.] And I still don’t know.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay, okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, yes, it was so funny. There you are, you know – [laughs] – and then it went somewhere else I think.

MR. HAINLEY: To Canada. I think it traveled to Canada.

MS. STURTEVANT: Canada. And so the space was very different, and it was very different – impossible to – I don’t even remember how we – oh, we did. That was right. That was a beautiful installation in that first – in the Beaux Arts in Canada. So what I did was I took – because it was a small room, okay, but a nice-proportioned room, and then you had people before and you had people after because they could walk into the room and they could walk out of the room. That changes in how the work is seen. So what I did is I put the four, five *socles* in the doorway, and put them close enough that you could walk – could not walk between them, but you could walk out of the room on either side of them.

And then, I had this incredible lighting that gave – which was not devised by me. It was something about the kind of lights they had, and the – I guess there was some daylight. I don’t know. But anyway, but turning them off and on and figuring out – I had a nice, a very nice kind of total color – you know, no color, but color. Yeah, that was very beautiful. Yeah, I had forgotten that. Yeah, that was quite nice, a very nice way to show those *Johns [Light Bulbs]*. But I have no idea why we were in that show. [Laughs.]

MR. HAINLEY: Okay, because you have always – I mean, people have often wanted to link you with Dada or Surrealism, and you’re always quite clear that they are not. And so the pairing of you and Magritte has always struck me as strange.

MS. STURTEVANT: But Magritte would never think of Magritte as Dada.

MR. HAINLEY: No.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, I believe so. But, yeah, no, it was very funny. And then I think on the catalogue cover, they say Magritte, and we’re not mentioned at all. I told poor Kosuth it was crazy. [They laugh.] Then I said, “Hey,” – it was actually doing this show – “Joseph, do you know they don’t have any slides in the press department of our work?” Whoa! [They laugh.] Yeah, it was fun. We had a good time there.

MS. STURTEVANT: [In progress] – just push it a little bit more, because that is interesting for me as well as whoever else might be in –

MR. LOBEL: Well, what do you want to push a little more?

MS. STURTEVANT: No, no, I think what we were doing was fine, yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: Well, I think – I mean, it is a question of – I’m struck – I have no interest in getting into names, but I have talked to you about – you know certain – there is a new – let’s just say a

new group of artists for whom I think appropriation – and we have made clear that is *not* what you're doing – is a lingua franca. All the young artists don't even think about it. It's constant; it's just what they do.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, production and use.

MR. HAINLEY: Yes, exactly.

MS. STURTEVANT: Production and consumption.

MR. HAINLEY: And this gets to the point, though, in that a lot of those artists they want to invoke a kind of high-'80s Appropriationism, and now because of your return, especially in Europe, you were seen as, for better or for worse, a predecessor to that. And yet, my problem with a lot of that work is I see no thinking about how I am supposed to look – or the work itself does not compel thinking; it seems to be sheerly – and that is what I find so interesting, is that you are asked to be – or have been – in dialogue with them, and there is really nothing to say.

And I wonder what you think about how –

MS. STURTEVANT: How that works?

MR. HAINLEY: Well, how that – how that doesn't work, I guess.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes.

MR. HAINLEY: But also what – how we – Michael and I are coming at this from a very particular angle of writers, but an art historian, and a critic. And I wonder how – the way it links up with your willingness and even, I think, great interest in participating in dialogue – how you see your work influencing or being used by younger artists, because that is a difficult question. They can't borrow a style. That is something that your work just gets rid of.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes.

MR. HAINLEY: And I wonder if there isn't something to be said about how you're doing a lot of writing; you're making yourself available for a lot of interviews, and how that plays into how a younger generation might see you and use your work.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, that is a good question, Bruce. That is a good question. I'm not sure – see, because if I have so many people that admire the work – and they are young.

MR. HAINLEY: Yes. And that is exciting to you.

MS. STURTEVANT: That is very exciting because you figure that you have contributed something to their thinking, but they are so – basically – most that I have talked to – are so embedded into this digital frame of reference, this digital black hole, that it is sort of like they are in a totally different place.

So, for instance, the good example is of people who do just – it's all about production. They just produce, produce, produce, which is the meaning of the work, which also had a ground back, as you know, at some point, but not so heavily. And then the use of the work is consumption. So if you – I think actually in Zurich, when I talk to some of these young people – okay, Beatrix Ruf wanted us to be, after my lecture, so I was certainly not going to be controversial with him. That's not interesting

for me.

So I talked about how they were extremely interesting and dynamic because they were a reflection of our cybernetic environment. They didn't really understand that. So – but in the same way, if you talk about shifting mental structures, they don't know – they are already in that shift; they did not see the shift; they do not know what the shift was before. So they are really – which I think we said before. It's not really – I'm not interested in saying they are good artists or bad artists. I talk about – and I don't talk about artists particularly; I talk about the phenomenon of what that is and how that is total – because you can get very depressed if you really start thinking about the art that is going out, right. Yeah. So – but it's interesting. I don't know how that works because I really have many, many admirers.

MR. HAINLEY: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. STURTEVANT: But who knows why, okay, because it's certainly – they are nowhere there; they do not understand how the work functions; they do not understand catalysts. And the big driving power of most new art today is a negative, which it has no energy. Isn't that right? Don't you agree? You got a show, there is no energy, absolutely no energy there. So I don't know – blah, blah, blah, Bruce.

MR. LOBEL: Well, it's interesting that Bruce asked you about younger artists, because I was thinking about an artist whom you just mentioned, Joseph Kosuth. And sometimes I think that – you know, because of Bianchini and Galerie J and what you started doing at first, and even Johns and Stella and that generation, that you got connected to that. But I often think that you are more closely connected, or at least there is a very strong connection between you, and, for lack of a better term, conceptual art, in this emphasis on language and thinking.

MS. STURTEVANT: I would totally disagree with that because of who I am. The way of – the presentation is different. And so because the – well, the base is so different. It is a totally different area of thought and thinking. And then, of course, at some point, you know, it was very interesting because I had to really go a little crazy to get the point across, I guess. At a lecture in Berlin, someone said, well, you are a conceptual artist, and they became very determined about it. And I said, are you talking about conceptualist thinking, or are you identifying as conceptual artist. And he said, yes, you are a conceptual artist. This is totally 100-percent wrong. I have nothing to do with conceptual artists.

Yeah, their emphasis on language is totally different, where they want to go is different. They never wanted to make objects. I mean, the premise was not to make objects, even though they made objects. So basically I said to this guy, I make tons and tons and tons of objects. [Laughs.] I cannot be conceptual. But it was – and then it would be written in many critiques that I was a conceptual artist, but not about thinking – they are talking about as a conceptual artist I don't know. These kind of confusions – I have no idea what kind of brain work is going on. [Laughs.] This has caused major confusion.

MR. LOBEL: Well, this is the point in some ways of this conversation, to engage you in talking about some of these terms and definitions. I mean, do you have any, Bruce, any further questions? I have a sort of wrap up question.

MR. HAINLEY: No. I mean, I think – I'm just trying – I'm just –

MR. LOBEL: Pause?

MR. HAINLEY: Let me pause just for a second maybe.

MR. HAINLEY: This is Bruce Hainley.

MR. LOBEL: And Michael Lobel.

MR. HAINLEY: Interviewing Sturtevant at the New York City offices of the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number five on Thursday, July 26, 2007 of day two of interviewing.

MR. LOBEL: Good. So Elaine, first of all, I want to say that I really appreciate your willingness to do this with us, and your being forthcoming.

MS. STURTEVANT: Thank you for taking the time to do it, both of you. It's quite incredible.

MR. LOBEL: You're very welcome.

MS. STURTEVANT: It shows a lot of thought on your part, yeah.

MR. LOBEL: And I'm realizing that we have been asking you a lot of questions over the course of the last few days. So two things: one, I'm just wondering if there is anything you want to say, you know, without being questioned on it, but if there is anything you want to add just on your own. And two, I'm kind of curious, what your – if you have any response to this experience of just, you know, being interviewed in this kind of a context.

MS. STURTEVANT: Hmm. Experience. Basically, you know, there really isn't – what is really on top of my head now is that I'm totally burned out, and so – so burned out that I don't know I'm burned out. And that makes a very big difference in how you think. I gave a lecture at the Whitney, and this is when – this is like right – I forget when it was, but certainly I was working on lots of things and shows, and dah-da-dah-da-dah.

And it was very – and having looked at the – because it was Chrissie Iles who interviewed me, and she has really very good questions. As you talk, she would ask questions that generated more answers and more – probing a bit more. So that was very impressive. But having looked at the – having looked at the interview, I realize I was not really there. I mean, I was not – there were many, many things I skipped, that I didn't go deep enough, that are really in my head, and I know, but that is about exhaustion, okay.

MR. LOBEL: So you read the – you were given a transcript of the interview.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes, yes. And so it seemed to me like it was good when we finished, but when I saw it, I could see it was – I was really skimming on a lot of things because I was too burned out to really delve into it. And then of course as a – knowing both of you, and having – Bruce, having read some beautiful things about my work, I realize the enormous amount of thought you have given to my work, and of course that is very, very – that is very special. You know, I mean, that is – that is very special. So I appreciate that deeply. That is really great because there aren't many people you can have kind of a dialogue with.

The part I don't like about it, which is okay because I know you're – it's loaded with information, and information is something that really freaks me out because I don't want to deal with it. I don't mean that I don't want to deal with the info. I think it's so disturbing to thinking in a totality. So thank you, guys.

MR. LOBEL: Thank you.

MR. HAINLEY: So I have question which actually goes to the information question just because I think in terms of this being an oral history, people might be surprised about what we have talked about and what we have not talked about. And I wonder if you could just – I mean, it's kind of strange to have this at the end, but if you could talk about the resistance of the information of biography, and how that I think becomes a stumbling block for people accessing the work. I think it – removing that, having that as an absence, reveals how often biography is used as a structure –

MS. STURTEVANT: Understanding.

MR. HAINLEY: – understanding a work rather than the work itself. And I just wondered if you could say something about that.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yeah, I would come in absolutely the other direction. And I think that because the work is so difficult, I think – I don't want any – I don't want – I think coming in, like, discussing details or talking about what I did or who I hung out with starts disturbing the rigor of the work, or is an excuse to not understand the work, all right. And I know that people – what do you do and where – blah, blah, blah, you know, and I do resist questions like that because basically I really want them to get into the work, not to – so then later, for instance, when – like, when people knew that I had been to Duchamp's house, to his house.

MR. LOBEL: To –

MS. STURTEVANT: To Marcel Duchamp's house.

MR. LOBEL: Oh, okay, okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: Twice, you know, very briefly. I really did not know him. And yet – so I never talked about that or knowing Johns or Rauschenberg because that is – then you are talking about that, you are not talking about the work. And also, then later on, when people would be very nice to me – okay, and this is much later – I always thought that because I was so wonderful that people were so nice to me – but they were nice to me because they want me to get them a gallery or they want me to do something for them. [They laugh.] And I said, "That is not because I'm wonderful?" Whoa! [They laugh.] No, it really was a little bit shocking. You know, oh, that is what they want. They want them to get in the gallery and so forth and so on.

So, yes, that is – and I think that is – like Hans Obrist in Basel says, "Well, what is your relationship with Andy," and I said, "You're asking me a personal question about Andy?" I couldn't believe it. Yeah. You know, so – and then of course a wonderful statement, which I did in our interview that it was in *Artforum* – the more you know about Andy, the less you have to – let's see. How did it go? The more you know about Andy, the less you have to know, but the more you have to see. And then you saw him all over the place.

But, yeah, it's about keeping the work very rigorous, or trying to – not give them a chance to sidetrack. But boy, they are very good at sidetracking. So that is – that seems legitimate, doesn't it? Coming in in a different way. Like that guy who was so turned off because I wouldn't sign an autograph book. And that is so Hollywood star.

I don't want to – you know. I just – and then to be photographed constantly, which is interesting because people – there are so many cameras now with the cell phones, and people are taking photographs of me all of the time. And you – ugly photographs and bad photographs and distorted

photographs – blah, blah, blah, blah, so you end up not looking like what you are. So like I said to somebody, I said, “Well, I’m sorry; I really – I don’t want – I want to keep what I look like what I look like.”

MR. HAINLEY: I have one more question just because we haven’t – we have talked about reading and psychology and reading and philosophy. But I did have one question because it comes early, but I know it might be published recently, but it was something you were doing in the 1970s. And I wondered about your relationship to the reading of [Jorge Luis] Borges and the Borges letter.

MS. STURTEVANT: Oh, great, yeah.

MR. HAINLEY: Because very few people talk about that, and I just thought it would be great to have that on record.

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, I did that when I was at Columbia, and it was a class in hermeneutics. And so I did that as my paper for the class. And of course, what I did is that in doing that – reading the *Don Quixote*, I was actually reading *Don Quixote* –

MR. HAINLEY: You were, okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: The pages that I used.

MR. HAINLEY: Okay, okay.

MS. STURTEVANT: So that was really a very – it was like a total embedment into that kind of thinking and so on and so on. And then of course – did you ever see the letter?

MR. HAINLEY: Yes, I have the letter.

MS. STURTEVANT: From the *New York Review of Books*.

MR. HAINLEY: So did you send it to Bob Silvers? Is that why he is replying to you?

MS. STURTEVANT: Well, I knew Bob Silvers.

MR. HAINLEY: Oh, you did, okay, okay. I didn’t –

MS. STURTEVANT: So then you said, that is really interesting. Why don’t you – I’m going to talk to Borges about that because Borges and his assistant used to come to New York every in a while. So Borges basically said, that is already interesting without giving into it.

MR. HAINLEY: [Laughs.]

MS. STURTEVANT: It’s great, yeah.

MR. LOBEL: Okay, good. Thank you.

MS. STURTEVANT: Okay, so we’re going to take our heads and get out of here now?

MR. HAINLEY: We’re out of here; we’re done.

MR. LOBEL: We are out of here.

MR. HAINLEY: We're done.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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