



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Anne Wilson,
2012 July 6-7

Funding for this interview was provided by the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America. Transcription of this oral history interview was made possible by a grant from the Smithsonian Women's Committee.

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Anne Wilson on July 6 and 7, 2012. The interview took place in the artist's studio in Evanston, Illinois, and was conducted by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Anne Wilson and Mija Riedel have reviewed the transcript. Their heavy corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Anne Wilson at the artist's studio in Evanston, Illinois, on July 6, 2012, for the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art. This is disc number one.

So, Anne, let's just take care of some of the early biographical information first. You were born in Detroit in 1949?

ANNE WILSON: I was.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And would you tell me your parents' names?

MS. WILSON: Gerald Wilson.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: And Nancy Gawthrop.

MS. RIEDEL: Nancy—sorry?

MS. WILSON: Nancy Gawthrop Wilson. G-A-W-T-H-R-O-P.

MS. RIEDEL: And what did they do?

MS. WILSON: My father was a vascular surgeon. And my mother had a family, raised the kids.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you have any siblings?

MS. WILSON: I have an older brother, Steven—I'm the middle kid—and a younger sister, Barbara.

MS. RIEDEL: What was your childhood like? Did you take time as a child to make art? Was art something that was valued in your home? Was it something that your parents talked about?

MS. WILSON: Well, my mother majored in art at Oberlin College.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: And although she didn't practice her art professionally, she always exposed us—those kids who were interested in art. The Detroit Institute of Arts is a wonderful museum. The Diego Rivera murals are there, and I remember many visits to the Detroit Institute of Arts, looking at art with my mom. So that was early exposure.

She would sit on the couch and we'd look at her art books from college. She loved talking about art. So I'm sure that was an important early influence.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. Were you engaged in drawing or painting or anything in elementary school?

MS. WILSON: Not particularly.

MS. RIEDEL: What were you engaged in as a kid? Was there anything that was particularly fascinating?

MS. WILSON: I liked sports, languages, writing. I think a pretty broad range. It wasn't until I was in high school that I became really engaged in art.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: I think I drew enough and so forth, but I wasn't like a grade-school-art kind of kid.

MS. RIEDEL: So what happened in high school to change that?

MS. WILSON: Well, I went from Detroit, Michigan—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: —to a Quaker boarding school called George School [Newtown, PA], which was very out of the sort of Midwestern, or let's say family-of-Wilson, culture.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: Going to boarding schools at all was not as much part of the protocol of the way—it was generally public schools. We lived outside of Detroit—the schools were fine. But this was a school my mother went to, and I was a kid that thought it sounded like a good idea. It was near my grandparents who lived outside of Philadelphia; I'd always gone back to the Philadelphia area, so it didn't seem so foreign.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: So I left home at—I forget what age that would be, but I spent the last three years of high school not living at home, and I never returned to live at home. I grew up much faster, I think, as a result.

It was coeducational. The Quakers, or Friends, are pacifists. In religion class we would do passive-resistance role-playing. It was the time of the Vietnam War, so it was a very political environment, particularly as imparted through the faculty, and particularly our religion teacher. I had never experienced anyone as outgoing—now I can think of him as being very progressive and liberal. I don't think I knew what those terms meant at the time I went to high school.

But we read *The Feminine Mystique* [Betty Friedan, 1963] in religion class and talked about women's issues and [... -AW] pacifism. I think those were the more important kinds of teaching through that Quaker boarding school than any kind of notion of prescription through religion. It was a much more provocative, open-discussion kind of environment.

MS. RIEDEL: So the religion seemed to focus almost on social issues.

MS. WILSON: That's right, it did. Or that's what I gained from it.

And, as well, at George School, there was a teacher named Robert Dodge, who was a painter, and he would invite us to his studio, and we would look at these large, sort of wall-sized paintings. He was ambitious and connected to New York, and I'm not sure in what ways he was commercially successful, but he was ambitious. And I loved the ambition and the scale of the painting, and that at the same time he was our teacher, he was very ambitious in his own practice. That was very meaningful to me.

MS. RIEDEL: What inspired you to head out from Detroit and go to George School?

MS. WILSON: It's because my mom went there, and other members of her family went there. Quakerism is in my mother's family. So it was familiar. I'd been to the area a lot. We'd go at the holiday times often just to live in my grandparents' home. I spent some time, periods of school years, going to school in that area. So it didn't seem particularly foreign.

I don't know why other than that. It seemed—my mother talked it up. It seemed like a really rich education, as indeed it was.

MS. RIEDEL: Had your brother gone there before you?

MS. WILSON: No, he didn't want to go.

MS. RIEDEL: He didn't want to go.

MS. WILSON: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. WILSON: And my sister didn't either.

I think the progressive nature of the school, as it turned out, was not exactly what my parents had in mind, and so I think they were perhaps in greater question about this—about boarding school for their youngest daughter.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds, from the limited amount that I've read about it, as if it was a radicalizing experience in some ways. Do you think that's true?

MS. WILSON: I think it was. But when you're at that age and you're taught things or you're asked to have rigorous, in-depth conversations about moral issues, ethical issues, political issues—that's part of school and you don't know anything else. I couldn't have said at that moment, that I was in this climate of a very progressive, liberal education. It's just what high school was for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: I look back on it and can see how important and affecting that kind of environment was for someone like [... me -AW].

MS. RIEDEL: Had you gone to Quaker meetings at home in Detroit?

MS. WILSON: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you have any kind of religious background as a child?

MS. WILSON: Oh, Protestant.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: We went to Baptist church. That's a long story. But I wasn't particularly connected to a religious belief structure, and am still not really. But I'm very connected to ethical living and questioning human relationships and how we relate to each other.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there any interest in fiber or textiles as a child?

MS. WILSON: Well, interestingly—well, I could say yes. My Grandmother Gawthrop, my mother's mother, was an incredible needleworker—made her own clothes and stitched and taught us how to knit. I don't know if that was particularly important for me being an artist. I took to handwork. The skill-based aspect of handwork, I took to.

I'm losing what we were thinking—the connection to fiber work. In high school Robert Dodge asked us to create sculptural forms, and I remember I was working with chicken wire and thread, and he was very complimentary about these dimensional structures I was making. I'm not even sure if I knew of the work of Eva Hesse then, although when I look back, I think I could have been influenced having seen her work at that time. But I'm not sure when I first saw it.

And I remember at a parents' weekend I was standing with my parents and Robert Dodge, and he told my parents that he thought I was really talented at art and that I might—they might consider art school. But he was talking to my parents and not me. In other words, he never told me he thought I was so talented in art. He told my parents. And that's sort of how I learned that he thought well of what I was doing—it turned out that I did apply to a number of schools, but I was particularly interested, having gone to a very small, private boarding school, in going to a very large university where there was a little more anonymity, wasn't so personalized, perhaps.

And so I applied to and decided to go to the University of Michigan School of Art in Ann Arbor [Stamps School of Art & Design].

MS. RIEDEL: And what was that experience like? It must have had pros and cons, because you didn't stay. You ended up moving to Cranbrook [Academy of Art].

MS. WILSON: Well, it was a particularly energetic, vital, and creative interdisciplinary moment in schools—a lot of political activism around the Vietnam War, a lot of intersections between art and music. And I had friends who crossed over both those spheres. There was a lot of questioning about the authority of academia, to the point where some teachers chose not really to teach, or their method of teaching was to ask the students, What do you want to do?

So there was a degree of freedom that, on the one hand, was provocative and interesting; on the other hand, I

wasn't sure why I needed to be in school at all.

MS. RIEDEL: I have one question—I want to jump back to George School for one minute because you've talked about being exposed there to Ghandi—Ghandi's teachings on spinning and weaving. The story has been documented, but is there anything in particular that we should say about that on this oral history? Because that seems like it was a pivotal moment.

MS. WILSON: Just the realization that a practice that's so foundational to material culture and to survival and to making a simple piece of cloth could be so profoundly political and mobilizing to a people and a culture at a point in history. And there's books written on the subject, so—but I think to be introduced to that at that time in my life, in high school, was profoundly affecting and memorable. I always remembered it.

MS. RIEDEL: And do you remember what about it was so profound? Was it that it was [with] commonplace, common materials that somebody had caused such extraordinary change? I'm just curious what about it was—

MS. WILSON: Well, that it was so available, that charkhas can be very, very small and can be carried—the whole apparatus for spinning can be so very small and transportable, so you didn't need to go someplace to do it. And it took a bit of skill, but not such an abundance that it would take so very long to learn to do it. And the fact that something that was so accessible to so many people across the hierarchies of class could be so affecting to [... -AW] economic empowerment—so the connection between accessibility with the tool and with the way of making that was so tremendously important to culture—the clothes we wear on our back—that could be [... used -AW] by so many people and have a political [... -AW] economic agency.

MS. RIEDEL: I've thought about your work in the continuum of fiber art, and it just seems that—I think of this experience in high school as being such an interesting one because it seems that it wasn't as much the textile or art, per se, but how it was being used and its political potential, its community potential. It seems like there was so much about that experience that wasn't about textiles exactly, but was about the way that textiles could be used, or the way that history of textiles—that offered opportunity, or a way in, for many of the things that were interesting to you.

MS. WILSON: That's true. And at the same time, a teacher like Robert Dodge, who had this ambition to be a painter of large paintings, and a kind of abstraction in sculpture that I was experiencing with thread, and those two directions—his work and my work at the time—weren't particularly grounded in the very topic we're discussing, which is more political agency through textile, but I think all those features were foundational to who I was as a young person at that time.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And that abstraction—I think that's a great point to make, that that was clear to you at that young age.

So, I pulled us away from Michigan. [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: We need to get back there. What inspired, then, the move from Michigan to Cranbrook?

MS. WILSON: So, I left the University of Michigan and—

MS. RIEDEL: After one year?

MS. WILSON: After two years. I had two years of art school, and at that time it was pretty much art foundations for two years. And I did have some good teachers.

MS. RIEDEL: And when was that from? Which were the years?

MS. WILSON: Like '67 to '69.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so you graduated high school in '67?

MS. WILSON: And I was at Ann Arbor from '67 to '69, and then I left Ann Arbor and floated for a bit. I went to Aspen, Colorado—worked in a gallery there for a while and lived.

I came back to Michigan and worked in the studio of Kathryn Edgerton. She was a production weaver. There was some introduction to technical use of fiber at the University of Michigan, but very little—but it interested me. It was my mom, actually, who knew of Kathryn Edgerton and suggested that might be a way to extend that kind of learning.

She was not an artist. She was an incredible technician. And I think my understanding of my own facility for

making in a technical, skill-based way became clear as I worked in her studio.

It wasn't about the world of ideas or cultural connections or political agencies. It was about using a linen warp at 40 ends per inch and knowing the intricacies structurally of summer and winter weave. It was a very rigorous, skill-based training. And I think she took to me and I took to her, and it was wonderful.

It was a matter of months that I would go to her studio every day. And it was through the portfolio that I had at the University of Michigan, which was essential drawing and painting, and the textile sample books—and they were sample books; I didn't actually make anything; they were all sample books—that I made with Kathryn Edgerton that I applied to Cranbrook Academy of Art for the last two years of my undergraduate study. Cranbrook at that time did consider undergraduates, but after I left—a couple years after I left, they made that unavailable.

So I felt very, very lucky that I was accepted to Cranbrook and that after a semester Gerhardt Knodel came to teach in the fiber area, and so I was in his first class.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MS. WILSON: It was an absolutely wonderful environment for me to thrive in.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. Would you describe that, the strengths of it?

MS. WILSON: Yes. Cranbrook is similar now to how it was then—departments organized around disciplines with one teacher, one artist in residence who lives on campus, and maybe 14 to 18 graduate students who work with that one professor or artist in residence. And I don't know how many students total—150, something like that—it's relatively small—on the grounds of the Cranbrook Academy of Art, the Cranbrook [Educational] Community, which includes a private boys' school, a private girls' school, a science museum, an art museum, a Greek theater, beautiful grounds to walk in. It's this very special environment outside of the city of Detroit.

So I sometimes liken that experience to—although I don't know what it's like going to a monastery, but there was something somewhat more—

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: —the opposite of Ann Arbor. It was the opposite of Ann Arbor. It was about total dedication to being there and learning, creative artistic learning within a small community in an environment that was relatively removed. There is lots to be said about why that removal is useful at a certain point in one's study and why it might also be limiting to one's learning because of—you're physically quite cut off.

But for me at that point in my study, I really flourished in that environment.

And Knodel came in with incredible optimism and energy. He would teach technical workshops as he saw them necessary. He loved textile art history and introduced us to histories of textiles that had not been part of my art history. Ann Arbor was very good at art history, and so I had a very good two years of art history at Ann Arbor at the University of Michigan, but Knodel brought in introductions to Indonesian ship cloths and lots of non-Western kinds of textile materials that were carriers of a cultural narrative.

So at that point, too, that kind of connection between the context of materials and how they reside within political and spiritual and conceptual positions, all simultaneously was definitely taught within the breadth of Knodel's teaching method.

There were no assignments really.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. WILSON: It was very self-directed. It was primarily—well, it was a graduate school.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: So I was an undergraduate student going to essentially graduate school. And as is often the case in life—when you're in an environment sometimes—perhaps a little beyond where you're at age-wise and in terms of your study, you kind of sink or swim, and I was able to swim in that environment and learn just so much from the other students that I was working with.

MS. RIEDEL: Anybody in particular that was significant?

MS. WILSON: Arturo Sandoval was there; Hiromi Oda, who now lives in Los Angeles; Barbara Wittenberg, who I

think moved to Florida. And I must say, I don't keep up as much with some of those friends from Cranbrook, although it was an absolutely memorable time and I learned from all of them.

I would say Knodel is clearly one of the most important mentors of my life. The kind of energy and enthusiasm and knowledge and inquisitiveness about art and life and the intersections were just infectious for so many of us.

MS. RIEDEL: And I would imagine the unlimited potential for what could be done in textile and fiber and its place in the world was expansive at that time.

MS. WILSON: Right. So, it was a time—I graduated from Cranbrook I think in '72—it's on my resume. But it was a time of the early Art Fabric movement—that's the [Jack Lenor] Larsen-[Mildred] Constantine term—there are lots of terms for this international movement of artists using cloth, pliable substrates, pliable linear fibrous materials of various kinds.

When I was at Cranbrook, Madgalena Abakanowicz from Poland came to visit. I remember sitting having lunch with her at a table of maybe six or seven other students.

We took a field trip to New York and visited Lenore Tawney, who I subsequently visited several times after that time as a student. And her commitment to her work, her collecting, the studios—this one particular studio at the time—and I can't think of the name of the street she lived on—but it spanned two city blocks, and the floor was painted white, and you took off your shoes when you entered. She was very gracious and gave us a wonderful tour of her collecting interests as well as her artwork. She had multiple chests with drawers filled with collections of things, much of which was used in her collages and sculpture, but like a whole section of quail eggs of different colors, other kinds of birds' eggs, little bones of animals.

So she had these collections, much of which came out of the natural world, some from her travels, of repeatable things in units that she would then draw from as inspiration, just visually, or use in her work.

But again, the commitment to living in such an environment, so dedicated to art and research, was profoundly affecting, I think to all of us visiting with Lenore Tawney.

And as well, the introduction to artists who were working at that time—[inaudible]—in Eastern Europe; Ritzi and Peter Jacobi, who I was the assistant to at Haystack [Mountain School of Crafts] the summer I graduated from Cranbrook; Olga de Amaral from Bogota, Colombia. And then other Americans—Sheila Hicks, who lives between France and the United States; Claire Zeisler; Ed Rossbach, who I learned more about after I moved to California.

But it was really an international movement at that moment that I was exposed to my last two years of undergraduate studies at Cranbrook. We were in the midst of this new development.

And I think it was, particularly, Abakanowicz making these large, pliable environments, two, three stories high, that could be rolled and folded and transported across the sea and reemerge in some large experiential installation that really pushed the properties of fiber as a very unique kind of material that had this great potential for scale—the thing with her work in particular is the scale—and connection to the body and issues around our own humanness, our own mortality, frailty, through the nature of the cloth itself.

At the same time as we were in the midst of this new movement developing, there was the work of Christo and Oldenburg and Rauschenberg and Robert Morris and Barry LeVa. I never was introduced to any of these artists as being separate from the artists in fiber, although art history wasn't quite seeing it that way. I think, as a young student, it was all coming to you. And it was being taught through Gerhardt and at Cranbrook and continued to be taught when I went to school in California.

Then, of course, the history of textiles that Gerhardt was so profoundly interested in—the way in which the textile was a carrier of a cultural narrative cross-culturally—was also something imparted by Knodel.

I feel like I'm repeating so many things here, but we'll—you can edit and—okay.

MS. RIEDEL: I don't have that sense at all, actually.

MS. WILSON: Okay. All right.

MS. RIEDEL: I think it's just extraordinary. You're the first person I've talked to—I think the only person I've talked to—that was a student, an undergraduate student, at the time when this just complete and explosive flowering of the textile field was happening.

MS. WILSON: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: And you were so young and just absorbing it, and everything was still ahead. It must have just—

MS. WILSON: Very lucky.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: I feel like Barbara Shawcroft might have done an installation, either when I was at Cranbrook or soon after—Barbara from the San Francisco Bay area. I think she still is there.

I could probably mention other names, because one thing about Cranbrook—although small, it would bring lots of international visitors that we were exposed to in very small groups, as well as lectures. But we had, the day following the lecture, small group discussions and critiques, and that was one of the great strengths of an environment like that, that kind of personal attention that was available to students in that environment.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. You also mentioned something—I'm trying to think—in conjunction to Lenore Tawney. You talked about her art and her research, and as I've been looking at your career and your work, it seems to me that research is such a fundamental cornerstone of your work.

MS. WILSON: I don't know if that term, "research," was used by Lenore—probably not, or it seems maybe a more contemporary academic term that artists are now using—your art and your research, your production and your research. But certainly she was an incredible researcher through her travel and her collecting.

There are a number of artists I feel that I visited at that time coming out of—or into—fiber in an expanded field of contemporary art who were interested in collecting. Certainly, Claire Zeisler was an amazing collector of art and artifacts, ethnographic and major, mainstream contemporary art. I know Rossbach collected a lot. So I think that was, in a way, part of their research.

MS. RIEDEL: And this was all your experience as an undergraduate, before you even went on to graduate school.

MS. WILSON: It was such a profound two years for me and such intense learning in so many ways. When I graduated, I thought maybe I'd go to graduate school, but I really wasn't locating a school that seemed—well, I just wasn't sure where to go after Cranbrook.

MS. RIEDEL: And no recommendations from Gerhardt Knodel?

MS. WILSON: Oh, well, yes, there were, but I just wasn't sure myself, having researched things, where to go, what made sense.

And so right after Cranbrook I went to Haystack for my first time—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: —and was the assistant to Ritzi and Peter Jacobi from Germany. And their work subsequently has toured—major retrospective exhibition toured throughout the United States through Mary Jane Jacob, who curated both the major Abakanowicz and Jacobi shows.

But to go to Haystack—not unlike Cranbrook in the sense of it being a small, living-together kind of community—and get to know them personally and their life as a couple and their shared life as artists was wonderful. They became friends, and I visited them in Germany subsequent to that time at Haystack.

But that was a fabulous thing to do right after Cranbrook, to go to Haystack. Francis Merritt was there, very much a force, and such an open mind. Such an amazing, open-minded person he was.

And I—just for a moment, a little tangent—but I have a particular fondness for that school, probably from that early moment forward. I've taught there and I've been on the board there. And I have the greatest respect for what Stu Kestenbaum has made happen there, the kind of intersection to other kinds of arts organizations in the state of Maine and the way he invests himself in lots of connections between Haystack and other communities. I feel it's an incredibly democratic, interesting place, and for those who are trained through academia and as a teacher within an academic institution, a wonderful kind of counterpoint, because you're working with artists who are trained and untrained, of multiple ages, where what they're doing is the center focus of their life, and those who are doing it as a hobby or a side interest, and people who love to talk and people who hate to talk.

And I guess the common bond there is a more skill-based, workshop environment, but of course, not entirely either. I know Stu always works to bring in, in addition to visual art practices that have a craft connection, dance and writing, literature. And so there are those intersections that are available at Haystack as well.

And it is one of the most beautiful places in the world. You've been there.

MS. RIEDEL: It is. It is extraordinary—[inaudible]—

MS. WILSON: Yes. And the architecture of Edward Larrabee Barnes—the thoughtfulness of how the architecture exists within a very fragile landscape and the architectural integrity of the place, as well as issues of repairing and sewage treatment and the kinds of just practical needs of continuing a place over a long term. I think they've been able to maintain the integrity of the architecture in a very sustainable way.

It was really an exciting—I have to stop talking about Haystack, but—

MS. RIEDEL: But it sounds like it was an interesting combination, too, of skill-based but very multicultural, multidisciplinary—a lot of breadth and depth.

MS. WILSON: And that session I was there was, I think, the international session, so—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Okay.

MS. WILSON: —and Haystack does that, will have sort of thematic sessions. It continues to.

I found it, as a location for my interests, not always a perfect fit as I matured as an artist and the kind of artist I've become. But I was there two summers ago, invited to be a speaker at a conference, and I couldn't wait to get back. So there's something about the pull of place and your own personal memories of experiences that can be very profound and moving to want to return to a place.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. I'll jump around a little bit, but since we've just been talking about George School and the University of Michigan and Cranbrook—we haven't gone to CCA [California College of the Arts, Oakland] yet, but we're talking about Haystack. You've been involved in a lot of different types of educational situations and institutions. Is there one that stands out as the most rewarding?

MS. WILSON: Where I am now.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. That's nice to be able to say.

MS. WILSON: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: That's great.

MS. WILSON: That's why I stay in Chicago.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay—[inaudible]—

MS. WILSON: We've been able—we: myself and my colleagues—to build a very progressive, thoughtful, collegial environment for growth through fiber, textiles, and an expanded field of contemporary art in a very interdisciplinary environment. And we together have been able to make that happen, and that's thrilling.

MS. RIEDEL: That is extraordinary and not that common. Yes. We will get into that in much greater depth.

So, how then did you end up at CCA?

MS. WILSON: So, I drove from Haystack.

MS. RIEDEL: You were in Haystack in '72, maybe? Something like that?

MS. WILSON: Yes, something like that.

Drove from Haystack across the country to San Rafael, California, at the invitation of some Cranbrook friends, some other graduates, who said, "Hey, we have a house in San Rafael and there's a bedroom here for you. We can set up your studio in the house, and maybe we can make the living room or dining room into a big studio or gallery. You want to come out?" So that sounded like the best idea.

So I drove across the country, ended up in San Rafael, and stayed there for—I'm not sure exactly how long, a year maybe.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: Then I moved to San Francisco for a year.

I always taught. When I moved into that house, it was a period of time—and I feel you could probably still do this, but I'm not sure—I put ads in the newspaper saying, "Off-loom weaving" or "Loom weaving for people who are interested in a small class environment." The place we lived was called 1212 Second Street, the address of the place. And so I would conduct classes.

I didn't have my graduate degree at that time, but I did apply to teach at the de Young Museum Art School. I'm not sure if the museum still has an art school. I started teaching there and then became the chair of their textile department, and they had a flotilla of looms—weaving looms—and other really nice facilities and studios. I kept working for the de Young Museum in various capacities for a number of years—through graduate school, actually.

So I moved into San Francisco and lived there for a year, and then eventually spent most of the '70s, the later '70s, in Berkeley—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: —on Adeline and Stuart, in a wonderful warehouse, with my boyfriend.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. [Laughs.]

Who was teaching at CCA at the time? Was Trude Guermonprez there?

MS. WILSON: Trude Guermonprez was there. She is the person I interviewed with.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: After a couple of years of moving from San Rafael to San Francisco and trying to get teaching jobs and sort of teacher-for-hire workshops—

MS. RIEDEL: And were you working yourself at the time—were you making work at the time?

MS. WILSON: I was always making work, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And what was the work like?

MS. WILSON: Oh, soft sculpture. I think that's what we called it then. Trying to market it, sell it, make it available, make it seen through any available means.

MS. RIEDEL: Were there any galleries that you were able to show in at the time?

MS. WILSON: No, no.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Not yet.

MS. WILSON: We sort of had our own gallery at this house.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: We tried the craft fair thing. That didn't work very well for me. But we tried to explore a lot of possibilities.

At one point—and I'm forgetting exactly when this was; I think it was out of grad school—I developed a small business with Marjorie Baer, who since went on and became a very successful jewelry designer. She and I had a small business making a kind of Japanese jacket. It proved to be very popular, but I realized it was a kind of business mind I wasn't well suited to. I didn't want to spend my time doing that kind of work, and she did. So she took off with that business that we had begun, and it developed into other things.

It was a time, as it is for so many artists when you leave school, graduate or undergraduate, of tremendous trying things out, experimenting with different avenues for how to make an income, what you're really interested in, what you're good at, how to apply your artistic talents. And so there's a lot of experimentation.

After two years, I felt I did want to return and get my graduate degree. I was seeing, because I loved teaching, that I would have more opportunities if I had a graduate degree.

I thought I wanted to go to UC Berkeley and work with Rossbach, but it was just at the moment—and I interviewed with Rossbach—he granted me an interview, but he was rather discouraging about the program at UC Berkeley. I think it was being cut back. He didn't see a future there for his program. And yet so many wonderful artists who I knew, like Lia Cook and Gyöngy Laky, had studied with him, and I'd heard so much about him.

But another wonderful program with a different kind of heritage and lineage in terms of faculty was what was then called California College of Arts and Crafts. I interviewed with Trude, and she knew of Cranbrook, was interested in my background and the kind of work I was making. And in any case—she was enthusiastic about

her program. And so I went there.

As I was studying there, Lia Cook came in towards the end. Lillian Elliot was an important teacher. Carole Beadle was an important teacher. I know Carole is still teaching and Lia is still teaching.

And I would say as important as the textile department was, the sculpture department and Bella Feldman were equally important. Bella was an active sculptor whose studio was in Oakland. And she was really interested in teaching classes in sculpture for women artists and embracing material methods that came out of textile but could be combined with her knowledge of steel and plastics and acrylics and large-scale material experimentations.

And so I feel the kind of interdisciplinary environment that CCAC afforded is very much a kind of model that I and my colleagues have brought to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

In addition to studio work at CCAC in sculpture and textile, there was also art history. I would say there were two influences—and I'm forgetting the name of my art history teacher. He came from New York, and he taught seminars in contemporary art and had us read Clement Greenberg and Barbara Rose—and these debates around modernist work and self-referential work.

On the other hand, there was the anthropologist art historian, Dr. Ruth Boyer, who, at the time I was in graduate school, taught two solid years of textile art history, which was both for graduates and undergraduates. It was a very academic look at textile production. She was more interested, I think, in non-Western, more ethnographic kinds of material than she was the history of European tapestry, for example, although that was covered to some degree.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: I believe her Ph.D. was in some area of Navajo weaving. So she came out of anthropology into art history, teaching art history. So it's that kind of leaning that was very affecting to me.

I still have notebooks—these thick notebooks of notes—from taking her classes. And although personally I lost connection with Dr. Boyer not that long after graduating, I know she continued on, and the school has continued to hire faculty who have that kind of knowledge base, that kind of specificity of a history of textiles within Western and non-Western parts of the world.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that your first in-depth exposure to non-Western textiles, or did that happen at Cranbrook too?

MS. WILSON: Well, it happened at Cranbrook with Knodel and his interests in collecting, what he brought to look at. It also, I think, was affected by just being in the San Francisco Bay area in the decade of the '70s. It was a crossroads for so much material that was coming from South America, Mexico, Asian countries. Even in the Berkeley flea markets there would be merchants and sellers of all kinds of materials from all over the world.

So I think where we saw things and how we were exposed to things was not just through school and academic classes like Dr. Boyer's. It was in the environment.

And then, as we talked about earlier a little bit, there was at that moment in Berkeley a Fiberworks School, which was developed predominantly from the students of Rossbach. And then Pacific Basin School of Textile Arts developed. The founders, [... -AW] Pat McGaw and Inger Jensen, [... -AW] were two M.F.A. grads from CCAC [... -AW].

Both schools had wonderful spaces and facilities and equipment. At Pacific Basin School—both Pat and Inger were weavers, so perhaps there was a greater amount of skill-based teaching at Pacific Basin. Both schools had galleries, lectures every night, and some aspect of contemporary and historical.

It was also a time of renewed interest in the way things were made in diverse [global -AW] cultures. [... -AW] Peru had the highest textile culture in the world. Peruvians developed every textile structure known to man except for like four or five.

And there was a strong connection with the textile research of Junius Bird, the archaeologist. I know Rossbach brought into his classes [a] tremendous amount of interest in anthropology and archaeology and intersections with the Berkeley Art Museum's collection and some of the other thinkers and researchers coming out of anthropology.

So for us artists, there was not only the visuality of this material and what it meant in terms of cultural context, which again positioned it in a very, I would say, Postmodern position in relationship to [the] self-referential art that Clement Greenberg was espousing at the time—right? The meaning of objects was very culturally aligned. That was a new, emerging idea that became much more understood and theorized in a slightly later period, but

it was debated through textiles at this time.

So, it was not only looking at textiles and understanding cultural context but also understanding how they were made. There was renewed interest in relatively obscure techniques of spinning and twists of yarn and kinds of fibers [... impacting -AW] what the thing looked like—sort of getting the inside of making processes. I think at both schools there was this fervor for bringing forward new information about how textiles could be made.

MS. RIEDEL: I think that sounds like the perfect word—"fervor"—because it just—

MS. WILSON: [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: You had school experience; you had Fiberworks; you had Pacific Basin; you had UC—

MS. WILSON: Kind of phenomenal.

MS. RIEDEL: —and then those, as you said, flea markets.

MS. WILSON: Yes, flea markets.

MS. RIEDEL: It was such a dynamic era for exploration of textiles on many levels.

MS. WILSON: You're so right. And often when you're in the midst of something, you don't know you're in the midst of it. It's just your life. I look back at that time in Berkeley in particular, and think that, really, the new video work and the new fiber work were the two hottest new emerging disciplines in the art scene. And although both fields have some connections in their newness, they move off in different directions, with different histories of origin between new technologies and old technologies and so forth.

But when I moved to Chicago, I thought that would certainly be here, too—

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: —that there would be this energy, and to have been hit with any kind of sense of marginalization or pulling into this kind of total women's-work world or European-model world was—it felt very limited and very unlike the world that I had been participating within.

MS. RIEDEL: I would think.

And just a little bit more—I'd like to talk a little bit more about Ruth Boyer because we—

MS. WILSON: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: —I think much has been documented about—[inaudible]—Rossbach, but I don't know that she is that familiar a part of the story. It would be nice to hear if there's anything in particular that she brought to the picture that was influential to you in any way.

MS. WILSON: Well, I think in part it was she had this broad knowledge of textile history and was able to impart it in a very academic, organized, thorough way. She was not only inspiring, she was a good lecturer; but it was the thoroughness of the way in which she organized and presented the material to the point where, when I graduated, I even imagined for a time an interest in going back to school in art history and focusing in the area of textile—I don't know exactly which part of it—in a more academic way. She gave me such a good baseline background for thinking about historical time periods and intersections between art of a time and the material culture aspect of textiles—what else was going on in the world: economic trade routes, when silk first appeared in one country and then appeared in another and why, and the economics between those countries.

So I think she had an anthropologist's kind of mind teaching art history or textile history.

But I would say it was the thoroughness, just the grounding she gave me in this breadth of world textile history that was so incredibly important.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds also as if historically she talked about the impact that textiles had on different parts of the world and how they were impacted by different parts of the world.

MS. WILSON: That's right.

MS. RIEDEL: So, very much grounded in history and in culture—

MS. WILSON: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —not just separate art objects at all, but very much a social art.

MS. WILSON: Social art object, which was, again, aligned with and was a counterpoint to some of the dominant ideologies in contemporary art at that time. But it aligned with this new, emerging field of textiles and our interests in those intersections to cultural and social histories, also gendered histories.

Another aspect of that period of time, of course, was the early women's movement, or movements, and I think often, when people think of that time period, they will quickly go to Womanhouse and Judy Chicago in Southern California. The role of women and women's work and the alignment to textiles was also being reasserted in new and different ways in Northern California at the same time.

MS. RIEDEL: What was happening at Fiberworks? We talked about Pacific Basin as being maybe a little bit more skill-based. I know [at] Fiberworks there were all sorts of interesting international people that came in for lectures and workshops. But I think that was founded maybe around '72, and went on for maybe 10 years or so. I know Gyöngy Laky founded that. But what was happening there? What was interesting there?

MS. WILSON: Well, all kinds of things were interesting. And again, there were lots of intersections and similar things going on. But I'll give you an example of a project that was exciting and continues to be relevant.

Emily DuBois was sort of living in the Fiberworks gallery. I don't know if she actually stayed overnight, but she sort of inhabited the gallery. And she was working between the structures, the mechanics, the ideologies, the theories between the player piano and the weaving [loom -AW] and would [... display -AW] different parts of machines and diagrams and proceed to open up the correspondences between systems. [DuBois in collaboration with Michael Elinson, *Woven Music* (1983)] The player piano roll was a [... -AW] physical notation that, when activated, gave rise to sound, and corresponded to the dobby loom and weave draft methods that guided or directed the visuality of a woven cloth.

And so there was this kind of open experimentation through the form of inhabiting a gallery, a kind of performance installation method, opening up these questions about correspondences between things.

And I feel that kind of project remains very current, very alive. Fiberworks was ahead of its time.

MS. RIEDEL: That was 40 years ago.

MS. WILSON: Yes.

More on that topic—the decade of the '70s—I knew a lot of young people coming out of architecture, some from UC Berkeley. Some really interesting projects involved textiles and architecture, pliable substrates, inflatables. Some of that was connected to interests in nontraditional living, sustainable-living practices, mobile living practices—the whole idea of being nomadic, right?

We knew a lot about geodesic domes and Buckminster Fuller, certainly Frei Otto and his pneumatic granaries and tensile structures and constructions. Some of this I was studying—I was doing some papers on textile architecture when I was in grad school—and it also intersected with the kind of ethnic histories of textiles, these newer, more progressive interests of young architects and artists.

That also is a sort of bubble from that period that has reemerged now. It kind of skipped the '80s a little bit and has reemerged now. There is an ever-present urgency around issues of sustainability and finding alternatives to buildings that are very problematic in terms of living a long time on the earth.

And so some of these pliable materials and transportable materials and time-limited materials—blow it up, take it down—tent-related kinds of transportable shelters—there's renewed interest in that now. That's a whole other topic.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. We will come full circle to that.

Would you ever qualify what you did as an apprenticeship?

MS. WILSON: I don't think so.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: The closest would be—

MS. RIEDEL: Not even Kathryn—with Kathryn—

MS. WILSON: —the closest, but I don't think we called it that. I just worked with her in her workshop.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

I wanted to talk a little bit, too, about the video work that was starting to happen at the same time and how you became interested in that as you were working on the textiles at the same time.

MS. WILSON: Well, my boyfriend at the time was a videographer.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: So I was just around it—he was doing some work with people at a place called the Optic Nerve. He knew the Ant Farm people.

I was very headstrong into the textile thing and he into video, but our worlds—obviously, because we lived together for many years—intersected. People were always over at our place. We lived in a big, open warehouse space on 2750 Adeline Street at Stuart in Berkeley. It's probably condos now, but it was this big, open warehouse space we heated with two wood heaters. It had skylights. That also is rather improper now, but at the time we just moved in, and it wasn't Chicago, and you could live in an unheated space.

I had three or four looms there, and I lived there before, during, and after graduate school.

So video was—video and video people were just part of my world.

MS. RIEDEL: And became part of your vocabulary too.

MS. WILSON: Later—much later.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: Yes, much later, and for different reasons than being connected to an early video movement really, but I knew a lot about it. I watched a lot of real-time videos.

MS. RIEDEL: So how did the shift come about to Chicago?

MS. WILSON: I was working at the de Young Museum Art School during and after graduate school. I was teaching workshops at Pacific Basin School of Textile Arts.

MS. RIEDEL: And you graduated from CCA in what year—'74, '76?

MS. WILSON: Seventy-six.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: Seventy-six. And then I came here in '79. So I had three years, I guess, out of graduate school working, as so many artists did then and do now—working five and six jobs, all of which were part-time.

[I did curate two exhibitions during those years for the de Young Museum Downtown Center. [... In spring 1979, I curated *A Weaver's Art: Selected Rug Traditions of the Middle East and China*, and in 1977 I curated *The Cover Story: An Exhibition of Ethnic Clothing Traditions*. -AW] To continue this kind of work, I considered returning to school for a Ph.D. in Art History, but studio work and teaching were more compelling. -AW]

It did not look like the educational system in California was looking up. As a matter of fact, in the late '70s, things were looking very poor in terms of growth in the arts and needing teachers, and yet I did at that point have a master's.

So I thought, Why don't I apply for a teaching job? I applied for the two that were available in the fiber area. One was in Fort Collins, Colorado, and the other was at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. The Chicago position was a visiting artist position for a year—full-time for a year—and it was a position that was an open-call interview kind of thing, but just for a year.

I thought at the time that I wanted to go to Colorado; I didn't want to come back to the Midwest. I'm from the Midwest. I loved being in the West and didn't think I would necessarily leave the San Francisco Bay area indefinitely, because it's the favorite place in my whole life where I've lived. I don't do this anymore, but for years would I get off the plane and feel like, Oh, I'm home.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: This is home now, but I just felt my soul was there. Something opened up and it was just an incredible period of time to live there. That said, it was really hard to make a living.

And so my boyfriend and I bought the classic broken-down, used station wagon, rented out our warehouse space for five years, thinking we'd go back—and he did. The car broke down over the mountains and overheated. It was just the classic getting yourself as kids across the country.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: And came to Chicago.

And then the one year here as a visiting artist opened to a full-time position. [... -AW] That was maybe a year or two after I first came that I applied and got that position, and then continued to stay.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

Before we move into teaching, let's talk a little bit about the work and how this was beginning to develop. Let's talk a little bit about the early work because I'm not as familiar with that, and I just want to make sure that we cover the work, say, from the early '80s. What ideas were informing the work, and what were you experimenting with?

MS. WILSON: Well, in graduate school, affected by all these things I've been talking about, I was working with this grid structure of a net, a knotted net that makes a grid, a materialized grid, and the way in which that intersected with a material history as basic as a fish net, and those histories of structures, and this minimalist grid which was forever debated and discussed in art school—this notion of materializing the grid with a line that was wire or plaster or any number of other tightly or loosely twisted spun filaments felt like a really meaningful thesis to take on.

And so some of those early works were these gridded layers that formed into sort of "2 ½-D" structures up on the wall. Some of them were free-hanging.

One of them from that period was, interestingly, purchased by a collector in Detroit and later given to the Cranbrook Art Museum. It was a very old work and needed some refurbishing, and was presented in relationship—because they were doing these pairings of artists that had graduated from the Academy, and other artists—with an Agnes Martin. So a very reduced Agnes Martin painting alongside my materialized grid of a light-gray-and-white wire that was connected to the wall with four posts that came out from the wall and held the net layers.

So that was very meaningful—and I think it is to many artists—when you've done something so early, and then somehow that work finds its way to a safe place. And then it's seen in a new light, in another art historical moment.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely, absolutely. So how long did the grid continue to inform the work?

MS. WILSON: That was through graduate school and into my time here. And then I just—when I came to teach in Chicago, they wanted an artist who knew weaving. And I was also interested in reasserting the griddedness of a woven structure at a time when many artists were moving away from the loom and working with what was then called "off-loom" structures that allowed for a much more free-form, organic kind of character to emerge in sculpture. I was interested in that as well, but with this sort of net-work structure and the grid theories; I was interested in what was possible by rethinking the grid work—which is what the loom most wants to do, to put threads at right angles.

Very related to the net work, I started using the loom again and was hired in Chicago in 1979 to develop the weaving area. I brought the first computer-assisted loom to the department and got Bell & Howell to give us a bunch of Atari computers—it was just sort of a toy computer—to teach drafting, because I had taken a workshop in Berkeley using the computer as a tool for the drafting method.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: I also was myself weaving, and that seemed really integral to who I was as a teacher, and the emerging connections between technologies, the emergence of the computer and working on the computer, and its connection, its zeros and ones, to weaving—woven structure.

MS. RIEDEL: So that was pointing to a very early intersection between the digital and the analog.

MS. WILSON: Yes—right, right. And then in our school, and many schools, there is now such an affinity, of course, between the computer and weaving—the digital—I know CCA now has a digital Jacquard loom; we're getting a second one. Really, really interested in the intersections between the newest technologies and the oldest technologies, yes. And a fabric is a wonderful matrix—

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. WILSON: —to extend both—the very old and the very new; the effect through the matrix of a woven structure.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, just that full circle with these computers, now, informing the weaving is so wonderful.

MS. WILSON: Yes—yes, yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Then how did hair become a material of interest?

MS. WILSON: There was a point in time when I was using the loom with threads and fibers that would extend from the structure—and even calling some of that woven work as it kept developing *Hair Fields* or *Urban Furs* [1988]—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: —and those are other periods of work—I was finding that as the work was intersecting more and more with interesting cultural issues, and certain kinds of political issues as well, that the loom was not the best tool. I've always been an artist who thinks in a very interdisciplinary way, where materials and processes are directed by the concept. Yet the textile has been, through all these years I've been working, a kind of central core of thinking and working because it exhibits so many characteristics that interest me both structurally, materially, and in the kind of social/political intersections.

So I wanted to create work that had a stronger connection with the human body, a more organic presence, perhaps—an intimacy, a greater degree of fragility in the use of a fiber or a filament.

Some of the first works I started making were with hair stitched into cloth. My mom was divesting the family household of lots of white linen cloth at that time, and this white linen cloth was very coded, formal, and brought with it a high degree of propriety and formality—proper social relations, particularly within the family, within my family. And it's what it continues to mean in formal restaurants—you still have white cloth, particularly the starched white cloth, that is the more pristine, more formal table covering. And the thing you would least want to see on that would be a hole, a stain, or a strand of human hair, right?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, right.

MS. WILSON: You would want to get rid of that because the hair, particularly detached from the body, represents dirt or waste or that which is unwanted—death, mortality. It represents lots of things that are very, aesthetically, of opposing sensibilities to the white cloth.

So as I was looking for forms that had a higher degree of fragility and connection with the human body—and my mother was giving me these cloths—I started ripping the holes out of these linen cloths. And sometimes the holes were there, ready to be mended; sometimes they were put away, never mended—but some of them were darned. And I started stitching around the hole with human hair. It was a drawing project. I developed this term: "materialized drawing," or "physical drawing."

I'm looking up there because there's a photograph up there of one of the first pieces. I call this the "dictionary piece," from which a lot of later work develops. So these are these little—

MS. RIEDEL: Ah, sort of a vocabulary of hair—[inaudible]—yes.

MS. WILSON: Yes, yes. It's what—I got—it's also—

MS. RIEDEL: —a sampler, almost, yes?

MS. WILSON: Yes, it's like a sampler of individual little pieces that are torn out and then stitched around. So they become orifices—maybe very directly erotic or sexualized, possibly, or fetishistic, sometimes. The bit of hair, the small amount—or just a lock of hair, sometimes, in the mix of this vocabulary.

So—that particular work, *Hair Work* [1991–93], was one of the earliest works that I did with human hair, in this sort of new direction of this connection to the body, this greater fragility.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was the scale of this?

MS. WILSON: That's about—that piece is about six feet by five feet.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: So it's a big work.

MS. RIEDEL: It's funny, because it almost has a quilt-like feeling to it as well.

MS. WILSON: Yes—or I call it the "bug box," too.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: If you go to the Field Museum [of Natural History, Chicago], you see specimens arranged, be they beetles or butterfly wings, often in that kind of gridded collection.

MS. RIEDEL: Does this piece feel to you like one of the earliest ones that was very successful at establishing juxtaposition as a very powerful element in the work? It's just that contrast between that fine, starched linen and that hair feels—

MS. WILSON: I think [... -AW]—yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Or if there's something earlier, maybe—[inaudible].

MS. WILSON: No, not earlier, but I think as the work developed—I can find these pictures really quickly—I think that sensibility is perhaps exhibited even more in works like these, the *Grafts* works, where there's a whole white, starched table linen, and the holes have been cut out over the stains that were still part of that linen, and then other holes were stitched around with hair and thread and grafted back into the cloth.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: —because perhaps the tension between a larger expansive cloth, as a whole, and not torn—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it's true.

MS. WILSON: With that kind of awkwardness of the drawn line, with the hair.

MS. RIEDEL: And we're looking at *Grafts [no. 1 and Grafts no. 2]*, from 1993.

MS. WILSON: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, that's helpful, thanks.

MS. WILSON: Yep.

MS. RIEDEL: Something about this must have really resonated with you because this became—not only it became part of your physical vocabulary of materials, but this is something that became long, ongoing projects that have run on now for over a decade, this investigation of linen and hair, and those being the materials that have become the basis for many of the explorations that you've done since.

MS. WILSON: It's true. And also it's the case often with work—I think many artists experience this—where you start working in a material, and you don't know of other artists working in that material or in that way. And then, lo and behold, there are these exhibitions that emerge, because astute curators are looking at what artists are doing, and traveling to different cities and seeing a lot of artists' studios, and the exhibitions start emerging. One of the earlier shows was by Alison Ferris, curator of the Kohler Arts Center [Sheboygan, WI], who curated an exhibition called *Hair* [1992].

And so there were a number of artists—Lorna Simpson, Jeanne Dunning, Andres Serrano—who were using hair because of its direct connection with the body. There were new interests in issues around the body that many artists were feeling in work, even though at the time I started working this way, I was not so familiar with other artists working with human hair—but there certainly were. So that's a piece of mine, and that's—

MS. RIEDEL: This is *Curled and Bleached*, from '91.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Twenty-four by 19 by one.

MS. WILSON: Yes, that's a diptych. So those works were *Flayed and Shorn* [1991], *Curled and Bleached*. And they were always shown—each of those two panels were shown in relationship, one to the other.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, Okay.

MS. WILSON: So there was also that direction where it was just the hair material itself that wasn't stitched into a white cloth. I did a number of works related to this in that same period of time, and eventually the stitching emerged as more dominant. And I kept going with that for a longer period of time.

MS. RIEDEL: So this was primarily the late '80s and early '90s?

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

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: Well, and then the work into the late '90s, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: I had a show [at] Revolution Gallery [Detroit, 1998] [... -AW] where I had a piece called *A Chronicle of Days*—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: —that was from '97—98.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: A piece called *Lost* [1998], a piece called *Misplaced* [1998], and a piece called *Found* [1998]. And those were all large sculptural works. *Lost* is—I'll describe it—a white, painted wooden chair, very simple chair, with a huge tablecloth that has black hair filaments, stitched line by line in a graduation of lighter to a darker coverage across this cloth. And then going from one selvedge edge to another, sort of halfway through the cloth, buttonholes—hundreds of buttonholes were made and stitched, and a leather cord went through and cinched it. So it might relate to perhaps a garment or a cloak or a curtain, but it wasn't really anything other than a large cloth that had this graduated hair that was then draped over a chair.

So very connected to body, to loss and mourning. My father had died, and I think a lot of my work sustaining this process of stitching hair was personally related to a kind of—a mourning process. And I even made some works called *Mourning Cloths* [1992—93] that were the same time period.

A Chronicle of Days is somewhat different. It was a piece that I made—it was '97—98. It was a drawing project where I stitched a bit of hair into a piece of damask cloth—one mark could only take one day to make—and in that regard related to other conceptual process artists, like On Kawara, his famous date paintings.

And so the hundred stitched parts were framed—or "conserved," I call it—contained within the frame and moved across the wall like a calendar might, without numbers or text. I really loved making the project. I kept developing formal, inventive ways of using color and line with hair and thread, and it still captured, I think, those oppositional aesthetics of the messiness of hair and the history of table linen, through the domestic patterning.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, this is a long grid, here, which—the five by 20. Was this intended to always be displayed in this format, because—

MS. WILSON: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So this was not intended to be mobile and moved in relationship—one to the other—

MS. WILSON: No, no.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: That was always fixed, because it was relating to the chart of its time of making.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, okay.

MS. WILSON: So there was this chronology of left to right. And interestingly, in making a large work like that, it's not necessarily so commercially smart, because it's—[laughs]—a large work to sell all at once. I was really pleased when the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa, Japan, wanted it for an exhibition and then bought it. So it's in Japan.

MS. RIEDEL: Was this one of the first pieces that you think of as really having a lot to do with time and the documenting of time?

MS. WILSON: Well, perhaps most exclusively so, because it did have that conceptual structure of one

stitching/one day. But I would say other works that might have taken months to make—that work visually doesn't exhibit the chronological organization of *A Chronicle of Days*.

MS. RIEDEL: Anything that comes to mind?

MS. WILSON: Well, like *Lost or Found or Misplaced*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: *Misplaced* is a table with a big hump in the middle, over which is a linen cloth that's been completely covered in blond hair, stitched down to the cloth. So it's a sort of a golden-like mound. But that also—I think when you look at it closely, you see what it is. You see lines that are connected to the cloth in this very labor-intensive process. And I think when you stand back, you don't see that at all, which is this gestalt of blondness—

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: —which I love. I've always loved that about textile, that there's this near and far.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: And also when you're near, it can slow down because you actually see a structure. You see the mark of the thread going over, under. And you stand back, and what that mark might make could be something very fast-looking. I don't want to get into what I'm doing now, but this near and far, slow and fast really, really interests me.

I love being able to go close to something and then stand back, to the field, and look at the gestalt of it in a very different perceptual way.

MS. RIEDEL: And that really was developed through *Topologies* [2002—ongoing as of this interview], yes?

MS. WILSON: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you emerge even in *Feast* [2000]? Was *Feast* the first piece where you—

MS. WILSON: That was the first horizontal work. And interestingly, in the museum exhibition in 2000 at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago—a solo show called [*Anne Wilson:*] *Anatomy of Wear*—in that show was *A Chronicle of Days*, *Lost*, some of the *Grafts* work we've been speaking of, and the new project made for the museum, in its own gallery space, called *Feast*—

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. WILSON: —which was the first time I took a lot of these stitched holes and tears from domestic table [linen], and then stitched open—or edged—[with] human hair and thread, and put these fragments back on a horizontal surface—

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: —not referencing place settings or becoming a napkin again, but more an abstract topography that was maplike. And yet just presenting it horizontally changed the reading of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, absolutely. And that piece then seems—it was the springboard for the many versions of *Topologies* that came from that.

MS. WILSON: It was.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MS. WILSON: Although after that work, I stopped working with the materiality of white table linen and human hair.

MS. RIEDEL: Right—yes, and that's what —

MS. WILSON: —and wanted to continue working with found-object materials that had social/cultural context of some kind, and started experimenting with lace and lace fragments—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, Okay.

MS. WILSON: —and started collecting a lot of lace fragments. I was going to England a bit, and there's this market called Portobello Market in London. There were some Belgian and French lace dealers that come there, and they would have these bags of rejects, of incredible—some of it very old, handmade lace, but they were just scraps that would sell very cheaply.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: And so I started collecting, really, incredibly interesting fragments of handmade lace at markets such as that; also new-made lace from San Francisco's Chinatown. I remember once finding some commercially made lace—Belgian and French commercial lace, stocking mesh, hat netting. I started collecting these openwork structures, both hand- and commercially made, from all over the world, developing this sort of vocabulary of new materiality that I wanted to work with.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was exciting about that?

MS. WILSON: Well, lace is—talk about near and far—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: —has so much intricacy. It's the line itself that was wrapped or knotted or threaded through or twisted to create the textile structure. Incredibly aligned with histories of class and gender, with contexts of celebration as well as mourning, depending on the color and the location of it on a garment. Continues to be something that we think of as being erotic or sexual, particularly when it exposes skin and it stretches.

Some lace has that kind of alignment. Historically, it's [also -AW] aligned—particularly the handmade lace—with authority, class, and power, because it's hard to make, and you can make it very fine, with very expensive materials. It has many, many riches of appearances as well as cultural/social alignments. So as a material vocabulary, it just kept opening up.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MS. WILSON: Let me just say one other thing about it. I think in the works that I developed using lace—the *Topologies* work—it was less the cultural and social alignments that I privileged within the work, and more an improvisational drawing process of like kinds that organize this physical, or lace, drawing.

MS. RIEDEL: You say "like kinds." Could you elaborate on that?

MS. WILSON: Lace structures that had sort of regular intervals of griddedness or holes. Lace structures that were extremely curvilinear, where you could pull apart a structure into segments that had a related appearance. So that's what I mean by like kinds. You might pull from five or six different laces—because they're structurally made the same way—and pull a fragment from it, and it might be like others that are made that same way, because that way of making gives a certain gridded look, or a hole that has a certain oblong characteristic, or a wavy line, because of the way the threads have been twisted.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: So when I say "like kinds," it's more of a visual likeness based on structural characteristics of how the lace was made.

MS. RIEDEL: And the lace strikes me as such an extraordinarily complex material with which to begin. There's so much history; there's so much psychological information; there's so much conflicting information—

MS. WILSON: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: There's so much ambiguous information in that lace. And then to begin to construct these horizontal, macro/micro grounds where these things are all related, and at the same time quite different—

MS. WILSON: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: So fragmented—

MS. WILSON: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: The level of complexity in that work—I'm sort of losing the speech of this. [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: Yes. One thing that I find—as you look at your own capacity as an artist, I seem to have a tremendous capacity to take on large, slow-moving projects that are really complicated. I sometimes call myself

a long-distance runner, because I can maintain a certain engagement and sort of speed of working and commitment to a project, and that was certainly an example of that.

I first started making that work when I was on a sabbatical. And in the studio where we're sitting, there was about 18 feet of it. I had a big foam-core board that was propped up by sawhorses, and I just kept making this.

And then when I ran out of space in my downstairs studio—I have the same space upstairs—I just kept making it upstairs, without really knowing exactly what I was making it for or how it would in the end be—what kind of space it would be exhibited in, if it would be exactly this kind of configuration or not. But it was definitely totally absorbing—I was totally dedicated to this process of evolving this improvisational, physical drawing with lace.

And kind of an interesting anecdote, maybe, about the making of *Topologies* is at one point I was on a list of artists to be considered for the Whitney Biennial. Lawrence Rinder, the curator of the 2002 Whitney Biennial, was driving around to different cities, and came to Chicago and asked for a studio visit. He came into my studio at a point when I had nearly [... -AW] run out of space in my downstairs making this *Topologies* work, and was just starting upstairs. And he said, "I'm really interested in this work you're doing, and I'd love to see how it develops later in the summer; I'd like to come back." And I thought, Well, that's good news. And like many curators, he did not exhibit a tremendous enthusiasm. I didn't really know how he felt, actually, except he wanted to come back. So I thought that was a good sign.

So at the end of the summer he came back. And he saw me continually develop it, and we had a nice conversation. But I had absolutely no idea from those two visits, really, what he thought of the work other than something generally complimentary. And we had a very interesting, nice conversation. But I wasn't really sure what he thought about the work or where it might stand within his curatorial position, and perhaps he didn't know either at that exact moment.

Anyway, it wasn't until October, after that summer has passed, that I got a call from the then-director of the Whitney inviting me to be in the Biennial. And actually, before I got that call I got a call from Rinder—he was calling from a sidewalk in New York; I remember he said, "I've got to ask you something. You've said that this piece has a lot of mobility in terms of its scale, dependent upon the site it's in. In that now you've built it much past the 18 feet that I had seen, what would you feel if you were invited to show at like 17 or 18 feet?" And I said I thought that was very doable—and was a large enough section of this concept to exhibit incredible variation within the relationships—so the fragments and—anyway, we had a good talk.

But that was perhaps an indicator that he was favoring the work. And then later—I don't know how soon after his call—the director of the museum called and asked me to be in that show—which is kind of like a dream for so many artists, a piece I wasn't making for anyone or any institution; I didn't know where it was going to go. It was really coming out of the kind of reading and research and theorizing and playful improvisation that was all sort of blended in the evolution of this work that I was totally engaged in. And then to have the opportunity to show it—it's such a major venue—was quite thrilling.

MS. RIEDEL: It makes me think of the word "research" and how I think of that as being so fundamental to your work. And actually, as I was preparing for this talk, it made me think of a quote from—[inaudible]—papers. And so I brought that—

MS. WILSON: [Inaudible.]

MS. RIEDEL: —because I just thought it would be interesting to mention here. And he—[inaudible]—is talking about Bob Irwin, and talking so eloquently about art-making as a means for acquiring new knowledge. And then he—I think—I don't know if this was before or after—[inaudible]—was at the NEA, but he's talking then about Ed Levine, professor at MIT, who was into how science and art are complementary and gain complementary insights from research. And he said, "I think if we can justify federal funds on scientific research, well then, you can justify supporting aesthetic research."

MS. WILSON: Is this when he was at the NEA?

MS. RIEDEL: It must have been right around the time.

MS. WILSON: Yes, right.

MS. RIEDEL: But it just makes me think that this is—*Topologies* is such a great example of that description of art as a research project, where you weren't necessarily even sure exactly where it was going, but you were engaged with a lot of research at the time. And this seems almost an outcome of working while researching, of opening your mind—

MS. WILSON: Absolutely. Thinking while you're making, right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: Thinking—and that's a lovely quote; I'm not sure it's—yes, I'm—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, isn't it? Yes.

MS. WILSON: I quite admire his work and thinking very, very much.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: Thanks for sharing that with me.

There were certain conceptual structures that guided *Topologies*. The idea of like kinds was foundational, and I was also thinking a lot about cellular structures that you look at through a microscope—sort of microscopic, specimen-like, cellular-like forms. And that took me into a lot of visual places, just looking at the proximity of parts within a structure, but looking through a microscope to see it. I also was reading a lot—like architectural theory—and about urban sprawl, the way things exist in relationship to each other in a built environment, very broadly.

And so, certainly, that kind of reading, those kinds of references impacted my decision-making as I was making *Topologies*—those issues that come out of the relationship between one part and another as directed by what force, what context, what situation—more than the way the lace might look like a cuff or a collar, or be aligned to its origins of why it was made and who it was made for—because I felt like sex and death, and hierarchies of power and authority and gender were all really available to read. People could come to it and see that in it. [... - AW] I was more interested in kind of displacing that, that which was totally familiar, in favor of this other kind of mapping-like kind of structure, this physical drawing structure that I was inventing.

MS. RIEDEL: And there was materials, then—*Topologies* was remade in a number of different locations as a communal project, engaging—

MS. WILSON: Right. It went next from the Whitney—that same year, in 2002—to MassArt in Boston [*Anne Wilson: Unfoldings*, Massachusetts College of Art and Design], and it became—I think it was 40 feet in Boston. I worked with students in that school over five or six days, and had some general templates for where certain kinds of parts were organized on the table, and then they were all fastened or held to the table with different elevations of insect pins, so there was this sort of elevation—this visual property that was created through the pins themselves.

Every venue, I would work with mainly art students at the local schools who wanted to work with me—and I really like working with communities, and I love working with students, so I would try to make it interesting for them and enjoyable socially for all of us, and a kind of a learning experience for all of us, because for me it was never a fixed thing; it was always somewhat—could somewhat shift. And I would get to understand the kind of, I don't know—[the] abilities of the detail work of one individual would be very different than the spatial ideas of another student, so I would sort of work with them, seeing what their strengths might be, as we developed the surface.

So, yes, the piece went to MassArt, and then it was at San Diego State University Art Gallery [2003], with curator Tina Yapelli. The piece went to the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston in 2004 [*Perspectives 140: Anne Wilson*] at the invitation of Valerie Cassel Oliver, another wonderful curator, who had seen the work first in the Whitney.

It went to a show at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London [*Out of the Ordinary*, 2007–08]. It was a different scale there. I worked with students from Goldsmiths College [University of London]—art students—and we developed that surface. And then a portion of that surface—not the very one—I remade a section that actually was acquired by the Victoria and Albert. So there's a little section there that was initially placed within the lace gallery; I'm not sure if it's still there or not, but that was pretty wonderful.

So I don't know—I should know the exact number, but I'm forgetting—seven or eight times I've remade the piece. And I've sort of retired it now, because I feel I played it out for a number of years, at the same time doing other works as well. But it felt like it had run its course.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that the first piece that was so actively and consistently participatory in nature that it required a community, or invited a communal group, to assemble it?

MS. WILSON: Probably that it required a group to assemble it, but collaborative in a very different way than other, later works.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, yes.

MS. WILSON: I would say this kind of collaboration is more aligned with student helpers—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: Either volunteer or paid by the museum—preferably paid by the museum. So it was working more like with studio assistants, I would say, than the kind of collaboration—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: Let's say Knoxville [*Anne Wilson: Wind/Rewind/Weave*, 2010]—the kind of collaboration that existed with audience participation, and the *Told & Retold: an inquiry about hair* project [1998, with A. B. Forster, installation based on Internet project *an inquiry about hair* (1996), Revolution Gallery, Detroit and New York, et al.], that's another media project—

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Actually, we should talk about *hairinquiry*[: *archived responses*, 2000, Internet project that evolved from *an inquiry about hair*], too, because we didn't talk about that at all, and I definitely want to talk about how that seems like an important shift that went from—became one of the first digital pieces, right?

And then it was very participatory, but in a really different way, focusing on narratives.

MS. WILSON: It's so interesting, how things come about. I'll tell you an anecdote that might explain why I was interested in doing this Internet project called *an inquiry about hair*, in '96.

I had a show at the Roy Boyd Gallery in the mid-'90s where I showed a lot of work using human hair. And some of the work—or the series called *I CUT MY HAIR* [1992—93] was part of that exhibition; it was one series within that exhibition.

A group of individuals asked if I would come speak to them. The gallery was going to host a lunch, and I was going to talk about the work. And at the point when I was going to talk, [... -AW] the gallerist [... told me that the audience was feeling some discomfort -AW]. I had met up with this in the past for different reasons, very personal and cultural reasons, and yet I've never quite experienced it by a group who asked to come to the gallery to speak with me.

So I took up the challenge of engaging these individuals with their own histories, and what about this work triggered [... discomfort -AW]. In many cases, it was the Holocaust and the loss of relatives and the horrific ways in which human beings were treated.

And this—the detached hair—detached from the body—although one could say it's ordinary; it's very ordinary in the local barbershop or hairdresser: you see detached hair on the floor, swept up and thrown away—or certainly in the big shops that sell hair for the theatrical costumers or the wigmakers; a variety of applications in that particular world that would be very familiar. And yet there was something about this work, maybe, this detachment, and being in an art gallery. So it was a very challenging day for me, in conversation. I felt that I'd tapped into something [... with -AW] a lot of possibility of further exploring audience response.

That's one of the reasons I decided, when I was given an opportunity to have an artist's residency at the Canberra School of Art in Australia, that I would take up a digital project called *an inquiry about hair*. And perhaps in '96 the Internet wasn't quite as completely flooded. That project asked two questions: How does it feel to lose your hair? And, What does it mean to cut your hair?

It had a lot of response from all over the world. I don't really know if this is true, but it just seems it's harder to do those projects now because there's so much use of the Internet.

So the two questions were: How does it feel to lose your hair; what does it mean to cut your hair?

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: And responses from men and women, old and young, from so many different countries, were kind of remarkable. For about two years I tended the project—responding to people if they asked for a response or a conversation, [and] uploading selected contributions to what later became an archived website [*hairinquiry*]. There are only about 70 of these contributions still on my website.

It seems to be an early Web research art project. But that came about, too, because HTML as a language was being taught in alternative galleries in Chicago. I was just learning it, thinking I'd do something with it—we didn't all have websites at that time, but it was evolving; it was coming. And so many things came into focus and made me think this was a good idea.

MS. RIEDEL: And that piece in particular is striking because it feels different than many other pieces. It had such

an emphasis on narrative; it had a really broad international community participating—

MS. WILSON: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: It strikes me also as an interesting transition, because the work was so completely digital, from anything that you had done before.

MS. WILSON: Right—right, right. And I guess you can look back on your work, and you can look back at art history, and find the language to contextualize what you're doing. At the time, it was just—it was research; it came out of the response I was getting to my physical work.

I wanted to engage more with the audience and do a project where I had more direct action and connection to people, experiencing this material, and perhaps also connections to my work. At that time, I wasn't sure—I just called it research. I think there are lots of projects that subsequently are related. You can call it whatever you want. But at that time, it worked; that term "research" worked for me.

MS. RIEDEL: Does that feel to you like a strong example of the digital nature of your work and the participatory nature of your work?

MS. WILSON: I feel when the digital became available to artists where we could Photoshop our own pictures, upload them to a computer, make videos easily in our studios—we didn't have the mediation of film labs—I think most artists took to it like fish to water.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: And particularly for someone who works in incremental ways with parts—that kind of fiber background and sensibility—[... -AW] making a net or a weaving, [was absolutely akin to -AW] working on the computer—the kind of organization of the computer, the kind of systems-based nature of it, the kind of building with incremental units. So it was the opposite of being foreign. It felt extremely comfortable and familiar to bring it into my material studio. I never saw it as being opposing—only complementary, and very related.

MS. RIEDEL: Did it feel like a social expansion of the work?

MS. WILSON: That particular project did. The aspect of that particular Web-based project, inviting the participation of others; it was all about the voices of others—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: —as a way of understanding and exploring the nature of this materiality I was using. So for me it was one of the first projects that was so participatory in that way, and involved the audience.

MS. RIEDEL: When you think of the earliest project that you think of as participatory, what comes to mind?

MS. WILSON: I guess it would be the—*an inquiry about hair*—that's right because *Told and Retold* grew from the responses of the Web-based project, *An Inquiry About Hair*.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

Before we go too much further, I just want to bring up the concept of the liminal aspect of your work, because I increasingly feel like that's such a strong aspect of your work, whether it's going from—

MS. WILSON: Water?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, that would be great, thanks—just the continual evolving, the deconstructing, the reconstructing the transition from *Topologies*, which has been such a physical, material—to something like *Errant Behaviors* [video and sound installation created for the *Perspectives 140: Anne Wilson* exhibition of *Topologies*, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2004]—so animated—from—[inaudible]—notation. Maybe I'm jumping ahead a little bit, but it does feel like, as the work evolves and as we move into it, that that liminal, in-between space becomes an increasingly important part of your work. And it seems that your work frames that concept of the liminal so consistently, in new ways each time, but in a profound and deep way, that liminal space. And does it feel that way to you, too?

MS. WILSON: Yes—I love the term "liminal."

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, me too.

MS. WILSON: And I appreciate what you're expressing. It's a term that's been used about my work in the writing

of others. I even think what might be thought of as "liminal" is the very definition of what it is I do as a form—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: Is it object, sculpture, drawing? Both sculpture and performance?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: Does one follow the other? Is one more central, more meaningful than the other? So I found—oh, art, fiber art, craft art?

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: I feel like all those terms have had different lineages and histories and meanings to different people; and most often, I find as problematic as I find useful, to pin work down to those names, those categories.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: So even in what my work is called, or where it more properly fits, it's sort of between things.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: It's between things. A lot of my wall work I've called "2 ½-D"—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: Students enjoy that term; it's kind of a funny term. And I would say that a lot of my work is a piece of cloth, is both an object and an image, and perhaps by traditional definitions, most properly sculpture, I would say, if I'm choosing a term that might best suit my range of practice. [... -AW] But that which I called sculpture could at the same time be called an embroidery.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: The history of found objects informs my work. Arte Povera, the use of materials that are from the everyday, those histories of thinking about material use clearly inform my work.

MS. RIEDEL: We're talking about influence, so maybe it's a good time for that question. We've talked about a number of different influences through your work. When you look back at this point, is there anything that—anyone or any movement—we haven't mentioned process at all yet; we may get into that—but is there any particular aspect of art, art history, artist readings, books that you feel have been especially influential in the overall context?

MS. WILSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: And we can continue to talk about what is influential through the different stages.

MS. WILSON: There are four major categories of art movements that inform the work tremendously. And we've talked about it a little bit—but certainly mainstream contemporary art at the time when I had been educated, and continue to follow. From the early cloth works of Rauschenberg to the architectural works and installational works of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, and certainly the thread webs and drawings and sculpture of Eva Hesse, the felt works of Robert Morris, the scatter work of Barry LeVa, process art in general, and Arte Povera. But all those things are really within the Western art history canon and were taught, at the time those artists were living and working, as part of our art history.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: What wasn't taught as part of our art history is the Art Fabric movement that was in that same general time period, late '60s and early '70s. It was my lived experience, but it wasn't theorized and taught in the way the artists I mentioned were—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: But extremely important. I think we talked about Berkeley being a crossroads for so much art coming in from South America and Asia. So, broadly speaking, the term "multiculturalism," looking at art forms that are affected by cultural contexts that were not necessarily part of the Western art canon.

I think more recently that has shifted so greatly, for all kinds of reasons, but the international biennials and triennials, where we're seeing artists from Africa and Turkey and the Middle East, where many of them are using

material traditions that come from their countries—the [Ghanaian artist] El Anatsui's stitched[-together] bottle-cap tapestry walls are a great example; Yinka Shonibare, Nigerian-Londoner, the use of Dutch wax prints and the way in which they are this carrier of a complex cultural narrative. So these artists whose work we're seeing in the biennials, the kind of globalization, has allowed many artists from all over the world to see practices of making art that have traditions that aren't from the Western canon. And that some of what we're seeing, a lot of what we're seeing is textile, textile process and material.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. WILSON: And then, I think I mentioned feminism earlier—feminisms, as we've moved through many different histories and theories, and debating theories about what that means and how that has affected work, and the prominence and importance, finally, of an exhibition like *WACK! [Art and the Feminist Revolution, 2007]*—which, with good writing and thoughtful historical review, symposiums, and lectures, and extended programming of all kinds has really, I think, made an important mark, an important position in contemporary art knowledge and teaching of contemporary [art]. So those four areas in particular.

MS. RIEDEL: All right, let's pause there.

[END CD1.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Anne Wilson at the artist's studio in Evanston, Illinois, on July 6, 2012, for the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art. We are on disc number two.

So let's start this with a conversation about galleries and exhibitions and the choices [you] made when you first came to Chicago, yes? Had you had many gallery exhibitions or much exhibition history in the Bay Area before?

MS. WILSON: Not much, but certainly my graduating show from CCAC. I had a solo show at Pacific Basin School Textile Arts Gallery. And then after I moved to Chicago, I had a show with Miller Brown Gallery on Hayes Street. They are not still in business, but that was a wonderful experience.

When I came here, I was indeed interested in representation. And I'd mentioned my feeling of coming from the San Francisco Bay area, where fiber seemed one of the most progressive, new, experimental forms of art emerging on the scene, with possibilities that had not been exploited or explored—very fresh, very new. Came to Chicago and there was Claire Zeisler, who was an amazing sculptor working, but more than that, the reaction to fiber was quilts, folk art, Outside art. Wonderful forms and work, but was not the kind of contemporary work or situation that I had been experiencing in California.

So I was very thoughtful about what context would best serve the work that I was making and wanted to make. It was clear to me at that time that the galleries that—in my assessment in that time; things changed and evolved in amazing ways subsequently—but the galleries that were more aligned with the word "craft" were just not what I was doing. It interested me more to be in a contemporary art gallery that was showing work that was not like mine, that was not aligned by discipline or a particular term.

I was introduced to the Roy Boyd Gallery by friends—one of whom was Buzz Spector, amazing artist and writer, and others—and Roy was known as a very fine contemporary art gallery showing primarily abstract painting and sculpture. He was interested in my work, and so I was with him for many, many years.

It turned out to be a very wise decision, because I feel that the work had an open voice in that context, and that the kinds of issues and ideas and material concerns were on equal footing as the work of a whole range of other artists—whether they painted with oil or acrylics on canvas or did sculpture using any number of other materials—that my work actually stood out in a certain way, because it was made in ways that weren't as familiar to some of the other artists, or the group of artists that Roy represented. So I think it was a really wonderful decision.

Later, I started working with Paul Kotula at Revolution Gallery in Detroit. I'll have to get those dates. But Revolution felt almost like a mini cultural center. The largest exhibition I had with them was in 1998 and had a number of works relating to the body, using domestic fabric, human hair, and much of it was stitched, although there was a sound piece and there was a photograph in the show, which extended the ideas into other media.

Revolution also opened a location in New York City, in Chelsea, and I had a solo show with them in New York.

Also, in terms of their program, Revolution was very interested in a breadth of forms of art, conceptual thinking, and material-based practices, and did not separate material-based practices from conceptual thinking. Paul Kotula himself was a trained artist in ceramics—had an M.F.A. from Alfred [University, Alfred, NY]. So all the people who ran Revolution had different kinds of backgrounds and brought different kinds of skills. But they were very, very open-minded about the relationship between concept and the way it was resolved with different kinds

of disciplines and media. They also were well-resourced and could do catalogues. And really thoughtful about working hard for reviews and visibility of the shows, the artists that they represented.

So Roy Boyd Gallery and Revolution were wonderful venues for my work, in terms of commercial galleries. I've often worked between kinds of work that have a commercial potential—meaning that they can be sold; they are discrete objects or things that have that possibility, or a video or a photograph, but they can be sold—and other kinds of projects, like *an inquiry about hair*, the web-based project; or more recently, the *Local Industry* [2010–11]—the participatory project with the Knoxville Museum of Art—that are not commercially viable.

I find over the years, there's an important relationship between my work as a teacher, in terms of the income that generates, and what it means to be an artist who teaches, because I take both activities very seriously and have made a really conscious decision to be both a professor of art and a maker of art.

I've lost my train of thought.

MS. RIEDEL: You were talking about Revolution and Boyd.

MS. WILSON: Yes, yes. And those exhibitions at Revolution and Roy Boyd can help sustain certain projects that don't have the commercial viability. So between a commercial gallery, a teaching job, and my ambition within my work, I can find resourcing that allows it to all continue.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting. So do you see a symbiotic relationship, then, between the commercial galleries and, say, the museum exhibitions?

MS. WILSON: Yes, because the museum exhibitions also don't require that work is available for sale, but allows me to show a range of kinds of work to a larger audience than usually a gallery exhibition affords. And in that way, other possible collectors or other possible writers, critics, other curators might see the work. And at every single museum show I've had, that has occurred. Just the sheer number of people that see your work in those larger museum venues, particularly in cities—larger cities.

At a point, maybe about five or six years ago, I moved from Roy Boyd Gallery to Rhona Hoffman Gallery, and with all goodwill toward the Boyd Gallery. Rhona Hoffman was participating in some of the major international art fairs and had a different collector base, as each gallery does have a different collector base. Rhona is very interested in a range of kinds of art, but including art that is political—she does not shy away from work that is political—and represents many artists whose work I greatly admired.

MS. RIEDEL: Anyone in particular?

MS. WILSON: Like Nancy Spero.

MS. RIEDEL: Only if you care to.

MS. WILSON: In the year 2000, I had a solo show at the Museum of Contemporary Art [Chicago], and Sol LeWitt also had a show. I felt very humbled by being in the same context as Sol LeWitt, one of the foremost Conceptual thinkers. There are periods of his work I admire more than others, but as sort of this foundational thinker, in terms of Conceptualism, so incredibly important. Rhona Hoffman knew him well and had many stories and anecdotes and deeply cared for him as a human being, as well as representing his artwork. So he's one that was above a major name.

But then even more locally, Julia Fish, the painter, [and] Richard Rezac, the sculptor, are represented by Rhona Hoffman. So I think the group of artists she represents ranges between very established—very, very internationally famous artists like Sol LeWitt and artists that are well known, but perhaps not to that degree—and artists that live in Chicago, as well as international artists. So it was a different group of artists that I was exposed to through the work that she brought in and through conversations with Rhona. And she continues to be my gallerist.

Interestingly, when Claire Zeisler was alive, she represented Claire Zeisler's work. So she has a feeling for the materiality of textile, fiber, and some of the kinds of issues that artists who work with fiber develop through that medium and some of the kinds of forms and histories of that medium. She's a very open-minded thinker, strong feminist, very political herself and admires that in the work of others as well.

MS. RIEDEL: How has your work been received over time, from those early exhibitions at Roy Boyd through today? Have you found there's always been a fairly strong—

MS. WILSON: Well, it's interesting. The first really large show I had at Roy Boyd included some of this hair work. And I'm not sure if it's the first show or the second show. I feel lucky in that I've had some wonderful reviews of work, but often was slow to sell. But then I look back at some of that work, and it's all sold. So I would say, often

my exhibitions don't hit right away, right at that moment, but seem to play out in a fairly consistent way over time.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. WILSON: And I don't know what that means. It's not the fast track to stardom, you know? [They laugh.] But as I said maybe once before, I feel sometimes I'm a long-distance-runner artist, that I have never stopped making art since I was in high school—I should say college, later college. I never stopped making art. And it remains central to my life.

I think there are a variety of things that come from an art practice, one of which is livelihood—income back from making—but that's just one thing of many things. I value as much the kind of discourse that exists among artists and other creative people, the kind of conversations we have that are maybe through actual talking to each other, or maybe it's through how the work talks to each other—the kind of discourse developed through writing, through the work itself, has been very, very meaningful.

Maybe one reason why I find my position as a professor of art at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago also so meaningful, that I find very, very invigorating, [is] being in that art-making process with other artists and the kind of conversations we have, the kind of learning that is achieved through the social structure of group process in classrooms, seminars, critiques. The kind of environment where visiting artists are coming in all the time and talking with students, talking with faculty. Publications, intellectually, that force us to deal with issues and ideas that are filled with debate and dissent and complication. I really love that environment, and I find it very—I don't know if it's nurturing for coming back and making my own art immediately, but just intellectually really, really invigorating.

I choose to be an artist who teaches versus feeling that's the only way to pay my mortgage. That's not the reason I teach. There probably would be other professions I could have gone into or other ways I might have figured to bring in that income. It's because I love the environment of the School of the Art Institute and the opportunity to work with my colleagues to build a program called Fiber and Material Studies.

I don't know if we should get into that now, but I know if we—

MS. RIEDEL: We can follow that train of thought and come back to the work. I actually think that sounds like a good idea.

MS. WILSON: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: It would be interesting to talk about how your thoughts have evolved and how your teaching focus and goals have evolved from [when] you arrived there in the early '80s through now, almost 30 years later. So what about that is still interesting to you?

MS. WILSON: Right, right. So I came to the School of the Art Institute as a visiting artist in '79 with no intention of staying—[they laugh]. I applied for a full-time position and got that, and continued making it through the hurdles of the tenure-review process to the point of receiving tenure.

When I first came, there were three or four faculty in the department that—called Fiber—it was the Fiber-Fabric department. Our name evolved and changed over the years. And soon after I came, Joan Livingstone, my colleague, came.

I don't know if it's interesting to name teacher's names, is it?

MS. RIEDEL: If it—

MS. WILSON: Park Chambers was teaching; Bill Hines [ph] was teaching; Helen O'Rourke was teaching full-time in the department when I arrived; and then there were other part-time faculty. So it was a smallish department, but not tiny, with a sea of handlooms. Else Regensteiner was one of the key teachers prior to my coming, who I met when I came, who taught weaving. Grace Earl was a very important faculty member, teaching in the area of dye and print. She preceded me and was not in the Chicago area when I arrived.

So Joan Livingstone came in. And over—so I've been there about 30 years; I can't count; '79 to 2012—we've grown enormously in size. We have about 30 classes every semester, 20 graduate students strong—up to 20 faculty, between maybe six full-time tenure-track or tenured faculty and the rest, part-time or adjunct faculty. So we are a really strong department with a progressive curriculum and good student enrollments at the School of the Art Institute, around the size, perhaps, or related to photography, sculpture.

We're very—

MS. RIEDEL: You're one of the strongest departments in the country.

MS. WILSON: I think so.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: Yes. And one of the things that's interesting about the school, which deeply affects our department, my teaching, and my work as an artist, is the school professes interdisciplinarity as a core value of the school, such that there are no majors for undergrads.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. WILSON: Some of our best undergrad students mature through a curriculum that's somewhat self-directed, and directed by advisors and teachers, and might work between, across fiber-material studies, performance, and video.

MS. RIEDEL: Intersecting. Wow.

MS. WILSON: So that's been the environment I work in. We don't have a curriculum where after your first-year program, which we have and many schools have, you then choose a major, and then you have a sequence of courses and you mature to develop an expertise in a particular discipline. There are strengths and weaknesses to every system, of course, but this is the system that I've grown with and deeply appreciate.

Also, graduate students enter through a department. They are accepted through a department in our school. But once they're accepted, they can work every semester with any two advisors of their choosing, based on the list of faculty from all departments in the school that are up for the position of graduate advising. So as a graduate advisor, most semesters I work with 10 students. Maybe three are from fiber-material studies, or entered through fiber-material studies. I work with someone from performance, two from video, someone from designed objects, someone from print media, two from photography. In any case, the composition of those students that I advise is from all over the school.

So, as a teacher at the school, I feel constantly pushed to learn new things, to think about the kind of interdisciplinary or post-disciplinary nature of the art world, particularly now, to keep reading, which I love, and researching the larger issues and themes that affect art and artists and culture at any given time. If I don't subscribe to magazines, I try to go to our library on a fairly regular basis and browse, if not read.

I'm really interested in the kind of critical frame, within a school like ours, and have been a teacher of interdisciplinary graduate critique seminars for a number of years now, where I have 17 students. Usually [students –AW] from seven to nine different departments are part of the graduate critique seminar. I set up the course by talking about various critique structures, about the concept of generosity, about constructive criticism and how to deliver that—which is not the same for every voice or every individual who receives it; there's tremendous flexibility and diversity of ways in which constructive feedback can be delivered and understood.

We talk about what are the components to a good, critical review, which might include description. How do you describe something? Particularly, what language do you use to describe a form that is not completely understood? [... –AW] That in itself can be very challenging.

What are some critical points of view that you might bring to a work or to an exhibition that could be very complimentary—it's actually sometimes harder to find language to critically examine something in a complimentary way than it is in a more negative or critical—negatively critical way. Both things are critical, but it's sometimes harder to find the language to talk about why you really love something.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting. I hadn't thought about that, but I can see how that would be the case.

MS. WILSON: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So when you think about how the program has evolved in the time that you've been there, what have you tried to bring to that program that you felt has been important?

MS. WILSON: That's such a good question. Let me just finish this one thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I'm sorry.

MS. WILSON: No, it's okay.

The third thing is context. So in looking at a good critical review, description, and critical positions, [... –AW] but also how to contextualize any given work or exhibition: cultural context, art historical context, and the context,

the biography of that artist, other artists working in related ways. To be able to do that is something that we talk about in the seminar. How to be able to do that for each other, and then also how to bring in the kind of disciplinary histories—the student that is trained as an undergrad and perhaps majored as an undergrad in photography might have something very interesting in a different language structure to bring to a student who is weaving on the Jacquard loom. And so how to open up that kind of discussion where the disciplinary histories and the language that frames those histories can open up and be useful across disciplines.

So you asked me about—your next question was about what do I bring to—

MS. RIEDEL: What have you tried to develop there?

MS. WILSON: Tried to develop there, yes.

I think there are a number of things. Certainly, the weaving, when I first came in, and the connection to new technologies, alongside traditional ones, validating both and seeing these intersections and connections, has been really important to me.

Early on, Bob Loescher—who was then a professor in art history—asked me to teach classes in textile art history, because I had some of that background, although quite limited relative to a properly trained art historian. But through Dr. Ruth Boyer at CCAC, I was able to sort of draw upon what I'd had and organize a textile art history class through the art history theory and criticism department.

There were a lot of outside guests that I'd bring in—curators. We're in a major city with the Field Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago—one of the major textile collections in the United States is at the Art Institute of Chicago—Doug Dawson, an amazing gallerist, good friend, and historian himself—who would come in and participate as invited guests in this textile history class. As time went on, we did find properly trained art historians to take on that position, which I welcomed, but both myself and Joan Livingstone, for a time, would trade off teaching the textile art history. So that was really important, to teach that art history, ethnographic, Western, non-Western, right up to very contemporary thinking about the use of pliable substrates and fiber materials within a contemporary art school.

So the relationship of history, theory, and practice, I think, always has been really important to me and to many of the faculty in my department. We now have a class called Critical Issues in Fiber and Material Studies, taught through the art history department, and that would be our theory class. Shannon Stratton is currently teaching that class; formerly, Kathryn Hixson [and] Margo Mensing have taught that class. Wonderful thinkers, theoreticians, writers, curators, who set up a structure in thinking about how to theorize art made through a textile mind.

It's also been very important to me, in terms of what I try to bring to my department, to help students find their own voice, rather than setting up a framework or a structure [or] an ideology that I impose on a department or to students, to help them through the incredible diversity of course offerings and museums and art history and studio practices that are available at the Art Institute. To find their own path of curricular structure and to find their own voice as artists, so they can leave our school feeling like they have this kind of internal strength that they own.

MS. RIEDEL: How have the courses evolved in the time that you've been there? How have they changed?

MS. WILSON: Yes. I think when I first came, the courses were often structured around the names of the techniques.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: Print I, Print II; Weave I and Weave II. [They laugh.] Stitch I, Stitch II. And we realized that, most often, those techniques were taught through theory and history, with some strong thematic parameters. So Chris Tarkowski's advanced print class is called Propaganda and Decoration. A much more, I think, provocative title gives some direction that this is just not about formal pattern repeat.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: But the way in which printed textiles have been used for propaganda and decoration, and how you play out the meaning of those terms in relationship to printed cloth.

Zeroes and Ones [is the name of a Jacquard weaving class -AW]—the term may be coming from Sadie Plant's book [*Zeroes and Ones: Digital Women and the New Tchnoculture* (1997)]—the Jacquard weaving class. Those are just some examples. Permeable Membranes, a class that might cover the making of substrates through paper or felt or other kinds of constructions that create these membranes. So rather than calling it Off-Loom,

Permeable Membranes has a suggestiveness that, again, is maybe a little more rich or provocative.

I teach a class called Time, Material, and the Everyday. It's a class that I invented—although others have taught it and reinvented their curriculum within mine—and it has its own particular lineage. But it's a highly conceptual class that draws upon ways of making that come out of textile, and come out of other kinds of skill-based knowledge that students bring into the class, but working with three dominant issues or core themes of time, material, and the everyday. So I think there is a lot of permission within our school—and certainly our department—to invent new classes that intersect with material histories, new projected conceptual possibilities, thematics that vary according to individual interests, so that the teaching remains really alive for us. And I think our enthusiasm for our courses in teaching is also communicated to our students.

MS. RIEDEL: It sounds as if the potentiality of the field is better explained or better outlined, more fully developed, just through the course titles.

MS. WILSON: Maybe. I think the course titles do illuminate something, yes—a way of thinking. Although I must say I still am confronted—and we are ever more so right now, as we're moving into a period of fundraising for expansion and renovation—[with] how to frame what we are, who we are now, because I think often when you use the term "fiber," many [student and -AW] parents of students think of the '70s paradigm of large, lobby-foyer textile works, which was a certain paradigm of some wonderful and not-wonderful work from the '70s.

Or sometimes, because a progressive fiber orientation isn't always part of high school programs, they might think design or placemats and napkins—some repeated, functional object. And there are schools that are known for more of a design approach to textiles. Like Rhode Island School of Design is a wonderful school that's more directly—well, I think it covers many things, including art, but it also has a strong design component. So I would say our department is more aligned with, at our school, sculpture and photo and print media than it is designed objects or fashion. And yet a lot of parents, or people who don't know our program, might think otherwise.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm thinking about your experience at the Art Institute now—at Haystack. Have you done anything with Penland or Arrowmont—any of those places?

MS. WILSON: I was, yes. I taught a workshop at Arrowmont and I taught at—I think I was a visiting artist at Penland. I've been down there.

MS. RIEDEL: When you think about all these different venues—both where you've been a student and a teacher—what do you feel are the strengths or the weaknesses of the different programs or schools, from the School of the Art Institute, to a larger university like Michigan, smaller place like Cranbook or CCA, and then the schools like Haystack and Penland?

MS. WILSON: Yes, so very different. I think the universities offer the allure—whether it's true or not, I'm not sure—of even a greater interdisciplinarity. I know when I was a visiting artist at the University of Michigan recently, there were some students that were encouraged to consider collaborating across disciplines—science and art, anthropology and art. And there was even some funding set up such that if you could find your collaborators, there might be some funds to help a project develop, which was definitely a lure. And I know, in talking with students, that was one of the reasons they were interested in that program, those encouraged and resourced opportunities for collaboration.

At our school, even though we're interdisciplinary, we are an art school—a school of art and design. So there's not quite—one can find it, and go out and find it—but there's not quite that same possibility of intersection.

Haystack and Penland—I can speak of Haystack more directly. It's a different kind of student body, as I mentioned before. I guess one of the things I like best about those places—or Haystack—is the spirit of community, of people coming together, and everyone has something to offer. And if you believe that, how do you find the strengths in each individual that may not come out of art at all? It might come out of having a medical background or being in advertising one's whole life and wanting to come to a school like Haystack to learn a new skill, to be part of a social dialogue, to be part of this amazing environment, community.

So it is, perhaps, this somewhat removed aspect of some of these smaller schools. The smaller community and the value placed on community, where the learning continues in the dining hall and at late night parties and walks in the woods. And it's maybe removing oneself from the workaday world of, in my case, a downtown commuter school where there is social interaction, of course, but it's very different than moving yourself from your workaday role and going to a place like Haystack and being part of that social community.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's interesting, because even though it's a smaller community and it may be, clearly, for a shorter period of time, it seems like it might offer a greater diversity, in some ways, in your experience, than a specific art school, simply because the range of people that are attending.

MS. WILSON: That's right.

One of the challenges I find, for me as a teacher at a school like Haystack, is sometimes I feel some individuals come there wanting to learn [a] technical skill and have less appreciation and enjoyment or interest in the dialogue around it or the world of ideas and what we might call critique or just debate or discussion—just the world of language. And that always saddens me, because I feel one of my strengths is to think and talk while making and through making. And learn a lot from each other in that way. That's what we do in art school a lot. That's what art school is: you're critiquing, thinking, and debating, discussing as you're making. You're constantly doing that. It's constantly a back-and-forth. And I don't think that's what some individuals going to a Haystack really want.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting to hear you describe that experience, because it sounds like such a community-based experience. It's such a collaborative experience, or at least a back-and-forth and a dialogue. It seems very engaged, both with other professors and with other students, on a regular basis. That seems—that communable aspect at the Art Institute—School of the Art Institute—sees, more than many, to have that ongoing dialogue.

MS. WILSON: Some of it happens because we have seminar structures. I'm very engaged in those seminar structures where it's all about talking and figuring out critique structures—and I talked about this earlier. So that's community-building, right? And those students, those second-year grads, who go out into the world with their M.F.A.s, will draw upon the closeness that they've experienced, because they have meaningfully debated really important things with each other about their own work: what was very, very personal and intense, what they're there for. And that social network that they have developed will be meaningful in an ongoing way their whole lives.

MS. RIEDEL: This is one of the questions, but I think it's the appropriate time for it: Is there a community that's been important to you in the development of your work, or multiple communities?

MS. WILSON: I think multiple communities. Certainly, one community is my school. Both my graduate students and, particularly, the faculty—not that we can always, as faculty, exchange studio visits, but for the entire history of Joan Livingstone and myself being there, we've always done that. We've been our best, harshest critics. I can always count on that and I think she can as well. So certainly that's one community—the artists within my own department, and then other friendships and respect through art that have occurred at the school.

I remember seeing Ken Fandell's video at Donald Young Gallery and the way it intersected with my interests in Time, Material, and the Everyday, in that class I was teaching. I sort of tracked him down and then realized he was a professor in photo at my school, and we've developed a friendship around our work. But it was his work at first that—and then finding—who is this guy who made this work? I really like this work; I want to meet this person. So that's a wonderful way to meet people.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: I think there is also another community—fiber within and the expanded field of art internationally. I'm invited to schools in many places, often through the art program—their visiting artist program—but sometimes it's spearheaded by the textile historian or the fiber/textile area. So anyway, there is a community there.

And as some of our graduates go out into the world—Josh Faught is a tenure-track professor at California College of the Arts. Susie Brandt is at Maryland Institute College of Art; Margo Mensing was at Skidmore; Jenny Angus is at University of Wisconsin Madison; Chris LoFaso is at Northern Illinois University at DeKalb; and on and on and on. Our students have gotten some of the best jobs in fiber programs. And that is another kind of wonderful network of connecting and recommending other artists for different kinds of programming and sharing about shows.

And then there are all these online networks, like the *Critical Craft Forum*. Glenn Adamson is co-editor of the *Journal of Modern Craft*. And I know Namita Wiggers is also a [co-founder and] consistent participant in the *Critical Craft* world.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. WILSON: And we have a Fiber and Material Studies graduate online group. So I think there are lots of different ways in which I and others intersect with each other. Some of it is disciplinary, but I would say that's not the predominant kind of group, either socially or artistically.

Is that good for that question?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you had any involvement with national craft organizations?

MS. WILSON: Like?

MS. RIEDEL: American Craft Council?

MS. WILSON: American Craft Council. No. I get their literature, and some wonderful people I know are involved. I feel like my strength is not what they do. There are so many other organizations—I was on the board of Haystack, so I feel that was a very particular and wonderful kind of contribution. I have been on the board of the Textile Society of the Art Institute of Chicago. But I feel like I'm not sure that particular organization is a fit, particularly with me. I'd be interested what you think about this—maybe not even on the record here.

MS. RIEDEL: No. It is interesting, just as we've been talking about the expansion of the word "craft" over the past decade or so, how something like Haystack would feel like a very good fit for you, but something like the American Craft Council not. It's interesting to just think about how that whole concept of craft has one definition with one organization and is something completely different elsewhere.

MS. WILSON: I know my colleague Joan Livingstone has been going to ACC conferences, and I'm interested in all the feedback, of course, the dialogue and discussions that come up. And I believe the organization has been working really hard to reinvent and position itself in ever more meaningful ways.

MS. RIEDEL: It's just interesting when I think about the continuum of what one considers textile art—we've had that conversation on disc already about the different limited ways, or the boundaries, that your work lives between and crosses regularly. But I think of your work as expanding exponentially what one might think of as contemporary textile. That being one lens we might use to look at the work. It feels like there's space for that when the continuum is broad enough to include that and when the focus is elsewhere.

MS. WILSON: So one thing that might be interesting to talk about now is the word "craft," because as I mentioned earlier, when I first came to Chicago, the term was used in a very limited way. I feel what it included was not so much what I did; that word was not the right frame. I could talk through the histories of my material interests very well within the art world. And at this time, textile, cloth, fiber is one of the dominant mediums in contemporary art. There's no particular need to frame it so specifically by a medium. And yet there are, continue to be, some wonderful exhibitions in all fields that are framed by media, so that exists at the same time.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: However, in the last maybe 10 years, there has been a sort of reinvigoration—a reevaluation of the term "craft." I think it comes from multiple places—the DIY movement, wanting agency over making. And perhaps, for some, a political position in opposition to the corporate mono-power of things that we use every day, wanting to take some ownership and agency in making new things and reusing materials. So that's certainly an aspect of the critical frame of craft now that has really enlivened things. There are a lot of younger practitioners who are champions of the word "craft," because it means something to them very particular about personal agency and politics.

I think also, the digital world, which has so completely infiltrated all our lives, has actually demanded its opposite. It seems to be asking for that which is material and related to our bodies, and sensorial experience—I see this complementary relationship within.

One might have thought 10 or 15 years ago that classes that utilized weaving looms—the older hand looms—would seem irrelevant at this point in time, that surely the most progressive advancements in art and art thinking would be utilizing only the newest digital technology. It's just not true. Students are really eager to touch materials, to make things with materials. They don't see the computer as being alien, but integrated into their process using materials. So it's not one or the other.

And I think some of it is borne out of the distancing that is created through sitting for so many hours at a computer screen and wanting to knit with two tools something made of wool. Or to actually engage your body with the mechanics of and the motions and the repetitive sequences of a weaving loom—and as we said before, its compatibility with the zeros and ones of computer systems. So I think the digital is, interestingly, a huge factor in this renewed interest in craft, in making things with one's hands, out of sometimes very traditional materials and traditional methods.

Particularly for a younger generation, politics and debate are part of this renewed interest in craft. It might be about lifestyle. It might be about renewed interest in collaboration, social experiments, which were so key and

important in the '70s as well. So I think there is a fair dose of that. But also—many who come and lecture at our school, like L. J. Roberts, see the word "craft" in alignment with the politics of queer culture. They see craft in alignment with DIY culture and personal agency and politics, alignments with histories of marginalized work of women or laborers of both genders—wanting to raise issues about the politics of labor and how things are made. Journals like the *Journal of Modern Craft* and *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* publish essays by so many different kinds of writers. And the audience for these journals moves between different definitions of craft and contemporary fine art and design.

I'm sort of interested in this idea of "post-craft," although I don't need to have my own terms used by others. When you say "post-feminist," it doesn't mean that the ideas of feminism are over, but it means that there was a defined period of time that was called "feminist," and there are dates that give certain kinds of parameters for different histories and waves of feminism.

Similarly, there can be dates and terms that apply very appropriately to craft. Something is happening now that's different than what is defined by the American Craft Movement. A younger generation that's very hip, very intelligent, very able to deal and engage with the world and politics in very rigorous ways is wanting to take up this term "craft" and own it in a very charged way. And that's really exciting.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: Richard Sennett's *The Craftsman* [2008] is a great book. He came and spoke at our school. Glenn Adamson has been at our school a couple of different times; Julia Bryan-Wilson wrote a book that was recently published called, *Art Workers* [2009]. She also writes for *Artforum* and has written a couple of wonderful essays that position new work in textile within her essays. Kathryn Hixon, Polly Ullrich—really important writers within the sphere of thinking about contemporary art that uses craft materials. I mentioned before this author, Maria Elena Buszek, edited a wonderful anthology [*Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, 2011]. [... -AW] A lot of wonderful thinking that's being explored through exhibitions and writing now uses new frames around the word "craft."

MS. RIEDEL: And actually, that ties in perfectly another question: Who do you think of as the most significant writers in the field right now?

MS. WILSON: In the field of what?

MS. RIEDEL: Well, yes. [They laugh.] Well, how about this new-charged, new-defined "post-craft"?

MS. WILSON: Well, all the ones I just said. Also Elissa Auther, her *String, Felt, Thread* [2009] book.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: Jenny Sorkin has a very interesting background. Studied at our school [B.F.A], was a studio assistant of mine, actually, and remains a good friend. She wasn't sure if she should be an artist or a writer or a theorist. Went on to curatorial studies at Bard, worked on the *WACK!* exhibition through an internship in LA at a museum, then to Yale for her Ph.D. She has that kind of phenomenal training that art historians go through when they get their Ph.D.s. Her [... -AW] upcoming book is on the work of some women ceramists of the '50s. So I think she also has a really interesting mind in reinvigorating this world of creative thinking and scholarship through craft.

MS. RIEDEL: How would you define what makes their writing significant to you?

MS. WILSON: It's not just description, and it's not just praise and celebration. It does all the things that I mentioned even a very brief, good review should. Think about language and description, for one, but in a very thoughtful way; take up various critical positions about the work, and place the work in historical, cultural context, so theory and history are important. And it takes someone trained that way, in part, but not only just the facts of history or memorization of history. I think it takes training to have a theoretical mind, and all these individuals I've mentioned have that kind of training, and bring that training to some new areas of research in craft in the expanded field of contemporary art.

MS. RIEDEL: Are there any particular periodicals, other than the ones we've mentioned, that you feel are especially significant or that have been significant to you?

MS. WILSON: *Artforum*, *Art in America*, and *Frieze*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: There are other magazines that I enjoy for a more disciplinary specific connection: *Surface Design Journal*, *Fiberarts*, when it existed.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: I would read for particular essays or things that were recommended. But I feel in my teaching, my work has been best served by seeing a lot of exhibitions. I travel. I'm going to documenta this summer; I went to documenta in '07 and found it an incredibly inspiring exhibition.

The documenta in '07 had an 18th-century Persian Garden carpet—huge, glorious carpet. The [curators -AW] were comparing and positioning earlier art forms with very contemporary work. And it meant different things in different cases, but I found it really fascinating. I hear the one this summer in Kassel is equally complicated in the way it positions disparate, [... -AW] relationships—[...] work that might span social practice kinds of non-object making, public interface, participatory art works alongside more traditionally recognized painting or sculptural form.

So, I think, for me, reading is one way. I think most important is to make. And to get out and see exhibitions in my own city, as much as I can, and travel to New York, LA, San Francisco. I just was up at the Kohler Art Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. I saw a wonderful show curated by a very wonderful curator and writer, and very important to fiber in the expanded field, Alison Ferris. And it's a show called *The Line Unleashed* [2012]. Is it *The Line Unleashed* or *The Unleashed Line*—it's one of the two.

MS. RIEDEL: I can check. [*The Line Unleashed*.]

MS. WILSON: And line in the expanded field of drawing that's been materialized—each project, each of the five projects is a major sculptural, installational work; so a wonderful show. I think Kohler Art Center, although not in a major city, often has some really great shows and good curators.

So it's traveling, seeing exhibitions elsewhere, getting to Europe as much as I can. I've been in London quite a bit, because I've shown at the V&A. When I was in Manchester, I took a study trip to see the Postmodern show that Glenn Adamson co-curated and other exhibitions in London at that time.

You asked me about periodicals: *Journal of Modern Craft* and *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* are also more disciplinary-specific. And I enjoy the sort intellectual range that is within those two journals.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: The essays are not just descriptive and celebratory. They take a point of view, and sometimes it's a very scientific or research-oriented kind of method, or a critical point of view about work in some other kind of way.

MS. RIEDEL: You also just mentioned Kohler. I want to talk a little bit about residencies and the impact they've had on your work.

MS. WILSON: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Because it seems that they have happened at certain junctures and they've really been very significant.

MS. WILSON: Yes, very significant. Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: You had a residency at Kohler, I think.

MS. WILSON: No, not Kohler, not at Kohler.

MS. RIEDEL: No, never Kohler? You definitely, in Canberra—

MS. WILSON: Canberra—

MS. RIEDEL: —Australia. And a couple—

MS. WILSON: That was the website. And, well, a wonderful residency—I think it was '05 or '06 now—was at, north of Seattle—

MS. RIEDEL: Pilchuck.

MS. WILSON: Pilchuck, Washington. Have you ever been there?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, I have. Once a long time ago, but I knew you did three residencies—

MS. WILSON: Stop just for a sec, Okay?

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. We're on.

I'm going to redirect and I'm going to ask the residency question later.

So let's go back and talk a little bit more about the work and the evolution of [*Errant*] *Behaviors*, from *Topologies*.

MS. WILSON: One of the aspects of *Topologies* that was always available—particularly if you sat down and looked across, down and across, at the sort of landscape-like drawing that was created—was the possibility of actually moving through it. It suggested a moving image, enlivened and acted out by those curious fragments. That idea was percolating along at the time I had an art student working with me in my studio named Cat Solen. She was working with me on some stitched works. And when I was talking about a relatively unsuccessful attempt to film the *Topologies* tableau, she started talking about her experience with stop-motion animation, particularly puppet animation.

So in a very experimental way, we started setting up fragments from *Topologies* and shooting movement in sequence, in the stop-motion sequence. And through her assistance technically and my conceptual overview, we started developing these motion studies.

Some of the lace fragments are very kind of quirky and odd and animated in their feeling, looking like insects or bugs or sort of microorganisms. So drawing upon what was already available in these kind of human- or animal-related characteristics, when you make them move, they then further evolve through animation these kind of living characteristics.

And so as to direction, for the longest time I had a working title of "Rude Behaviors," because I was interested in also subverting the presumption of that bit of nothingness, that tiny little fragment of lace, and subverting the expectation of this little filament being not much, something you'd throw away or scrape away into the wastebasket, to creating a behavior that was unpredictable, not familiar, a bumping, wacking, hitting, gyrating relationship between two fragments that would exhibit something that was sort of odd, not nameable, and sort of psychologically curious.

It's a very different possibility that the moving image afforded than what the still *Topologies* tableau afforded. Although you could project into it any number of scenarios or narratives, it was still in itself. We were enlivening and acting out some of these latent kind of possibilities that I thought were available within the *Topologies* tableau.

So as Cat and I were working on these motion sequences, I, at that time, went to Northwestern University's gallery and saw the work of Shawn Decker. Shawn Decker is a professor in the Art and Technology Studies department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and has a background, a deep background, in computers and also music, traditional and very new music forms as well.

He also worked a lot with found sound, so a lot of my work has dealt with found materials, found objects, and evolves or extends the histories that are available within those materials. He works with found sounds and did this installational kinetic sculptural project called *Scratch Studies*. And he would use found sounds, whatever they were, birds or beetles or cicadas, as the underlying, generating, kind of impetus for movement and sound in this installation.

So I was really interested in what the sounds sounded like in these *Scratch Studies*, these sort of minimal, repetitive kind of sounds that were coming out of this stylus that was scratching into this material in that show.

He also lives in Evanston, and I sometimes think proximity is very helpful to artists. Even though digitally we can do things at great distances, there's something about being [able] to walk over to someone's house and talk to them. It's just really direct and really immediate.

Anyway, we became friends and I asked him if he would be the composer for *Errant Behaviors*. He was very interested in the project, so he became the composer. All the sound in *Errant Behaviors* is found, a lot of it is found from the—well, it's found from all over the place. A lot of it is from the outdoors, some of it is from inside. And then it's created through computer intervention to have the pacing and the character that works with the motion.

Errant Behaviors is composed of 23 animation segments, in which fragments from the *Topologies* tableau are moving, with 23 different sound tracks. And the 23 animations are divided into two groups and authored in such a way that both groups will play continuously on two different monitors or two different projections and with sound that accompanies. So the sound and the images were always made knowing that they would be played

against other sounds and images. Right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: So there's always this improvisational mix in the behaviors and the sounds.

Going back for a moment, the choice of using stop-motion animation for *Errant Behaviors*—as I said, I tried unsuccessfully a couple other film techniques. And when introduced to stop-motion through Cat, I realized how very related stop-motion animation is to the structure and making of a textile, because it's part by part by part that slowly over time accumulates to create a whole, a whole motion or a whole textile object.

And also the way in which we were animating, we were accommodating the kind of foible and irregularity that's available in stop-motion animation. Something bumps or tips over a bit, or moves irregularly from one point to another, [and] can create a kind of humorous quality, very handmade quality, which we were interested in. Not to dumb it down, but just allowing those characteristics that easily occur in the puppet animation to occur in this animation, again reinforcing the relatedness of the handmadeness of stop-motion animation to the handmadeness of a weave, a knit, a net, a twine structure.

In that regard, I feel stop-motion animation is the filmmaking technique best suited to the textile aspect of these filament fragments.

Shawn did the sound. Cat and I worked on the stop-motion animation. And then Daniel Torrente, who was also a student at the School of the Art Institute, did post-production, which is huge, putting all of those many, many, many files through color correcting and sound syncing.

And the interesting thing about it—and we talked earlier about the way in which the digital can be integrated into a studio that has been primarily physical handwork—we could all do it in my studio, using the computer.

We didn't need film labs. We could learn about it and do it ourselves. And there was, at that time, such a feeling of liberation. We had to learn stuff; it took time; we'd bump along a bit; but we knew what we wanted; we're very, very visual; we could learn stuff.

Daniel had really good training in After Effects, an application program for moving images that is really well suited to the kind of color correcting we needed to do on these volumes of still frames that made these 23 animations. So he helped us finish the project.

The project has been shown quite a lot. Sometimes I think videos are requested, in part—they have to be good, okay—but in part because they're easily shipped discs, to Japan or to London or to Germany. It's been shown in a lot of different venues internationally.

And also the flexibility. This particular project, for example, when it was shown in the exhibition at the Museum of Arts and Design [New York, NY] in an exhibition called *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* [2007], curated by David McFadden. They built a room within the exhibition that accommodated two flat screens that were architecturally built within walls, with sounds, thereby containing the sound and image and allowing it to be a completed work with that kind of sound block and darkened space and not bother, interrupt other works that had nothing to do with sound.

It was really a gift to my work, but perhaps also to the other artists, because I think one of the most problematic aspects of works that have motion or sound is how demanding they can be in a group show. So that was a wonderful solution that I really appreciated at the Museum of Arts and Design, being able to accommodate *Errant Behaviors* in its own room.

A very different presentation and capability of the work was at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa, Japan, [2009], where they had a huge room and projected two huge projections on walls 20 feet high. It allowed me to continue to know the work through these different venues that afforded different kinds of possibilities. And that situation, that whole room was devoted to *Errant Behaviors*. It was just one, huge exhibition space, and other artists had their own spaces for other works.

But the quality of sound and what that little fragment did when it was blown up to be this huge monster also affected meaning and the reception of the work. So I feel for me as an artist, it was a work that had a lot of flexibility, not endless flexibility, but in those two situations very different kinds of presentation methods that were both very meaningful to me.

So through showing it, I learned more about the potential of the work itself, the meaning of the work.

MS. RIEDEL: And that begs the question of scale, something coming from such a tiny piece, inspired by *Topologies*, these tiny—[inaudible]—to something then shown on a wall 20 feet tall. Do you think about that

when you're making a piece, that how it's displayed might change drastically?

MS. WILSON: Well, I think the video work was an example of something that was most radical in that regard.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: Its capability through the media itself of flat screen, different-scaled flat screen, to huge projection to be a rather intimate—or to be monstrously large relative to the subject. And in that regard, the work gave back to me potentials for meaning that I didn't know at the outset.

So I'm very much an artist who learns and thinks through the process of making work. Even though I feel I'm a strong Conceptualist—I always have a conceptual structure that I begin with that guides the creation of work—it's very important to allow the process of making, to give back in a material sense, a formal sense, and a conceptual sense as well.

MS. RIEDEL: And it does feel very much as if one piece directly or indirectly does lead to the other, and then they can be a circling around, or there can be a back and forth—[inaudible]. It feels like the work over decades. There's a language or there's a conversation that happens there, and one thing often—

MS. WILSON: Moves into another.

MS. RIEDEL: —suggests the next.

MS. WILSON: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: Right. I agree.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems like architecture has been an interest and an increasing focus of the work. How did that originally begin?

MS. WILSON: Well, I think of a textile as an architectural construction, and perhaps that was first understood in my history classes in graduate school, either in textile history or another art history class, looking at textile architecture, Zulu *indlu* [huts] from Africa, these essentially basket structures that people lived in, sub-Saharan African tents, Native American teepee structures, pliable membranes made dimensional through suspension or tension, also tensile-structure kind of architectures. So there's a very direct connection between textiles and architecture.

But I even think a woven cloth itself is very architectural in the way it's built. It's built construction.

And in the project called *Portable City*—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: —that I made for the Rhona Hoffman Gallery exhibition in 2008 [*Anne Wilson: Portable City, Notations, Wind-Up*], that show very directly worked with the relationships between textile and architecture in all sorts of ways. There were 47 variable-sized vitrines that created another horizontal topography. But unlike *Topologies*, in *Portable City* each contained vitrine was fixed as a unit and could be moved in relationship to other units in the site.

The structures, I feel, were essentially about pre-construction, or maybe even the ruin. So it really resisted overt representation. The work really resisted being an igloo or a tent, but it was about tentness or igloeness, or before the process of being built, or afterwards. Taut, parallel lines existed throughout the *Portable City*, that kind of order against a lot of disorder. So that was another sort of thematic in the *Portable City*, order and disorder.

That kind of order very much referenced the warping process, the process of organizing threads as a preliminary stage prior to putting those threads on the loom to weave. So the process itself is very performative—this back and forth on a warping reel or a board. And when you have a studio or a workshop or factory where everyone is doing that, it's like a kinetic sculpture and very performative. There are lots of things to say about group work, workshop or factory, and most often it moves into the political realm, which interests me very much. But I'm also interested when a group of people get together doing a related process, what bodies look like in space, when the task is very particular, onto the making of something very particular.

So I was riffing off the warping process and pulling threads taut between posts on these tabletop vitrines in the *Portable City*. So the relationship between pre and post, beginning and a ruin, the before and after order, and

rigidity and tension against collapse, those themes were throughout the project called the *Portable City*.

MS. RIEDEL: *Portable City* also—I think of it as significant because it's one of the pieces where I really feel that color begins to have an impact. Was there an intentional reason? What was the reason for bringing that into that piece?

MS. WILSON: I was interested in the very gritty, gray city in the winter that Chicago can be, and how the warning garments worn by city workers can pop against that kind of grayness, that kind of neon yellow-green or that orangish-red. And so those are the colors that I used in the *Portable City*. They seemed very urban colors, related to architecture, related to a color you see within the built environment.

It also allowed, formally, a kind of punctuation in the visuality, moved your body and eye around the space to introduce color. And most of that color was within the kind of riffing off the warping. There were these taut parallel lines that were built up with color.

So in the piece that—shall I go on about another piece in that show?

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MS. WILSON: Yes. So the first *Walking the Warp—Wind-Up: Walking the Warp* was in that same exhibition at Rhona Hoffman Gallery in 2008. In the front space sat a stainless steel warping frame that was 17 feet by seven feet, with the proper number of stainless steel posts that went up the frame about 30 inches. And we performed the warping process.

So in a way, that performance was very much an extension from one of the perceptual principles in the *Portable City*, this riffing off the warping process, but realizing it on a physical human scale. Like architects often work—they imagine something or invent something on one scale, either on paper or in the computer or in a three-dimensional structure, and then evolve it into other scales to understand it.

As I've talked with architect friends, I understand that approach comes from architecture. And so for six days prior to the opening of the show, I worked with nine other artists who were students at my school, faculty at my school, and we worked that week of performance, walking this thread back and forth between the posts to keep the proper tension, to build the thread up those posts to make this visual sculpture, which then, after it was created over the week of the performance, resided in the gallery as a sculptural work in relationship to the *Portable City*.

I think when seeing the exhibition, you could see the relationship. The same yellow-green color was there. *Walking the Warp* kind of filled the gallery space; in a way, the gallery space itself became the vitrine. We asked the audience, whoever came to see us perform it, to look from the outside street window, because we needed a space of quiet meditation inside to actually do the work of performing.

It was quite a challenging social experiment, where there were different kind of roles and tasks, but also just basic skilled-based knowledge to keep the tension even such that the thread would continue up the posts, not fall down, not pull the posts in with the incredible tension that we were developing over six days of durational, continuous performance.

How to take care of our bodies in the social space of doing this kind of work, how to create rotations, breaks for exercising, breaks for eating, a lot of the kinds of issues that are so very challenging and complicated with labor. Being in our human bodies and performing repetitive labor over long hours—how do we take up some of those challenges in this art project as our own sort of social inquiry and experiment about labor?

It was its own little microcosm of social relations and labor that was practiced in a way that we could complete the task effectively, really effectively, and still take care of our physical needs.

MS. RIEDEL: Those *Wind-Up* pieces, they've been performed now, I know, in a number of different places. They feel like the most overtly social and performance works that you've done. Do you feel that's accurate?

MS. WILSON: Well, yes, they're the most overtly performance works I've done.

I sort of backed into performance. Yes, they're performances, but it didn't grow out of wanting to experiment with the form of performance.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: It evolved out of wanting to realize on a human scale the perceptual principles of the *Portable City* and take on the social experiment of labor within an art practice, a particular kind of labor within an art practice.

MS. RIEDEL: That actually makes me think of another question I had. *Portable City* also inspiring *Notations* and that evolution. I'd like to actually talk about *Portable City* inspiring *Notations*, that then inspired *Wind-Up*, correct?

MS. WILSON: Well, *Portable City* inspired both *Notations* and *Wind-Up: Walking the Warp*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Okay.

MS. WILSON: Those projects were all presented within the same exhibition, those three projects.

MS. RIEDEL: I just think that's such an interesting combination of works to evolve together. To me, when I was reading about your work and thinking about it, it just seemed like it was such a great example of that luminal aspect of your work, where one thing is evolving almost—you can see it evolving into a completely other form—

MS. WILSON: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —something that might be static versus dynamic, something that's very material based, something that's sound based. And you've evoked John Cage, or mentioned John Cage, in relation to *Notations*. I just think that would be an interesting point to bring in, given your reference earlier to Rauschenberg.

MS. WILSON: Well, John Cage and Alison Knowles, the Fluxus artist—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: —coauthored the book called *Notations* [1969].

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: Do you know it?

MS. RIEDEL: I know the book, but I haven't read it.

MS. WILSON: So I may not have this quite right, and you probably need to research it a bit—and I don't have the book here; I had to give it back to a friend who lent it to me. But it's this wonderful compilation of scores by a range of traditional composers and new-media artists and other famous artists, including the Beatles, and I think Yoko Ono is in there. I think Paul McCartney or John Lennon might be in there.

So, what is a score; what is a notation? What does it look like? And what might come of it? Traditional music notation has a sort of criteria or system. You could tell musicians, This is my score; play it. Right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: And so John Cage—he's just a phenomenally important artist to many art forms, and Alison Knowles, too; I have tremendous admiration for her work, her performance work—together invited this whole range of other artists, who were classically trained and who couldn't read music at all, to create a score. And that's what the book is, *Notations*.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: So what I did in a work of a related title was to think about the hand movements that were used to create *Portable City*, right, the movements, and to sort of compose what that might look like as a notational system.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: Yes, that's what that is.

MS. RIEDEL: And then a score came out of that, correct, a musical score?

MS. WILSON: That's right. So then Shawn again, Shawn Decker, the composer who I collaborate with, took those notations that I had created and composed music. And so in the Rhona Hoffman exhibition, in the middle gallery were the scores, the notational structure that I'd created, and his sound.

So this responsiveness is very much a part of that work—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: —very much a part of textiles, very much part of music. And in dance—there's this interesting

exhibition that was recently hosted by the ICA Boston called *Dance/Draw* [2011—12]. Helen Molesworth, [... -AW] one of the most progressive curators of our time, curated the exhibition *Work Ethic* [2003—04] and the book *Work Ethic* [2003], which I use in teaching a lot. Also a wonderful show about objects at the Wexner Art Center. She also curated the '80s show that has been touring, was [at] the MCA Chicago, quite a brilliant curator, who is able to see connections between different artistic forms.

MS. RIEDEL: I'd like to have a look at that, actually.

Shall we talk about the residencies, the glass residencies, because they preceded some of this work, 2005, 2006?

MS. WILSON: Yes, sure.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: They didn't get shown until 2010, but you're right, they preceded it, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I think 2005 was Pilchuck, yes? Yes.

MS. WILSON: Two thousand five was Pilchuck. And Pilchuck came about—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, that—

MS. WILSON: Yes. It was through an invitation to be an artist in residence at the Pilchuck Glass School. And I know that Pilchuck was interested in inviting artists who did not have any exposure to the glass medium to experiment and thereby, by going to Pilchuck and having this incredible opportunity to work with very skilled artists and technicians, to create work in glass. And I know the Northwest in our country is [... -AW] known as this glass center. I think Pilchuck was really interested in opening the potential of this amazing medium in a broader way.

Kiki Smith—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: —has done some amazing glass work as a result of going there; Jim Hodges, some amazing glass work, and numbers of other artists who did not know about glass really, or handmade glass, prior to going to Pilchuck.

So I went there for two weeks. Paul Marioni, who is a friend of mine, who I met at Haystack, who's a wonderful—do you know Paul?

MS. RIEDEL: I do.

MS. WILSON: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: I actually interviewed him.

MS. WILSON: You did?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: Really? I know his son and his daughter.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: And yes, he's a very dear friend of mine. I met him first at Haystack.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. WILSON: He was another artist in residence at the same time. And [his daughter, jeweler] Marina was there as well.

So I went there with an idea, but [... -AW] my idea was not well suited to the glass medium or this particular opportunity. [... -AW] And so I worked with [... -AW] gaffers Katherine Gray and Nancy Callan and Jessica Julius, who are just amazing artists and so skilled. They were my gaffers in the hot glass studio.

Once I gave up the original idea that I came with, we started experimenting with the relationship between the spinning, the binding, the winding that is in fiber, and what glass can do when it's molten. So essentially, glass

can become fibrous when hot and molten, and behave like a pliable linear element. Those techniques that utilize that property of glass are historically used for all sorts of things but particularly decorative tracings or rimings on cups and bowls and so forth. When you start looking at it, there's lots to be seen about the way a fiber line can be used in glass.

So we started pulling these tubes in glass, making spindles around which we started winding glass thread. And both things were very doable and very appropriate to be realized in glass—the pulling of the tube and the cutting of sections and then winding the glass.

It wasn't easy; it was all really hard to do well. And color and the different kinds of qualities of glass, some would bend more easily than others, and there was tremendous skill involved. We could make enough work to learn to do it well, and really, it's credit to Jessica Julius, who was my artist assistant, who is a wonderful glass artist as well, who worked with me daily. And then I would intersect with the opportunity to work in the hot glass studio with Katherine Gray and Nancy Callan.

There's something about Pilchuck. It is such an outgoing place. It also is likened to Haystack in being in a beautiful part of the world and a small community; you're living so closely, you get to know people well. But it's extremely outgoing. I'd say it's the most outgoing community I've ever been part of.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. WILSON: And maybe it's the glass thing. I don't know what it is.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it's such collaboration. It's all about collaboration, right?

MS. WILSON: Yes, it is. And I think the performative nature, particularly, of hot glass where—the actors on stage performing their incredible abilities, and people sit around and watch: it's like this entertainment. It's certainly not anything like I've experienced in the fiber realm.

But there's also a really good-spirited, outgoing feeling there. It was wonderful to be a part of that community for a couple of weeks.

And so I developed this idea that intersected with a lot of my interests about labor and politics and textiles and how things are made. Okay, what does it mean to make a frozen bobbin? So we could do it and they could look amazing; you could not even tell that some of the bobbins weren't silk, because we could use this kind of white glass that would look like silk. And so I struggled [... -AW] with that question. Do I want to make an artwork of it? Why?

I would never make it because it just looks good.

MS. RIEDEL: [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: Because I can make things that look good, right? It has to have a theoretical, conceptual meaning to me to actually spend the time to make it into a project. Otherwise, it could be a really useful, wonderful experiment that Pilchuck afforded. They didn't require a show, so they weren't saying you have to do a show, or you have to sell this much for us to give you this opportunity.

But I came to believe that the still object represented many, many histories of labor issues. The analogy I best like is to bronze baby shoes: Why bronze baby shoes? Why do you do that? You do that for the purpose of sustaining the memory of the baby, of the child, sustaining the memory of the person. So making a bobbin in glass, frozen and fixed, not usable, sustains the memory of the process of making itself, right?

I don't think of it as a mourning for loss; I don't think of it that way. I just think about how we are in a moment of such complication over how things are made and who makes them, who benefits from them, who is exploited as a result of the making. Certainly, everything we wear has those problematic political conditions within them.

And so this project called *Rewinds* exists as a horizontal carpet-like space, eight by 12 feet, with hundreds of these glass bobbins made at Pilchuck.

The next residency was at the Museum [of Glass] in Tacoma [WA, 2006]; the next residency with students at RIT's, School for American Crafts [glass department, 2006].

Hundreds of these bobbins were made collectively and presented as a still object in a room in the Knoxville Museum of Art when it was first shown in 2010. You could bring in a school group to sit around this conceptual carpet with drawing pads and imagine what this carpet might be, given these glass bobbins are the tools of making. So the carpet space and the bobbins are present, but it's all still; it's quiet; it's stopped in motion, right?

So how could you draw [a] carpet that could be made and thereby, in the context of doing that, talk about issues: about who makes what we walk on, who makes what we wear, how are rugs made, where are they made?

So that was perhaps the deeper thesis around *Rewinds* that allowed me to make a really beautiful sculpture with the incredible technical expertise and collaboration of so many other glass artists and gaffers.

[END CD2.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Anne Wilson at the artist's studio in Evanston, Illinois, on July 7, 2012, for the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art, disc number three.

I'm going to start this morning with a few thoughts you have in reference to our conversation yesterday, something you wrote this morning.

MS. WILSON: Yes. I think of my art of the past 15 years as a kind of conjunction between visual art concepts and material culture, where the histories embedded in materials and the way things are made are critically important to the content of the work. I've used table linens and bed sheets, lace, hair, thread, wire, and glass.

And there's an underlying political agenda in choosing to use materials and methods that intersect with historically marginalized craft practices within fine art, as well as women's work and domestic spaces, especially in using, for example, spool knits, hand crochet, warping patterns, and very elemental textile structures with thread.

I'm interested in contributing to an interdisciplinary dialogue that opens up new questions and brings into play multiple references from both art and culture. As a professor in the department of Fiber and Material Studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, I've been part of a faculty team that has worked to support this multidisciplinary and inclusive approach to art-making.

MS. RIEDEL: I'd asked for something that gave a broad summing up of things that I've been hearing about, and I think that did an excellent job.

Let's just move directly into *Local Industry* from that.

MS. WILSON: Sure.

MS. RIEDEL: And maybe we can use that work and that exhibition in Knoxville as a way to examine some of those points you just made.

MS. WILSON: Good. Good.

MS. RIEDEL: How did the plans for that exhibition come together? How did that whole concept of *Local Industry* come into being?

MS. WILSON: Well, in 2008, when I had a solo exhibition with Rhona Hoffman in Chicago, Chris Molinski, who is one of the curators at the Knoxville Museum of Art, came up to Chicago to see the exhibition and asked to meet with me. And then I had a meeting with the director of the museum, another curator, and Chris in my studio and was invited to have a solo show at the Knoxville Museum of Art [*Anne Wilson: Wind/Rewind/Weave*, Knoxville Museum of Art, TN, January 22—April 25, 2010].

At that point, the invitation was presumably to include the work that Chris Molinski had seen at Rhona Hoffman. But as I looked at the location of the Knoxville Museum of Art in eastern Tennessee, in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, I realized that museum was located in the historical heartland of hand-weaving traditions, as well as industrial textile production in the United States, an extremely historically important location for textiles.

And instead of exhibiting work that had been shown in Chicago, moving it down there for another venue and audience, I proposed to the museum some new projects that would evolve and extend ideas around weaving and histories of labor and making.

Three works were proposed: one, a video projection of *Wind-Up: Walking the Warp* from the 2008 exhibition—but rather than doing a live performance, it would be the video, which was projected in one of the exhibition spaces.

Secondly, a large glass project that I had been evolving over three residencies—Pilchuck School of Glass, Tacoma [Museum of Glass], and RIT School for American Crafts. Since 2005, I'd been evolving a large sculptural project called *Rewinds*, hundreds of handmade glass bobbins, creating a sort of topography of use. That sculpture was contained within a second large gallery at the Knoxville Museum of Art.

And the third project was both performance art and live production, a project called *Local Industry*, which was set up in a 40-foot-by-60-foot museum space. It was the largest space of my exhibition. And in that space, we orchestrated a production team to create a bolt of fabric.

Let me stop there for a sec. I'm wondering just how to proceed. Shall I proceed in talking about *Local Industry* directly [or] just the whole project?

MS. RIEDEL: Sure.

MS. WILSON: Yes?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Maybe we'll use some of it in background, and then we can discuss it more in depth. But—[inaudible]. It's been well documented, so I don't think we need to go into huge detail.

MS. WILSON: Maybe I'll just give a schematic of the layout and talk a little bit more about my research and preparation for it.

MS. RIEDEL: That would be great.

MS. WILSON: Okay. So just a schematic of the layout. When you walk into this exhibition space/factory, weaving factory, there are tables set up, very temporary—saw horses and wooden tops—to accommodate 15 to 17 bobbin-winders at individual stations, with hand-crank bobbin-winders. One loom was loaned to us from the Arrowmont School, which is close by to Knoxville. A wall, which we called the "thread spectrum wall," held all the bobbins made by individuals who came into the museum and wanted to participate in the *Local Industry* factory. The bobbins would be positioned on this wall in a spectrum of colors, such that the weavers then could choose the colors wound by museum-goers as the weft in this continuous collective cloth.

It's really important to note that the weaving was not a museum how-to demo. Weaving was not open to everyone. The bobbin-winding was open to everyone. Small kids as young as four and elderly folk all participated in winding bobbins, with the help of museum staff and instructional handouts that were on these worktables. But the weaving loom was open to only experienced weavers, primarily living throughout the Southeast, as well as a few others, artists and weavers who were coming through. Jane Lackey lived in Tennessee and participated. Lia Cook from California was doing a project in the area and was able to come over.

In increments of one to three days, 78 weavers participated in collectively weaving this one bolt of cloth, following a kind of weavers' guideline that I'd prepared through my studio research, working with my studio assistants, most of whom were students from the School of the Art Institute—a seven-page guideline for weavers. We'd worked out a lot of the technical aspects of the kind of warp, the density of the warp.

The weft was also sourced, was given to the museum free from 20 different mills throughout the United States. Many of them had closed or were facing closure—not all of them, but many of them. So one might say that in this period of time, our country has been facing a crisis of production. Very little of what we actually wear, for example, is made in this country. [... -AW] The complication of politics, of labor practices, exploitation of labor relative to fair wages and living conditions and grievances of workers all those kinds of issues around labor were certainly available [... -AW] for museum-goers [to consider -AW] within such a project.

But my way of proceeding was perhaps more about honoring and respecting the continuing skill-based knowledge of many who were from the Knoxville area and the mountains of western North Carolina and other surrounding states, who were very committed to weaving guilds, who had a kind of artisan shop production going that was economically self-empowering to sustain a life.

Some of the weavers were teachers of weaving, so their methods or resources came through an academic route. There was a group that came from the Atlanta area, art school teachers and students. So sometimes there were groups, sometimes individuals, coming from guild, hobby, craft interest, to conceptual fine art. I was not interested in making distinctions but tried to embrace a kind of skill-based knowledge that an experienced weaver has that could be applied to the making of this collective cloth.

Conceptually, I sometimes call this cloth a relay of personal bests. Each weaver came and wove one day to three days—usually not more than about 18 inches could be woven. It was a slow-going, weft-faced weaving, always selvege to selvege. It was essentially a stripe problem.

I often aligned the conceptual structure to the surrealist exquisite corpse exercise, in that when one weaver would sit down, that weaver was asked not to unroll the cloth from the beam—partially because it would release uneven tensions, and tension was a very important technical aspect of keeping this work flow continuous. But that weaver would sit down, look at what the last weaver had done, aesthetically and visually, go to the thread wall, choose new colors of thread, and start evolving what they saw was happening, extending and evolving that

into something else.

So it was always about response and then evolution to something else, which, although abstract, is very related to the exquisite corpse drawing project of the Surrealists. I always like to pair the kind of conceptual frame that way. Even though the result looks quite different, there's a conceptual structure very, very related in both those forms.

Much of this project was a grand experiment: [... -AW] Over three months, [could -AW] we weave a cloth that maintained good enough tension? Would weavers respect the guidelines of it? And I feel that, in part, one of the reasons why the cloth was so successful was because of the two years that the Wilson studio crew took to be in touch with people, follow up with email questions, continue to invite others.

It was very much a one-to-one, person-to-person kind of email exchange, initially with me, and then Libby O'Bryan was my right-hand person, who is a wonderful artist and has evolved a sewing factory within the Oriole mill, which is one of the most progressive small mills in this country. And so she, for that year or so—or maybe it was more than a year—worked with me in my studio as the project manager, sourcing a lot of the fiber that was introduced to the project from the mills, and also following up with the one-to-one kind of email exchanges that I developed, and then sometimes writing group emails about progress and so forth. So I feel we involved people in a very personal way right up through the exhibition.

I remember my husband, Michael, and I driving down to the Southeast within that two-year period of research leading up to the Knoxville exhibition. I'd heard about this wonderful weaver named Catharine Ellis, who lived in the mountains of western North Carolina and was very highly regarded as an artist, weaver, teacher, and lecturer, called upon to impart her knowledge about natural dye processes, well-traveled.

In any case, she agreed to a visit to her studio. So we had this wonderful trip into the mountains of North Carolina to visit Catharine Ellis and her studio and see some of her collection of Japanese textiles. And we shared a love, we realized soon after I was there, in historic materials, in the history of textiles, both visually and in terms of technical innovations.

I had brought with me, under my arm, the roll of sample cloth for what I was proposing for Knoxville, to show her that there was a set and a kind of weave and a kind of quality of cloth that I'd hoped was very weavable by a lot of different artists. And she was impressed by that, I think.

I think a trust developed between us such that she was an advocate for the project and an ambassador for the project and would share her enthusiasm with other weavers. And so that also, gaining her support, helped the project gain more participation.

MS. RIEDEL: How did you locate her in the first place? How did she become known to you?

MS. WILSON: That's a good question. I just knew of her name. She wrote a book that was called, I think, *Woven Shibori* [2005]. She was known as a teacher. When I was down there, I would hear her name by talking with other weavers. I think it was just from multiple sources I heard about Catharine. There were other very accomplished, well-known weavers, but I felt that visiting with Catharine would be particularly meaningful. And it was on many different levels. So—and she was one of the weavers.

And there were 2,100 museum-goers who chose to sign the book of production, which is now in the catalogue, the archive of production. And there were—I think I'm right—78 weavers, including myself. The level of participation was, I think, the greatest that the museum had experienced in any one exhibition. So it was a very welcoming project for them.

And, of course, at the close of the exhibition, this incredibly long—almost 80 feet, but not quite; I think 76 feet, something—had to be given to the museum. And they welcomed that gift, accompanied by all the names of the weavers and all the names of the people who wound bobbins to always accompany the display of the cloth.

What was so wonderful about giving it to the museum was the next year they had an exhibition just of that cloth in the same room, devoid of all the looms and the worktables. Just the cloth was presented. Half of it was presented for half the exhibition, and then it was rerolled and rolled out again the other half, because there wasn't an 80-foot gallery. And then, within the next year, the [University of] Manchester [UK] museum, the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester, requested that cloth for an exhibition they were doing this past spring called *Cotton: Global Threads* [2012]. That's another topic that we might talk about.

But the cloth already has had these two wonderful venues for exhibition. I think others see in it the kind of visuality of the cloth and the kind of skill and rigor of thinking and care that went into the making of the work.

Although I'm calling it a "weaving factory," there are lots of ways to frame it, as artwork, particularly within

histories of relational aesthetics [that] contributed to my thinking about participatory work. But I also think about the early Minimalists and Conceptual art, artists like Sol LeWitt, who creates text on a piece of paper that is the generating force behind large wall drawings that museums and collectors remake based on his set of instructions.

So I think there's a relationship to the work of a lot of well-documented Conceptual artists. It's just we're working with a weaving factory and regional traditions and textile histories and so forth. Also, quite different from the way relational aesthetics has been defined, which places the greatest value on the social space of art, which was indeed important to *Local Industry*.

But we also were placing great value on the cloth itself through the skill of makers. The collective community aspect of it, indeed, was terribly important to make it happen at all. The quality of that experience, and the collective participation to actually be able to make a cloth like this, were interrelated and very critical.

But in a lot of work that is framed within a relational aesthetics paradigm, having a thing result from it that has aesthetic merit is not so much the focus. That's not so much the aim or the goal of most—much, most relational aesthetics work.

MS. RIEDEL: This piece seems like really one of the pinnacle pieces that I think of in your work. It illustrates that balance between process and product, and the product so fully carrying in it the process. More so than pretty much any other piece I can think of, that seems true with this one in particular. Does that feel that way to you too?

MS. WILSON: I think that is true. And, of course, when you propose the creation of a work like this that is such a public production, it is very unclear, with the actual bobbin-winding and weaving of the cloth, if it will even work, if we could sustain the kind of technical requirements to make a cloth like this.

I had no criteria or established goal of what length it needed to be. We provided lots of visual possibilities for the ways in which stripes, which are foundational to a woven textile—the most iconic image in a woven textile is a stripe—examples from all over the world, from all different time periods.

These visual sources were part of the reading room that my studio oversaw the development of. Also, a video of stripes was produced from hundreds of sources that played in an improvisational way across three flat screens in the lobby of the museum. So there was a lot available for both museum-goers and weavers to think about [... -AW] in the incredible visual possibilities of stripes in textiles historically.

But within the weavers' guidelines of the *Local Industry* cloth, there was no requirement of having to weave any length of a particular color or when colors changed or the thickness of stripes. There was a guideline that there be at least one shot of black or some very dark color between each color. And I do feel that, as a sort of guiding design parameter, helped pop the color and maintain the visual coherence within the cloth as it evolved. But other than that, it was really up to the weaver to extend what had been done and move it somewhere else. And so there are incredibly interesting, evolving differences within the cloth.

MS. RIEDEL: And also this piece goes like a pinnacle participation in terms—and your work has been participatory from decades, really, from the early '90s, as far as I can recall.

This might be an appropriate time to talk about the difference you see between works that are participatory versus any works you consider collaborative.

MS. WILSON: Right. Turn it off just for a sec.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

[Audio break.]

Okay, let's finish the thought you had and we'll go on to the next.

MS. WILSON: Yes. So one of the reasons I felt I could take on this project of *Local Industry* at the Knoxville Museum of Art was the kind of knowledge that I had as a teacher, art professor, alongside the practice of being an artist.

I found, in making *Local Industry*, there was a kind of conflation of teaching and art-making in ways that I had not predicted. The kind of background that I had in dealing with groups and guiding discussions, contributing to individual young artists finding their own voice within the academic world—I could bring a lot of those skills that developed through teaching into this project. My studio, in the two years prior to the exhibition in Knoxville, felt like a mini-cultural center.

It was sort of a research/cultural center, where one assistant was at one computer researching historical stripes and putting that into a format that could be used. Someone else was working on the video extension using that material. Someone else was working on the kind of color spectrum that might be utilized for the thread wall. Someone else was working with me on workshopping the protocols for the weavers' guidelines and the sample weaving.

So I would have sometimes up to five assistants in my studio here in Evanston working on this project, a project that had nothing to do with any commercial object or selling. We didn't even know at that time that we could even make this cloth. It was initially about creating an experience, about encouraging belief in the project on the part of many other artists and weavers. It was about building energy around the project so that, when it opened in Knoxville, there would be a spirit of participation.

And then the question arises: Exactly what is my role? Well, it's related perhaps to teaching. I'm assisting others to create work. I set up a conceptual structure, guidelines, syllabi, curriculum, reading. And that then generates the voices of others to emerge. I feel that that kind of participation requires always an acknowledgement of the individual names of each person, every time the cloth is shown.

The word "collaboration" is used in a very open way, often, and I've had a lot of experience with collaborative practices of different kinds. In a way, I could say every way in which I've worked with people could be called a collaboration. When I work with a student intern who's getting credit to work with me, that's a particular way in which I work with someone.

I might hire a former intern for a fee for service, for an hourly fee. And that's another way of working. We keep the time clock going, and an invoice is given to me, and I pay the invoice, and we agree on terms.

I always have the terms, with anyone who comes to my studio, that I make lunch. If they're vegan, I'll do it. [They laugh.] Vegan, vegetarian; likes or dislikes, whoever's coming here to work doesn't have to think about bringing food to eat. And it also gives me a pause in the day for a social space to catch up with people, to talk about their work or recent lectures or books or essays. Sometimes we use it like school, actually, and talk through something we've all read. But it's a really nice break. And I sort of like making that happen and also providing food.

There's another kind of collaboration—for example, Shawn Decker, who I've been working with on a lot on different projects, who does the sound component. He was the composer for an incredible score for the recent Manchester performance. In a project we did together called *Mess*, which was a video-sound, four-channel sound installation that was initially made for the opening exhibition of the Hyde Park Art Center here in Chicago, that was a collaborative work and we both owned the copyright.

On other projects, it's my copyright. He's credited, and others working on it are always credited. So that's another kind of collaboration in terms of the authorship and how it's acknowledged, which then can have some meaning or import if the work down the road sells—how the income is distributed, right? That becomes an important issue, that there's clarification about that.

So, I don't know; I could keep talking about this topic. And it's not totally clear-cut. But over the years I've become very aware of how important it is to think about these kinds of issues before you go into a project. Not always do you know, when you're with a group of people working on new artwork, what it's going to be. So you don't even know what to say your roles will be.

Sometimes it needs to be an ongoing conversation about, Okay, who's putting money into this? I think that's one key thing. Who's making it happen financially? Where do the ideas come from? How does it evolve and extend itself? Who continues to evolve and extend it? Is there a thing that results from it? What happens with that thing?

So all those issues of authorship, ownership, copyright, perhaps it's because—well, for example, take the Knoxville *Local Industry* cloth. I gave it to the museum, with crediting always accompanying it, acknowledging participation of literally thousands of people.

If that work was made with the intention of having a price tag on it, how would that develop? I never went there, because it never was about that. But I think in projects where things are sold for a lot of money, there are other considerations. There's so little money coming into the studios of so many artists—and, of course, gallerists are incredibly important to artists to help sustain practices, help some of that happen. But anyway, there's no one answer to that question. It's just a complicated and a really important question to think through.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

I was thinking this morning about the importance of repetition in your work. And off disc this morning we

mentioned meditation. I think about pieces like *Topologies* and *Wind-Up*—as they're reproduced in new venues, is there something new that you have in mind when you go into each location? Is there something new that you're looking for? Does the previous installation affect the next version of the piece, the next interpretation of it? And is it different that it's something more static, like *Topologies*, or something more dynamic in performance, like *Wind-Up*?

MS. WILSON: Well, certainly with the *Topologies*, many of the decisions were borne out of the space itself. How big was the space? What were the territorial parameters in the proximity to other artists? How did that work for my work and their work? And that's more of a curatorial decision, but in consultation with artists, of course, and the needs of the work. So each space, I would say, contributed in determining aspects of the work.

I think that, with *Topologies* in particular, there are always baseline templates that I had. I could always know a constellation of relationship of parts, and what might go where. Then sometimes I would make new things for an installation because I wanted to tease out or extend a particular area. And then a lot of it was developed on site.

My work does go slowly. I've always worked with visually minded art students who want to work with me. So that is enormously contributing to the group process and the visual development of the work. But it goes so slowly that there's always time for me in every single one of these installations to spend time with each and every individual and talk through any given particular aspect of the project. It's really slow going.

And as to why that works for me, I don't know why that works. I don't find the slow going to be boring. I don't find it to be actually even slow going. It feels like there's just always so much happening within a particular—like, with *Topologies*—constellation of parts that we're refiguring or thinking about. And maybe it has to do with looking in and within and in deeper, and finding within that close looking so much to consider—that close looking keeps opening up.

I know that sometimes other individuals have come into my studio and watched the kind of stitching I've done. I'm working on a new project with stitching, and for years I've used stitching as a primary way of developing these physical drawings. Some would look at my work and find it—would use words like "tedious," words that acknowledge the slow-moving, detail quality of the work. But to them it would seem tedious, which sort of has a negative spin to it, just by using that word. [Laughs.]

For me, it's always been the exact opposite of tedious. I suppose it's about new learning. I know how to move my hands very fast. I'm fairly ambidextrous. Is that the word? I can use my right and left hand pretty evenly. I've learned to stop at least every half hour, stretch, look out at a long distance to rest my eyes and rest my body. I've learned that the hard way over years of not doing that and being flat on my back and going to chiropractors.

Every morning when I'm in my studio, if it's not 100 degrees out like it is today, I try to walk to the lake at least for half an hour, 40 minutes. I also have, over the years, practiced walking meditation, which is very compatible with my interests in focus and being inside of something, which is the opposite of mindless. It's very mindful. And so that's been a kind of practice that I think has been very useful to helping my body do this kind of work, my body and my mind do this kind of work.

I find, when I'm stitching—and I often do stitch using a magnifier, like a conservator kind of floor lamp with a light magnifier—that it's very fluid. I think I move relatively fast. And it's very, very fluid; perhaps what it would be like to certain kinds of painters throwing a bucket of paint on a huge canvas, which might seem very fluid, fast. I feel this is fluid in a different kind of way and moves along incrementally. But I see progress and keep getting more and more inside the process, and it keeps opening up in ways that are very, I would say, enjoyable to make. I like making my work, and create new visual problems constantly.

MS. RIEDEL: I want to touch on that one question we discussed this morning, just in the context of walking meditation. One of the list of questions we have here from the Smithsonian is, Do you consider a sense of religion or spirituality in your work? And I just wanted to have that on record, your response to that.

MS. WILSON: I don't use those terms.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. We thought the closest perhaps, when we'd get to that, was ethic. Yes? No? Not even going to go there. [Laughs.] Okay. Interesting.

Time seems to figure increasingly importantly in your work, both in its actual making and in its performing. Does that seem like it's become more of a concern to you over time, or has that stayed constant throughout?

MS. WILSON: It seems to me, all the work I make involves time. And maybe in some of the walking performances, time actually becomes the subject, part of the content. The viewer has the opportunity in those walking performances to look at the performance of time. Inside of the final sculpture is this aspect of time performed.

In the Chicago performance, the word "ritual" was brought up by members of the audience, and connections to things that have a liaison to that which might be thought of as a spiritual practice or a ritual practice.

And so I think the appearance of that—I think there's probably lots to say. But the fact that it does have that appearance—there's a connection to ritual through time and repetition, through the discipline and the mindset and the physical health, to be able to have a practice that requires this kind of ongoing repetition to be able to create the work at all.

And so in the Chicago performance, it took—I think it was six days, working from the morning until the gallery closed, relatively 9:00 to 5:00, working with rotations, in teams of three or four, spacing out breaks, integrating yoga and other exercise practices, integrating healthy eating. Chocolate—[they laugh]—of course, was important; oranges, bananas, lots of hydration.

And in the Houston performance, working with the Hope Stone Dance Company, we actually integrated eating as part of the content of the work. We were actually just sitting there, as part of the performance, eating, hydrating. Stretching became a really interesting, visually beautiful part of that performance, in addition to the rotations involved in *Walking the Warp*.

MS. RIEDEL: Certain projects have been ongoing for a long term. At what point do you decide to retire something, like *Topologies*, or do you imagine retiring the *Wind-Up* piece? When does that decision become clear?

MS. WILSON: I think it just becomes clear at a certain point when an aspect of it has been played out. I don't remain as engaged. It might be that, like with the *Topologies* work, four years from now it might be really thrilling to have the opportunity to see it again, so there's a freshness there.

So I don't know if I would say it's retired forever. When new opportunities come up, I want to focus on new things, to make time and space for new projects. But I'm not sure—there's no prescription as to exactly when any given project might be retired.

The third *Walking the Warp* project was in Manchester—so it went from Chicago to Houston to Manchester; the Manchester performance was this past February. There was no tool or floor frame. There was no fiber. The repetition of collective movement among the 17 young dancers metaphorically became the textile and a kind of soft machine.

That was the foundational sort of concept of the work, acknowledging the relative absence of the huge textile industry in that part of the world that was once the center of the industrial revolution. So it was a work that was developed around that particular place.

It wasn't about mourning the loss of Manchester production, of a bygone era. It was more just looking at what that work looks like and maybe talking and thinking forward about how that work exists somewhere in the world. It is a conversation that is generated by and extends from the art itself.

But it might be with that third performance—I might retire those performances for a while as well. I think they also are the kind of work, as I was speaking about *Local Industry*, that sort of conflate the teacher in me and artist in me in complicated, interesting ways. But I do teach full-time, and [... -AW] other things are happening in the studio now that I'm going to spend time with.

MS. RIEDEL: You spent a lot of time in England, and in London in particular. Do you think about your work as part of an international tradition, as a particularly American tradition? Have you thought about it one way or the other?

MS. WILSON: I'm not sure. I think there are certain projects, certainly *Local Industry*, that very consciously acknowledge textile roots and histories in this country. And I'm going to depart from your question just a moment and then come back to it.

One thing I didn't mention about *Local Industry* in Knoxville is the history of the settlement movement in the Southeast. There's a wonderful book called *Weavers of the Southern Highlands* [2009], by Philis Alvic, and she was a writer for the Knoxville catalogue. As I read that book and thought about the kind of economic empowerment offered by some of these collectives of women weavers—those histories evolved into some of the schools that currently exist in the Southeast, Penland being one and Arrowmont being another—you could really look at those histories as a kind of proto-feminist history, although the term was not used.

So it's fascinating to me to read those histories, which I wouldn't have done to this extent had I not had this Knoxville exhibition. I really needed to research earlier histories and the relationship between the industrial production in the area to hand weaving, both of which are fascinating, deep histories and complicated histories

in the southeast part of this country.

So coming back, where were we?

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we talked about Manchester, and so we were thinking about the way to rephrase that question about American versus—

MS. WILSON: International and national.

MS. RIEDEL: —international.

MS. WILSON: That's right. Okay, that's—

MS. RIEDEL: Maybe it's more site-specific.

MS. WILSON: Yes. Well, a lot of my work has been site-specific in one way or another—

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. WILSON: —in different ways. Actually, I guess, no, I don't think of my work within just a national tradition. I think many artists now are looking very globally or very internationally, particularly with all the biennials and triennials and documentas and these shows that bring together artists from such diverse locations in the world and kinds of backgrounds. And particularly, as many of us can travel, I feel my work is affected by many, many different things that are not just regional or American.

MS. RIEDEL: When you think about what's happening, for example, at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and your department, and you look at what's happening around the world as you travel with different exhibitions, where do you see what's happening in the U.S. on a national scale? Have you thought about that at all?

MS. WILSON: You mean, like the kind of thing we're doing at our school?

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right.

MS. WILSON: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: For want of a better term, this post-craft textile.

MS. WILSON: Well, I would say other schools [... -AW] are engaged in the kinds of discussions that we're engaged in at our school: Concordia University in Montreal, for one. When I was at the Canberra School of Art, Anne Brennan taught in a theory area within the Canberra School of Art. Art history was then a whole other school or department as part of Australia National University.

So rigorous debate and discussion around ideas and concepts when was I in Australia in '96 embraced this whole idea of integrating theory into art practice and studio teaching alongside art history. Through travels to Australia, Canada, and the U.K., I saw how theory was often its own subject. That was really fascinating to me and helped me [... -AW] more fully integrate theory into teaching within fiber material studies.

Goldsmiths College, University of London, although, sadly, their M.A. in textiles has closed, Janis Jefferies, Pennina Barnet, and many others developed an incredibly progressive program there. It was concept-driven and research-based, much like our program in Chicago. And I feel like so many of the artists and individuals who are trained through that method have gone out in the world and are teaching and practicing with that kind of mindset.

Within a number of other programs that I've experienced, work in textile and fiber is now more integrated into sculpture programs. At our school, the first-year program, called Contemporary Practices—the sewing machine is a tool, like a saw or any number of other artists' tools. And I see work that is stitched alongside painted works.

So I think areas that have traditionally excluded some of craft or textile-making methods have brought them back into the spheres of sculpture or three-dimensional practices.

Within our country, certainly, the graduate fiber program at Cranbrook Academy of Art is related to ours. Mark Newport is the current teacher, a graduate of SAIC many years ago. Prior to Mark Newport, Jane Lackey trained in a very similar way. And then Margo Mensing was there for a time, also a graduate of SAIC; and then Gerhardt Knodel. And I think I'm missing a number of other wonderful faculty who have come in and out of that program. I know Joan Livingstone was there for a time as well.

I think the Maryland Institute College of Art fiber department is related. I think there are a number of fiber-based programs that have a related approach to the kind of approach we advocate. But quite different from Rhode Island School of Design: although such a fine and highly revered school, it is quite different in the kind of orientation of what the students do when they graduate. I was recently in Manchester, at Manchester Metropolitan University, a huge textile program. I forget if they call it textile or fiber.

MS. RIEDEL: That would be—yes.

MS. WILSON: Okay. In Manchester, I feel like their textile program was designed in fine art and fashion and production and one-of-a-kind objects and performance and research all together. It was a really huge program. I'm not sure I understand just how all it was organized, but I was very impressed by the numbers of students.

They asked me to lecture when I was there in 2011, October—doing research for the exhibition that opened at the Whitworth in 2012. It was a lecture, like, at 11:00. It was during the day. And I thought, Oh, there will probably be a small group of students I'll speak to. And I went into an auditorium and I looked up within this huge auditorium. There must have been 350 students sitting there, hundreds of students.

I gave a lecture about my work, and I tried to encourage participation in the Whitworth project upcoming, and there was great interest in that. Manchester students took on a really wonderful dye project for the costuming for the Whitworth performance. I said to one of the teachers afterwards, Who were all those students? And they were mainly textile students. So it's a very, very big program. And I feel that a number of the faculty, the tutors, the staff, who were trained at Goldsmiths, have migrated into this program. So it has diverse areas of input.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. WILSON: So there are programs that aren't one or another.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: It's about creative learning that might be applied to design or production or a more concept-driven, research-based, fine-art kind of orientation at a school like ours.

So our department is called the department of Fiber and Material Studies. At one point when I was chair, we worked to change to this name. And the chairing of our department rotates through the full-time faculty.

So I remember one year we did a lot of research on the subject of changing the name of our department, realizing that the term "fiber" seemed to [be -AW], in the perception outside the school, too limited for what we actually were doing. Was there another way, through language, of framing our department that better served what we actually were doing? And it was quite a process, including polling our alums. I had thought perhaps the word "textile" might be more open.

When I was studying with Dr. Boyer at CCAC in the '70s, she felt "textile" was the most open of terms—anything made of fibrous materials by hand, a very open definition. Yet to some of our alums from the East Coast, the word "textile" referenced industry. And they said if a department was named "textiles," they wouldn't apply, because it did not relate to their interests in sculptural practices using fiber or cloth. So "fiber" seemed generally to be a more open term.

And yet to others, the term "fiber" sort of stayed in the '70s. It stayed as a term that was associated in a negative way, to large, furry wall hangings in corporate lobbies. It got stuck there. Or kind of mean-spirited, not-well-intended remarks were made, like, Oh, placemats and napkins—a condescending, negative spin on a production textile orientation.

So we had built something in our department using this term "fiber." And of course, the idea was to try to open things up. When we came upon the term "material studies," one might say, Well, what's that? And we felt that the question, "What's that?" was a better response—[they laugh]—than someone thinking they knew what that was. Right?

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Yes.

MS. WILSON: It didn't close things down. The school felt that we developed meaning around the term "fiber" in our school, and they didn't want to lose the meaning that had been developed. So Fiber and Material Studies became the terminology that the faculty and the alum support group and the administration finally landed on. And I would say it's been helpful. It's been helpful—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. WILSON: —in just opening things up. And of course, now, with the Internet, we have graduate and

undergraduate portfolio sites where potential applicants can go to the school site and go to our department and look at the work. The work is what best represents any school. Although it's not the actual work, pictures of the work are much better than language. But you have to get people there when they're researching through language. You have to help them want to be interested in what the work looks like.

I'm going to stop just a moment and get some water.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

[Audio break.]

One other question about *Local Industry* and just the diversity of media involved in the exhibition in Knoxville. We were talking just earlier off disc about Rauschenberg coming to mind and that variety of media that he brought to his work to examine particular ideas, the diversity, the work with [Merce] Cunningham and Cage, and how that might apply to that specific show of yours or your way of working.

MS. WILSON: I think the period of the '60s in New York is incredibly inspirational—the kinds of collaborations between dance and theater and visual art practice. Robert Rauschenberg—what an amazing artist in being so interested in incorporating into his practice any new technology that came his way. The form of his work could change so dramatically, working with very early technologies alongside the newest media that was available, interested in collaborations and partnerships with other artists. It's very moving to me and inspirational, that time period.

In documenta in '07 there was marvelous Trisha Brown work, both her drawings of dance movement and a performance piece. Much contemporary art now is acknowledging the intersections between disciplines of creative artistic production, between dance and visual art practices and the kinds of new forms that evolve with those collaborations.

So in Knoxville, yes, there was *Rewinds*, a glass sculpture; a video of a movement performance; and a participatory weaving factory—all in one show. And certainly tying them together were the conceptual issues around textile labor, connection to place, and so many different kinds of issues and criteria about making, from the artisan or artist to factory production. So I think that show had a range of content that those three projects addressed. And each project allowed for perhaps a different kind of discussion to evolve.

So perhaps for me, that era in New York of such tremendous collaboration—of course, music too—Cage and—

MS. RIEDEL: Cunningham?

MS. WILSON: —Cunningham, Cage [... -AW], Rauschenberg, the Judson Dance Group were very inspirational to me as artists whose work evolved through collaborative practices. The way they incorporated new media and technologies in very liberal ways created artworks of aesthetic freshness and new possibilities.

MS. RIEDEL: That, I think, is a nice segue in—dance into the *Walking the Warp* pieces, the one that Rhona Hoffman—was done with nondancers, correct?

MS. WILSON: That's right.

MS. RIEDEL: And the one in Manchester was dancers and dance students.

MS. WILSON: That's right.

MS. RIEDEL: What was the situation in Houston?

MS. WILSON: So in Houston, I was invited by the curator, Valerie Cassel Oliver, to be part of a show called *Hand + Made: The Performative Impulse in Art and Craft* [2010]. It was a group exhibition in one large, beautiful, big space at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston.

Valerie invited me to do another performance of *Walking the Warp*. And as we were talking about it—I forget; I guess it must have been Valerie who was suggesting a collaboration with dance. And initially, the ballet, the Houston Ballet was proposed, and I thought that seemed really challenging and exciting. And yet as she researched who was available, the ballet wasn't available during the time frame of this particular work.

But the contemporary dance group called Hope Stone Dance was interested in this collaboration. So I worked with professional dancers. Many were trained in ballet but moved into more modern, contemporary forms, and they were engaged by the museum to work with me to help develop this work.

I've not worked with dance—although I have a bit of dance background, I've never really worked collaboratively

with dancers. A lot of things about the organization of the project had been pre-arranged, of course; I met with the dancers and talked through the project prior to the day of the first performance.

One thing that was made very clear to me—and this was just a day or two before it was to be performed—they were not interested, really, in the kind of collaborative process that I was familiar with. For example, I had thought that with the incredible range of color of thread that we were working with, all of which was the Knoxville-sourced thread for *Local Industry*—there was a bounty of excess of that material that was shipped to Houston, so that became the material with which we developed the *Walking [the Warp]* Houston project. But they were not at all interested in thinking through stripes and color, and talking about that or making that part of the performative process. They weren't interested. They wanted to know exactly the color sequence.

I had thought it would be a little more free-flowing, or it would be a discussion, as I would be there the whole time, but they weren't interested in that. They wanted a very structured choreography, and to get it right—to get the choreography right, to do exactly what I wanted.

So I went back to the hotel room the night before the performance and stayed up most of the night developing a more concrete stripe plan that would give the dancers the structure that was required for them to perform this work. That was really good learning for me. It was certainly a collaboration, but of a different kind. They wanted much more clear direction. So I was able to have that ready the next day, and we worked through some steps.

And they, I would say, have an unbelievable memory of rotation sequence, different from artists, even though a lot of artists who work with textile process, myself and others, know a lot about repetitions of sequences of small movements, and it can be very, very, very complicated. But the dancers' memory was unparalleled to anything I knew. And so there was no problem with who goes when and who follows who and those kinds of structures.

I had a stripe plan, and I worked with Sarah Jones, who was then an intern at the museum—subsequently came to our school in fiber and material studies. She was an incredible help in continuing the finishing of the *Walking* at a later point of the museum show.

So we had two afternoons of *Walking the Warp* with the professional dancers. And I think the hardest thing for them, once I gave them very clear direction of color, was tying a square knot. It was a kind of fine motor skill, manual dexterity, because these bobbins would run out a lot, and so built into the performative choreography needed to be the tying of knots. How you stop, who brings the new bobbin, not only what color—maybe it's the same color; it just ended midway and you have to finish it. How do you keep tension on the thread? But it was actually at that moment where the two ends are held up, right over left, left over right. And so we had lots of little mini-stops and workshops in tying a square knot, which I think, to others with a different kind of training or background, would be just a complete no-brainer. Like learning any number of knots quickly would be—not be very hard.

So they were super dedicated and good-spirited throughout the entire project. Really professionals. Really professionals. And I learned something about professionals, able to pick up things so quickly when given the direction.

A little bit different than the group of younger dancers or dancers-in-training that I worked with in Manchester, which was the third *Walking* performance. Those individuals were between ages 13 and 16, and they were in training at the Lowry Center for Dance, right outside Manchester. They were individuals that had applied and been vetted through the competitive structure to participate in that program.

I spent four or five days going to the dance studio prior to the performance, watching their teacher work with them. And seeing the kind of teaching methods was absolutely fascinating to me, developing teamwork and focus. Teamwork and focus. And perhaps it's because they were ages 13 to 16, you know, that teamwork and focus were especially critical to being able to do this new performance.

I remember at moments of break time, the boys in particular would just launch into twirling and ballet moves. Doing work like mine that was more pedestrian, more task-based movement, although very choreographed, was very hard. They were used to a kind of dance that had more flourish and more of a movement based on ballet, which was the training of these young dancers.

So it was a very different experience. It took a lot more attention and work and individual focus to work with that volunteer group.

MS. RIEDEL: I think the final piece, maybe we'll talk about—that we haven't touched on at all yet, is, too, from 2010 [*to weave/to wind/to knot/to knit/to twist/to push/to pack/to press*], the glass [tools] piece and how that—we will touch, start off with the inspiration there from [Richard] Serra's list of verbs.

MS. WILSON: Well, I think Serra's *Verb List [Compilation: Actions to Relate to Oneself]* has been quoted and used

by many artists since he first made that work in—what year was Serra's—1967—

MS. RIEDEL: Sixty-seven? Sixty-eight?

MS. WILSON: Yes, '67—'68. And it is interesting to me, as an artist who's choosing to work with a lot of different methods and techniques, ones that are foundational to me, come out of textile-making. The kind of action verbs used in Serra's list were part of the time in which he worked.

And I often think, in the '60s, a lot of the Minimalist and process-based work came out of the metal-and-wood shop, and the construction site, all of which at a certain point in history were very male aligned. And in the evolving Post-Minimal period, there are lots of other materials and processes that have other kinds of alignments. Alignments to traditions of women's work and home.

In any case, I was interested in—particularly through travels and going to museums like the Victoria and Albert—all these amazing delivery systems for thread, both industrial and hand, and also of lacemaking, the ways in which you turn bobbins that hold threads.

When I was at Pilchuck, that became a side project that several of us worked on, sort of spearheaded by my artist's assistant, Jessica Julius, and David Willis. We remade tools in glass. In one of the studios we discovered in a cabinet a set of tools that were made for *pâte de verre*, which is a particular kind of very, very early glass process [*sic*]. And they looked sort of like knitting needles or a bobbin, related to textile tools.

In any case, I started this project recreating tools in glass as almost ghosts of themselves, or blanks—not intended to be functional—and thinking about this range of processes in textiles and glass that had alignments different from Serra's verb list, and the words that might be used to describe the actions of these glass tools. I chose to title the work in a way that acknowledged correspondences to Serra.

The making of art now is a genuinely much more open proposition. In my own lived history I see a greater range of making processes now considered, I think, through contributions of feminism, queer theory, and multicultural traditions. I feel that textile processes are sort of an open field for many artists. They do not have the same stigma or marginalization that they once had. And they did once have that; it wasn't all so long ago.

So this is a work that brings in my own past interests and histories, acknowledging this moment in time, a greater degree of inclusiveness in making art. The action verbs are different now than they were in Serra's time.

Maybe we should eat lunch.

MS. RIEDEL: [Inaudible.] [They laugh.]

[Audio break.]

All right. Would you describe your working process and how it has changed, or not, over time?

MS. WILSON: Well, I always have a studio. And I've worked in many studios. One of my favorites was the warehouse open-studio live/work space in Berkeley, California. I had a wonderful 800-square-foot storefront in Rogers Park, northern part of Chicago, for a good period of my time here in Chicago. Here in Evanston, just north of Chicago, my studio is the front third of the second and third floor of a really old house. So in a way, it's kind of loft-like, warehouse-like, live/work, because each floor is about 2,000 square feet. So it's a huge place and has plenty of room. We moved up here to raise my stepdaughter, Anna. So this has worked well too.

I think often a storefront is ideal for many artists, because it's ground level, access to in-and-out with trucks and transport easily, often accommodates noise and machinery, although that's not part of what I need right now.

In any case, I think, in terms of working process, having a space dedicated to work is really important. It's always been that which has been most privileged in terms of space in my life, having a studio.

MS. RIEDEL: Is there anything in particular that you've had to have, has been an important element in the studio?

MS. WILSON: Clean walls. I make them clean, put up boards, Celotex, paint them white. I've increasingly appreciated keeping storage separate from an active workspace so that everything is not in sight at every moment. Like in this studio we're sitting in here—although everything's pretty low, so that when you come in, you see the windows, the north windows. And there is a lot packed into the space below the windows, but most big stuff or past artwork is in a storeroom off site, or in a huge basement in this big old Victorian place. So I have a lot more things, but I choose not to fill up my studio as a storeroom or as a space for just collecting materials or equipment.

MS. RIEDEL: How did it work with something like *Local Industry*, where you had so many interns and so many students working—[inaudible]?

MS. WILSON: One thing you haven't seen about my studio—and I can give you a peek—is, I have an office upstairs, so I have the same amount of space upstairs as downstairs. There's another room this size right above this one, and then an office space. I can have different kinds of activities going on upstairs and down. Each room can accommodate two or three people very, very comfortably, with plenty of room to spread out.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. WILSON: Yes. So it works.

MS. RIEDEL: It's a big space.

MS. WILSON: Yes, it's a big space. Yes. It's double this size.

And then, particularly as our kid is not living here anymore—she's grown up—my dear husband, Michael Nagelbach, has no problem with the studio moving into the living room, moving into the dining room. We have lots of upstairs space that he can use that's private and not part of the more public downstairs area. So I don't think there's a problem with expanding in this big old Victorian place that we own.

So in terms of process, having a space dedicated to work is really important. And certainly computers and printers so that I can do visual image processing here, if not projects that use the computer. When we were doing video, we did it all here in the studio, all the editing.

I keep a pretty healthy library up in my office, and I like having that for reference. Of course, online reference is kind of extraordinary as well, in the age of Google. And open work surfaces. I love natural light, working in natural light. I don't know if there's any other requirements to the studio, other than having it separate and dedicated. The entire time of my working life since graduate school, I've always had a dedicated space for a studio.

MS. RIEDEL: Commissions. Do you accept them? Have you decided not to?

MS. WILSON: I don't welcome commissions. I don't encourage commissions, although when I was invited to be in an exhibition at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa, Japan, a few years ago—they were interested in *Topologies*, and I wasn't interested in doing another large version there. There was a lot of other work to be considered. But anyway, it became a discussion between [... -AW] the curator [and me -AW]. She proposed that I might do a smaller-scale, site-specific kind of *Topologies*-related piece. And I agreed to do it.

The museum in Kanazawa is quite amazing. It's designed by the architects SANAA. They've done a number of projects in the United States; one sort of recent building is the New Museum in New York City. This Kanazawa museum is circular, and when you walk in, there are all these exhibition spaces that are circles and rectangles and squares, and they're at different elevations, different heights inside, and different floors. So there's this sense of uniqueness to the galleries. The interiors are fairly neutral but different in the surfaces that are used.

Also there's this incredible inside-outside feeling to this museum, where you're in a space, and you walk out, and you're looking through the window to an interior courtyard that's another square, where you're looking at trees growing and maybe a sitting area. So there's this sort of conflation of inside and outside within the circular walls of that museum.

So I chose a space for this commission. Actually the curator flew over and we had a talk here in the studio about the project ahead. It was located in a window niche space such that when you're inside the gallery looking at *A Chronicle of Days*, you turned and looked out, and my *Topologies* commission was situated in this niche space—in kind of a window space, actually—looking out to one of the interior courtyards. So it sort of participated in this liminal space, neither here nor there, between things, this commission. And that was a really meaningful and enjoyable commission.

Another work that was shown in this exhibition, in another space, was *Errant Behaviors*, and *Errant Behaviors*, of course, is this activation of the *Topologies* tableau. So having some representation of *Topologies* in the museum was a nice correspondence—to have the video playing in another room, albeit huge in relationship to this small world that was created in between inside and outside.

Other than that, I've not sought any other commissions.

MS. RIEDEL: And is there a reason for that?

MS. WILSON: I think because I teach full-time, I choose to keep the work I do in the studio directed from my own

concepts and research. Yes.

I suppose another kind of commission, the V&A, when I showed there in 2008, I did do a large *Topologies* tableau for the exhibition. They wanted to travel the show, and they couldn't fly me over every time it went to a new venue to recreate this work, because *Topologies* was only created on site and was up only for the time the exhibition was open. Then it was dismantled and the parts were shipped back to me.

So they did ask me to do a commission, a smaller *Topologies* section. I think it was about five by seven feet, and I agreed to do that, and that is the work that traveled to the other venues in the U.K., and eventually the museum acquired it.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Right. It's interesting that both commissions have been related to museum exhibitions—

MS. WILSON: Right.

MS. RIEDEL: —and they're the only two that exist.

MS. WILSON: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So do you have any thoughts about the similarities and differences between some of the earliest work, perhaps, and some of the most recent work, and what's transpired between?

MS. WILSON: Right. That's a big question. I think [... -AW] there's quite a continuum in my work. I've never had a —knock on wood; I'll knock on wood—a blank or a complete disruption from my own making. I've been able to keep working pretty rigorously and consistently for a very long time.

MS. RIEDEL: Since college. You haven't really seen—[inaudible]—which I think is interesting. It's been consistent —forward.

MS. WILSON: Since college, yes. Yes. Right. Yes, I've been able to keep working.

I think one project moves from the past one, so in a certain way my work references itself and, hopefully, responds to a dialogue within contemporary art and culture at any given moment. I'm very interested in art of the time I live in, following the work of other artists and keeping abreast of current writing.

I'm also very interested in being a student of Rauschenberg's, watching the way in which he explored new media as it entered his world, be it a Xerox or fax machine. In my world, video editing, for example, to be able to work through and accommodate digital video as it connects, intersects with my own interests and concerns. And perhaps move formats from video into performance and intersections with dance and choreography.

I think there's a core there that is always very integral to my work, which has to do with an acknowledgement of material histories, both in the processes of how things are made and objects as carriers of cultural meaning, alongside conceptual thinking in contemporary art theory and history.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. That sounds like—[inaudible]. How has your work been received over time?

MS. WILSON: Well, I've been lucky. I've had an audience for my work quite consistently. I'm not like some artists I know who have had these really fast-track trajectories. [... -AW] But I feel like there's always been an audience, and it's built over time. The galleries I have been affiliated with and the collectors who have collected my work—both individuals and museums, and the support of curators are all absolutely critical to the reception of my work and sustaining my practice financially and in all other ways—the conversations, their belief in my work, the questions and challenges they ask that I need to think about. [... -AW] Not just intellectual questions and challenges, but practical questions, too.

I also feel that there's been a fair amount of critical recognition in the writing about my work by some really wonderful, thoughtful critics and writers. That has contributed to a kind of momentum or a history that's recorded about my practice.

Sometimes I ask my students—and this is really a provocative question that I know is kind of stupid in a certain way, too, but—where would you like to see yourself in 10 years? And so if someone turns that on me, I would say, Oh, I'd like to have a solo show at the Pompidou next year. I don't know; I always go to France, or Paris; I do like the Pompidou.

And do I really want that, though? I don't—well, sure. If I were invited to do it, sure, I would. But is that the end and all? Is that the pinnacle of success? Not necessarily. I've had the opportunity to have a solo show here in Chicago at the MCA Chicago, to be included in a Whitney Biennial, to show at some wonderful museums like Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, the museum in Kanazawa, Japan, the V&A in London, the Whitworth in

Manchester— I've really had some wonderful opportunities.

I think maybe because of my shows in the U.K., I might be better known there, actually, than the United States. It just feels like that from the queries about my work that come to me through the Internet, student research papers or art historians' research papers and that sort of thing. Particularly the V&A was just an incredible kind of exposure for the work.

One sabbatical I took, I cooked up this topic of 17th-century stumpwork, embroidery research. I wanted to get into the V&A; I just wanted to get in and see some things that were relevant to my research at that time. So I was able to, with some help, with friends of the curator's, have access to that collection—and that's probably one of the deepest collections of Western needlework anywhere in the world, what the V&A houses. So there's something about the U.K. and these material culture collecting histories of museums.

There's a lot of publishing in England, lots of publishing. Berg, the Black Dog Press, a lot of publishers who are interested in intersections between fine art, design, and craft—not so much how-to books, but maybe those too. And there are a lot of schools and universities, a lot of places for academic training in material culture studies.

Anyway, I'm not sure why it is. Perhaps that show at the V&A. But I feel like I'm better known there. It's been really a pleasure to research and to exhibit in the U.K.—well, England, in particular.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you want to say anything else in specific about the importance of collections and collectors on your work—[inaudible]?

MS. WILSON: Yes. Well, one thing about having work in museum collections is that you feel, unless there's a disaster, that your work will be maintained and cared for. And a lot of work I've made is somewhat fragile, and if not properly cared for, it cannot fare well over time. So having work in a collection that is maintained, where there's a staff to maintain it, is for an artist really a wonderful, great privilege.

The MCA Chicago has—I think they have four of my works. The Art Institute of Chicago has a couple. And so I have work in a number of museums where I feel there's an ongoing place where one could see the work.

As we know, often is the case that private collections eventually go to a museum. There are Chicago collectors who have acquired my work for their collection and sometimes, even as they are shifting their collections, the work then goes to a museum. So that's happened.

Usually when one collects, there's some kind of accountability or caring for the future of the artwork. And so the support of individual collectors is hugely contributing and sustaining to my practice. I try to have my practice take care of itself such that there's money coming back into the studio for materials and, sometimes, paid assistants. Grants are also super helpful for that. I used a major grant I got towards the Knoxville catalogue, in addition to the funds that were made available through the museum, which were considerable, as well as staff time. So having funds from grants is really helpful for sustaining the practice as well as funds that come in from selling work.

So, much appreciation for the curatorial interest, for museum shows and private collectors.

MS. RIEDEL: I just have one final question, and then if you have any final thoughts, some of the thoughts you'd like to add, they're more than welcome.

So how or where do you see yourself and your work fitting into contemporary art?

MS. WILSON: Well, my work is contemporary art, so it fits in.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you very much.

MS. WILSON: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]