



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Allan Sekula,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Allan Sekula on August 20, 2011 - February 14, 2012. The interview took place at Sekula's studio and home in Los Angeles, California and at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, New York and was conducted by Mary Panzer for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Sally Stein, widow of Allan Sekula, has reviewed the transcript. Her 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

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MARY PANZER: Okay, all right, here we go. This is Mary Panzer interviewing Allan Sekula at his studio in Los Angeles, California on the 20 of August, 2011 for the Archives of American Art. And this is disc number one. Okay. So, Allan we talked—pay no attention to that. Although we know you're an artist and this is for the Archives of American Art. I would like you to describe to me what kind of an artist you are. Or what your career consists of in your own words.

ALLAN SEKULA: Okay, fair enough. Well, I think from roughly 1971 let's say to 2001, I would have probably most readily described myself as a photographer and a writer. And after 2001, I would say filmmaker, photographer, writer. And the writing element, certainly in the earlier years, would have denoted a pretty strong tension between the kind of writing I would do as part of an artwork within an artwork, and writing that was criticism. And since about maybe 1995 or so that difference has shrunk, and I'm doing less writing that I would call art history or cultural history or criticism. Well maybe cultural history, but less formal critical writing, or writing on the history theory of photography, for example, that I'd done previously. So I think there's been a certain—perhaps a closing of the gap between critical writing and writing that might be called part of an artwork. But writing's always been a consistent part of the work. And it's mostly prose writing though the forms of—I think I've partaken of a lot of different modalities of writing from critical essays, to autobiographical texts, biographical texts, texts that entailed type found material based on tape recordings, and transcripts of peoples speech, everyday speech, self-justifying speech if you want, letter writing, prayers, prose poems, polemics.

MARY PANZER: Polemics?

ALLAN SEKULA: You know I've pretty much felt that there are a whole range of literary possibilities. And that's been, I think, one of my differences with the way language was incorporated into conceptual art, which tended, to my mind, to be rather narrowly either propositional in the motive analytic philosophy, or Wittgensteinian. You know, text like the *Philosophical Investigations*. Or list like, you know, kind of list writing. You know, which always struck me as a bit impoverished. So I felt like opening up all the possibilities of prose style in a way. And I think—I think by and large that conceptual art, the role of language in conceptual art tended to embrace perhaps not explicitly but that kind of idea of zero degree of stylist writing. And in that sense in following the line that Roland Barthes charts from *Le Degré zero de l'écriture*. And I was interested in threads of narrative that were older and, you know—

MARY PANZER: Ones that are more complicated so I mean this sort of segues into the next question, which is how do you position yourself in relation to say contemporary art? Or who are the artists that are similar to you and word different so that if one was to do an exhibition in 2050 of the artist of a particular era or style, where would your work fit? I mean this a simple minded historical point of view but historians without the benefit of personal or, you know, impersonal relationships are forced to come up with these things. And if you tell them now, they'll have a—they'll get it right.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well that's—

MARY PANZER: Maybe.

ALLAN SEKULA: Okay one could hope. But who knows where we'll be in 2050. Well, I know where I'll be. But, you know, I won't be around but—

MARY PANZER: I mean there's Jeff Wall. I mean, and other people have compared your work sometimes to the—Jeff Wall, or even some—

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, I think there was a kind of west coast variant of conceptualism that had manifestations in Vancouver, in San Francisco, in Los Angeles, and San Diego in the early '70s that were—had certain commonalities and perhaps were different from the conceptualism that emerged in New York around the same time. There may have been more emphasis on narrativity out here in the work of some artists. I mean, Eleanor Antin would be an example. The kind of literary interests that people like Ian Wallace in Vancouver, you know, was a teacher of Jeff Wall's. So we had a key influential figure there. Maybe some of the bay area artists, Howard Fried, Terry Fox, you know, people that were kind of in between performance and a kind of—kind of conceptualist interest. But I—I mean immediate context. So one question is, "Well what was the cohort that I had the time I first started making art?" and the other question is the associations that are made later in one's career, or the associations that are imposed by critics, or by people constructing links between practices. But I guess it's complicated because I think there are various Venn diagrams that you can draw. And one key issue for me was that I guess I came to photography not really as a photographer, you know.

And I'd been probably more consistent just to maybe follow on the point—the first point I was making that while I think the styles of writing that have interested me have involved a lot of genre switches, I've stayed fairly close to a documentary mode in the photography I pursued. And that's laid down a kind of baseline for me even if from time to time I've staged images or done things that were records of, you know, obviously staged actions. I mean they might have been documentary photographs but they entailed a certain amount of prearranged fictional staging, let's say. But by and large I'd say that it's pretty strongly running along a kind of social realist line. So I guess I would—whatever my quarrels have been with realism over the years, I see what I do as part of realist legacy because I think in the 19th century realism was a—however much it might have been linked to faulty positivist models of science, for example, [inaudible] idea of the experimental model.

It was also realism broadly construed was a democratic current and entailed the appearance of the working class on the historical stage as actors and agents of their own destiny. And I think that's important to remember especially when modernism did a lot to suppress realism and to derogate it. And, of course, realism always crept back into the picture often born by photography or by cinema. And so that would be maybe a first principle for me. I mean, again I'm not giving you names here, associates, but I'd say if I were to chart a broader history, you know, it would go back to figures like Courbet or Corsoro, you know, the turpitude moral of [Honoré] Daumier. And I wouldn't be so keen to embrace the Michael Fried high road of Manet Patoyo [ph] flattening. The tableau that have—has been so congenial and bankable for an artist like Jeff Wall, you know. To me it's to be in touch with the popular currents of caricature in the 19th century. And for example Daumier or things that seem like minor currents perhaps in the—in the—in the—in other words I don't—I don't—I don't like the—I don't like the idea of history of modernism that's a kind of victorious you know —

MARY PANZER: March?

ALLAN SEKULA: March, you know, a la you know a kind of Revel score of modernism marching on to its ultimate dialogical goal because it always seems to me that one's sympathies—I've always felt that it's the underdog currents and the lost currents that are the most interesting and the threads that get dropped. So, for example an artist like Meunier came to interest me in the last few years. The Belgian Courbet—but it turns out he's more Courbet than Courbet because Belgium had an industrial revolution in a much more profound way than did France. And so he confronted the existence of this new proletariat in a way that Courbet didn't, you know, and came up with solutions in sculpture that were pretty interesting. And, of course, get lost because they're seen as particular when—and of course when the same solutions reappear like figure groups with Rodin they become universal and acclaimed. But, you know, as far as I'm concerned, you know, Meunier's *Puddler* is as thoughtful as Rodin's *Thinker*, you know.

And so there are those—I'm kind of—I'm interested in those minor figures. And also if we're—if we're—if we're interested in—well I mean even an artist who's seen as highly significant for photic practice today, and someone who's thought of in relation to my own work, John Heartfield. And Heartfield, of course has interested me over the years greatly. The links backward from Heartfield go back through—go back to Daumier for example, by way of Edward Folks, spoke on Daumier. And Edward Folks' work on the whole culture of caricature in 19th century Europe. So all that popular prints, all that material of the 19th century strikes me as a ground out of which—a kind of lost ground, I guess. I guess part of what interests me is the—is the vitality of all the currents of social art that precede the Bolshevik Revolution, precede 1917. You know, when you have an anarchist movement, you have the second international, you know, first international, the various currents of socialism in Europe and in America. And so what was the art that emerged in that context, you know.

MARY PANZER: Well that sounds to me like a question that traditional historians are only now beginning to ask. To find the visual expression that goes along with the—with the ideological revolutionary movement, I mean aside from very obvious propaganda posters. But you're talking about reorganizing or creating a new vision of the history of art that requires the synthesis of a historical vision and a pictorial one or picture practice. So you're providing a history in which these images and artists begin to make sense in a new way. Because modernism's story casts them to the margins—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: And you've created a new story.

ALLAN SEKULA: I guess when I say realism I'm taking—I'm taking caricature and the grotesque into account, you know. So I wouldn't, you know, someone like [James] Ensor becomes important, I think, for me.

MARY PANZER: Well, because they're not moving towards an abstraction. They're not interested in abstraction.

ALLAN SEKULA: No. Yes, and I guess I would—I would for example a painter like [Roberto] Matta, the paintings that Matta made in the—in the—from '44, '45, '46, '47 that time frame right around the end of the Second World War and the dropping of the atomic bombs. He's one of the few artists to come out of surrealism and move into abstraction but to come up with this kind of weird almost proto-cyborgian, you know, techno-humanoid depiction, you know. No one else took that path and you feel like he's the one artist who was responding in a—in a—in a rather interesting imagistic way to the new conditions of warfare and new conditions of production. The—I mean whether you're thinking about an airplane cockpit or a CAT scan or a PET scan machine, you can see the premonitions of those devices and the—and the echoing of the already existing technical forms from the '40s in his paintings. You know the body kind of crucified within a machine but not treated in a [inaudible]. You know there has to be at least some Catholic residue there but it's not in any way foregrounded. It's more like a matter of fact—it's kind of a strange dystopia of machines, you know. So I guess I mean I would, you know, if I imagine myself in a—in a—in a kind of a history of art, you know, it would—it would—I can imagine artists like you know Daumier, Ensor, Matta, [Laughs] in that some sort of strange meandering wind.

MARY PANZER: Well yes you get to—yes well you get to create your own genealogy. I mean that's sort of the—that's the question. What about your friend Lewis Hine?

ALLAN SEKULA: Oh for sure Hine, yes, and more and more so. I mean more than I—I'm more sympathetic to Hine now than I was when I first wrote about him I think, because I think I over the years it's been clear that there's an aspect of Hine that's just unassemblable. I mean when you—I mean the stack of books about Walker Evans, and I have huge respect for Walker Evans, but the stack of books about Walker Evans is got to be at least six or seven times, 10 times higher than this—the few books there are on Hine. And, of course it's—Hine gets again dismissed for his particularity. I mean he's the photographer—the working class of child labor. The fact that he, you know, I just found Homer Prices' book on the consequences for civilians of the First World War which is illustrated by Hine photos.

MARY PANZER: Oh fantastic.

ALLAN SEKULA: And, you know, I knew the photos and there's been a publication of them. But when you actually see that this was a clear area of social research and reportage in 1919, particularly in the Balkans where the wounds of that—where the war started in effect because it was a kind of a continuation of the Balkan wars in 1913 and where it ended with particularly horrific consequences for the civilian population. And with that then with the crumbling of both the Ottoman and Austro—Hungarian empires led to consequences that, you know, bore bitter fruit in the '90s of course with the collapse of Yugoslavia. You really see this incredibly important work of social research on the effect of war—more mass war, total war as war against civilians. So there—our definition of Hine is a social researcher and visual documenter of conditions of existence. It kind of has to really expand well beyond the sphere of labor. I want to make sure it's Homer Folks. Let me just grab the book.

MARY PANZER: Okay. I'll put us on pause here.

ALLAN SEKULA: Because I just got it and it's hard to find.

MARY PANZER: Okay, so you said it's Homer Folks.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, Homer Folks, *The Human Cost of the War*.

MARY PANZER: Could you—could you just spell that?

ALLAN SEKULA: F-O-L-K-S, like folk song or folk story or folk tale—1920. And *The Human Cost of the War*, which was published by Harper and Brothers and includes a great number of plates by Hine, double paged, double image. Or single page, double image bound in plates.

MARY PANZER: Did he have a relationship to *Survey* magazine?

ALLAN SEKULA: He did, yes, to—he was the organizer and director of the Department of Civil Affairs in the American Red Cross in France. And he was a special commissioner to southeastern Europe. But he had a history with the—yes with *The Survey*. I think with *Survey Graphic* or *Survey*.

MARY PANZER: But if he's the person who is responsible for bringing Hine over from Europe because so far we've known he was connected to the Red Cross but not—I certainly haven't seen this book where the work was actually applied.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: Released.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, there's a great deal about Serbia and France as well, and Greece, Italy.

MARY PANZER: Okay so all right. I'm going to take a—I'm just going to go with the flow here. How did you come to find this book and how—I mean how—you were just reading about Hine and you realized or you were thinking World War I there's got to be more or how did you make that connection?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well I guess—I just at the moment I was thinking about the—I guess my interest in Hine just sort of waxes and wanes but it I mean I don't think there's a single topic I've taken up that hasn't—I never felt it's finished, you know. That you sort of have it on the back burner or on reserve and then something sparks a return to it and the—it's sometimes surprising what—like I never thought that maritime questions would take me back to August Sander, you know, for example. And that happened when I was working on *Fish Story*. And I wouldn't have normally thought that questions of like the changing nature of warfare would lead me back to Lewis Hine but it was kind of in that context that I got curious about this book. And I happened to come across one that was available and thought maybe I should pursue it.

MARY PANZER: Did you know that the Hine illustrations would be in it when you ordered?

ALLAN SEKULA: Oh yes, sure, yes.

MARY PANZER: Oh, no, but that's just helpful to be able to know a little bit more about how you—how those connections come about. Or you know, or how you're able to follow these trails in such surprising directions, because obviously if you go to the library and look up Lewis Hine this book is not going to come merrily up.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, as it happened I think the person listing this foregrounded Hine.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, that Homer Folks was—whoever it was, they understood that Hine was more of a name to conjure with. But the—I mean I think I remember early in the '90s, I can't—I mean this must have been around '90 on a trip to London I think it was at the Serpentine Gallery, if I'm not wrong, there was a Heartfield show. And there was a reconstruction of one of Heartfield's exhibitions where for the first time I understood that he would—he would post quotes from other artists on the wall. Like Van Gogh and he would—he sort of framed his practice in terms of prior figures. And in a kind of polemical way, and as if to say, "This is what art could be and here are other guideposts preceding me who have pointed in these directions, in these potential directions." And that intrigued me, and I think bore fruit later when I thought about projects where I could actually include commentaries or on other artists within the work like someone like Meunier or, you know. So that also was an instance of the collapsing of the distinction between doing criticism and doing an artwork. You know, that an artwork could, you know—and of course there were other—I mean plenty of examples. I mean all of the Godard, historic cinema you know where you're reflecting on your own medium's history within with means available of the medium itself, you know, in an explicit way, not in an implicit way but in directly citing names, examples.

MARY PANZER: Right. But that's more easily found in moving images or cinema than in—than in the still pictures, which is where you at least until pretty recently devoted yourself, still pictures or collections of still pictures, sequences of still pictures.

ALLAN SEKULA: But of course in a work like *Fish Story* I could include an essay that spoke historically about other images of the sea and of maritime space of, you know, ranging from Jane's *Fighting Ships*, to Turner, to you know, to Eisenstein's *Potemkin*, and so on. So I mean the thing—I think the thing that's been important for me is that, okay there's writing and there's photography. Or there's, let's say, writing and picture making, non-painterly picture making. Photography is a kind of graphic art of reproduction from mechanical means. And then there's all the particular forms that those—that writing and imaging can take. I mean whether it's an exhibition on the wall, a book, or a slide sequence, or a film, you know. Is the language written, is it spoken, do you read it sitting down or standing up? How many words are palatable in these different contexts? I mean—you realize that a book—books can be very, very wordy and there're obviously limitations on image size in books. So the amount of detail that you can pull from an image is limited. In cinema you have the factor of time, the amount of time you can expect an image is less than perhaps on a book page or in a print on a wall. So each mode has its own privilege, certain kind of attention whether visual or verbal attention. And if you open up your practice to all those possibilities and realize that every work is fungible enough to be reconfigured with certain potential loses

and certain potential additions of material, on the visual axis or on the verbal axis. You get a sense that the works never really done. It's kind of an open form that is always subject to reconfiguration depending on the context, you know.

And sometimes the factors are economic, you know. Someone says "We can do a show, but we can't." Or someone says "We can do a publication, but not a show." Or someone says "Can you send something that doesn't cost much to ship." Therefore slides or you know, so you—the idea of being flexible, I think is crucial to—so there aren't definitive forms necessarily. Though there may be ones that work better than others, you know. Like I may decide that of all the four ways this thing was configured, this is the best and that's the one I provisionally consider definitive. But then five years later I might discover there's a way to re-crack that and open it up again.

MARY PANZER: So, but if you're—if you're—okay so this is another nice big philosophical question you can range around. So what's your relationship to the art market, Allan Sekula? I mean, seems to me one of the problems with documentary photography and why it's had such a difficult relationship with the ongoing history of modernist art, is that documentary photography and magazine photography do not privilege the object, vintage prints. There are no vintage prints that exist. And as a result there's nothing to sell. And as a result, they don't—they drop out of the—out of the history. So that I'm—so that I'm very interested in your work in one way because it's brief configuring a history of art that's not simply the history of the art marketplace. So how do you—how does your work fit? I mean if someone wanted to buy one of your—what would a work by Allan Sekula—what would they—could they buy anything? Or how does that work, and how do you explain it?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well—

MARY PANZER: You have a gallery?

ALLAN SEKULA: I have, yes, I do have—I have two galleries. I have one in Paris and one in Los Angeles. Actually in Santa Monica and—but I worked for roughly my first real—I had—I mean occasionally I was in a show at a commercial gallery just as one of, you know, a number of artists invited to show there but really quite rarely. And until 1998, so I was working for a good 27, 28 years without any gallery representation. Let's say 25 years, I mean roughly. And there—occasionally a work would be sold to an institution. You know, I could do that directly as an individual. But like the Vancouver Art Gallery for example. Or the [inaudible] Gallery in Essen, or early institutions that have acquired works of mine. And they acquired entire works so—

MARY PANZER: So that would consist of prints?

ALLAN SEKULA: Prints, texts, yes, the whole exhibition version of a work. So given that there were—I mean this was consistent with the economy of the work, which was the—there might be one exhibition version of it maybe with a second set of prints. Or you know, but that would travel around and then typically initially it would be shown without frames in a very casual way and then in order to preserve the work it might get framed. And someone would pay for frames and it would get a little more protection, physical protection. And then after, you know there might be some institutional interest and then it would end up in a collection. But the big problem was that the photo market was very much conjuring with individual images. And, you know, I was very interested in sequences and context—I'm sorry we have to stop for a second.

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MARY PANZER: All right, my name's Mary Panzer. I'm here talking to Allan Sekula on the 21 of—on the 21 of August. And we're in Allan Sekula's back yard. It's Sunday morning. How are you?

ALLAN SEKULA: Okay.

MARY PANZER: [Laughs] This is going to be more a conventional kind of interview. The Archives would like me to ask you where you were born, and where you grew up, and what your family was like. And so I would like you to tell me about that. Where did you start out?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, I was born in 1951 in Erie, Pennsylvania, but hardly lived there. I think my father was writing technical manuals for General Electric for diesel electric locomotives in Erie, and trying to take some pre-med courses on the G.I. Bill. And then my mother took ill just after I was born, and they moved down to a western Pennsylvania town called Luthersburg. Both my parents are from central and western Pennsylvania. And my dad was working as a painter, a house painter, and other sort of pickup jobs. But he'd been trained as a chemist before the war and ended up getting a job with the Department of Interior in Salt Lake City. And so not long after the sojourn in Pennsylvania they moved west to Salt Lake City. And then seemed like every couple of years moved to follow other jobs. Salt Lake City, my dad worked as a chemist, quality of water chemist during the day and as a bartender at night—

MARY PANZER: So this is the—

ALLAN SEKULA: —for Jack Mormons.

MARY PANZER: Is this about 1954?

ALLAN SEKULA: It would have been about, yes, I guess—I guess it would have about '53 maybe. I was about two, and my younger brother had just been born. And so then they ended up in Sacramento where my dad was working as a chemist for the Air Force at McClellan Air Force Base. Then he moved back to Ohio, to Dayton, at Wright Patterson Air Force Base where he was also working as an Air Force chemist. And then by the time I was eight in 1959, he got a job with a chemical company out here in Los Angeles near the harbor. And so we all moved out to southern California.

MARY PANZER: What was the name of the neighborhood where you—where you were living?

ALLAN SEKULA: We lived in San Pedro, which is the—one of the three, well one of two port towns in the Los Angeles harbor sort of 25 miles south of downtown Los Angeles. And my dad—the company my dad was working for was in Wilmington, so it was right there in the—in the harbor area. Though initially—he was—I think they—when he first moved out they were located in Watts and then they relocated in maybe 1960 down to the harbor area.

MARY PANZER: So—and then how many people were in your family then? And can you describe where you were living and where you went to school?

ALLAN SEKULA: I—well, I had two—at that point there—when my folks moved in 1959 I had two younger brothers. And then two younger sisters were born in 1961 and 1963. And so then we were living in San Pedro. And we lived in a kind of apartment complex that was next to an army base that had been built as civilian housing. There was a lot of shipyard workers housing built in San Pedro during the Second World War. In fact, Richard Neutra built a—one—another well-known project called Channel Heights housing. And I guess with the post-war housing crisis there were—there were some private developments that sort of followed that model. You know, of kind of large scale, two story apartment building complexes. So it was kind of working class harbor community housing. There was—it looked a bit like social housing but wasn't. But it was—it was rather—it was crowded. I mean it was like we lived in a two bedroom apartment. There were five kids, so my—the three younger siblings all had like bunk beds in the dining room, you know, of this little apartment. We were pretty crowded. My brother's friends used to refer to—if they'd come by—which I think my brother tried to prevent—they'd say, "This is the war years." You know, it was kind of their nickname for the accommodations.

But my dad was of the fervent view that it was better to have saved some money and—than get involved in having a mortgage on a house. And so even though at one point they were going to buy a house a bit further up the hill—I mean the thing about the whole costal harbor area in Los Angeles is that the social status would increase with the elevation above sea level. So, you know, you had your sort of traditional water front, which was still in place in those years with sailor bars, and brothels, and ship chandleries, and the like, and then sort of older housing stock. And then you'd go up the hill and that's where maybe, you know, you'd pass through these working class neighborhoods that were largely Italian, and Sicilian, and Croatian immigrants. It was the two big ethnic groups in the harbor area. Those were the two big ethnic groups in the harbor area. And it was actually a much more southern European ethnically inflected area than almost any other part of Los Angeles at that time, you know. And largely because of the populations of fishermen, and longshoremen, and—

MARY PANZER: How did that inflection make itself evident?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well one saw it in school. I mean certainly, I mean you—I would—there were—there were lots of—I mean you—one's classmates, you know tended to be often first generation Americans. Parents would speak Serbo-Croatian, or Italian, or Sicilian. Kids might know a little bit. There were other ethnic groups. I mean it was—it was probably about, I think at the time it was said that the black population of San Pedro was roughly about the equivalent to the average for the city, which was maybe 12 percent at that time or 10 percent. I don't remember exactly but and we were south of the black ghetto of Watts. So there was a kind of odd isolation. You know, that when you had this industrial built around downtown L.A. at that time to the south, which included, you know, auto plants and tire factories and steel fabrication plants and the like. And, of course, that didn't really begin to be de-industrialized until after the Watts riots.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, in the early '70s and then—and then you had the harbor area, which was kind of a union area. I mean you had very strong water front union, ILWU [International Longshore and Warehouse Union]. And then around that you had the south bay, which was towns like Torrance, which were more white working class aerospace workers, refinery workers, and that kind of thing. That's the landscape that Quentin Tarantino

came from. You know, that's reflected in his films. But of course very, very white, very segregated from the black ghettos to the—

MARY PANZER: So were there black kids in your school?

ALLAN SEKULA: —to the east. Oh sure, yes.

MARY PANZER: There were. So did you have black friends or?

ALLAN SEKULA: I did, yes. And in fact, more so in high school than in—than when I went off to the University of California in 1968. So I had this experience of a fairly integrated high school. Though there were—there were racial tensions. But I remember the—both the student body president and vice president when I was a senior were African American. You know, and that was, you know partly because the African American kids voted as a block. But also, you know, I mean these things were largely ceremonial but also because there was a sympathetic—I would say, you know, a lot of white kids liked these kids and, you know.

MARY PANZER: So did you do anything in high school like play on a team, or run for office, or anything like that?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well I was—yes, I went out for sports because that was the way to avoid gym class. Because gym class was like really horrible. I mean you'd climb a rope and the coach would say you know, "There's a—you're going to be climbing a palm tree with the Viet Cong chasing your ass." So that was sort of the drill, you know. It was—it was pretty militaristic. And this was L.A. city schools but—

MARY PANZER: And so Vietnam was part of the landscape already?

ALLAN SEKULA: Oh sure. And a lot of kids were going into the army when they graduated. I mean that generation just before me was drafted in pretty large numbers, you know. So you know, people a couple of years, three years, four years older would have really been pulled in when the—when the—when the—the funnel to Vietnam was pretty—going full blast. And there were—there were quite—there were confrontations, you know. There were a couple of kids, Rachel and Eugene March, brother, and sister, middle class, Jewish kids. There was a minority of Jewish kids in school mostly from—either professional or sort of merchant families. You know, like I think it was probably pretty typical of south central L.A. and south L.A. that you'd have, you know, clothing stores with Jewish proprietors. You know family businesses that had been around for a while and then there would, you know, people from professional doctors, dentists, things like that. So, Jewish kids were in a definite minority. And—but Rachel and Eugene were both very active against the war and organized a protest around the PWA [Public Works Administration] monument that was at this sort of centerpiece of the high school. The high school was a new deal PWA project art deco building. In fact, the design of San Pedro High School and Venice High School are roughly identical.

MARY PANZER: This is what year, '67?

ALLAN SEKULA: This is like, yes, I think it was '67. And the football team—the coach basically encouraged the football team to come and attack these two kids, you know, with throwing their bologna sandwiches, and cursing them, and so on, and confiscating one of my friend's film from his camera who was photographing the event. And then the funny thing was that Rachel and Eugene were basically expelled from San Pedro High School. And the word from the—either the Principal or the Vice Principal, I'm not remembering now was, "Well we're going to send them to Santa Monica High School where those kind of people—those kind of people are accepted." Santa Monica being a separate city, and of course Santa Monica being identified with—

MARY PANZER: Jewish people?

ALLAN SEKULA: —more liberal—well, perhaps with Jewish people but also with those antiwar types, you know. And so they were out of the picture. So you saw that kind of—even in high school—you saw that kind of repression. And I mean San Pedro was a funny town. It, you know, Kevin Starr the, you know, the Dean of California historians has talked about the extreme left/right divides on the west coast. And, you know, it goes back to the days of Wobblies, you know, you just see it in, you know, on the one hand you had this right wing vigilantism, and, you know, on the other hand you had anarchism—cynicism. And that legacy survived in San Pedro partly because it was a union town. So outside the public library—and I was a frequent haunter of the library, come home with stacks of books—you—the *People's World* sold you know, the west coast communist party newspaper. So there was a—you know, you'd have the *L.A. Times*, and the *News Pilot*, which was a right wing Copley newspaper with the same owners as the *San Diego Union*. And then you'd have *People's World*. But then on the outskirts of town, near the oil refineries there would be a—I remember a black and white billboard that was up for quite some while with a photo of Martin Luther King with a—with a caption, Martin Luther King, a Communist Training Camp. And that was a John Birch Society billboard. So the Birchers were all, kind of, around in those towns like Torrance, again, Tarantino land. You know, there was this Long Beach—and in fact that went back to the '20s when San Pedro had actually both a Wobbly Hall and a Ku-Klux-Klan, a church that served as

kind of a meeting place for the Ku-Klux-Klan. And one of the big water front strikes in the early '20s, the Klansmen rode on the Wobbly Hall. And, you know, basically attacked, and threw children into vats of hot coffee that were being brewed for the strikers, and so on. I mean there was—it was pretty violent, you know.

MARY PANZER: Well, all right. So did that violence infuse the atmosphere in which you grew up, and wait—you said you were on some kind of team?

ALLAN SEKULA: Oh, I ran cross-country and I swam. Yes, so, in the—in the—

MARY PANZER: So you were a jock?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, not really. I was—I was trying to figure out how to get into college and it seemed like—I wasn't a very good jock but I, you know, I liked those sports. And I didn't particularly like team sports but I liked running, and I liked swimming. And we were wharf rats, you know. So we would—we would—the interesting thing about San Pedro was that it was both an industrial water front, you know, with these—with tuna canning, ship building, and cargo movement, which was just beginning to be containerized at that time. So there were a lot of changes in the land use. And I had friends—I had a friend who in junior high, I think it was, whose dad was the boat ride at a—at a private boat anchorage, you know. All of which was sort of pretty modest in those days, you know. They were smaller sailing boats and the like. But—so we could—we could go down there. We—and borrow row boats, and sneak under the navy field dock, and swim in the harbor, and basically—yes we were—we would sort of hang out on the docks, and we were wharf rats. But then at the other—once you went outside the harbor you had this very rocky coastline.

[Background noise of airplane.]

MARY PANZER: —our poor transcriber's going to get lots of noise. Okay, all right.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, once you—basically it's a—it's a—it's the old estuarial wetlands of the—of the—of the Los Angeles River that forms the kind of low lands that form Los Angeles Harbor. And it's all land fill. I mean—I mean it was—it was—it wasn't a natural harbor. I mean the bizarre thing about California is you have these two incredible natural harbors in San Diego and San Francisco Bays. But the biggest commercial port ended up being Los Angeles/Long Beach without any particular topographic advantage. So a lot of it was engineering works dating back to the first decade of the 20th Century. And you've got this peninsula that was very upper class, Palos Verdes, Rolling Hills, which is dominated by San Pedro Hill, which is the highest point in the southern part of Los Angeles County. And that's very rocky coastline. And so we would go out and free dive for abalone, and lobster, and you know, California lobster, and spear fish. And we'd also go off the breakwater because this is a very long federal breakwater that serves as the main protection for the anchorages of the harbor. And we'd go out a mile or so to the light house and dive for fish. And that was a whole scene. You'd have a lot of African American and Latino fishermen who'd go out fishing for their families there. And then these kids who would dive and—

MARY PANZER: What would you do with the fish? Would you bring it home or would you?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, we were—we were a bit unscrupulous about that because we would—we would sometimes sell them for like a quarter each to the fishermen. There was a fish called an opal eye we knew had worms in it. I mean you could cook them and they were fine. They didn't—they didn't taste that good but we preferred to sell them for a quarter and then go to the army base PX canteen and buy hot dogs. And you'd be starving after a day of diving. And you'd eat about three hot dogs or go buy smoked fish at the—at the fishing docks. And we didn't typically—abalone on the other hand we prized or lobster, you know. We'd sometimes cook those on the beach. But—so there was this combination of sort of, you know, Huck Finn, you know, Tom Sawyer stuff, and then this kind of industrial waterfront wharf rat existence.

MARY PANZER: Were you hanging out with your brothers or were you?

ALLAN SEKULA: Mostly with my younger brother. He was a bit more—he hung out with a bunch of, kind of some Chicano and Sicilian kids who were kind of, you know, sort of junior pot heads and the like. And so he had more connections. That was mostly my younger brother's gang that I'd go with when I did this. I had a couple of—I had some friends. But I was also sort of a science geek, you know. And at that time the Los Angeles city schools had majors. So you were tracked. You were—you were given an IQ test, and usually in grade school and that would follow—your Stanford—Binet quotient, which you weren't supposed to know, would follow you. And then that would track you into either, say, business math or college prep math. And of course it was also Sputnik. So at that time the L.A. city schools, at least my high school, somehow got selected out for Harvard based physics program, which was quite rigorous. But the—given the post—Sputnik emphasis it was pretty common to get tracked into science/math. And that's what I—that's what happened with me. And that kind of led me to—even though I liked writing, and I was encouraged to write by a high school teacher, English teacher, the royal road seemed to be science and math.

MARY PANZER: And so you said you were trying to figure out how to get into college?

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: And that that was—because you were going need scholarships or U.C. system was pretty accessible at that time?

ALLAN SEKULA: It was pretty accessible at that point. If you had a—if you were, you know, if you did better than a B plus average. And I was pretty high in my class. You know, I—it was fairly easy to get accepted. I didn't want to go to—I knew UCLA. We used to go up to UCLA. My science geek friends and I would—before we even drove, when we were about 15 or so we would take the bus up to downtown L.A. and ride the elevators in some of the department stores that still existed downtown in those days. And then we'd transfer up on the Wilshire Boulevard bus out to Westwood and just go around, hang out at Ackerman Union or whatever the student union was called in those days at UCLA. And kind of act—pretend we were college kids and then do things like go over to the physics department and knock on the door of the nuclear reactor and ask if we could see it. And things were so easy going then that we'd get invited in. And some grad student would show us the reactor, and we'd get to look down into the blue glow in the swimming pool. And that was great fun, you know, because it was—but I never wanted to go to UCLA. It seemed too big, and too close to home. And so—and partly because I liked the ocean, and the tide pools, and diving, I was fascinated by La Jolla, and the fact the Scripps had this institute of oceanography around which they built the campus, the new campus of the University of California. So I applied. The only school I applied to was U.C. San Diego. And it was two, you know, roughly two hours away.

MARY PANZER: Well, that's far enough.

ALLAN SEKULA: That didn't seem far enough away. And of course once I was accepted I learned that you—it wasn't the sort of school where you could become a marine biologist. And in fact, the provost was a biochemist named Paul Saltman, big surfer. And a very aggressive believer in what I guess became bioengineering. You know, gave us all—the new students a lecture and saying, "If you want to study fuzzy little animals, transfer to Santa Cruz now," you know, "but we're all about—we're all about molecular biology here." You know, and so that was sort of the beginning of a slow process that took about two years of me getting—becoming disillusioned with the sciences. I mean the idea there were—U.C. San Diego was based on a college system. So a little bit on the, like, Santa Cruz and the college I was at, Revelle College, was intended to be U.C.'s answer to Cal Tech for undergraduate science. I mean very rigorous, very tough, and they had a more—I was in the more difficult physics math track there, you know.

And it was extremely competitive. And the first thing I noticed is that students would take, for example, a genetics lab and they'd—you were given an allotment of drosophila, you know, the fruit flies for the—for the course of the lab. And so people would go sneak in at night and kill other students' fruit flies in order to skew the curve, you know, because once you lost your fruit flies you couldn't—you needed the full—the full semester recorded to see the results or you were dead in the water. And you couldn't do anything. And people were—it was famous that people would come running out of final, like, or mid-term exams screaming, you know, in agony of their performance in the big physics and physical chemistry classes. So, I did okay and—but I got more and more—they had—they had the idea of a non-contiguous minor so I decided—I hadn't declared my major yet but I declared a minor which was art and—

MARY PANZER: And you came to that because how?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, I sort of liked art. I mean I didn't really—I mean I had done drawing and painting in high school but, you know, there were—there were—the art classes were basically a kind of detention or study hall you know. And so you could—I remember sharing a work table with a kid who was a serious drinker and all he would paint were wine bottles. You know, he was kind of an alcoholic marandee [ph] of all, you know—but he was in—but he was in art class because he was drunk all the time, you know. I don't know how the hell he managed to get alcohol into school but that was sort of the—that was the nature of art class. You'd have these sort of benign teachers—

MARY PANZER: Well this is—we're talking about high school?

ALLAN SEKULA: But we're talking about high school now. So that was—but at the same time, I mean going back to high school, there was a little municipal art gallery in San Pedro in what had been the old civic building there down by the waterfront. And I remember my mother mistakenly taking me to a John Altoon drawing show. And I thought that was like fascinating. I mean she immediately wanted—I was maybe 14 or 15 but—

MARY PANZER: I'm sorry. I don't know John Altoon.

ALLAN SEKULA: Oh he—well Altoon was a key figure close to a lot of the Ferus [Gallery -SS] artists but largely an abstract painter and really key L.A. painter in the—in the—in the '60s. And he also made extremely ribald kind of

semi-abstract drawings. But they're full of phallic and, you know erotic motifs. And that's sort of what set my mother off, you know, as a good Catholic convert. She realized she'd stepped into the devil's house but not before I could check these out, and thought, "Well, that's interesting? Is that what art's about?" Just the sort of thing a 13 year old Catholic boy wants to see. And the other—the other thing I remember was the controversy about Kienholz. Because Kienholz—so the—that kind of—

MARY PANZER: What—tell me—

ALLAN SEKULA: —whole *Back Seat '38 Dodge*, you know. And the County Museum and the county supervisors basically tried to censor the exhibition of Kienholz's work.

MARY PANZER: And that was like in the paper so you were aware of it that way?

ALLAN SEKULA: Oh yes, there was a story. And I think there was an exhibition at Cal State Long Beach. So there were—and I—and I certainly in those days you could—the County Museum didn't move to its Wilshire Boulevard location until, I think, '64. So we were fairly close to USC and Exposition Park, which was the museum center of Los Angeles. It—you know, Exposition Park in those days was kind of a complex that, you know, that had the promise of being what people like Eli Broad want Grand Avenue to be, which is a sort of cultural center. There was a science museum, natural history museum, and the art museum. And they shared a building.

So I remember seeing there was a New York painting show. Maybe '63 or so, and you'd go through—I remember going through the preserved mastodon skeletons, which were all sort of black from the tar of the tar pits from which they'd been—of La Brea, the La Brea pits from which they'd been excavated. And coming across the—well it's—who all was in the show was—I remember seeing the Ad Reinhardt black paintings.

MARY PANZER: Oh, okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: But you're 12 years old so—

ALLAN SEKULA: Well I was maybe—I would have been about—

MARY PANZER: 13?

ALLAN SEKULA: Thirteen or so.

MARY PANZER: So could you go in these museums for free so you would just go and walk in by yourself?

ALLAN SEKULA: No I think they were—yes or went with parents or with school trips. I mean it was—I don't—I don't particularly remember school trips to the art museum but certainly to the science museum and you could kind of wander off and—but and so I remember seeing these mastodon skeletons and mammoth skeletons and saber tooth tiger skeletons and then these black paintings, you know, and being fascinated by that.

And then in '64 the County Museum opened on Wilshire. And I remember being fascinated by things—there was a painting by Baziotes called *Congo* that's been in their collection for a long time that I just loved. It was like a map, you know, with the kind of river like form and sort of green and black painting. So there were paintings that really fascinated me. And I didn't particularly have any encouragement, you know, in terms of art teaching. But I always had this idea that art was kind of interesting, you know, and so when I got to UCSD in September of '68—well when I was registering, you know, I think we signed up for courses that sometime in the late spring of '68, I saw the name Marcuse teaching undergraduate humanities course and I knew who Marcuse was just from reading *Time* magazine and—I think *Time*. And so I knew I—you know, May '68 had just happened or was just happening and I thought well that would be interesting to take a course with this guy. And then they had—there was a course called Representation in a department called "Visual Arts" taught by someone called Baldessari. And I thought that would be interesting. I don't know what Representation means but must mean something. And so in my first semester I had a course with Marcuse and a course with Baldessari. That was pretty exciting. I mean Marcuse was under a death threat at the time. The American Legion wanted to buy back his contract. But he was really targeted by the right wing in San Diego. And—

MARY PANZER: So was it kind of punishment to be teaching this undergraduate lecture class?

ALLAN SEKULA: No, I don't think so. I think he wanted to teach. He—I mean he obviously had his grad students. I mean he was advising Angela Davis, who'd followed him from Brandeis. But I think—and actually he was quite clever about it. And at that time, this Revelle College had a humanities sequence that lasted for two years for first year and second year undergrads. And it started with a course called "The Present Age." And, you know, there were maybe five or six different sections of it taught by different people. So some people were having people read, you know, Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*. Other more conservative faculties had, you know,

different reading lists. But Marcuse's list was pretty remarkable. I pretty much can recite it by heart. It was *Civilization and Its Discontents, Wretched of the Earth*.

MARY PANZER: *Wretched of the Earth* is—

ALLAN SEKULA: Fanon.

MARY PANZER: Fanon?

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: Franz Fanon.

ALLAN SEKULA: Lenin's *Imperialism*, Geoffrey Barraclough's *Introduction into Contemporary History*, Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Brecht's *Galileo*, which was an exceedingly clever choice because of the way he elucidated Galileo's conflict with the church and Brecht's handling of that and then turned that into—in a complicated way, which I probably didn't follow very well at the time, into a kind of parable about the responsibility of scientist. So he understood very well who he was teaching, you know, and without being explicit, made it clear that we were all faced with certain moral choices. And that lesson, I think, also was a part of my sentimental disillusionment with the—with the path into the sciences. You know, the feeling that one was becoming complicit, you know, in a war machine. Not that—not that the Galileo case mapped directly. It was the—it was the indirectness of the mapping that I think was so fascinating and intriguing.

MARY PANZER: So could you talk a little bit about your relationship with Marcuse. I mean are you just a student in this classroom?

ALLAN SEKULA: I was just a student in the class. Though later we had some brief encounters when I was a grad student but that—and in our—the circles of people around Marcuse and the circle—you know, there were—again the Venn diagrams began to intersect a little more closely about four, five years down the road.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: And actually he was a neighbor when I was in grad school. He lived a couple of houses down and we'd see him, and I knew people who were very close to him. And now and then.

MARY PANZER: Well but then—but Baldessari, where you making art for his class then?

ALLAN SEKULA: Oh sure. It was—it was a practice class. I mean he had us—he gave us very clever assignments. You know, he'd say, "Go make a perspective drawing. Use a ruler." Or he'd say, "Go photograph dirt and then make a painting based on the photo." Sort of—

MARY PANZER: How many people were in this class?

ALLAN SEKULA: Probably 12 or so. They were quite small. And that was another thing is that you had—you had more—the classes tended to be six hours a week that you'd meet with people. And you'd get to go—everyone—the faculty had studios in these old military Quonset huts that were part of the campus because the campus was built on what had been an army infantry training base for the Second World War. For example, when I started early sculptures I made—I would just scavenge old rusty barbed wire from the old military boundaries of the base. I'd go out with work gloves, and a wire cutter, and bale up all this old wire, you know.

And so there were lots of faculty had these studios. And you could, if you had a meeting with a faculty member you'd go see them in their studio and you'd see what they were working on. I remember John was doing his series of paintings of—based on photographs where he had sort of amateur painters in Balboa Park reproduce the photographs as paintings with the sign painter giving the, this is a painting by, and then the person's name underneath. And he was also working on his map of California where he visited various—the sites and the landscapes that corresponded to the placement of the letters on the map of California that—made out of available materials, that letter, you know, like a "C" or an "A." So "C" was somewhere up in, you know, near Red Bluff or Redding, and the final A was down near Chula Vista or National City where Baldessari was—grew up, you know.

So seeing that—seeing his practice and—was quite something. And he was extremely generous with his time. And he was encouraging. And I think it was John was the first person that said, "You could be an artist if you wanted. You know, you could do it." And I needed to hear that, because I hadn't had that kind of encouragement. And I heard the same thing from Miriam Schapiro maybe a semester later.

MARY PANZER: Was she teaching sculpture or drawing or—

ALLAN SEKULA: Painting mostly—

MARY PANZER: Painting—

ALLAN SEKULA: But sort of also courses—they had courses on—they weren't strictly medium based. You know they had sort of more philosophical titles, like "Representation" or I can't remember. And often these courses ran for two semesters. So you got to spend two thirds—two quarters, you'd have to spend two thirds of the year with a faculty member. And then I also had a—I think—so after The Present Age humanities course, we did—then you did a fast rewind to the Jews and the Greeks. And as it happened I had Sacvan Bercovitch as a—

MARY PANZER: Oh really.

ALLAN SEKULA: —as a—professor, and he ran my section. And so having read Sartre in my first semester, and having also worked in the library and read Sartre method, I mean becoming fascinated by Sartre. He had us reading *The Oresteia* against *The Flies*. So the Sartre affect continued. And I remember writing a paper about *The Oresteia*. And he—and he took seriously what I wrote and said, "You know you could be a critic if you wanted." So I had this encouragement, you know, that was really like a gift. You know, I mean it was a gift. And I, to this day I've had this, you know, John Baldessari, Mariam, Sacvan Bercovitch, they were like—they blessed me in a way, you know. Because it wasn't the sort of thing that you just—there was nothing particular in my background that gave me the feeling that I had this automatically guaranteed in anyway, you know.

MARY PANZER: No but at the same time you're still a science person right?

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, sure.

MARY PANZER: While you're taking these classes and doing all this reading and?

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes and the counter story was that I had—we had—I mean it really was an extraordinary faculty there because of Stanley Miller. I took, I think it was physical chemistry from Stanley Miller and this was by the end of my second year. And Miller had gotten a Nobel prize for work he'd done as a graduate student. Well, I mean work that followed from his graduate student where he'd first exposed organic compounds in a—in a methane environment, to simulated lightning bolts, you know using electric current and produced the beginnings of amino acids. And so this had led to, you know, it was a very key research in trying to figure out the early formations of life, right? And so Miller was, along with Harold Urey, who had worked on the moon rocks, and was a key figure in astrophysics—they were—they were kind of major scientific eminences at U.C. San Diego. And I was in this huge P-Chem class and basically loved the labs but found the lectures increasingly difficult. And would sit in the upper rows of the lecture hall and work on my drawings for sculptures, and things, and kind of tuned out. And finally I realized I had to make a decision. I had to declare a major. And I made an appointment with him, and I said, "Look I think I don't really want to be a scientist." And that was a kind of a negative blessing. He said, "Well, maybe you're not. You know, maybe it's not for you." And maybe he was courteous, and I would say kindly. I didn't feel shamed by this. I'd obviously made the decision that I had to have this meeting.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: And it was like go in peace you know. And so that was the negative version of what I received positively from the people in the humanities and arts.

MARY PANZER: But still, I mean he was a good teacher for under graduates and that you took—you made an appointment. He took you seriously.

ALLAN SEKULA: Indeed, yes.

MARY PANZER: He responded to your remarks not as if they were—which as they were as important and worth consideration.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, yes.

MARY PANZER: So in that way it is a benediction. You are thinking and your perceptions have validity.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. He treated me like a young person trying to figure something out in a—in a—in a way that I think, you know, it's very often in teaching people just—it's embarrassing, you know, to have a student who perhaps is rejecting a path.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: That's a hard conversation to have.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: So I kind of remember him fondly, you know, and sometimes I wish I remembered his lectures better.

[They laugh.]

But, yes, so that was sort of the context. And then the whole thing was kind of roiled by political activism, the Vietnam War. And San Diego at that time, of course, was just a huge, as it is now to this day, a huge military base. I mean there—I mean today there's something like almost 80 separate military installations in San Diego. Dominated by the Navy and the Marine Core but also including—you know, it was also big aerospace town, a big military ship building town.

MARY PANZER: But that must have meant that there were a lot of people on campus who were—who supported the military or who were involved in the military activities of some kind. I mean who are already working for the military industrial complex. Even as students. I mean, I'm thinking it must have—it could have been a very conservative political—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: —environment.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, I think UCSD was fourth on the—I think in the late '70s, I don't know, they were right around fourth on the—on the—on the—in the—in the list of institutions receiving Pentagon—direct Pentagon funding for research. So they were a big—I mean even as a young campus some of that might have been the Navy in relation to Scripps with oceanographic research, some of that might have been—but a lot was information sciences. I mean it was a—it was a school with very serious computer language work. And they were also—they were people that were doing—applying fuyia [ph] series to image restoration trying to recover motion blurring, aerial reconnaissance photographs, and things like that. And so there were a number of sit—ins that were directly targeted to these labs or these research centers. And the campus had an interlocking network of tunnels that students had kind of figured out how to access. So it was—it was possible to kind of move pretty creatively in terms of occupying buildings and things like that.

MARY PANZER: So if we're talking about—well maybe we should take a break for a just a second.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: Okay, so here we are back at the demonstrations in UCSD and it—the year is '69?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, yes.

MARY PANZER: Or '70?

ALLAN SEKULA: Into—all through from I'd say '68 through to—I think the intensity—well I'm there as an undergrad from '68 to '72. And I mean this is pretty—like jumping ahead a bit, but what I basically end up declaring a major in visual arts. And I tried painting, sculpture; I mean that was sort of what I—and we—and there were only seven undergraduate majors. So we all were able to find studio space. At one point I was in a seventh floor lab in the very building that had been the target of one of the sit-ins a few years earlier, which I came to know the building intimately because I knew the inner kind of utility core, and I'd climb up the ladders there. And I figured out it had windows that were supposed to be closed all the time, but I realized with an allen wrench I could open these windows and sit on a little one foot concrete ledge seven floors above the—

MARY PANZER: Ground [Laughs] and but—

ALLAN SEKULA: I basically ended up living in my studio because I didn't have any money. Every once in a while the campus cops would come in and shine a flashlight at me and I'd tell them that my—first I'd start out telling them that my girlfriend had thrown me out. I didn't even have a girlfriend at the time. But I told them my girlfriend had thrown me out of the house. And then I realized that they'd be more sympathetic if I said my wife had thrown me out of the house. So I'd tell them that. And sometimes they'd let me stay and sometimes I'd have to take my sleeping bag and go sleep on the cliff above the ocean. But it was—you know, I had a little refrigerator. And I figured out they had food machines with sandwiches, and yogurt, and little blocks of Kraft cheese. And I realized that Plexiglas doors could be bent. They could be sort of warped. So I supplemented my meager food income with that.

MARY PANZER: Now did you have a job on campus?

ALLAN SEKULA: I worked in the library. Yes, so that was the other thing is that I was a—I was probably the most

inefficient book shelver. They used to do time and motion studies on us. Or at least they'd time our part—our shelving, how many books we could shelve per hour. But I would, you know, be cruising along, and I'd come across John Cage *Adaptations in Passing*, or, you know, *Philosophy of the Bedroom*, or something. And I'd sort of sit there and read for a half hour and then get back to work. So I was always on the verge of getting fired. But it was a great—I mean I had access to the art and music collection. And then—and then—so that started my interest in photography books. And, of course, I could look at all the—all the journals that came in. I mean I would look at [inaudible]. I would look at [inaudible]. I'd look at you know, *Life*, *Look*, up until '72 or so when those things declined. The Swiss magazine *Camera*.

MARY PANZER: [inaudible]

ALLAN SEKULA: I don't think they had *Du* [Magazine -SS], but—and then that just got me in the habit of being a real library rat. And well, that had started in San Pedro too, because of the public library.

MARY PANZER: So, what about your family, were they disappointed that you weren't going to go be a scientist or?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, yes my father I think was. But I had a much bigger falling out, and my—roughly around the same time my father lost his job at Lockheed. He'd gone to work for Lockheed in the mid '60s and was commuting from San Pedro up to Burbank. And—in fact, my first summer out of college I'd actually worked for a chemical company that was near Lockheed and commuted with my dad. So that gave me a really interesting perspective on what his working life was like. How tired he was. What—the difficulty of the commute. And what working for a similar sort of chemical aerospace chemical company was like.

I'd actually qualified to get a job with the Department of Water and Power as a ditch digger at about four times the pay that I got in this chemical technician job. But my dad kind of swayed me to take this much lower paid job because he thought it'd be good for my resume. And it was—it was sort of slide rule chemistry and, you know, I learned to—I was chemical technician basically. And I—and I did the same thing the following summer actually working at the company that my dad had worked for down in the harbor area. Though it was quite some years earlier that they only discovered there was a family relation at—one of the veterans of the place said, "Are you the son of the guy who used to be here?" And I said, "Yes."

But—so I had this time—I mean that was maybe item three in the list of disillusionments with science, you know, was actually working in these technical industries and seeing one, how corrupt they were in terms of faking data to get contracts, and I mean to the point of danger, you know. And just, I mean they were toxic, and poisonous, and callous, and cynical, all these things you know, just ample evidence.

There was all—I mean I was working in Burbank the summer of the Manson killings. And in fact had gone to see a woman friend who lived on Benedict Canyon the day of—I think I hitch hiked over from Burbank to Benedict Canyon the afternoon before the murders at the Tate mansion the Tate house. So that was—it was a strange apocalyptic seeming milieu working at this chemical plant in Burbank in 100 degree L.A. smog, 1969, and seeing all these Lockheed guys jogging in their white shirts with their plastic pen protectors, you know, during their lunch hour. And reading Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* sitting at a picnic table, you know.

MARY PANZER: Who did you share your thoughts with?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, some friends down in San Pedro, but a number of whom were going to community college. We'd go—I never slept. I mean I—we'd stay up until four in the morning drinking bad coffee and talking about politics. And I'd come home and get in the car with my dad and drive to work, you know. He did the driving, I mean for the most part. But my job coming home was kind of waking him up when he'd fall asleep in the lane and hit the—hit the box dots between the lines.

MARY PANZER: That sounds scary but—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. But you could just see, I mean here he was. So what happened was that in around, I think it was in '70—let me think now, it was my second year, so it would have been in '70, my dad loses his job at Lockheed. And so he's out of work. There were actually quite a—quite a few blows to him. You see his younger brother committed suicide. He had—he and my dad had been provisionally partners in a sign company in the early—in the late '40s. And that kind of fell apart. And that's one reason my dad took off on all these itinerant short term jobs because the petty bourgeois promise of going into a partnership with his brother was kind of short circuited, I think by—for reasons of sibling rivalry that I just don't comprehend. But at any—at any event—so here my dad was at—having this crisis. His other brother had committed suicide.

MARY PANZER: What? Two brothers committed suicide?

ALLAN SEKULA: No, I'm sorry not the brother. I'm—

MARY PANZER: One brother—

ALLAN SEKULA: One brother who had been—no I'm sorry it was the brother—I'm completely screwing up here.

MARY PANZER: Okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: Sorry, give me a sec.

MARY PANZER: Sure.

ALLAN SEKULA: No the brother with whom my dad had had a kind of provisional partnership relationship in the—in the—at the end of the war, that came to nothing to my dad's disadvantage in his own mind.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, and had a history of depression and then ended up committing suicide in the—in 1970.

MARY PANZER: Okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: Right about the time that my dad loses his job. So then not only does—these two blows hit my father but his oldest son, yours truly—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: Tells him to fuck off and walks out of the house. Because he was harassing me about my girlfriend. And I think he was afraid I was going to get her pregnant or something and have to get married. Or God knows what. But he was being authoritarian and it wasn't something at which he was very good. And I basically said, "That's it. I'm leaving," and moved into a—actually an artist—older artist friend's garage that he and his wife let me stay in their garage, which happened to be two houses away from my girlfriend's house. And then it was in that context that I found a job. I mean the oedipal drama here is just too much. I basically found a job at the place where my dad had worked previously at his first job when he'd come out to L.A. in '59. And that got me through. I'd lied saying I was going to transfer to Cal State Long Beach, and I'd stay on and go to night school, and—because in those days if you went looking for anything that wasn't a summer job you had to claim to be available. And the first question people would ask is "What's your draft status?" And so—

MARY PANZER: And your draft status was?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well I had a student deferment, but I had to claim that I was going to go to Cal State Long Beach because I had, you know if I was going to San Diego obviously I wasn't going to be around to come to work. And then sort of August came around—late August and I said, you know, "Look, I just went to register at Long Beach and it turns out I have to take day courses. And they've given me some scholarship." I made up a story and quit. But that time I spent, you know, in maybe total, less than a year obviously, and working in these chemical companies really was pretty instructive. Because I got to see the, you know—most of my other work experience had been like being a busboy, cook, and later I, you know—things that were not as implicated in technological enterprise.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: And—

MARY PANZER: I think we're running out of time here on my chip. So I am going to—

ALLAN SEKULA: You need to get a new—

MARY PANZER: I need to get a new tape, yes. So I'm going to stop.

[END OF TRACK sekula11_1of4_sd_track03.]

MARY PANZER: Okay, now. Oh, I think we weren't recording.

ALLAN SEKULA: We weren't recording then? Should go back. Let's go back.

MARY PANZER: Okay, let's go back.

ALLAN SEKULA: Just to be safe, yes.

MARY PANZER: Let's go back to, you are—

ALLAN SEKULA: Did you want to introduce the tape? Maybe you lost that.

MARY PANZER: Okay, this is Mary Panzer talking to Allan Sekula on the 21st of August 2011. We are together in Allan Sekula's backyard in Los Angeles. And my question, I've got two questions going. But I think it's probably more important for us to talk about the distinction or how you saw your artwork in relation to your political activities as a college student, you know, as a young man in your late teens in the late '60s and early '70s. Where did politics and art intersect, or how did they come to intersect?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well yes, I think at the time, art was more like a—kind of a very intriguing game for me and the politicization I felt everywhere else, you know, in just everyday experience or in protests on campus or off campus because that was—one of the things about San Diego is that we would go down to protest at the Marine Corps recruit depot and even, I think, in my first semester there, or first quarter there, or maybe second quarter, we helped some young marines, recruits desert because they basically were coming. We had a protest outside the fence of the Marine Corps recruit depot, which, next to Parris Island, was the other big processing center for new Marine Corps recruits. And there were huge, there was, like, a huge incidence of desertion.

You know, people would break out. They would try to run across the runway of the San Diego airport, which was adjacent to the Marine Corps recruit depot. Sometimes, they were killed by airplanes. I mean, all of this was pretty much covered up but we heard about it through these deserters. Course, it could have been lore but the place was just, you know, a lot of young Marines were going into the brig, you know, for insubordination. And what I did see with my own eyes is, we'd be outside the fence and young Marines, often in civilian clothes, would be coming up to the fence to talk to the protesters. And the shore patrol would be grabbing them and pulling them back, and almost like a riot squad, you know, pulling them back from the fence and possibly taking them to the brig, you know, for motivation, what was called motivation platoon, which we learned more about because we had a couple of guys came to the fence and said to friends of mine, "If we can meet you, if we can get out, can you meet us at that laundromat or that liquor store down the street in two hours?"

And sure enough, my friends did it. I didn't have a car at the time, so someone else did it. And we had these guys staying in our dorm suite for about a week, you know, just camping out with us. And their plan was to head to Canada. And I remember one of the guys clearly was just repulsed by the whole thing and felt his humanity was being degraded. And the other guy seemed to be, had already had such anger and rage that he probably could have been a very effective killer. It's just he hated the authority and so my idea was, he was probably going to become a very successful—he was going to have an interesting criminal career in Canada, if he ever made it. But, so you could see those kind of—

MARY PANZER: And these guys were sort of your age, right?

ALLAN SEKULA: They were, yes, they were our age or, yes. And they were, and they, course, from really rural, you know, poor backgrounds and a couple of white guys. And so we helped them get on their way. You know, we put them up. And so that was just part of being there and—

MARY PANZER: So your political activity—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, I mean, you'd go to protests. You didn't like—I mean not to harp on high school, but I had, in high school, for example, I mentioned the John Birch billboard. But I recruited some friends to go in to a John Birch meeting so we could sort of ask embarrassing questions and harass them, you know? So—but I never thought of that as art or performance. And, in fact, at UCSD, there was a right-wing. I can't remember if he was a congressman or state assemblyman, but he was an extremely right-wing kind of Birch society aligned politician who came to give a talk on campus. And I proposed to my friends that we organize a welcoming committee for him. And we went to a theatrical supply house and rented a gorilla costume and dressed myself as kind of a poster Bolshevik with a red star on a kind of stocking cap and a trench coat.

And another guy dressed as kind of a Secret Service agent. And we escorted this gorilla, who was played by one of my friends, in to, you know, ask questions of this congressman. And of course, all the older SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] kids were there and the serious politicians. And I remember going up to them and saying, "We're going to do this little event here and hope you don't mind." And they begrudgingly said, "Do your thing, kid," you know? But it wasn't—I didn't think of that as an artwork. I thought of it as sort of a political action. And I certainly hadn't identified myself in any way as an artist. But there was just this feeling of doing theater that I think went back to high school and being rebellious and taking the piss out of the right, you know, like feeling like they were—you went ahead to confront them, you know, that there were—even in comic ways, you know? So I kind of enjoyed that. I liked that.

MARY PANZER: Was your family Democrats or union people?

ALLAN SEKULA: No, not at all. My dad was an almost classic Polish Catholic anticommunist and identified strongly with the military, you know. My mother had been in the Waves in the Second World War. She was a

Wave lieutenant, I think. Did her training at Smith College. Was a Navy, you know, because Smith College was, turned into a Wave training camp and spent the war pretty much in Washington, D.C. reading in Naval intelligence rereading the cables that were sent before Pearl Harbor, in part, to try to figure out what actually had happened with the Japanese attack, though she, to this day, refuses to talk about it, saying it's still classified. And she'll sometimes say "Well, you know, it was a lot of microfilm and I sometimes got very tired, so I might have missed something." And because she had, both my parents were first generation college students. So my mother had gone to Thiel College in Greenville, Pennsylvania, a Lutheran college. And my father had gone to Penn State. Took him about seven years to get his undergraduate degree. He worked on—I mean, you know, the federal jobs program. I mean, he did real work.

MARY PANZER: The CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps].

ALLAN SEKULA: He'd take the CCC. He had CCC jobs that got him through to make enough money to come back after a year off or so. But he managed to make it through the Depression and then he became an Army Air Corps lieutenant in logistics and was supposed to be sent over to the South Pacific but it seems that a wildcat strike—illegal wartime wildcat strike on west coast waterfront in San Francisco kept him sitting in a troop ship under the Golden Gate long enough that the thing never happened. So he basically was stateside the whole war. But he super identified with the military and stayed on as a reserve officer. And of course, working for the Air Force had this cold warrior mentality. I mean, he never, I don't know that he read right-wing publications beyond.

I mean, for example, he subscribed to *Time* rather than *US News and World Report* or they certainly didn't subscribe to the *National Review*. But he had, he used to, I remember, he would make apologies for McCarthy and was pretty vehemently anti-communist and even continued after the collapse of the Soviet Union to believe that this was all, that Gorbachev was the world's most clever, you know, political manipulator. And then, ultimately, the Soviet Union was coming back. So he held to fairly right-wing ideals, although certainly, when he was unemployed, I remember voicing him extreme antipathy to Nixon. And I mean, he was caught in a kind of vice and that's sort of what led me to *Aerospace Folk Tales*, was the contradictions of my father's world view, in a way, and how that then clashed with my mother's world view, which had more connection to the New Deal, I think, you know, because she'd seen relatives helped out by Social Security.

And despite her, the side of her that identified with—I don't think you can work for Navy intelligence without at least having one foot in the tar pit of the National Security state. And she had a kind of Catholic—there was a side of her that was open to things, like, I would say the world of Dorothy Day and the Catholic worker and, you know, [Thomas -SS] Merton and all the liberal strands of Catholicism, you know, that, if not, I mean, certainly not liberation theology but at least the idea of a, you know, preferential option for the poor, you know, that you help people and you, that Christianity involves these, you know—

MARY PANZER: Altruistic?

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, a giving dimension and not just Ayn Rand selfishness.

MARY PANZER: As I'm listening to the story of your education, would it be right to call you an autodidact, Allan, because there's nobody training you in—you don't have a labor background. You don't have, sort of, there's no democratic politics background. You know, you chose your own way. I mean, you're not, like, say conventional labor historians whose grandfather were organizing the furriers. I mean, there's none of that. I hear none of that.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, yes.

MARY PANZER: That somewhere, I mean, that at a wonderfully lucky moment, you're ready to hear what Marcuse has to offer. I mean, and there you, John Baldessari is saying go to town and there's all this politics in the air. And somehow, you manage to make all those pieces relate, where it seems to me, a more conventional path somebody would have chosen one or the other. They would have gone into politics and let the art alone. Or they would have gone into art and foregone the more sophisticated philosophical investigations. Yet you managed to keep everything together.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, I think the catalyst, well, I think it's unfair to genuine autodidacts to call me an autodidact because obviously, I mean, I was able to go the University of California at a time when scholarship money was available. I mean, this was all part of, kind of, Clark Kerr's multiversity military-industrial educational complex. I was the beneficiary of that. California is kind of the intellectual fortress, you might say, of the national security state and the creation of its new generations of underlings, you know? I mean, like, I mean, when I think about the time, I think well yes, they're probably, they were, there were classmates. There were younger people on the faculty who became, certainly, part of the Silicon Valley explosion. I mean, Jef Raskin, who was one of the key figures in Apple, you know, designed some of the early interface stuff, was on the faculty at UCSD and gave me advice about what kind of camera to buy when I first went out to buy a camera, that kind of thing.

But so there were people who took that path into what, in England, they like to call a Californian ideology, you

know, this kind of utopian cyber world. And there were certainly people that went into politics, left politics, some of them. I mean, I had a roommate who ended up becoming a sort of a parole officer up in Santa Cruz who was, had started out studying political theory at UC San Diego and went down to Mexico in '69, I think it was and met people from Punta de Vista. I mean, the survivors of the—felt the local massacres. So there were people that were deeply engaged in anti-imperialist politics, too. And it made connections outside the US, like, people who had gone down to Chile during the Allende years. So there were those links, too. And there was a strong radical Latin American presence, partly because of a number of people in the literature faculty who had come, you know, had been Spanish exiles to Mexico. And then, so there were the—that was another thing that was operative in San Diego, you know, though I have the feeling now that—

MARY PANZER: You don't want to go back—

ALLAN SEKULA: —the link is much more localized in the connection between San Diego and Tijuana as to conjoint metropolises.

MARY PANZER: Now when you say in San Diego, you're talking about UC San Diego or are you talking about the town?

ALLAN SEKULA: I meant, no, I meant the university. I mean, I think there were probably other people at some of the other campuses there, San Diego State. But you know, there were, there was an affinity with Mexico and it was so close and so—

MARY PANZER: Did you end up spending any time in Mexico?

ALLAN SEKULA: Very little. I mean, I always felt like it was an act of imperialism even to go there. But I did go down with my girlfriend camping at south of Ensenada. And I remember reading *State and Revolution* while camping, you know, really Lenin on the beach in Mexico.

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I feel like a little nervous about having the book because you had, you know, this was during the period of guerilla warfare in Guerrero state. And while not as militarized as Mexico is today with the drug war, you had Army checkpoints and people were, even in the north, I mean, even in Baja, a bit of nervousness about the situation. And we would go down. I mean, even before Nixon's opening to China, there were Chinese trade fairs in Tijuana. Or there was one that I remember going down to photograph with Martha Rosler and a number of other [inaudible].

MARY PANZER: Okay, so, but that's who your—

ALLAN SEKULA: Not sleeping in it.

MARY PANZER: Yes, so I want to get. How did you start using? Is it appropriate at this moment to ask you how you started using a camera because I've got you, you know, sort of involved in, with all these different political actions and you were an art major. And then you started using photography as part of your political process?

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, I don't, I, well—

MARY PANZER: I'm not sure if that's the right—

ALLAN SEKULA: Aside from John, I mean, when John Baldessari asked us to make photographs, I had to write my parents and ask them to send the box Brownie that they had down to me in parcel post, you know, the family camera. And I don't think I really started photographing around until November of '71. And I'd been, I might have, I might have done—borrowed cameras and done a few things documenting sculptures and things that I'd made. But—so initially, photography was a way of documenting either an action that I'd done or a sculpture I'd made. But I also made photos that were of things that interested me as kind of protosculptural found objects, you know. And when I look at all the proof sheets from that time, a lot of it was that kind of study photo, you know? But what had happened was that the art department at UCSD had been founded by Paul Brach.

MARY PANZER: Okay, B-R-A-C-H?

ALLAN SEKULA: B-R-A-C-H and Paul was married to Miriam Schapiro. And they had come, I think they'd both been at—Brach had been a, on a, I think on the G.I. bill, had a, he'd been, fought in the Normandy invasion and was a, had gone, had gone to come back on the G.I. bill and I think he and Miriam had gone to, I mean, was it Iowa? Yes, I think he'd been studying with Max Beckmann. Where was Max Beckmann teaching?

MARY PANZER: Could have been Iowa.

ALLAN SEKULA: I think it was Iowa, yes. I'd have to check on that but Paul founded both the art department at UC San Diego and CalArts art school.

MARY PANZER: Oh, my.

ALLAN SEKULA: So he's a key figure in art education in the west coast. And Paul, though he is in some ways a rather traditional painter, and he had his own ideas. I mean, he had this idea that became kind of a motto at CalArts, no technique in advance of need, which led to things like post studio. And, you know, but he hired people like David Antin, you know, poet from New York.

MARY PANZER: In the art school?

ALLAN SEKULA: In the art school, so.

MARY PANZER: Was there a literary program in the art school?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well no. It was that David was hired partly as a curator of the art gallery there. There was a gallery in a former Marine Corps Army bowling alley. And David launched into a rather ambitious exhibition program. So I remember seeing my first couple of years there, a very good show of Fluxus, Nancy Sparrow, a pop show that included Wesselmann show of, I mean, well, most everyone, I mean, Wesselmann. And there was an Alex Katz show.

MARY PANZER: So this is bringing—

ALLAN SEKULA: It reflected David's critical interest, which could be followed in art, *Arts Magazine* and he was writing for *Arts*. He did some things for Studio International.

MARY PANZER: And his wife is a painter?

ALLAN SEKULA: No, Eleanor was, well, Eleanor was sort of a protoconceptual artist and performance artist. And she was not on the faculty. She didn't join the faculty until later.

MARY PANZER: Oh, she was not on the, oh, okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: But she'd come out with him and had her own, you know, incipient career, I mean, isolated in San Diego, living in the suburbs. And she sort of breaks through, initially, with her postcard novels.

MARY PANZER: But that's, but that was now part of your education, your direct education, the way David Antin's exhibitions were. I'm just sort of trying—

ALLAN SEKULA: No, I only got to know Eleanor's work later when David was my advisor and, you know, I would go to dinner with them and, you know, she was part of the scene. I mean, she was, her work, we all, we either got her work, or we knew people that got the cards. But basically, what Paul had done is, and I think David might have encouraged the hiring of Baldessari, who was the local painter, a local artist, you know. And was increasingly doing this conceptual work. And there were a couple of other painters there at the time. Towards the end of my undergrad years, I mean, I'd become an art major in '72 and there were seven of us. I had my studio art as doing sculpture. And I was, you know, through reproductions and looking at art magazines and publications, I kind of had some idea of—not a very sophisticated one, I don't think, of Arte Povera and of Smithson.

So I did stuff with sand and mirrors and glass. And I was trying to work out a vocabulary of materials, even tar, dry ice, spun glass insulation, materials, things I could scavenge. Sometimes I'd find glass pipes that had been used in chemistry labs and work with those, would suspend things. And, I mean, like, I still have drawings and some photographs of these pieces I did at the time. But around—as I was approaching graduation in which would have been June of '72, I was thinking about what to do and one clear thing was the draft issue. And even though the war was starting to be quote unquote Vietnamized by Nixon, a friend called me on, I think, the 31st, the morning of the 31st of December of '71 and said "Give up your deferment by tonight." And, because the word is that you'll go into a pool for a draft call and it's highly unlikely there's going to be a draft call over the next couple of months. And then you'll go into a reserve pool and you'll be clear. I had a very low draft number, so I was liable to get drafted as soon as I graduated. And so I did that. I went, rushed to the post office, got the thing postmarked and sent off a—I turned in my student deferment and asked to be requalified as 1A. And sure enough, it worked. I mean, I wasn't called up. And I sort of went into this limbo of, you know, reserve pool of draft candidates. But in the meantime, I'd written to the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design with the idea that if they had a grad program, I would, maybe, go there and just get out of the country. And got a letter back saying they were planning one but it wasn't going to be starting up for a couple of years. So that didn't seem like an option.

And in the course of—Baldessari, in the meantime, had gone on to CalArts, right? Because CalArts had started as the inheritor of the old Chouinard Art School and the L.A. Conservatory of Music. And they spent a year, I think the year '71, in this temporary quarters at the Villa Cabrini. I brought up people like Max Kozloff and that was a very energetic thing. Paul had gone on with Miriam. Baldessari had followed them. As an undergrad, again, in that last two years, the art gallery, which had been in the bowling alley, moved to a rather nondescript sort of large, low-ceiling classroom in the very same building where Marcuse had his office and where I'd work in the library and had a kind of unofficial studio in an unused room in the back at that point.

David was no longer the gallery director and this staff member became kind of the interim, a woman named Pat Baxter, very energetic, a lovely woman. And the decision was made that students should run the gallery and that we would. And so I had two years of working with grad students and a few other undergrads running the program of the art gallery. And we invited Mabou Mines. We invited a lot of San Francisco artists. We just decided to skip L.A., though we came up and met Paul McCarthy. But we liked the idea of San Francisco in a strange, but I think we wanted to go to San Francisco. And we met people like Howard Fox and Terry, Howard Fried and Terry Fox, had them come down and do performances. Carl Savia [ph], I mean it was a mixed bag. It depended on their different interests or the people in the group. But we did a program over a year or two and one of the, one of the people we invited was Simone Forti and I helped—

MARY PANZER: The dancer?

ALLAN SEKULA: The dancer we saw the other night. And Simone was at CalArts and came down to look for a performance base. And I took her into all the canyons leading down to the ocean, showing her the beach. I thought she'd want to do something on the beach and she did something else. But, you know, I spent time with her and she invited me to come up to CalArts. And so I ended up staying in a house that she shared with Peter Van Riper, Alison Knowles, Dick Higgins, the House of Dust people, sort of fluxus, neo-fluxus folks and got a look at CalArts. And John Baldessari said to me, you know, if you want to come to CalArts. Oh, John gave Fred Lonidier and me, Fred being, at that point new as a lecturer on the faculty, having just completed his MFA, like, he'd been in the MFA program from '72 to '74.

MARY PANZER: At UCSD?

ALLAN SEKULA: At UCSD.

MARY PANZER: So you've known him as a grad student when you were an undergrad.

ALLAN SEKULA: I knew him, I knew him as a grad student.

MARY PANZER: And he was a photographer?

ALLAN SEKULA: He's a photographer with a sociology background. And there's a whole story about Fred to be told but John invited Fred and I to come up and do a show at CalArts. And typically, CalArts, even in those days, didn't have outside shows. There was all galleries there, were all for students. In fact, that's—

MARY PANZER: But the student, the student body couldn't have been that big. The school is so new.

ALLAN SEKULA: It was a new school but we came up to a class and I remember going and I showed a, an early version of *Meditations on a Triptych* and Fred [Lonidier -SS] showed, I think he showed a version of a *PC Dunn* [ph] as a slide piece, about a — what do you call it when people do letters, you know—

MARY PANZER: Correspondence.

ALLAN SEKULA: A correspondence but there was a word for it, when you had a friend that really—

MARY PANZER: Pen pal?

ALLAN SEKULA: A pen pal correspondence with a, with a young woman. I mean, when he was a teenager with a young woman in, somewhere in Idaho or Montana, you know, a woman was probably going to end up in some pretty dead-end working-class world, you know, but is full of this aspiration and funny edge of romance of teenage kids at that time. You know, it's called *I Sent You a Rose, Haha*" which is a quote from one of her letters, I think. She would always write on flowered correspondence, you know. So Fred made a slide piece of that, which had been published around that time in *Studio International* in a, in a—

MARY PANZER: Layout?

ALLAN SEKULA: Of a kind of selection of artist work that Antin had edited, including Baldessari and George Nikolaidis, and a number of other kind of protoconceptualist people from San Diego. I think Eleanor might have had something. So John invited Fred and I up to do a show and we called it socialist realism, which we thought

would really freak out the art students at CalArts, who we imagined all to be rich kids. And we came up to talk to them. John brought us up and we sat in this little gallery up in the upper floors of the school. And they all seemed a bit in-comprehending. And what I found out later was that that class included James Welling, who wasn't there. He was off on a trip recruiting people for some other project they were doing. But there was one student who dressed like John. I think he was smoking a cigar like John. John, in those days, wore a denim jacket. I mean, John is hugely tall, you know, almost seven feet.

And the way to find John at an opening is, if you have a video camera and you hold it up and extend the screen, he is always the tallest person in the room, you know. And you can, if you can get above, if you have a periscope, you can find John. But this quite a bit shorter young art student was wearing the same denim jacket, the same jeans and, I think, smoking a cigar like John. The only thing he didn't do is dye his hair white. And I found out only later that this was David Salle. So that was the gang there and then, and I think another person in the class was the novelist, Jill Ciment.

MARY PANZER: Wait a minute, but David Salle, this is when? This is '74?

ALLAN SEKULA: This is '73, I think.

MARY PANZER: Okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, David Salle?

MARY PANZER: Yes, no, I thought he was younger rather than that, but that's a—

ALLAN SEKULA: No, he was, he was there at that time, yes.

MARY PANZER: That's my mistake. Okay, so.

ALLAN SEKULA: So John, but John had said look, if you want, actually, we did the show after I made the decision to stay at San Diego. But yes, I had friendly relations with John and there was this kind of connection to CalArts.

MARY PANZER: But you're already working with Fred, so this transition from, I mean, this, it's not a decision, like the movement to whatever. You're combining art and politics and Fred seems like somebody who was a little bit ahead of you.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, yes, yes. I mean, Fred — well Fred for one, Fred had done a sociology degree at San Francisco State. And Fred came from a really working-class communist background. His dad was a wood sawyer in Oroville, California, the guy who judges the logs when they come in and figures out you can get this many two by fours and this many four by fours, and then, you know, would dictate the way they milled, you know, the log, which is a big part of that northern California economy in those days, logging. He had relatives in Seattle and they were pretty much Cajun background working-class lefties. And Fred had gone to San Francisco State, gotten a sociology degree, was there during the SF State strike and you know, because that was one of the real working-class schools that was, you know. Being, though, the myth of the '60s is that this was all, you know, [inaudible] and Columbia and, you know, the children of the—

MARY PANZER: Grad students.

ALLAN SEKULA: —of the upper middle class, you know, the disaffected children of the bourgeoisie. And we know very well how deeply entrenched in the working class opposition to the war was, you know, also within union movement, even if the anti-war people got defeated by the [George] Meany's and the, you know, business unionists. So that struggle existed and Fred was very much out of that. And he'd gone into the Peace Corps and was the first person. He'd been sent to—he'd studied not Tagalog but one of the other major dialects of the Philippines and had been dispatched to the Philippines and was drafted, given a draft call in the Philippines. So he's the first Peace Corps volunteer to be drafted from foreign deployment. So this became a cause célèbre, I mean, going from Peace Corps to the war corps. And he was taken back to Seattle and brought up on charges and—

MARY PANZER: Well wait a minute, because he refused to go?

ALLAN SEKULA: Because he was, he was refusing to go and was making a principal case about it. And in the end, after a couple of years of wrangling, there was a dismissal on a technicality. And Fred was a bit at loose ends, I think, at that point and he had his sister, Lynn Lonidier, was a San Francisco poet. And Lynn had come down to San Diego. She was the lover of Pauline Oliveros, the new music composer. And so Fred was, and Fred always had said that it was his sister who encouraged him to be interested in art. You know, she had that, you know, that role in his life and he came down. He did a very wonderful piece that should be shown nowadays, I mean, absolutely, documenting the wedding of Pauline and Lynn, which was a kind of gay carnival on the beach in

Leucadia and a frolic with a lot of gay and lesbian friends and music people, and just a whole performance that Fred shot. So that was perhaps an unusual piece for him, given, you know, that he's identified with working with training ends and this kind of thing.

But he, then the possibility came up that he come into the grad program at UCSD. So in '72, he started and then they asked him to stick around and teach photography. And as a lecturer because they were sort of bootstrapping their way into photography and I think they also hired a guy named Phel Steinmetz. And Phel was a, came from a San Diego family. His father was a small-scale building contractor, built houses at a time when you could, you know, it wasn't all big-scale tract development. You could, you know, contract for maybe two or three homes and build them, and get a crew together. And Phel himself had worked as a carpenter and, you know, came out of that and was from some eastern part of the county, which was getting near the mountains and had—I don't think Phel had had any college background. That was the other thing about UCSD is that they were quite open to hiring people with unusual non-academic backgrounds. Manny Farber had no particular college experience, for example, even though he had been the film critic for *the Nation*. And Manny also was a carpenter, you know, in Arizona, you know, so.

MARY PANZER: And he was another teacher of yours at USC?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well he came in around '70 or so and taught film and painting, so I took both painting and film from Manny.

MARY PANZER: As an undergraduate or as a graduate?

ALLAN SEKULA: Starting as an undergrad, yes. So, and so going back to Phel, Phel had taken workshops with Ansel Adams and been kind of around that scene of California sublime landscape photography but was trying to figure out a way to take on the suburbs. So we all, you know, a kind of conversation between Fred and Phel and I started when I was maybe in my last year of undergrad school and then continued when I joined the grad program. And they very quickly let me teach a course on photography as a grad student, so I got to try that. But we were talking about things like Bill Owens' *Suburbia*. We thought that was interesting, the flawed. We were very interested in A.D. Coleman's *Polemic Against Minor White* in the *New York Times*, you know, that, and Fred, in fact, was trying to write, had written his dissertation because, or his thesis because at that time, they were asking for very serious critical essays from the practicing art MFAs.

MARY PANZER: MFAs, from the MFAs?

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: So they were already combining criticism in practice.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, that was David's idea that they were going to be training artist critics, people that could do both somehow.

MARY PANZER: But that's, that was very unusual.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, and David, of course, had already outlined an essay that's not that well known in art circles because it's more about literature. He and Ihab Hassan are two of the key people to really define postmodernism in literature.

MARY PANZER: Ihab Hassan?

ALLAN SEKULA: Ihab Hassan, yes, the—

MARY PANZER: Spell the last name.

ALLAN SEKULA: H-A-S-S-A-N.

MARY PANZER: Okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: Hassan, but they both, well, Hassan is more interested in what exists that is already postmodern before modernism in literature and Melville and the various examples that he uses. And it's in the, I'm blocking the name of the book. I keep wanting to say *Dismemberment of Orpheus* but—

MARY PANZER: Don't worry. Don't worry about that.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, it's got Orpheus in the title but it's not, obviously not—

MARY PANZER: No, but we're interested in David [inaudible].

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, but David had written, he wrote a very good essay on, largely, about Charles Olson and [inaudible] and what that might mean.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And it's still literature. He's a poet.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Yes. Well David, one really great thing now is that Chicago's finally come out with a selection of Antin's criticism and it's divided between his art criticism and his literary criticism, which is a very, I think, very smart trifurcation.

MARY PANZER: Combine them, but to combine them-

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, but you can see them together and they're the key essays, I mean, the Warhol's *Silver Tenement*, Alex Katz essay, essays on Duchamp and not so much the top pieces, which have appeared elsewhere, but—

MARY PANZER: But those essays, you wouldn't read them as an undergraduate but that was, those were ideas that were circulating—

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, no, I didn't read them.

MARY PANZER: —any problems, any—

ALLAN SEKULA: Because David, once I was studying, once I got maybe my last year as an undergrad I started reading because we read everything David did. And we also, you had poets coming in, so you had, you know, Diane Wakoski would come or Jackson Mac Low. It was a lot of New York poets.

MARY PANZER: Ginsberg?

ALLAN SEKULA: And didn't like Ginsberg, no.

MARY PANZER: Oh, okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: Though I had Ginsberg chanted over the disassembly of a sculpture of mine. I made a sandbox in the middle of the plaza and this was, again, back in undergrad days. I was in a class with Newton Harrison and I decided to make this free speech sandbox. It had barbed wire around it. This is where I used my barbed wire. And as it turned out, Ginsberg had given a reading at San Diego State and one of my TAs was there with him and a group of lit grad students. And they were standing around my sculpture. And I'd walk up. I'd see this bearded guy. I didn't know who he was. My TA says, "This is Allen Ginsberg. This is the sculptor." And he said "Hello." He said "[Inaudible] what are you doing?" I said, "Well they've told me my free speech ticket has run out. I have to take it apart." He said "Oh, then I'll chant the mantra for the end of an event." And he chanted and I started cutting the wire and it was wonderful.

[They laugh.]

So, but Ginsberg wasn't particularly on the approved list. It was more the New York poets. Well Gary Snyder would come, you know, and, but—so there was a lot of exposure to poetry but David, and David was also teaching semiotics and getting—they brought Jack Burnham, who wrote this crazy book about modern sculpture but who then went on to try to find the kabbalah and Duchamp. And I had huge clashes with him but he was an interesting guy to have around because he was interested in structuralism and, you know, partly because he was coming, I read his book. And I read Levi Strauss and, you know. So that was all happening, maybe, my last year as an undergrad. And then there was this sort of conversation about photography happening with Fred and Phel. He changed his name to Phel at one point, but yes.

MARY PANZER: Never mind, yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: And—

MARY PANZER: So you could stay as a grad student and keep this conversation going?

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, and then Martha Rosler, who'd been around, had moved out from New York with her husband at the time, Lenny Neufeld, who was a linguistics grad student.

MARY PANZER: Was she already a photographer?

ALLAN SEKULA: Who left her for Kathy Acker, who was a student at Marcuse's and who used to conduct her session in Marcuse. I was not in Kathy's section of the Marcuse class but Kathy was famous for—and you have to understand that Revelle College had, like two and a half males to every female because it was so science

oriented. So as it happened, Kathy had a section of all 18-year old—

MARY PANZER: Guys.

ALLAN SEKULA: —guys. And she would sit on a table in a miniskirt with no underwear and talk about eros and civilization. And drive, and I would hear these guys. We were just going crazy.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: She was quite a character. But I mean, this is probably something we should—

MARY PANZER: Oh, that's all right.

ALLAN SEKULA: But, you know, but Martha, Lenny split up with Martha for Kathy and Martha was around doing her art with her son Joshua, who's now a well-known cartoon artist who did a wonderful book about—

MARY PANZER: But his name is Joshua—

ALLAN SEKULA: Joshua Neufeld, Josh Neufeld. He did a wonderful book about New Orleans and Katrina. And he and Martha actually have collaborated in recent years. And he's got his own, you know—

MARY PANZER: But she was working with photographic materials or—

ALLAN SEKULA: But no, she wasn't. She was doing collage and publishing some of her collages in feminist newspapers. There was one called *Off our Backs* in San Diego that she published. And this is pretty well documented and her, some of the catalogs of her work. But her telling is that nobody in UCSD particularly liked her collages. I thought they were fine. I thought they were interesting. And she was doing kind of a sculpture. But she wasn't so into photography as such. I mean, she wasn't—

MARY PANZER: Well this is what I'm interested in, is when you start to, your production, where was your work being seen and who was seeing it? I mean, and who was your audience? Who was, who was going to see this work? And how did you—

ALLAN SEKULA: I only remembered the other day that I did a piece called *One, Two, Three, Many...(Terrorism)*. And that was maybe '72. And I had a friend who appears in a number of my photos from that time. He was a housemate and both of us lived in a house together. He and his girlfriend were housemates of mine. And he was a musician and quite a performer in terms of facial plasticity and he was of Mexican background named Greg Arreguin. And Greg, I had Greg dress up as a NLF fighter in, unfortunately, what was, Fred had an old Filipino conical peasant's hat and we went around La Jolla and just posed him as this, you know, Tet offensive guerrilla, you know, in the milieu of the University, you know, next to the sauna, next to the swimming pool, next to a Mercedes Benz, you know, next to joggers and this kind of thing, you know.

So it was a kind of, my approach to collage was, you just do it with one frame and then you stage it, you know. I don't think I knew Martha when I did that. I don't think I knew her yet and I didn't know that she'd done these War at Home pieces, you know? But some of those were published in a lefty student paper called the North Star. I just came across the prints that I sent to them, the note to the editor. And I don't, I don't think I have a copy of it but, yes. So they got out that way. I mean, you put show work in classes. But then also what was strange is that we were able to do some outside shows while I was a student. And one show, for which I came up with a title, was a show at Grossmont College where a guy named David Wing was teaching, who had somehow got a strange combined degree between UCSD and CalArts.

MARY PANZER: Already.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, already and he was on the faculty there as a young, you know, community college professor. And they invited us to do a show in their gallery. I don't know if David was directly involved and I don't remember who the key person was that we dealt with but we did a group show of a number, of work of a number of us.

MARY PANZER: Meaning—

ALLAN SEKULA: Fred, Phel, Martha, me.

MARY PANZER: So this is grad student—

ALLAN SEKULA: We were grad students and a couple of even undergrads had some work.

MARY PANZER: Right, but this is you as a grad student. I'm just trying to follow what—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, and I think this was in '73 and I came up with a title, *A Photograph is Worth a Thousand Questions* for that. So we got work out and then there was the show that Fred and I did with Baldessari at CalArts. I mean, on Baldessari's invitation. And then I did *Aerospace Folk Tales* in my first year as a grad student. I'd started making the photos while I was still an undergrad because I thought about my dad's unemployment and how to get ahead. And I'd had a kind of reconciliation with my dad.

MARY PANZER: I was wondering how he—

ALLAN SEKULA: Which I then immediately followed up with by starting to photograph everything, which I'm sure he was uneasy with.

MARY PANZER: Well he tolerated.

ALLAN SEKULA: It was, he tolerated it but it was tense, in a way, and that tension's sort of in the work. And my mother was happy to have me around because I'd been kind of AWOL, you know, from—and the other thing I think that was key for me is, I was kind of supporting my, I mean, I was supporting. Here my dad was unemployed. He couldn't support me. I was basically living on my own from 19 on. You know, I didn't have, I had to be kind of independent, and it was certainly easier in those days. I mean, we didn't have the kind of debt burden students have today but, but, but I had, you know, I could feel returning to my parents' milieu had — I just had the illusion of a certain autonomy with that. And the financial strains weren't there. I mean, I did owe my dad some money from how he'd helped me. He loaned me money for expenses and I, you know, I owed him a few thousand dollars, which it took me a long time to repay. But you know, but that was—

MARY PANZER: But you had psychological—

ALLAN SEKULA: That was kind of deferred but I had a certain psychological distance.

MARY PANZER: Now, yes, go ahead.

ALLAN SEKULA: Sorry, ask your question.

MARY PANZER: Well no, the thing is, also, it seems like already with *Aerospace Folktales* that you were, the concept of a work of art is images in sequence, is text and image combined, has to do with varieties of presentation. We were talking about that before, that there's an exhibition form or a book form. And so that puts you direct, I mean, it couldn't be more different than, say, what's going on in the east coast where, you know, rocks and trees made an exquisite tiny sparkly black and white prints was the goal of the art photography grad student. I mean, you're on different planets, it seems to me.

ALLAN SEKULA: Oh, absolutely, and we also felt this, the burden of that tradition is something we were completely—

MARY PANZER: Well also it was sort of local, I mean, all the Ansel and Weston and Imogen.

ALLAN SEKULA: It was definitely a west coast thing, yes.

MARY PANZER: But they were also setting the standard to everybody back east.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, and I mean oddly enough, you see James Welling recalling his days at CalArts and, you know, talking about his interest in Ansel Adams and the light and, you know, so that even within the what you might call the *Metro Pictures* or the post, you know, a kind of pictorial. Pictorialism is definitely a cat with more than nine lives, you know. It's returned in so many different guises and we were very anti-pictorialist. Now maybe that made us guilty of, you know, the crime that I'm forgetting who was it that said that conceptual art was just pointing at things? I think it's, it's well known.

MARY PANZER: But how much fun you were having. I mean, you guys were not invested in any kind of establishment.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, and I mean, I had the idea, I mean, when, for the *Aerospace Folktales*, it was so exciting to think. And then later with *This Ain't China*, which I did the next year based on working in this restaurant and it's kind of opera buff of, you know, trying to unionize a little restaurant. Just the idea that you could photograph someone and have them do a version of, you know, Jean Falconetti in Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*, you know, and have that be a still, you know, or something that looked like a Griffith picture or, you know, with your friends, I mean. So it wasn't just documentary. It was also film, you know, because I was seeing all these films, probably through Farber and other venues. So the link wasn't just to photography. It was to cinema sequences but doing it in a really cheap way with a few images, really, you know, *Aerospace Folk Tales* cost me probably about \$200 when I added up all the paper I bought, printing it, and that kind of thing.

And then audio. I'd had the idea, in fact, before I came up with another topic for my thesis that I was going to write about three people, Arbus, August Sander, and Studs Terkel. And that was going to be. And what is a verbal portrait? What is a pictorial portrait? What are the interactional bases of this? I mean, it was probably strongly influenced by Goffman and, you know, I do some interactional sociology but who's the author when you have this intersubjective?

MARY PANZER: Wish you'd have done it. I could use that. What did you end up doing your thesis on?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, it was the, it was a much longer essay out of which the invention of photographic meaning came. It was a lot more about content. And I had the good fortune that, so I write this thesis, which was the hardest struggle of my grad school. I mean, it was really, I mean, because writing, that kind of writing never came easily to me. I remember calling David at one point saying I'm going to have to take another semester and I still have recurrent dreams where that appears, you know, like the student's dream, classic Freud's student's dream. And David was resolutely anti-psychoanalytic, saying well just calm down. You can do it. He was used to dealing with Eleanor.

MARY PANZER: So you were writing this for David, I mean—

ALLAN SEKULA: Well David was my advisor and then I had—my committee was Manny Farber, Newton Harrison, who, you know, is this environmental artist who works now with his wife Helen. He's retired and up at, I think he's emeritus but also at UCSD but teaching in Santa Cruz, still doing these massive ecological environmental projects. And the outside person was Louis Marin and Louis Marin is a—well he died quite some years ago prematurely. A French semiotician, *Portrait of a King*.

MARY PANZER: Was he teaching at UCSD?

ALLAN SEKULA: He was at UCSD and we had a study group. And so he did this famous essay on Disneyland as a degenerate utopia. He wrote a book on utopics and one of the essays. And we, for example, our study group discussed that essay and Fred actually made a piece. We all went to, went on a pilgrimage to Disneyland. Louis didn't come. He'd been there plenty.

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: But we all photographed, kind of thinking about Louis' essay and then the only person to make a piece out of it was Fred. And that's been shown in France now and people have rediscovered that piece. But he reproduces Louis's essay as a text with his photos. It was Martha, and me, and Brian Connell just kind of dropped out of the scene, but so they were on my committee and Manny was, he just wanted me to talk about one Walker Evans photo and I wasn't writing about Walker Evans. I was reading about Stieglitz and Hine. But he, for Manny, he was, like, how do you read an image. And Louis Marin, I remember, encouraged me to read Pierre Bourdieu and Barthes. I had translated, laboriously, "The Photographic Message," [inaudible] for everybody. Not very well but I did it and discovered only later that it had appeared an issue of *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* that we didn't have in the library but we had everything else, so. But I did the work and that was helpful for me.

And so here I was, you know, with a [inaudible] maybe six months to write the thesis and I thought, I'm going to, I'm going to translate this essay before I do anything and I did. And then I [inaudible] but the weird thing that happened was then right around the end of grad school, Martha and I get together as a couple. And her plan is to move back to New York and I think well that'd be great to go to New York. So we planned to do that.

MARY PANZER: This is '75?

ALLAN SEKULA: Seventy-four.

MARY PANZER: Seventy-four.

ALLAN SEKULA: And so we drive out in a drive-away car to New York in September of '74 after helping the art department move from, like, I had a job driving a truck moving people from the old campus to their new quarters in a new building. And got deathly ill. I remember I was pretty sick at that time.

MARY PANZER: During the car trip or during the—

ALLAN SEKULA: During, no, well into the car trip, yes. But I kind of ended up in New York, like, losing a lot of weight. And then, but David had sent my thesis to Max Kozloff at *Artforum* thinking that maybe they'd want to—have me do reviews or something. And Max was really taken by it and said we want to publish this. I mean, it needs editing. It's too long but let's publish it. So I had this incredible good fortune of, you know, it was like the second set of incredible blessings, you might say, of them allowing me to publish something substantial. And

then they commissioned the piece about Steichen because I met Harry Lunn, and Lunn was promoting these aerial recon photos as Steichen's and I saw through that. And [John] Coplans, who had been a fighter pilot in the RAF [Royal Air Force] in the Battle of Britain, you know, he was a South African.

MARY PANZER: I didn't know that. I'd never met him.

ALLAN SEKULA: I don't know. I think John came in kind of late in the game. He wasn't in the, but he was definitely flying spitfires and had that combination Brit-South African toughness and RAF, the few, you know. And so then that got me, that was a reinforcement for being a critic, you know? And I didn't have to pass through the crucible of being a young reviewer at *Artforum*, which was the only way you could make a living, if you cranked out a lot of reviews. And then you had [inaudible] telling you that you couldn't write about your friends or your girlfriends, as if that was a vice only of young people, when it existed at every level of the apparatus. And that was also the time when—so they commissioned several things and they actually commissioned a piece from me about the west coast art schools.

MARY PANZER: Oh, did that end up running?

ALLAN SEKULA: No, because by that time, I did research. I went and interviewed Paul, which was important. I have the tape still, which I should—

MARY PANZER: Maybe the Archives wants them.

ALLAN SEKULA: And they might. They might, actually. But they probably have interviews from Paul. I should contact Miriam, you know?

MARY PANZER: Yes. I think they've got stuff with Miriam also but anyway, so.

ALLAN SEKULA: I'm sure he didn't tell me anything he hasn't said a million times. He's quite a raconteur. He is amazing. He'd sit there and smoke cigarettes in a holder and he'd talk about being in the hedgerows in France and, you know, a German 88 would open up and you'd see this cloudburst and I'd think, it's Courbet [Some kind of airplane from WWII -SS].

MARY PANZER: Oh, good lord.

ALLAN SEKULA: I know.

MARY PANZER: Anyway, but the thing is what also what impresses me is that here you are in California where sort of, there is no art establishment that resembles the New York art establishment. And also, it's so international so quickly, so that, I mean, your intellectual frames of reference are direct with Europe? I mean, you're reading Barthes essay that aren't necessarily everywhere, the way they are now.

ALLAN SEKULA: They hadn't quite hit yet, yes. They were accessible, yes.

MARY PANZER: No, no, they hadn't. They hadn't.

ALLAN SEKULA: I was reading *Working Papers on Cultural Studies*, so I knew about Stuart Hall. I was reading *Art and Language*, you know? And then I met those people in the New York group in '77 or so. So I met Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden. And as they were having their schismatic split with Kosuth. And I was sympathetic to them, particularly to Ian, who was an Australian and then I met Carole Conde and Karl Beveridge, who were Canadian. So we talked a lot about anti-imperialism and white settler states and Samir Amin and this kind of stuff. So I was going back to New York, even after coming back to San Diego. I'd get back to New York a lot, you know, even if it was just getting invited to CAA. You get on the Greyhound for \$50 and cross the country.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: Or take a cheap flight.

MARY PANZER: Well wait a minute. All right, so we got you to New York in '77.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, '74 or '75.

MARY PANZER: Seventy-four, '75, and we're going to have to wrap this up but, and I'll find out the chronology. That's something that's—but you're in New York writing criticism in the end. And when do you get to Ohio State?

ALLAN SEKULA: Oh, that's 1980.

MARY PANZER: Oh, okay, all right. So there's lots of stuff to talk about.

ALLAN SEKULA: There's a, that's another—and Sally [Stein] invites me to give a talk at RISD [Rhode Island School of Design] but it happens only a year later, so I don't end up meeting her until two years later.

MARY PANZER: Seventy-seven.

ALLAN SEKULA: Seventy-eight, I think. '77?

MARY PANZER: When Ute Edkildsen our tour.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: So okay, well, I'm glad I got you. I think I got you out of school, though, right?

ALLAN SEKULA: More or less, yes.

MARY PANZER: Yes, you got your MFA.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, somewhere along the line.

MARY PANZER: You got cross country.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: I think that's a good place to stop.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: Thank you very much.

ALLAN SEKULA: Okay, good.

MARY PANZER: Great, okay.

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[February 11, 2012]

[TRACK sekula11_sd_3of4_track01 is a blank track.]

MARY PANZER: I'm sorry. I'm just looking—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: This is wonderful, Allan. Nobody else would—there'd be no other way to get this information.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, it's just what I remember happening. I mean, it's not—

MARY PANZER: Do you have enough water? Do you need—

ALLAN SEKULA: No. I'm [inaudible] I heat the—

MARY PANZER: Also, I mean, since we have more time—let's see. I don't want to wear you out because it's fairly—I mean, I'm not talking—I'm just—from a human point of view—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: —this is—you know, this is tiring. So—

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, I was able to do—I did this three hour thing at the Whitney program, and it was—I was pretty—I had a lot of green tea—

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and I was really going like crazy there.

MARY PANZER: And you were covering the same territory?

ALLAN SEKULA: No. No. No. No.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: I was talking about because they'd seen the films.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: So, they have questions, and so, I was, sort of—it was—it was a discussion. But—

MARY PANZER: Okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: —it was, kind of—a little bit was like a tutorial and what it's like to make a feature film with a crew and—

MARY PANZER: Oh, okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: —and I also had to give them a lot of background on Miller and—I did little capsule—I mean, it was weird. I gave a, kind of, capsule biography of Noel Burch and a capsule biography of Crystal Eastman.

MARY PANZER: Why?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, because of an example I was giving them of this—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —kind of, proto-photomontage that she had and women—*Work Accidents and the Law in Pittsburgh Survey in 1910*.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I need to eat the rest of my pills.

MARY PANZER: Do that. Do that. We're good. We were. This was an hour. It was an hour, but I mean, this whole picture of downtown New York, it's not Mapplethorpe and not gay. I don't mind gay. It's just not the only thing—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: —that was going on. [inaudible]

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. It was funny because Barry would show up, you know, and he'd be, sort of, droopy eyed and—and sometimes, he'd just show up—yes.

MARY PANZER: Gary?

ALLAN SEKULA: It's Barry Rosens, who it is I'm talking about.

MARY PANZER: Oh, okay. That shower always scares me [Laughs.].

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Well, they need—you know, it's very common in Holland—

MARY PANZER: Yes. That was—

ALLAN SEKULA: —these showers with no—

MARY PANZER: —that was the only time I ever saw it was in Amsterdam.

ALLAN SEKULA: —and—but there, people usually have a, kind of, squeegee on a—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —you squeegee the water back toward the drain.

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I really shouldn't have one in here [inaudible].

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: What I do is I put the rug up on the—I close the toilet seat and put the rug over.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And then, I can eat my [inaudible] and so you think the place is just going to get all moldy.

MARY PANZER: Or you're going to freeze.

ALLAN SEKULA: But it's a great shower, actually. [inaudible]. I need my glasses. I had dinner in Brooklyn last night, and so I didn't get home until—

MARY PANZER: I'm sorry.

ALLAN SEKULA: —after midnight. I had dinner in Brooklyn with a former student, and—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: It's so nice to be over there. You know, it's like—

MARY PANZER: Where were you? Were you in Williamsburg or—way out?

ALLAN SEKULA: No. It was like near Atlantic, and it was off the C train. I think it was called—it's got a—it's like heights. It's not Ground Heights, but it's—the name of the neighborhood is—

MARY PANZER: It's Park Heights. It's like—

ALLAN SEKULA: I think so. Yes.

MARY PANZER: Not Park Slope. It's Park Heights.

ALLAN SEKULA: No. It's not Park Slope. It's got—one second.

MARY PANZER: It is nice around here.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, but just the scale of it. And it just feels—I mean, Friday night in this neighborhood. I can't believe the money and the people—

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —and the way they're dressed and the—and the—it's just unbelievable.

MARY PANZER: I know. I mean, like—

ALLAN SEKULA: This is really the one time for the one percent here. I mean—

MARY PANZER: Their kids.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: It's their kids.

ALLAN SEKULA: And I mean it's hard to believe this neighborhood getting more chic. But since then, I think the last time I had stayed here for any length time was during the—when I came to film the 2004 convention.

MARY PANZER: Oh. Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: And I'd come back from what I was doing. This isn't going to lead—it would be—we'd, kind of, look at each other and go, "He's going to win." [Laughs.] You know, it was just, sort of—it felt—you know, with all the New Yorkers hostility to Bush and you just had the feeling it was going to be inevitable that he was going to win. You know something as they went on, and I just went with that.

[. . . -MP]

MARY PANZER: So, but I mean, B—Avenue B looks like 2nd Avenue, you know, like—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER:—there's bars, and I mean, it's—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Yes.

MARY PANZER:—a little less intense. But I plowed through all that crap so that we could go to the Angelika. But then, getting home, it's like blah.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, and the whole scene on the train lines. We used—almost everyone was African American on the train or, you know—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and, you know, just guys—young black women, kind of, fending off guys talking to them. And, you know, it's, kind of, like what a scene. I mean, it was just like, "Oh, man."

MARY PANZER: Can I [inaudible]?

ALLAN SEKULA: Please. Yes. Yes. It's—I just—

MARY PANZER: Okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: I just put more hot water on the tea bags. So, it's pretty weak stuff. [inaudible].

MARY PANZER: Right. Well, we can—anyway, thank you [Laughs]. Yes. Well, that's why I like it where I live. It's not like this [Laughs].

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Yes.

MARY PANZER: But it's far away. So, you get to choose.

ALLAN SEKULA: Let's see. I guess I—these are just the supplements. I just—I need to make sure I take them—

MARY PANZER: Oh, yes. Yes. Sure. No. Sally would be very angry with me about interfering with that.

ALLAN SEKULA: This is going to need some serious editing.

MARY PANZER: Don't worry about it.

ALLAN SEKULA: Has anything been transcribed yet or no?

MARY PANZER: Don't worry about it.

ALLAN SEKULA: Okay.

MARY PANZER: It's, sort of, like the more there is the better because there's no other way to get this information. I mean, I've used other people's—you know, just the fact that you can talk a little bit about *Artforum* and the split between *Artforum* and *October*.

ALLAN SEKULA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY PANZER: Nobody else is going to be able to tell anyone that, kind of, stuff. So, the trick is, sort of, to stay on target but also, to be able to cast a light on these, kind of, things that are in the periphery—

ALLAN SEKULA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY PANZER:—because there's no other source. I mean, unless they interviewed Max, which I suppose they could.

ALLAN SEKULA: Oh, and they may have.

MARY PANZER: I don't know.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: I don't know, but when I think of the—

ALLAN SEKULA: They must have interviewed Joyce, but, you know, that's another story.

MARY PANZER: That's different. Yes. I mean, I know Kristen Meiselas is interviewing Susan for this—for this round.

ALLAN SEKULA: Susan?

MARY PANZER: This Susan.

ALLAN SEKULA: This Susan. Oh. That's a very different history—art history.

MARY PANZER: Oh, yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: [inaudible] But that's—all that obviously intersects [inaudible] Sally [inaudible].

MARY PANZER: Kathy [Lubben -SS]?

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Because Sally went with her on some of those carnival stripper trips, I think. [I never accompanied my friend Susan Meiselas on any of her trips following carnival strippers -SS]

MARY PANZER: Really?

ALLAN SEKULA: I think so. Yes.

MARY PANZER: Was she at Harvard or—

ALLAN SEKULA: They—well, they had—

MARY PANZER: I guess it was when she was at [inaudible].

ALLAN SEKULA: —I think in the same summer, they had a workshop together there. They brought in a workshop. I can't remember exactly.

MARY PANZER: Okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: Anyways.

MARY PANZER: Okay, that was a good break. Thanks for the green tea. What I was going to ask you about was another thing you've—your relationship to another mythic community on the lower east side being the music community. I mean, there you were really—I mean, you can there was nothing. I just would feel remiss in not asking you did you ever go to CBGB's? Were you ever close to anybody who was in a band? I mean, just because in terms of contemporary—contemporaneous movements, they were—you overlapped.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. No. I mean, not really.

MARY PANZER: That's an answer.

ALLAN SEKULA: We did know some new music people from San Diego who were out there, and I might have heard a few things.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I mean, they wouldn't come here, you know.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Like the Fugs. That wouldn't have—they would have been—that's pretty later. They were—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. I mean I would—

MARY PANZER: [inaudible]

ALLAN SEKULA: I knew that music, but I didn't—I didn't hear a lot of live music.

MARY PANZER: Yes. Well, that was—that was the late '60s. Yes. So—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Yes. I had more—I had more connection to music in San Diego, I think—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —because I—because I knew one of the people who appears in a number of those early pieces, Greg Arreguin was a jazz guitarist, and we—people from one of the houses I lived in with a group of people—we'd go up to hear Alice Coltrane in L.A and we'd hear Captain Beefheart and—

MARY PANZER: But that's a very different—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Yes.

MARY PANZER: It's a very different [inaudible].

ALLAN SEKULA: But that was—so I—I had more sense of where to find music in Los Angeles. You know, and it was—it ranged from, you know, hearing Bo Diddley to—yes. Bo Diddley to Alice Coltrane to Captain Beefheart—that pretty much gives you a sense of the [laughs] range. With Little Richard showing up suddenly—

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —at Captain Beefheart's intermission at an old theater in Long Beach and saying, "I'm going to be here next week. Come hear me." I mean, that was his other thing that would happen. It was very bizarre.

MARY PANZER: Right, but it's not—

ALLAN SEKULA: To think that Little Richard would, sort of, pop up in the middle of a Captain Beefheart concert, and that's one reason why I wouldn't when I got a handle on this, sort of, Dan Graham view of rock and roll, you know, coming out of the Jersey—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —white suburbs or even a paper. I remember Tommy Crow giving at a conference on modernism and modernity at—in Vancouver in 1980 where Tom Crow was suggesting that there was, kind of, reflexivity, and self-awareness in the Velvet Underground that was just completely absent in Little Richard. I mean—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —Little Richard was his example of a, kind of—I don't know, unreflective—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —performance, and having seen Little Richard on, I think, the *Dick Cavett Show* running circles around John—I think it was John Simon the theater critic at *New York Times*. I just couldn't buy that argument, you know.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: It just seemed to me that this history of, kind of, modernity and popular music was failing to accord to African American expression—the real criticality that it had. I mean, Little Richard—well, on the levels of gender, on the levels of race. He was just an extraordinary character, you know.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: This is an extraordinary character, and so, that—to his credit, Tom Crow never published the piece. I believe there's a recording floating around in Vancouver, but, you know—but I remember objecting from the audience and saying, "How can you say this about Little Richard? He's one of the geniuses of rock and roll."

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: So, that's—I mean, but I don't remember New York—having that played out much in New York.

MARY PANZER: No.

ALLAN SEKULA: I mean, the things I remember that had a strong effect on me of a musical sort were things like [inaudible]. It was a, sort of, gamelan and Japanese or Balinese shadow puppet play that was up at the Museum of Natural History, you know.

MARY PANZER: Oh, yes. Well, that could have been Julie Taymor-ish or something.

ALLAN SEKULA: Might have been. Yes. I don't remember.

MARY PANZER: Yes. Okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: But just the cinematic musicality of that was something very impressive for me.

MARY PANZER: Yes. Well, I'm just happy to be able to document the fact that Andy, Velvet Underground, CBGB's was not the only, kind of, cultural community at work in the mid to late '70s in New York City, and it seems to me that you're practice and the people that you're—that you're able to introduce us to or the relationships you're able to introduce us to are a very helpful anecdote [Laughs] to a history that I'm anxious to see not

challenged, exactly. But I would like to show that there was more than that going on in New York.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. It's just that I—we certainly didn't find an alternate music scene—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: we knew a few people from that—people—you know, people like Ned Sublette and that, kind of—some of those folks were in—

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —here—around SoHo at that time, but I didn't—I don't remember much in the way of encounters with them. They might have popped up at some of the events at The Kitchen, some of the things at St. Mark's Church. Yes.

MARY PANZER: So, all right. So, we've got to—I mean *October* starts in '76. Does it?

ALLAN SEKULA: I think it's our first issue was in '76. Yes.

MARY PANZER: So, okay. So, do you want to talk about "Steichen at War"?

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Yes. Well, what happened—I mean, that was not a—the idea for that originated with John Coplan's—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and that John and Max took me aside and said, "Well, look. Let's"—and the fact—I mean, taking aside is silly because basically there'd be three people at the-*Artforum* office.

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: D'Angelo working on getting the ads in and, you know, selling pages.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And there'd be John thinking out the issues and Max, very often, just, you know, editing and talking with writers. And so, most of the times I was up there it was—I was the only visitor.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And then, sometimes Annette would show up. And you'd meet one of the other writers or [Robert -SS] Pincus-Witten, you know.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: But it was a fairly quiet—it didn't have the quality I think that publishing has now where things are more phonetic. And people are on their phones and on e-mail. And you've got lots of interns and people floating around. Yes. It was—it was like a little workshop, and so, John [Coplan -SS] says to me, "Well, I've been—I'm really interested." He told me he was interested in a body of photographs that had come to his attention through a man named Harry Lunn—

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —and that Steichen—was I interested in Steichen, would I want to write about Steichen, and that Steichen had supposedly taken these aerial reconnaissance photographs. And at some point, I met Harry Lunn. He seemed like a very inscrutable guy with a peculiarly anachronistic beard. Of course, I only later learned that he would have been a CIA agent, had infiltrated with National Student Association—well, all of which was exposed in Rampart's magazine in '67 and then had become this print dealer. What can you figure in the marketization of art photography? So, Harry was, sort of, you know—so, it was clear to me and John was honest enough to see this, as well, that this was a, sort of, promotional operation. You know, we're going to add these to the canon. So, I said, "Well, I doubt—maybe Steichen made some of them. He couldn't have made all of them. This is clearly a, kind of, military, bureaucratic operation, but I'd love to look into it." And so, I spent a good part of that next year both I think I started working on it in New York and then continued after having moved back to California and then, sort of, swatting through the relationship of this first World War aerial reconnaissance photography to some broader issues of instrumental documentary. You know, the kind of, what I came to call instrumental realism. You know, a realism that not only records the object but then seeks to implement a transformation of the object either through distraction or incarceration.

So, it was leading toward in my interest in police photography and all the other forms of very practical, instrumental photography, and of course, a key issue along the way was this strange dialogue with the space of modernism. You know, if Malevich and suprematism, you know, the—because that was the easy, sort of, stylish to make—leap to make, which is—which someone might—I don't think Hilton Kramer was guilty of. And, you know, having reviewed a gallery exhibition of the same photographs and, you know, just—

MARY PANZER: So, he brought up the relationship between Steichen's aerial photography and the, sort of, the evolution of abstraction? I mean—

ALLAN SEKULA: I believe so. Yes. Yes, but also gave it a, kind of, war time heroic cast and—

MARY PANZER: Oh. Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. So, it all—it all seemed a bit too easy to me, and it didn't seem like Steichen's mindset included that radical a view of space, you know. I mean, clearly, he was, you know, because there's so many—I mean, yes. Steichen is a—becomes a modernist, but he carries with him the baggage of a, kind of, late 19th century Mucha's art nouveau you know, commercial artist background with its symbolist baggage and everything else that goes with that. And—but I didn't see abstraction in its more severe and critically suppler forms emerging out of those pictures, you know.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: I mean, if you think about it in retrospect, I think Steichen—he's consistent with—Steichen's relation to abstraction is more or less like art deco's relation to cubism. You know, it's decorative. I mean, when he throws matches on the—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: On the, you know—

MARY PANZER: For the fabric design.

ALLAN SEKULA: —to make a fabric design. That's—it's a practical and second order—secondhand application of some—I mean, it's interesting. It's, kind of, a salutary move, but it's not Duchamp you know?

MARY PANZER: No. No. I always—was always—

ALLAN SEKULA: It's not the standard stoppages, you know.

MARY PANZER: Right. I mean, the way I was taught or introduced to this was that it made Steichen focus the camera—

ALLAN SEKULA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY PANZER:—and he kept it focused ever after.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: But that's not—that doesn't change the basic orientation. It just changes the appearance—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER:—in the most superficial way, really. Anyway.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, I mean, the ways that Steichen introduced modernity to fashion and publicity photography was in part to bring Hollywood set lighting to the still studio—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —you know, in a way similar to Hurrell and then people in Hollywood. And he's doing that for *Vanity Fair*. And he's probably doing it earlier. I mean, I'd have to go back, and you may know better, at this point, when—who does what in that because I haven't looked at it in some time. But—

MARY PANZER: Well, also had to do with the fact that—well, you know, the changes in publication technology so that *Vanity Fair* was able to reproduce an image in a particular way—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER:—and then, he's constructing these images in order to meet the needs of that—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER:—reproduction technology.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Yes.

MARY PANZER: I mean—so—

ALLAN SEKULA: Once you've got it keiko paper or smooth paper [inaudible] or, you know, sheet-fed press—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Yes. He's definitely on that track, but so, part of it was to try to sort out the validity of the aesthetic claims but also to lock down the real character of the instrumental logic of [inaudible]. And so, by the time I delivered the essay, it was a bit of an ordeal to write, along the way I did things like interview Wayne Miller, you know, about the—I had a fairly wide net I cast because I was interested in at least making the link onto Steichen's time as director of the program of photography at the Museum of Modern Art to at least be able to say something about *Family of Man*, you know—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —this, sort of, God-like aerial perspective of *Family of Man* on a metaphoric level, you know. But the editor bombardier, you know—

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —if he were editor of *Recon Man*, you might say—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —doing—running a recon of the world of photography and summing it all up in one big salvo, right, which is then sent out to the world. So, it was interesting to talk to Wayne Miller. Somewhere I still have the tapes of that. Jane Mayer—I'm sorry, not Jane Mayer.

MARY PANZER: Jane Livingston?

ALLAN SEKULA: No. No. No.

MARY PANZER: Grace Mayer.

ALLAN SEKULA: Grace Mayer. Jane is his sister. I make that mistake because that's, you know, through Sally that's—

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —family connections now. But Grace was quite helpful. That was another interesting discovery when I was at the Museum of Modern Art because I'd go from having these strange meetings with—encounters with Tod Papageorge and [inaudible] in the main room there, in the photography department, and John, with his pipes, sort of, avuncular and jolly, presiding over it all. And—

MARY PANZER: Poll land of the dyes.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, and then—

MARY PANZER: Excuse me.

ALLAN SEKULA: —I'd go around the corner. And there'd be Grace in her little office with all the Steichen papers and very kindly and pleased that some young man who looked a little scruffy would be even interested in this material. And so, I read through a lot of the USIA [United States Information Agency] files—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and things that MoMA had there. But I didn't do research beyond what MoMA had. So again, that was—I mean, I guess one thing I have to say is that I—even more than my experience in graduate school, I think being in New York and looking for materials made me more of a historian without any particular training in doing history. You know, it was just the practical demands of how do I find—how do I find the evidence?

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: And—

MARY PANZER: Right, and it was so much in the control of individuals at that time.

ALLAN SEKULA: Right, and—but that was also an insight into how an earlier history of the museum had been sequestered in this little office, you know. It was no longer part of the—

MARY PANZER: Official.

ALLAN SEKULA: —the main trajectory, you know. So, that was being pushed forward. So, all of this was incredibly intriguing. When the article came out in the December '75 issue of *Artforum*, it was in an issue that had a number of pieces on, you might say, the, kind of, social history of art. There was a piece by Carol Duncan—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —on a painting and the—on the eve of the French Revolution—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —I think reviewing an exhibition—I'll have to go back and check.

MARY PANZER: Yes. Well, anyway, that's—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Yes. There was a piece by Eva Cockroft. I mean—and this led to a ferocious response from Hilton Kramer—

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —saying that muddled Marxism had replaced criticism in *Artforum*. This was in the *New York Times*, and that caused quite a—quite a stink and presumably contributed to Charles Cowles decision to remove John Coplan's—

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —from the editor show—

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —of the magazine, although, there were other factors.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: And, you know, it wasn't having to do with circulation—all of which seemed rather opaque. But it seemed that the fire storm was quite something at the time.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: And I remember that the late husband of Linda Nochlin—

MARY PANZER: Pommer.

ALLAN SEKULA: Pommer. Richard Pommer—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —who had written what I thought was one of the best short articles on August Sander.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I actually wrote a letter to the *Times* suggesting that I could—as I recall, suggesting that I would be within my rights to sue Kramer for libel.

[They laugh.]

And—but it was clear that since I was—I had insulted Kramer by citing his earlier article on Steichen and saying this was naive and foolish to believe that all of this was a, kind of, act of authorship. You know, Kramer was really getting back and me but also at the whole tendency in *Artforum*, and he was policing the nature of our

criticism. So, I think the attack on *Artforum* in '75 was a, kind of, rehearsal for the culture wars that were then carried out with some vigilance by *New Criterion* and which culminated in the—in the—in the '80s with the attack on the critics grant—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —of—at the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] on—I think—I think that that light—and this was an interesting thing to me because it—as I came later to know the people at *October*, you know, which didn't happen until maybe '76 or '77 when I was invited to a CAA [College Art Association] conference here in New York by Rosalind Krauss and was on a panel with two of her grad students, Craig Owens and Hal Foster. They were just starting out at that time. And—but—what was interesting is that—I guess the point I'm leaping to here is that the—to the degree that *October* styled itself as the left of the art world and to the degree that—they certainly weren't interested in defending the social history of art. You know, they weren't—they weren't going to make common cause with people like Carol Duncan, you know, and her work. And of course, Carol had been involved in the just, sort of, counter bicentennial in '76 and then, you know, anti-catalogue group and this, sort of, work. I also think they underestimated the threat or dismissed the threat from the—you might say, the cultural right. I mean—

MARY PANZER: *October*—

ALLAN SEKULA: *October* never—I mean—

MARY PANZER: Took Hilton Kramer seriously.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. He was irrelevant. I mean, this was just, you know, not to be even—and of course, these—the people at *New Criterion*. There's—so, *New Criterion* forms—from the point of view of the right, I think of critics like Kramer, the—there were two poxes that had been unleashed upon the land.

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: One was the—this, sort of, culture of vice and bad values that in some ways promoted by the mainstream art world and was highly commercial, and, you know *Artforum* could exemplify that. But the other was the elites, who either looked the other way or covertly condoled and supported this. And that—so, in that sense, the split between *October* and *Artforum* was seen probably, by people like Kramer, as less significant than many others thought because those two parties were seen as part of the same, you know, degenerate alliance of liberalism. Right, and so, the muddled Marxism replace in criticism on *Artforum* was, sort of, also had a corollary, which is muddled Marxism finds a new ivory tower for itself in *October*, you know. And that became clear with the attacks on criticism that followed later. And Benjamin Buchloh became a particular target. And that led to the attack on the art criticism grant at the NEA. So, in the '80s, for example, I saw a very clear link. The only state that an art critic's grant was Ohio, and I was living in Ohio at that time.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I'm leaping ahead. I'm teaching at Ohio State from '80 to '84, and there was clearly—there were clearly people in Columbus close to the cultural scene—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —Republicans who read *New Criterion*, saw Kramer's attacks on, you know, the Marxist tendencies of high criticism in the United States, and ended up killing the state grant in the wake of the killing of the national grant.

MARY PANZER: Of the national grant.

ALLAN SEKULA: And I was actually on the last panel. I mean, one reason I'm interested in this is because I was a—I was a big beneficiary of the art critics grant. I'd got two of them, and the—I think I'd got two art critics grant and one artists grant in the course of the '70s. And those were a key part of my income because I was teaching 10 courses in beginning photography in an extension program. I'm making \$10,000 from that.

MARY PANZER: Where are we now?

ALLAN SEKULA: That was—well, that was when I was back in San Diego in '76,'77 through to '78. So, in that period I had maybe two grants that really helped me a lot. You know, you get grant for \$10,000, [inaudible]. It really helped. Yes.

MARY PANZER: That would make a big difference. Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: Or \$7,500, you know, and so, the—you could see the erosion of public support. And I remember going to Washington then in the '80s for whatever it was the last grant, after they killed it, you know, the early '80s, and how contentious it was because there was someone on the panel who was representing the interests of this block, you know.

MARY PANZER: Well, wait. When you're saying for the last grant, that moment you were part of the jury?

ALLAN SEKULA: I was on a jury—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —the very last—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —Art Critic's Grant. Yes.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] All right. So, the New York thing, nice as it had been, came to its natural conclusion, and you went back to teach photo studio?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well—yes. We—I—you know, in the spring of '75, we decided it was time to get back to California.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: We were running out of money, and we both had some problems with part-time teaching—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —here. And—

MARY PANZER: Been an extraordinarily productive period for you. I mean, you must have missed the resources for research when you got back to California. I mean, no more Grace Mayer and no more—

ALLAN SEKULA: I—Yes, but then, there was—it was a bit of a swing back to, you know, these cycles of doing art works—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —and writing. Well, I had this huge burden that felt like a gigantic monkey on my back to write the Steichen piece, but I also rented a studio space, built a dark room, you know, scavenging materials to fit it out. You know, retired enlargements from the visual arts program at San Diego and the like.

MARY PANZER: I'm sorry. Retired what?

ALLAN SEKULA: Enlargements. You know, things that they are no longer using, you know.

MARY PANZER: Oh. Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: And—but I still, I think, in that period I was doing a lot of writing. And the nice thing that happened, also, was that people began to cycle through San Diego like Carol Duncan came to teach for a semester. So, Martha and I were close to her. Ian Burn came.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: So, that was my first connection with the art and language New York group. So—and we were invited back to New York with some frequency, which we—if there—you know, if it was a college art, they'd usually come up with the airfare. If it was something else, we could take a \$50 greyhound bus across country. I remember one trip—couple of trips where we—

MARY PANZER: How long would that take like four days?

ALLAN SEKULA: Three days, three and a half. Yes. One trip, we paid—we got paid \$50 for giving talks at Wright State University, and that paid for the bus across country. And it was—we had a lunch there. I think Peter D'agostino was teaching there, and Barbara Kruger was teaching there because she—the only way she could survive, at that time, was by subletting her loft and moving to Ohio and teaching. And Laurie Anderson was there as, kind of, a visiting artist. And so, you had these funny, kind of, encounters in the middle of the U.S. And then, we'd get back on the bus and continue on to—

MARY PANZER: Wait. Wright State is in Ohio?

ALLAN SEKULA: It's in Dayton.

MARY PANZER: Dayton.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Dayton, Ohio.

MARY PANZER: Oh, right.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: Wright Brothers. I'm sorry.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, where I actually lived, as a kid, in 1954 to 56. So—and whether—then oddly enough returned four years later to Columbus to teach at Ohio State. But—so, there were quite a few trips to New York. And then, in '77, I think, I came back and did a series of talks. Oddly enough, one of which had been set in motion by Sally Stein when she was a student at RISD, though we didn't meet until a year or so later in California. By the time they got around to inviting me, I was—she'd left.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: She had gotten her MFA at RISD. So, I went up to Providence. I did something at University of Rhode Island. I did something at Tyler. Oh, and John Hanhardt at the Whitney invited me to do work—a talk in a program of lectures on video and film, and he also showed me, along with Francesco Torres and Brian Connell, who was just behind Martha and me in the grad school at San Diego, in a new American filmmakers series. So, I did a talk about a piece I've still never published, although, there's a version of it that has appeared in French that Noel Burch completed and translated, and I'd never seen it. I mean, he lost it, and I don't know where it is

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: But it was called *Television Authority in the Collapse of Liberalism*. And I was looking at the, sort of, the beginnings of the—of entertainment news.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I mean, I had read Erik Barnouw. I did all this work on television history. I never looked at television. My parents never had television.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: So, I started doing—I did two things. I started looking at television, reading television history, and reading *TV Guide*, which in, you know, that Adam Berg—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —publication—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —which is—was an incredible resource for, kind of, ideology of television in a way.

MARY PANZER: And these talks are being given in the context of an art school?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, this was a Whitney talk. I talked about my own work in my art school talks.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] But did—Whitney was—so, you're criticizing—it was a critical history of TV in a way that you'd introduce ideas about a critical history of photography. Is that—that's too simple. I'm sorry. I'm just trying to—

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, maybe. Yes, though, obviously you had—you know, photographic history didn't have a Barnow—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —you know, and of course, the main thrust of photographic history once it passed from—

MARY PANZER: The techno—

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, the—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —technological historians and the [inaudible] to Newhall, you know, was largely an aesthetic enterprise, you know.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: Whereas, the history of television was always about society and communications.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: But I guess what I was interested in is how video art—I mean, some of this, you know, some of these issues were taken up by David Antin in the terrific essay he wrote called *Television: Video's Frightful Parent*.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, but—in which he argues that—he says many interesting things among which he argues that the very shape of the television is—you know, the rounded contours of the screen—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —cathode—

MARY PANZER: The cathode ray tube.

ALLAN SEKULA: —ray tube—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —front surface are belied by the cutting rhythm of television. You know, that there's a way of smoothing out the—

MARY PANZER: [inaudible] sort of flicker.

ALLAN SEKULA: —the, kind of, digital cutting—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —you know, this recuperation of continuity through this, kind of, rounded surface, but that's not his main—it's not his main point. But it's one key point. But he was very much interested in a, kind of—yes. The way the video art reflected back on the conditions of television culture.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And it remains probably the great pieces on—both on the aesthetics of television and then the reaction, you know, that video art—the reaction to television is often not the first thing you think is at issue in video art.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: But what I—what I was curious about was—well, who—the internal breaks in television history like what happens when the golden age, as it's often called, of Edward R. Murrow ends—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: What happens to that reportage lineage? Is it picked up? So, I was looking at groups like TBTV—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —you know, and the logic of authorship like does everything—once you get a, kind of, independent video of work, do—does it tend toward individual artistic careers—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —these sorts of questions. But it was all a bit unresolved. I didn't—I think I had some good

things to say about *Harvest of Shame* and about the—about network—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I read quite a bit about the film network—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —and about the different—the beginnings of the differentiation of cinema culture from television culture. You know, the way Paddy Chayefsky wrote the script for—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —*Network* was, you know, in a way, recapitulating his history as a television drama writer in the '50s—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —because you didn't just have serious—supposedly serious television news in the '50s, you know. So, they had serious television drama. You had *Marty* and, you know, programs like that—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —and the loss of that was one of the things—

MARY PANZER: *Playhouse 90*.

ALLAN SEKULA: —reflected on in *Network*, you know.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: So, that was what I was talking about at the Whitney, and John Hanhardt was very supportive. I'd got to know him at that time, and—but the experience was very strange. I remember going up to RISD to give a talk. This is like '76 or '77—might've been '77. No. I think it was '76—winter of '76, and I was staying at Ian Burn's and Ethel Burn's loft in—on the Bowery.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And Mel Ramsden had the adjacent loft. So, this was like the *Art and Language* base, and the wars were happening with—within *Art and Language* at that time. So, you had the British group represented by Mel Ramsden, who was here in New York. You had Ian who was Australian, and you had a couple of Canadians, Carole Conde and Karl Beveridge had come into the group. It was the beginning of another magazine called the *Fox*, which was a, sort of, spin-off from *Art & Language* with some other people involved including Joseph Kosuth was on the scene, but there was a split between the Ramsden, Burn, and Michael Baldwin group and Kosuth. At that time, Kosuth was with Sarah Charlesworth, and so, my infinity was largely with Ian, you know, probably because Ian was really a—had this very Australian, working class take on the world. And both Ian and Carole Conde and Karl Beveridge were considering returning to their home countries. They felt that New York was just helpless politically, and they both had the idea of working with trade union movements when they went home.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And they both did that.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And I stayed in touch more—I mean, more with Carole and Karl but then ended up going down to Australia in 1980 and stayed with Ian there giving some—taking part in some conferences and getting to know the work he was doing. So, that was my connection with *Art & Language*—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and I saw that, sort of, split. Kosuth seemed incredibly careerist and self-serving and was, sort of, personally objectionable—I mean, just whereas I—I mean, I found Mel really crazy guy to deal with. But Ian was a good person. And a lot of people would come through the studio at that time. So, on one point, just as I was about to head up to Providence to give the talk, Bernard V had come in from Paris, and he said he had a handful of Centimes. And he said, "Oh, you know. These work on the subway." And he gave me some.

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And I'm always looking for a way to save money, you know, because I was carefully adding up how much I was getting from all these lectures and thinking about how long I could live on that. I said, "Great. Thank you, Bernar" and headed out with my pack to take the—head to the subway to go up to—

MARY PANZER: Port authority or the—for the—Penn Station.

ALLAN SEKULA: To Penn Station. Yes, or maybe it was Grand Central?

MARY PANZER: No. It's Penn Station.

ALLAN SEKULA: It was Penn Station. Yes. It was Penn Station, and I hit the—I put the Centime in, hit the turn stop and it jams. And suddenly, these big Irish hands grab me.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: And I'm pulled into a closet next to ticket booth by two subway cops. There's a young Puerto Rican kid next to me who'd been caught for popping the turn style, and I've written up—they've written up a ticket on me. And I've got a court appearance and all this. And then, they send me on my way because I had no priors. But, you know, I showed up late for the lecture. And I had to explain that I had been arrest for putting French money in the subway—

[They laugh.]

—and Baruch Kirschenbaum who had been Sally's—you know, one of the artists [inaudible] that Sally studied with when she was doing her MFA as RISD, was quite—thought it was funny. But it was a strange experience to have this, kind of, combination of arrest and giving a talk. And so, I gave a main talk. And then, the photo people at RISD invited me, on the side, to come and talk to them. And I showed this piece of mine called *Meditations on a Triptych*, which involves these three family photographs, which I, you know, work includes a reading table and a booklet with a—with a text interrogating these three photos or mediating on them, if you want. And the idea is that you—there's a very careful calculation of the distance.

So, certain things you can read and check the validity of the statement by looking up at the photo. Others you'd have to get up and look closely. Others are not verifiable, and the whole thing becomes, sort of, a weird exercise in uncertainty, you know, about the point of view of the text, the degree to which there's some prior knowledge, or whether it's this invention or fiction or a, kind of, memoir. None of it's very clear, but—and so, my request was well, just get me three slide projectors. And I'll project all three images as a triptych.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Now, that was tricky—that no one—no one seemed to have done that ever at RISD. But aside from someone one the faculty coming up to me and saying, "Are you here to take my job?" which I found very bizarre. I mean, it would make me think there was some, sort of, generalized madness going on. I think this was the very end of the days of Callahan and Siskind.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: I wasn't clear who all was teaching in the photo there at that point, but as soon as I—there were maybe 20 students—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —photo students in the room. As soon as I put up the three family snapshots—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —before I had said a word, 15 people left the room—

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —like, "What? Family snapshots?" You know, so you could see how—to go back to the story about the snapshot book—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —the whole mental landscape was so committed to this idea of art photography that you were really dragging in a dead cat if you brought your family pictures in. And I—actually, I remember showing that piece at a regional Society for Photographic Education meeting in Orange county. And Robert Heinecken is

sitting in the front row glowering at me the whole time—

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —that I presented the piece like, "Who are you?"—partly I think because they knew I published in *Artforum*.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: But I was like some weird new kid on the block who hadn't gone through the ritual humiliations and I was out of their network. You know, I was coming from some weird conceptual art land, and so, the photo people were pretty hostile—a lot of them.

MARY PANZER: Threatened.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, and so, it's funny. On the one side, I was supported by John Coplans RAF spitfire pilot from the Battle of Britain, and on the other side, there was Heinecken who had flown a jet—Navy jet in the Korean War.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: [Laughs] Then you see, sort of, fighter pilot guys.

MARY PANZER: [Laughs]

ALLAN SEKULA: One on my side and one not on my side.

MARY PANZER: Oh [Laughs]. But so, this is pretty interesting because you're getting invited to give these talks. But it's not as if you're being lionized by everyone you came in contact with. I mean, it was still pretty out there. I mean, what you were offering was not usual, and the people who are disturbed by things that are not usual, which can be art students or Hilton Kramer or, you know—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER:—were not very supportive of your work [Laughs].

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Well, yes. It was strange because the interest came from funny corners. You know, I had—I mean, the people who did social history of art were very interested. So—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: People like Carol Duncan, artists like Ian Burn, you know, were interested in what I was writing. I think—I mean just a year or so ago, I had a dinner with Brian O'Doherty in Los Angeles through mutual friends, and he was saying how he was remembered with Steichen—

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —and how much he'd liked it. And—but at the time, I guess I'd got—I would get people like Meyer Schapiro, you know—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —liked it. You know, I didn't know, but he, you know—so, you have this Marxist art historian of medieval art.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And then, for example when I went down on that same tour giving talks when I went down to Philadelphia, I met Jay Ruby, the anthropologist, and then, I ended up on the editorial board. I mean, just in a figurative sense of *Studies in Visual Anthropology*—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —and then, at some point, I corresponded with Howard Becker because he'd published in the *Visual Studies Workshop*—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —newspaper *Afterimage*.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And we both did summer courses there—

MARY PANZER: Oh. Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —in '78-'79—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —that time frame. And Howard and I became friends. At one point, Howard, who was moving more and more into, kind of, visual sociology, and Jay Ruby and I were going to edit a, kind of, reader on photography. We discussed—we met with an editor at University of California [inaudible].

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: The project was, kind of, under way. I remember they all, at that time, I think—this was roughly '77,'78. I was living in a little—I was basically living in the ghetto in Long Beach—what was, kind of, an interracial ghetto of whites from Oklahoma, gypsies—

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —African Americans, Mexicans—sort of, on the west side of Long Beach—kind of, the industrial side of Long Beach.

MARY PANZER: Safer than St. Mark's Place, though.

ALLAN SEKULA: Oh. Not really.

MARY PANZER: Oh, okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: No. Good. Yes. Pretty similar in a way, and certainly, the police were very tough in Long Beach. They wore cowboy boots and—

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: But I remember we had this meeting of Jay and Howard and I at my place. And we had big plans for this book. But then we all got busy on our separate projects. And it never worked out. But then, different people would come see me—I mean, Jerry Liebling—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, that was maybe '78 or so. He took me photographing. He'd want to go photograph on Long Beach—he said—handed me one of his Rolleiflexes and said, "Here. Try using this." We had a great time. So, there were photo people that were sympathetic, but it was—it was—sometimes, it was really begrudging, you know. And—

MARY PANZER: Well—

ALLAN SEKULA: —there were always—I'd be introduced with all these qualifications like [Laughs]—

MARY PANZER: Well, but so, was Jerry—Jerry must have been in New Hampshire by then. And so, that would explain your presence in the *Massachusetts Review*.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, I think that was after he'd—

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: I didn't—we didn't—he asked for something for that.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And then, he visited me in the—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —wake of that. Yes.

MARY PANZER: So, when—okay. Well—so, you go to Ohio State in '79?

ALLAN SEKULA: In '81. Well, yes—very—at the beginning of '81 just as Reagan is—just before Reagan is inaugurated.

MARY PANZER: You decided that full-time teaching was going to be the way that's going to make—give you the most opportunity to work or—

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, what—going back to New York, I think—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —Martha and I had the idea that we, you know, maybe we'd get a gallery show in New York. I mean, very naively—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: We had Newton Harrison had put me in touch with Ronald Feldman, and I went to see Ronald Feldman. And it seemed that Ronald, he was very personable, but the main thing he wanted to do was to introduce me to Hannah Wilke. And because I was also seen as a critic, you know—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —so—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —you know, there's that, kind of—I very quickly became aware that's—those two hats are very hard to wear at the same time. And if an art dealer—art dealer is more interested in promoting the artists they have than taking on the risk of a new artist. And I remember I showed him some work. We went to see John Gibson at John Gibson Gallery because he was showing so called narrative photography—you know, people like Peter Hutchinson and quite a few artists that aren't well remembered now who were, sort of, between conceptual art and a more photographic practice but strictly speaking, weren't photographic or photographers. They were using more color—

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —than most photographers were at the time because—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —remember Eggleston—that's '78.

MARY PANZER: Well, that was—was that '78?

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. [inaudible]

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: So, this is '74.

MARY PANZER: Right. Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: So, for example, in relation to color, I was very excited—I'm sorry to keep going back to New York.

MARY PANZER: No. No. There's—no. No. No.

ALLAN SEKULA: But a lot of this—a lot of the blockages that happened and miscomprehensions or incomprehension's or inscrutabilities—

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —or ineligibilities that happened in New York affected the choices I made later. The—and probably some of that's true for Martha, as well.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Though her story is a different one, but we—so, Gibson was showing—oh, God. I'm going to block a lot of the names of these artists.

MARY PANZER: Yes. Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: But the—

MARY PANZER: I'm sorry. I can't help you because I—

ALLAN SEKULA: —the work often involved bigger prints than art photographers were making.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And if you see a lot of the work, a lot of it was done very unarchively. So, if you see a lot of the work now, it's—the color has faded a lot.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, the materials were—you know, that people used just the readily available stuff. They weren't get dye transfers or—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —or Ciba [Color dye prints -SS] [inaudible].

MARY PANZER: Prints. Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: That kind of thing, and Ciba appears a bit later, anyway. I don't think the Ciba existed as early as '74, and that's a big question when we get into Gordon Matta-Clark.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, and those collages because they're all Ciba. But then, when were they made and so on. But the—but I remember Gibson looking at these because one of the ways I showed the work was in these little Xerox books.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: So, you'd have these eight by 10 prints, and you'd just put them on a—we'd go in—Martha worked at *Psychology Today* magazine in Del Mar, California.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And before we had left for New York, we spent a good chunk of the summer just making Xerox copies of stuff—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —you know, that we—either things we wanted to read or—we'd go in and night. And there was a copier called the IBM2 that did a reasonable job of reproducing a high contrast copy of a photograph.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: So, you could get some of those legible, but you lost a lot of the—

MARY PANZER: Midtones in a way [Laughs].

ALLAN SEKULA: Midtones. Yes, and you—and you've got something almost, kind of, like a flipbook on paper that you couldn't flip, you know.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: So—and—you [inaudible] those and you'd make something that showed the work, you know, and so, showing these things to someone like John Gibson at John Gibson Gallery, which was in SoHo at that time. And it was showing these rather larger scale narrative works that often had a little bit of text and a story, and he said, "Well, it should look more like *Life* magazine." That's what he wanted, you know. I don't know. It

was a strange—and of course, *Life* magazine was the enemy, as far as I was concerned, you know.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: Or had been the enemy because it had met its demise already at that point.

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ALLAN SEKULA: So—and I remember we shipped off—and again, I'd made a suggestion—we shipped off a big box of material to Nick Serota at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford. And then we never heard from him and—we should have known better. You just don't do that. But I knew he meant well by suggesting it. And it was generous of him. But we had to bug Nick to get the work back. It was like, one of only two copies of the stuff we had and so it all seemed rather frustrating. And I remember writing the decision that I just wouldn't have a gallery. And it—

MARY PANZER: So you—nobody introduced you to Metro Pictures, for example? Or did they?

ALLAN SEKULA: I don't think Metro Pictures. I think Metro started in—

MARY PANZER: I don't know. I mean, it's all in that sort of middle/late '70s.

ALLAN SEKULA: Metro was not around until, I think, '76. So what I'm talking—these stories were '74, when we were living in New York.

MARY PANZER: Okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: And—

MARY PANZER: I mean, it made such a huge historical difference and the days, years sound so close together, but—

ALLAN SEKULA: Right, right. But there was no Metro Pictures on the scene at that point. And, yes, once I saw, you know, the whole argument from [Douglas -SS] Crimp and so on about the Pictures Generation, I found it all sort of—the work, not that interesting. I mean, Richard—certainly, Richard Prince wasn't an interesting—I mean, sure they were [inaudible] and—but—

MARY PANZER: So your work wouldn't have fit into that anyway?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, yes. And already in *Aerospace Folktales* I'm doing pictures that refer to Evans sharecroppers but, you know, these are white-collar people up against a similar sort of—but people didn't get that. That wasn't legible at the time. And so, I mean, now with Pacific Standard Time and some of that history on how, people are willing to say, "Well, maybe on the West Coast, people worked out some of these problems separately." But I never took the Metro Pictures thing that seriously once I learned about it, because it didn't seem that innovative. And yes, so I decided, well, I would work without a gallery. I would just do what I was doing. It had, fundamentally, documentary character. That was to explore how to do that without repeating the mistakes or the—or ending up in the cul-de-sacs of prior documentaries. And if I had to teach or, you know, I'd just get by. There'd be some way of going forward. And so yes, back to California. I didn't—the idea of approaching galleries on the West Coast never really occurred to me. Los Angeles never seemed receptive.

MARY PANZER: Right, well.

ALLAN SEKULA: Particularly the reigning currents there weren't that interesting. And though, I mean, when I look back, I think—so we're back there. Pacific—there were a couple of group shows. One that Victor Burgin and I curated at the San Francisco Art Institute in '77, I think it was.

MARY PANZER: Was he teaching there then, or?

ALLAN SEKULA: No. Victor and I met here in New York in '76 or so on a time when I was here on an extended visit. And we—I think I invited Victor to be on a panel of College Art along with an anarchist guy named Dave Smith—Bob Smith from Berkeley, who had published a wonderful kind of broadside newspaper where he pirated—he had printer friends—and he pirated all the Arbus pictures. You know? Full-page, big prints of them, from her book. And then had this kind of situation as texts called *The Negative and Its Use*. And I invited Martha and Fred—Martha Rosler, Fred Lonidier and—Phel Steinmetz so it was Victor, four—three of us, I think, three of us from San Diego. Three or four of us and this guy Bob Smith, this kind of anarchist appropriationist guy. Obviously he credited the Arbus, I mean, he didn't—but it was completely illegal.

So this to me was much more interesting than, you know, what came to pass at Metro Pictures. As someone who could just lift a body of work without getting copyright approval. And of course, all the rigidity of the Arbus estate had not completely fallen into place yet. And Bob Smith went on to do other things. I mean, his main interests weren't in photography. But he was out of that—he was very much—he was, like, out of that culture that we now see so present in Occupy. It very—he lived in a house in Berkeley that was called Spider Acres and it was sort of a collective of anarchists and so on. And it's also related to the world that—say my good friend Sherry Millner and Ernie Larsen live in, you know? Both of whom were—I met around that same time, I think. So there were certain connections with people doing interesting work. But they're not people who've risen to the top of the cappuccino foam of the art world, you know?

MARY PANZER: [Laughs] Well, no, the other thing—I mean, just—Cindy Sherman's relationship to representational photography. I mean, it's kind of like the undocument or something, right? And so that's something I would really like to be able to address, is this—the reinventing documentary. I mean, that's sort of where we are in terms of chronology, I mean—I mean, just in the useful way. Not to confine you to, you know, you—rigidly marching through time [Laughs].

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Well, in, I think it was '76, David Ross had come out to the Long Beach Museum of Art, so he'd been at the Everson and had been the first person to show video art. I mean, he's like 19 years old and becomes a curator in Syracuse.

MARY PANZER: Oh, in Syracuse?

ALLAN SEKULA: So he—and he knows now June Paik and he knows all the early video artists. Ira Schneider, all of those people. Juan Downey. So David comes to Long Beach, sets up a video program there, and he does a show called *Southland Video Anthology*. And I think—

MARY PANZER: At UC Long Beach?

ALLAN SEKULA: No, no. It's a city museum. It's an old Victorian house on the ocean front there. It's basically the harbor front because it's all contained by breakwater now, which hopefully they'll bust down and let the waves come back in.

MARY PANZER: So that's where he is?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, he was there at the time and he came down to San Diego and met us all. And he did this big exhibition at *Southland Video Anthology*. And he also supported—they set up a production studio in an old firehouse on the south end of Long Beach. And a lot of people vetted it there in those days when it was old fashioned tape editing where you wind the tape back. And so, a lot more video was made in Los Angeles than here, and David's been very clear about that history. And then, of course, he went on from there to the ICA [Institute of Contemporary Art]—no, he went to—

MARY PANZER: Berkeley?

ALLAN SEKULA: University—or Museum of Berkeley. Then to the ICA in Boston and then to the Whitney and then to the San Francisco Museum and now he's up in Beacon, kind of doing freelance stuff. But—so David did a show—wanted to do a show of Fred Lonidier and Phel Steinmetz who were the two photo faculty at San Diego, who'd—Fred, coming out of the grad program; Phel coming out of having been a carpenter and never really having gone to college. But starting out kind of as a would-be, you know, acolyte of Ansel Adams, you know? All that kind of zone-system photography but increasingly getting in—I mean, Phel is actually kind of transitional figure between a version of *New Topographics* and the older sublime California landscape school. And unfortunately, Sally Stein told Colin Westerbeck about Phel's work for the show he's just done at Riverside, trying to bridge that gap. But—and he did put Phel on the show, but only one photo. Whereas, he could have been a pivot for the two.

MARY PANZER: Right, because *New Topographics* is just coming up at this time.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, that's the other—yes. The *New Topographics* show is in '75, so I don't go up to Rochester to see it, but I see the catalog and it annoys me. I mean, I like the photos, but I don't like the idea, the concept of the new—you know? This deep—and by the time Carter's president and the whole neutron bomb issue comes on—I'm calling it the neutron bomb school of photography. It leaves the building standing and kills the people. And everybody thought it was a big step forward to, you know, look at the social landscape that was humanly made and suburban. And obviously the work, taken individually, there's fascinating work there. But one, Ruscha was missing, you know. There are any number of other problems with it. But I felt every site—social site should be seen as the sites of social conflict and contention, you know? And so very—actually, one of the things I did in this recent show in L.A. is to go back to some of my unfinished projects. This is my gallery show that Christopher Grimes had in November. It just closed in early January. I shot a piece in the summer of '75 where I had taken Martha up to show her San Pedro, where I grew up. And we were, like—but I had another agenda, which was I

did two things: One is, I picked dwellings, houses in different parts—San Pedro's on a hill, a slope. What's called San Pedro hill. And it's the highest promontory in the South Bay, so it overlooks the South Bay from the south. If you—on a clear day, if you're in the Hollywood Hills and you look south, or you looks south from the Getty, you see this bump. Like a radar dome on top.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: If it's really clear, you can see Catalina Island to the south. "Twenty-six miles across the sea, Santa Catalina is waiting for me. The island of romance, romance." That's how the song goes. So you've got this topography and the actual social class goes up as you go up the hill, so I just basically posed myself. I held the camera like this, posed myself with my hand at various levels in front of my face, starting with a kind of beat-up apartment house near the waterfront, then up to a house that could have been a—

MARY PANZER: Professional—

ALLAN SEKULA: —sometimes semi-prosperous fishing boat captain. And then to one that could have been a, you know, merchant ship captain or somebody in the port authority, you know, with the, like, kind of neoclassical facade and eagle crest over the front door and that kind of thing. And so my hand keeps going up toward my upper forehead. So that was the attempt to correlate social class with high-above harbor elevation.

MARY PANZER: And this is in the form of stills?

ALLAN SEKULA: It was a series of six stills, yes. And then the other one I did was went to a site where I'd had an encounter in sometime around '67. I don't remember exactly, but I was walking along the cliffs by the ocean and that's kind of landslide area with these very steep cliffs that drop down about 300 feet to the rocks and to the sea below. Very rough sea comes in there. And there's an army—a former army fort on the other side that was still, at that time, military property. And at one point—and perhaps at that time, in '67 there was still a fake Vietnamese village there that army reservists used to practice attacks.

MARY PANZER: Sixty-seven?

ALLAN SEKULA: Sixty-seven, yes. It was roughly—this was not when I made the photos. This is when I had the experience.

MARY PANZER: Oh, I'm sorry.

ALLAN SEKULA: So I wasn't a photographer yet. I'm in high school.

MARY PANZER: Yes, great. Okay, thank you. [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: So I'd had this experience and this young African American kid pops his head up from the edge of a cliff, and he's holding on to some pipe that's sticking out of the cliff. And he says, "Do you see any cops?" And I look. You know? I stop. You know, he's got no shirt, but he's kind of wearing some trousers. Barefoot. I look and I say, "No." And he says, "I got some friends in a car. Can you see them?" And I—this beat-up old Chevy Impala comes smoking along. And slows down and people are looking out. There are about six people in it, an older man driving. All African-American. I said, "I think that's them." And he kind of makes a sound—whistles or something—and the car kind of pulls off in the dust and makes a big U turn. It's fan belt's screeching away. He runs out, jumps in the car, and they peel off and peel out of there. I'm going, "Wow, what was that all about?" You know? And then I continue on my walk. Three minutes later, I see a L.A. police officer, harbor division, coming toward me. And police car from the other side pull up and they say, "Did you see any young colored boy here?" You know, and I said, "No. I didn't see anything."

And that's sort of the—and so what I shot when I went back with Martha in the summer of '75 was a kind of memory panorama of that space, you know? Where it happened. I'm pointing to where the kid was. Martha's sitting reading a—maybe it's Janson [Janson's *History of Art* -SS]. I don't know. What you see, it's like she's doing her homework for the summer session art history course she was teaching. There's a [inaudible] Adam and Eve there. And then kind of the panorama around—there's a peanut vendor with a kind of roto-relief spiral and a dog running by and some cars and it's all, you know, mid-'70s cars. And so it's kind of re-staging—to me that was like a way of approaching social landscape. And it was a step toward what I think I did later in the *School as a Factory* piece, which I started working on in '77 or '78. But it really was a response to *New Topographics*, and I—just as—and that became maybe more explicit in the *School as a Factory* piece where I'm—it's clearly I'm bumping up against Baltz's view of the industrial parks and writing about that and the accompanying text.

The work, I think it's two panels of—adds up to about 12 photographs and a texts that tells sort of the story, but also talks about the Vietnamese Village and looking down toward the rocket base where they had nuclear armed aircraft missiles. You know, so trying to evoke the idea of this militarized landscape in which, you know, there's

this cost of surveillance of the poor and of black people, you know?

MARY PANZER: And then your own personal—

ALLAN SEKULA: And this kind of moral choice that you're faced with in those circumstances, you know? So I—I've been thinking a lot about resurrecting—for years I've wanted to resurrect these pieces.

MARY PANZER: But it seemed like the moral choice available to you as a 16 year old was pretty clear. But the moral choice available to the viewer on being able to perceive that landscape thanks to your representation of it—I mean, what's the—I mean, if you'll forgive me—what's the moral choice in that situation? Or who's making the choice? That's what I'm a little confused about that. When you say the moral choice is clear.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, I meant the one for me. For the audience, it's just a—

MARY PANZER: So you've got your story. You've got your childhood story and then you have—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yea. It's not first person. There's no first person in it. But it's told from a point of view that's almost biomechanical. You know? Head swivel left, this kind of thing. It's very short. I mean, but I—and I—the one thing that is anachronistic about it is that given that I never wrote the text at the time, but that the story has kind of stayed in my memory, I can't claim that I would have achieved the style of this writing. I mean, there's no way I could repeat the voice with which I would have written it, had I written it at the time. So there's an odd other level of—there's a displacement that's sort of like '85 to—there's '85 to the immediacy of the events of '85. The fact that I felt I was responding to *New Topographics*. But for the life of me, I wasn't, you know—here I was with a kind of intermittent audience and somewhere between conceptual art and photography and so I didn't have the pragmatic path that would have led me to think really strategically about this and say, "Oh, I'm going to do a show where I'm going to take the piss out of *New Topographics*."

That didn't occur to me. What occurred to me was, "I could make this work." But then it got sort of short—the fulfillment of the project got blocked by probably not having that many opportunities to do shows, having really high expectations of myself. A lot constituted of really serious work, so small-scale things I just didn't do. And it was like, it had to be at least as big and as complex as *Aerospace Folktales*. So little sketchy pieces were just that. Sketches. So you don't—only so much time in the dark room. Only so much paper I could pay for. So I didn't ever print it and now I look back and I think there was something pivotal going on there. And I felt—it was interesting to resurrect it. One after the revival of *New Topographics* with the big show at LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art] by—I'm blocking her name, now. The curator there. Who was it? Center for Creative Photography.

MARY PANZER: Deborah Klochko?

ALLAN SEKULA: No, no. It's not Deborah. It's—

MARY PANZER: Oh. Oh, that Trudy?

ALLAN SEKULA: No, it's not. No, no, no, no. Trudy is no longer—no. It's Britt Salvesen.

MARY PANZER: Britt Salvesen.

ALLAN SEKULA: Britt. Like I felt—and it is strange, because Paul Schimmel in *Under the Black Sun* exhibition in MoMA, which was just closing, I think, tomorrow.

MARY PANZER: Oh, dear.

ALLAN SEKULA: Has—he has my *School as a Factory* in the same room with Baltz's.

MARY PANZER: Oh, really?

ALLAN SEKULA: Irvine Views.

MARY PANZER: I'm going to try to get over there, tomorrow.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, this is at MOCA, you can't. You can't make it.

[They laugh.]

You'd have to—take a red eye. And also with Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel's *Evidence*.

MARY PANZER: Oh, but that's really—that's a very important exhibition. I mean, just historically to situate you all

together, because if you were doing it from an aesthetic point of view, it never would happen.

ALLAN SEKULA: Right, and Paul's agenda is to map this thing out between Nixon's Watergate and Reagan's election. I mean, he brackets the whole exhibition with political events. But, you know, that's another story. But—so—but interestingly—you can send an email. I showed my film at LACMA and so on and I sent an email to Britt saying it'd be great if she could see the show at my gallery. Well, I assume she saw the show at MOCA. And I don't think she ever went by or saw it but that's another—that happens. But I did, I mean, I—so the—the other thing about doing, I mean—people are just overloaded in Los Angeles right now. You know? This history—this return to the history of the '70s has just—there's so much to see. I mean, I could forgive anyone for missing shows because they're—it's just complete overload at this point. You know, after too little historical reflection it's almost like too much, you know? Too much to digest and it'll take years for people to work through it all.

MARY PANZER: Okay, well, all right, so I gave you a hard time but I'm not so sorry from an interviewing point of view. Because I got you to talk about—or you ended up telling us in terms of your working method, that there are no little projects, you know? So that—and also talking about sort of the frustration of where is your audience? Because as a historian, I'm going, "Where is his audience?" And in fact the fact that it's not clear is accurate. From a historical point of view.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, I mean, we did do these couple of shows. I mean, I never really linked them, but there was a show that Victor and I and Roy Ascott curated at San Francisco. Roy Ascott was a Brit who was present at the school at that time.

MARY PANZER: At the Art Institute?

ALLAN SEKULA: San Francisco Art Institute, yes. It was called Social Criticism and Art Practice. And we had Conde Beveridge [Canadian artist duo, Carol Conde and Karl Beveridge -SS] in it. Hans [Haacke -SS] was in it. Victor [Burgin]—the group of us from San Diego—Wanda Deere [ph], Steinmetz, Rossler, me. And Roy brought in Stephen Willats, British conceptual artists. Deals with social systems. And we also invited Fern Tiger who was at that time—I don't think she's making art anymore—but she was in St. Louis and doing media work in relation to urbanism and community politics. And—but no, there was no catalogue for that, so it's not a well-remembered show. Certainly people saw it. And then there was a show that a group of us did as a kind of collective project at what was the only active contemporary art space in L.A. in between the demise of the Pasadena Museum and the formation of MOCA. And that was a space called LIFCA—Los Angeles Institute for Contemporary Art—which was started by a guy also called Bob Smith, who was a key figure in the L.A. art scene in the '70s. And the show we did there was called *Social Works*, I think. And that included—that had a more feminist dimension, I mean, beyond Martha and—it was—Suzanne Lacy was involved. And that, there was a little catalogue for that in newsprint.

And that was the first time I showed the *School as a Factory* piece outside of the school that was the subject, the gallery at the school that was the subject. So one of the ideas that I came up with in that time is you make a work for a specific place that's about that place. You know, a kind of internal critique or, you know, it's related to institutional critique. But my idea wasn't—that it's not the art institution. I mean, if you're in a two-year college, you make it about that—the political economy of that place. It's raw.

MARY PANZER: So then fast forward to Zoey [Strauss -SS] and the I-95 project.

ALLAN SEKULA: In a way, yes. Absolutely. You turned—in her case, all of Philadelphia into a reflection on Philadelphia. And the country, you know. Because I think she's more than a regional artist. But if you go in deep enough into the interspaces of the immediate location, you could out with something potentially quite universal in its implications, so hopefully. Yes, so while all that was going on, I mean, I would say that after moving back in '75 from New York to California, the main things were writing these two essays. The one on expanding this—what had started as a catalogue essay for the Wanda Deere/Steinmetz show at Long Beach with David Ross. And that, then, became in its expanded form the dismantling modernism essay. I'd finished the essay on Steichen which was the more historical work. And I guess I thought the dismantling modernism essay was kind of a little bit of manifesto for the group of us.

But it was tricky to write, because you're writing about your friends and, you know? And I think people who had a critical take in the photography world, like A.D. Coleman at that time who'd come out to San Diego because we thought he was interesting because of the way he'd taken on the minor white myth. He—while he had certain insights, he also called us very hostile for that. Because he had probably more familiarity with a broad range of photography, especially on the East Coast, and felt we were—there was kind of special pleading going on from this group of ne'er—do—wells out in California. Maybe we didn't extend the hospitality to him that he expected, but I don't want to—

MARY PANZER: Well, you were still—you know, you're on the wrong side of the Hudson or wrong side of the Mississippi or something, so there's—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, well there was this idea that, one, that we were these nasty Marxists, and two, where, you know, you can't take seriously any Marxist from the West Coast because that's Lotus Land. Which is a total East Coast myth, because—

[They laugh.]

—you know, the Left Wing history. It is the Left Coast, but for a reason, which goes back to the Wobblies and the San Francisco General Strike and the Hollywood Left and a real branch of politics. I mean, it's—you know—as diverse as anything anywhere else in the country, if not more so. I mean, I remember one—there was an essay published called Television Art and the—*Video Art in the Television Landscape* by a critic whose name I'm not going to remember now. But it got some play at that time. But it was—it read it us all as the children of television. And I knew I wasn't a child of television. I hadn't seen television as a kid. Except at friends' houses, apartments, you know?

MARY PANZER: Right, so it's a reference to it.

ALLAN SEKULA: It was this idea that we were all sort of out there and some sign—you know, it was kind of a pre-Baudrillardian naive version of the argument that we lived in a [inaudible]. You know?

MARY PANZER: It's too easy.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. So—and I don't think that even explains artists who were fascinated with the mediagenic savvy of their relatives, like Ilene Segalove. Who you probably don't know because she's got a reputation only on the West Coast.

MARY PANZER: See? [Laughs] I'm as bad as everybody else.

ALLAN SEKULA: There's nothing to blame here. She's forgotten by most people. She's only been re-resurrected in this latest round of Pacific Standard Time shows. But she felt her mom a lot. And she figures prominently both in Paul Schimmel's show at MOCA and in the *State of Mind* show at Orange County Museum. Very funny videos. But her mom is kind of a—you know, is one of these performers, you know. They'd come, you know, as presenting themselves as issues on television, you know. So for Ilene, I think it's an apt moniker. But for the rest of us, it wasn't, necessarily. We didn't—and there are people like Susan Mogul who has a kind of video personality, but it's related—it's more coming from the East Coast.

MARY PANZER: What about Ed Ruscha?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well I always think Ruscha is about—as much as he's about ways of representing, you know, the book and the drawing or, you know, the painting. I mean, he's very—every medium that he takes in hand is dealt with in a very precise way. And then—but he—there is this kind of—I mean, Morgan Fisher pointed this out to me. You know, that Ruscha can be regarded as one of the great documenters of Southern California.

MARY PANZER: Yes. *Sunset Strip*? I mean, talk about fantastic piece.

ALLAN SEKULA: Parking lots, the—and one of my favorites is *Real Estate Opportunities*. Because that's—who's going to pay for this plot of desolate, sunbaked, you know—

MARY PANZER: Right, I mean, comparative—

ALLAN SEKULA: —jimsonweed or whatever.

MARY PANZER: Right. You compare Ruscha to Lewis Baltz, it's—anyway, Ruscha has a sense of humor, which I always loved in him.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Well Baltz has a sort of tragic, epic—

MARY PANZER: It's all downhill, though.

ALLAN SEKULA: Dimension, yes.

MARY PANZER: Anyway, okay. Because the notion of reinventing documentary, I think is so important. It doesn't—you know, it keeps coming back. I mean, and I don't know—and I don't know if maybe it's an East Coast/West Coast thing where there is, like, a more critical documentary practice going on. I mean, it seems like to me—and see, now I'm going to be outing myself for history forever after. But that New York is backwater, you know? And if, you know, in Metro Pictures, is the center of the drain or something, you know? I mean, it's very important and it meant something at a moment in time and so, historically, it does have a function. But in many other ways, it did prevent or short-circuit a practice that was interested in documentary. Because you couldn't get any hearing

for it. I don't know. Whereas you didn't have Metro Pictures in L.A., so you guys have got something else. Some other frames of reference or some other guides of sort of value system that isn't guided by the market. I mean, it was a hot marketplace if you wanted to sell your pictures and you were in Metro Pictures, your pictures would sell.

ALLAN SEKULA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY PANZER: So that's sort of a confusion between radical aesthetics and your wallet. Right? I don't know. You can't blame people for making money, but it's difficult to remain—it's difficult to get a perspective when your own interest is so, you know, short of intensely influenced by the success of the gallery that, you know? Anyhow.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, yes, well and it also extends of things like the American idea of what constitutes German photography. So curators became interested in the Becher students, but they didn't know Michael Schmidt, they didn't know, you know, any number of other—Lothar Baumgarten, you know, any number of other people in Germany.

MARY PANZER: All right, so—

ALLAN SEKULA: Or—well—

MARY PANZER: Anyway. So. All right, so, Allan, what happens now if we're talking about—I mean, not to stop talking about—[Laughs] before you go to Ohio State, but when does your—when does this great international set of connections kind of click in? I mean, you've been talking about New York and L.A. also, you know, Victor Burgin—so it's not as if you were only talking to people from, you know, the Corn Belt and then suddenly began. But how does Ohio State fit into this changing?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, the pre—there's a little bit before—we have to talk—start a little bit before that. Not to keep dragging us back to the '70s. So end of—so basically I was in Long Beach. Martha and I split up in '78. She moves up to San Francisco. And we worked out an—somewhat excruciating sharing of jobs, even though we'd split up. I—UC Irvine was—so we'd been living in the North County of San Diego, had a studio in Cardiff and Martha and I shared a house with a—actually with Phel Steinmetz and a couple—another person in Encinitas, in North County, San Diego. And in '78, I get a call or a letter from a grad student at UC Irvine saying that they want to hire me for the year in something they called the "student-recommended faculty program." And one of the gains of the '60s militants at UC Irvine was that students got to hire—recommend 10 percent of the visiting faculty of any year. I mean, it—people remember that a Bank of America was burned at UC Santa Barbara in '69, but it also happened at Irvine, as well. There was quite a militant movement there, and one of the concessions it was founded on was this program. And Stanley Aronowitz was teaching at Irvine, and he'd been hired under that program. And he had influenced a number of art students. He'd also had—Irvine was kind of in its decline as an art school at that time.

I mean, they still had people like John Mason there and Tony Delap and Ed Burrell. But the Coplans had been there. I remember *Artforum* was founded in California. And Barbara Rose had been there. Frank Stella had refused to come because he didn't want to sign the California Loyalty Oath, or he used that as an excuse. But in any event, Irvine had had this real presence in the late '60s. It was probably most interesting in California art school, late '60s, early '70s. Chris Burden was there, Nancy Buchanan, Michael Asher had been there at one point? Anyway, he took some courses. So the art program was—seemed to be in a bit of a doldrums, but they brought in David Askevold one year. Very interesting Canadian conceptual artist. And they asked me to—if I wanted to teach. And—

MARY PANZER: What are you thinking?

ALLAN SEKULA: Martha was—well, I'm not sure. I don't want to be indiscrete. But Martha was a bit offended that she wasn't offered the job or, you know? And I guiltily said to her, "Well, let's split it." And the way it turns out is that we shared a course. We split the position at Irvine and we had co-taught before, so, you know, there was a history here of us co-teaching, of course, at UC San Diego—a graduate seminar. And we split a course at San Francisco. So she moved up to the Mission District in San Francisco, and she would fly down once a week to teach at Irvine. I'd go pick her up at LAX or at the Long Beach airport. And then I would fly up to San Francisco every other week to teach a 6-hour class and then we'd alternate on Saturdays. In those days, you could fly for \$13 on Western on the—I guess it was a mail plane that would leave at 3 a.m. Or you could fly on a—from San Francisco down to L.A. on a 747 that was—Pan Am 747 that was headed to Managua with all these Nicaraguans who were—this was '78, so you—it was before the revolution in Nicaragua and there were a lot of Nicaraguans in exile, but they're going home. You know? For visits and the like. And so they're not in complete exile, you know?

And then only a few people knew about this flight, so you could get in this giant airplane and go like that. And there were always tickets available for people who wanted to do the short hop, because there were a lot of Nicas living in L.A. and they'd fill up the plane for the long haul down to Managua. So I'd commute. I'd stay with my

brother, do a six hour course. I'd be so exhausted afterwards, so I'd go to the theaters on Market Street that showed, you know, what came to be called the Black Exploitation pictures and I'd see, like, *Shaft* and *Mandingo* and these movies. I'd watch about three of them and then I'd take the J Street car home to my brother's basement wood shop and go to sleep. And then usually get a flight back down to L.A. the next day and get ready for my courses at Irvine. So that was happening and then—and I was also—I'd moved up to Long Beach so I was also active in politics there. I joined the New American movement, which was a kind of—

MARY PANZER: Sort of an—

ALLAN SEKULA: —democratic socialist feminist group that had some ex-communists in it, some people that had come out of the old Trotskyist international socialists. Kind of a mix of new left and—it was a pretty good group, but unfortunately it got sucked into the maw of the Democratic Socialists of America and became kind of toothless. And our group in Long Beach, which is a very working-class group. We had a lot of people who worked in factories and we refused to follow the trend. And I remember Dorothy Healey and Ben Dawes [ph] who were two of the old CP—Dorothy had been the principle person in the communist party in L.A. and she'd come over to 'Nam. And they came down and gave us, you know, the real democratic centralist drill about how we should go along with the group. And we refused. But that was good exposure to the style of Communist Party politics, even in a time when those folks had supposedly become more open and democratic.

We also had a guy—I remember there was an old, elderly man in our group who—Long Beach was full of old people. There was a big retired community there and there were a lot of cafeterias that would have the—I used to go and get the 6:00 overcooked chicken dinner, you know? And our guy was like a typewriter repairman who was gay and had been refused admission to the CP because he was gay. So there was that kind of history and knowledge, because there's also a big gay community in Long Beach after North Hollywood and Silver Lake. It's the third biggest concentration of gay men and lesbians and so in L.A. County. And so we did housing activism and we did—I mean, we did various things. I mean, the Iranian Revolution was happening, and I remember I'd go up to Anaheim Street to the liquor store to buy the *L.A. Times* in the morning and the owners were Iranians and we discussed the news from Iran. And, you know, it was quite a lively time in that—and I think the one thing I wanted to do getting away from San Diego was to just get involved in political work, you know? And I taught a course at the socialist school in downtown L.A. on photography and sort of Marxist reading of the history of photography. And I had various people come to that. You know, it was a free school course.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] But it was to history, it wasn't about practice?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, I went through up to the present. There was maybe six lectures [inaudible] remember exactly what I did.

MARY PANZER: But, I mean it wasn't for photography—

ALLAN SEKULA: No, no, no, it was more like—

MARY PANZER: —[inaudible] critiqued their work?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, of course photographers took it and had me look at their work and they came out and took it. So there was some of that. And then I got—I'd come out in the summers to teach at Visual Studies workshop and so—

MARY PANZER: How many summers did you do that?

ALLAN SEKULA: Couple summers. '78, '79—and met Trachtenberg in that context. And I'd met Sally in San Diego, and then we'd sort of gotten together over one of those summers, so I wanted to move to New York because it just seemed like—and then Annette Michelson, who I'd met earlier in the '70s, invited me to come to each of the summer studies programs at NYU for a year. So I came back to New York for a year and was able to teach through that following summer. And then tried to find a job to stick around—applied for a job at Rutgers. Rutgers was the kind of humane place where their idea of doing a job search was to bring all the candidates in on the same day and have them sit on the same bench in the hall and then—and Martha, who had been living in Vancouver because she'd gone up, I think, to teach at either Simon Fraser or UBC for a year, applied. And she got the job. And then I was like, looking at where to go and I'd met Noel Burch through Joan Braderman, who teaches at Hampshire, an interesting video artist who's worked with DeeDee Halleck and Paper Tiger Television. I think one of their videos is, I think, *Joan Braderman Reads Vogue*. Then Joan has a whole activist and feminist history and she had introduced me to Noel Burch and Noel had come over from France to teach at Ohio State. And the idea of a job came up there. We met Ron Green who was the chair of the department there, and he told us that they also wanted to have a curator position in the department. And Sally was interested in that.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] At Ohio State?

ALLAN SEKULA: At Ohio State, yes. Though at this point, she's doing her coursework for a Ph.D., so—but it looked like that position was going to open up after a year or so. I end up driving out to Columbus on January 4, 1980 and my car window breaks in Harrisburg. It's four degrees. I drive all the way on the Pennsylvania Turnpike with the window open and this Army coat and scarves around me. I had this metal glasses frames that were starting to freeze to my eyebrows. I arrive in Columbus, you know, late that night and drive down High Street past the state capitol, and the yellow ribbons around the columns of the state capitol for the Iranian hostages. And I think, "Oh my God, where have I arrived?" I'm staying at Noel's place. And I have to teach the next morning. And then they—it became like this four year slog of what was in some ways a very interesting, but also very unwelcoming place. You know, immediately one of the senior faculty who'd been internally credentialed with a Ph.D. from Ohio State told me, "You have to get rid of your bi-coastal arrogance." So by that point, I was both arrogant as New Yorker and arrogant as a Californian. And here I was in Ohio, where I'd lived as a kid, with all the bad habits of the coastal elites. And—but—or so it seemed, I guess, that's good to know some of those slow-talking—Columbus is, you know, sometimes you think, "Whoa, wait, are we north or south of the Mason-Dixon line, here?" You know?

MARY PANZER: Yes, it's like southern Illinois.

ALLAN SEKULA: It's not Cleveland. It's not Akron.

MARY PANZER: It's not—

ALLAN SEKULA: Cincinnati. It's not Cin City. I mean, Cincinnati was always wilder, I think. Probably because you could go across the border.

MARY PANZER: To Kentucky, right.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. But anyways, that was—and—but what was very interesting at Ohio State was you had Johnathan Green there, who'd done the snapshot book and, you know, was a kind of acolyte of Minor White. But he'd come from MIT there, so he was the senior figure in photography. You had Ron Green there, who was—had come from Buffalo. He'd been up there with Thom Andersen, they'd worked with George Stoney in the media program there. So here I was meeting this Californian, Thom Andersen, who'd done this beautiful film about Muybridge. He'd [inaudible] praxographer and comes out with a kind of structural film—independent film—in Southern California close to Morgan Fisher and these people. And Thom was programming—and Noel. Here's Noel, the author of *Theory of Film Practice*, you know. Crazy [inaudible] ex-patriot history in France since '51, where he went at the age of 19 to study film. Faced with a draft call to tour to go be in the Korean War with the American Army, because he was an American citizen. Refused to go, so he became persona non grata, no passport, stuck in France until he became a citizen in '71. So 20 years in France, unable to leave France, you know? Knows Bataille, you know, knows—close to the Americans who had come to—Sontag—Annette Michelson. Teaches at—goes—studies and then teaches at Edict [ph] close to, you know, the technicians of cinema. Writes proxies to cinema. Makes his own films. Ends up at Ohio State teaching. So between Noel and Thom, they programmed the Visiting Filmmakers Program. And they were bringing people like Joan Straub and Danièle Huillet, who had already come to San Diego. I'd met them when Manny Farber brought them back in the '70s. Noel did a very great program on Eastern European cinema.

MARY PANZER: Oh, that was pretty great.

ALLAN SEKULA: And the funny thing about it was that Noel had joined the Communist Party in France in '71. And he was just a rank-and-file party guy, you know, worked on the media program for the [inaudible], was in the cell of the [inaudible] and his—you know, the cinema technicians' union. You know? Was never, like, a party intellectual, and really separated that side of his life from his film theory and film work. Which, he came to regard as formalist to modernist in his later years, to the point where, when *Theory of Film Practice* was republished in the early—I think it was republished in '81 or so—right around the time he was at Ohio State, he said, "This book was written by a dead boy."

MARY PANZER: Oh. [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: So he was getting more and more interested in the social history of cinema and—which led him into the projects that he did after he left Ohio State. As soon as Mitterrand, who was elected in '88, won, he went back. Because he felt there was a political opening and that things were going to get interesting. And then we—the rest of us stepped around, and then there was this long purge. Needless to say, Sally never got a job. It was probably partly my fault, because—

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[TRACKS sekula11_sd_4of4_track01, sekula11_sd_4of4_track02, and sekula11_sd_4of4_track03 are test tracks.]

MARY PANZER: Yes. It sounds okay. This sounds okay. Hi, Allan Sekula. This is Mary Panzer. We are at the Museum of Modern Art today. It is February 14. Happy Valentine's Day. And it's about 4:00 by now, I guess. When I talked to you a couple days ago, we had—in terms of your career, you had reached—you had just arrived at Ohio State, where you were going to be working with Noël Burch. And what department was that going to—did that have an official name?

ALLAN SEKULA: It was Department of Photography and Cinema that actually had—was, I think, the first—was reputed to be the first photography department in the country dating back to the 1890s. It had initially been in the architecture school, which was part of the college of engineering. And it actually remained in the college of engineering into the—into the—into the '80s—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —until our time there. In fact, that was the source of many difficulties, this affiliation with the college of engineering. But the way it had worked in—at the outset was that civil engineers were expected to take surveying—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and then photography was seen as an adjunct to that as some part of the education of a civil engineer.

MARY PANZER: So—

ALLAN SEKULA: Or an architect.

MARY PANZER: So, when you—when—oh, and an architect—so, when you came, though, the department had migrated out of the school of engineering?

ALLAN SEKULA: No. It was still in the school of engineering.

MARY PANZER: I see—

ALLAN SEKULA: So, the Department of Photography and Cinema—it had become a cinema department, I think, in the '60s—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —with the spread of, you know, college cinema curricula.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And it remained in the college of engineering. And one of the—I had a production unit for film, and a photography lab that, you know, did contract work for other departments in the university that needed photo reproduction, and things like that.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: But the main task of the film production division was to make training films for the Ohio State Buckeyes football team. And I remember there was a controversy, because there was a promising woman cinematography student who was expected to apprentice on these training films. And Woody Hayes, the coach, the famous coach of Ohio State, objected to having a woman cinematographer on the field during training.

MARY PANZER: Now, wait. What year is this?

ALLAN SEKULA: This is 1981.

MARY PANZER: Oh, my god.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. The objection was that the players used profanity, and would urinate on the field, and a woman wasn't—

MARY PANZER: So, what happened?

ALLAN SEKULA: —supposed to be around. Well, there was a kind of affirmative action case around it. And I can't remember how it was resolved, but the faculty member who was responsible for this kind of production unit, Carl Clausen, had really championed this woman, and fought valiantly to get her, you know, the experience working on these productions. But it was one of the cases where it was clear that in a big sports minded university, like

Ohio State, you didn't cross these—

MARY PANZER: Oh, Woody Hayes would've been—

ALLAN SEKULA: —people like Woody Hayes easily. And this was also sort of—it was the first controversy I remember, but it was symptomatic of everything that followed. And it was certainly a very—I mean when one—I mean I've told the anecdote about bi-coastal arrogance, but, you know, clearly there was another kind of land grant, sports world arrogance that was probably the more powerful countervailing force.

MARY PANZER: Well, I guess you'd never been to a big ten school, certainly not inside the bureaucracy of a big ten school.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Well, on my—actually, we'd stopped and visited—one of my friends from the Louis Maran study group, back at UC San Diego, had taken his first teaching job at Ohio State.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And, so, Martha Rosler and I actually stopped to visit him on our way across country moving to New York in our drive away car. So, I had bit of exposure to that world of Columbus and, you know. We'd also made a stop at the Air Force Museum in—

MARY PANZER: Oh, right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —Dayton, Ohio, which had been, you know, the site of my boyhood fantasies of the Air Force going bankrupt, and me getting to inherit all their airplane models. What I'm—you know, this is a kind of fantasy that I had when I was about six, and then I had to confess this covetousness when I made my first confession, you know, that I'd wanted all the model airplanes that belonged to the Air Force. So, that was a trip down memory lane, but little did I know that it was also a trip towards an as yet unimagined future working at Ohio State myself.

MARY PANZER: Who were your students there? I mean—

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, it was an interesting mix. I mean there were film student—there were film students and there were photo students. And there were certain overlaps. I mean the—partly because I had these affinities with—quite quickly. I mean I already knew Noel. I got to know Thom Andersen. So, there were students who worked—

MARY PANZER: Thom Andersen was a—is a film person?

ALLAN SEKULA: He's a filmmaker who made this brilliant film about Eadweard Muybridge, called *Eadweard Muybridge Zoopraxographer*.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: Back in '75. And—

MARY PANZER: Oh. You might have mentioned that earlier.

ALLAN SEKULA: And, now, he's best known for a film called *Los Angeles Plays Itself*—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —which is a kind of history of Hollywood's idea of the city of Los Angeles, and the evolution of the city from being a kind of backdrop to being a self-conscious subject matter on the part of film makers, and informed by Thom's extraordinary knowledge of film history, but also by his very comprehensive and intimate familiarity with the urban landscape of Los Angeles.

MARY PANZER: So, those are the film—those are sort of the major people that students come to work with if they were learning film? It would be Thom, and Noël?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, no. There were other—there were a few other faculty, but Noël was teaching I think screenwriting and directing, and courses on the history of cinema, because he's—and film theory to some degree. I don't know if he ever taught film theory as such. You know, I think it was always by way of films. And there were older faculty, more long standing faculty who also were teaching film history and film production courses. But it was a department that had been, to some degree, internally credentialed.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And then there were a couple of émigré film makers. There was a professor Agabri [ph] who was a veteran of the '56—of the Egyptian Army in the '56 War.

MARY PANZER: Whoa.

ALLAN SEKULA: Had been a tank commander I believe. And there was a professor Gravota [ph], who was a Czech émigré who had left, I believe, after '68. And they tended to be quite conservative in their views, and very suspicious of this gang of, you know, sort of left wing avant-gardists.

MARY PANZER: Well, who hired you, if you were so—

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, Ron Green, who was the chair at the time. He'd come from media program at SUNY Buffalo.

MARY PANZER: Ah.

ALLAN SEKULA: And he himself was a young film historian. But what quickly happened was that—I mean it's worth going into the politics of—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —the scene there, because it was a big lesson in a way. Very quickly a number of us were involved in Latin American solidarity work, you know, with CSPES, and—we formed a—we helped—we were part of a—

MARY PANZER: CSPES is?

ALLAN SEKULA: Is the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador.

MARY PANZER: Oh, okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: So, this is during the El Salvador War, and the Nicaraguan Contra War. It's Reagan's first term. I remember getting on a flight to New York, and seeing—having just read the *New York Times*, with a report that Susan Meiselas had been wounded in El Salvador—a friend. And another photographer killed, I think, when the Jeep there, the truck that they were in hit a mine. And just having that news in my head as I got on a flight full of business men flying to New York from Columbus. And, you know, you get a strange sense of both the distance and the immediacy of what was going on. And—in any event there were quite a few graduate students, undergraduates who were politicized around this issue of the American—Reagan's big push in Central America to roll back, you know, the expansion of the Cuban Model as he saw it, and, certainly, up the generalized stakes of the Cold War. And, so, a number of us were active in this politics. There was this ad we placed in the student newspaper signed by concerned faculty and staff.

MARY PANZER: How many people signed it?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, it's hard to remember. I'd have to find the newspaper.

MARY PANZER: Near 100?

ALLAN SEKULA: Oh, no. I mean it was a fairly—it might have been 20, or so.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I mean there were people in the law school—I mean, a man named John Quigley, who was quite a serious activist, a law professor. A number of people in German, Helen Fehervary—there were people at Ohio State in German who were involved in the—one of the key critical journals on German culture—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —kind of Frankfurt School, and post Frankfurt School—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —German cultural issues. There's this journal called *New German Critique*.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Helen was on the editorial board of that. Judith Mayne was teaching film in the literature department from a French literature background. So, there were—strong feminist—so, you know, there were—

there were a range of, for want of a better word, people you could call progressive faculty. And a number of them signed this ad. I can't remember—

MARY PANZER: Right. No. I was just—

ALLAN SEKULA: —but it was that, you know—it was maybe 20 people. Something like that.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I mean it's a huge campus. At that point I think it was the biggest single campus university in the country. It had over 52,000 students on campus.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And the students were, I would say, from middle class, to lower middle class, to working class backgrounds. I mean—

MARY PANZER: You mean in your—

ALLAN SEKULA: At Ohio State in general. Yes.

MARY PANZER: Oh. Well, yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. It was a big land grant school.

MARY PANZER: Well, you see. I'm from Michigan, so Ohio State is forever the opponent, you know, in the great football game.

ALLAN SEKULA: Right. The great rivalry. I mean I remember one day departing the house to go teach and realizing I was wearing a red shirt and grey trousers, and immediately going home and changing, because—

MARY PANZER: You were wearing the right colors, you mean?

ALLAN SEKULA: I was wearing the right colors, which I didn't want to wear.

MARY PANZER: Oh, dear. Well, don't wear blue and yellow.

ALLAN SEKULA: But I never wore—I never was foolish enough to wear a yellow shirt with blue trousers, or gold shirt.

MARY PANZER: Yes. [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I don't think I had either, but—

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —yes. It was—it really was a football town. And in fact, I never saw a game in the whole four years I was there. But—so, at one point in this activism around the Central American issues, we decided to stage a kind of performance guerilla art event in the central quad of the campus, sort of between—near the entrance to the main library. And I found a rubber Ronald Reagan mask, and recruited some students to play the role of secret service agents, you know, and stuff—decided that they would wear proper suits and ties, and twist some wires hanging from their ears. Unbeknownst to me, one of the—one of the students brought a gun, because we'd heard we might be getting some trouble from the followers of Reverend Moon, the Moonies.

MARY PANZER: Well, that's a good idea to bring a gun.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. And when I found out I was pretty dismayed. But, in any event, the event happened. The Moonies caused trouble. There was bit of a tussle, and no guns were drawn. Luckily, the gun wasn't discovered. I ate some money. That was sort of the idea of—just sort of holding up cans of Salvadoran coffee, and eating money, and giving a kind of bogus Reagan speech. But the whole thing was reported in the campus paper. I was identified as the guy behind the Reagan mask, as a professor, probably a big mistake. And, apparently immediately, the dean of engineering, who was nuclear engineer, was—as an undergrad had gone to Antioch, and thus in subsequent meetings with the group of us dissident faculty, said knew where we were coming from, which didn't stop him from wanting to see us removed from the university yesterday.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: And, apparently, his phone started ringing with people from the National Association of

Manufacturers, who were alumni of the engineering school. You know, people probably associated with Timken, and—you know, the bearing company in Ohio that has a—is very strong executives, of which are strongly supportive of the Republican Party.

MARY PANZER: But they would have gotten all this information from the campus newspaper?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, apparently. I mean there's sort of a, you know—god knows what sort of—or it worked the other way around. One doesn't know. But, I mean—because this was never demonstrated, though there were hearings in the academic senate looking into all this happening.

MARY PANZER: Well, Columbus isn't the state capital is it?

ALLAN SEKULA: It is the state capital. But the—

MARY PANZER: Oh, well, that makes things a little—

ALLAN SEKULA: But the incident wasn't reported in the *Columbus Dispatch*, for example.

MARY PANZER: No, but it wouldn't have had to be.

ALLAN SEKULA: But I already said that the—you know, they had—somewhat later the art critics grant was eliminated in Ohio.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: So, Columbus had a way of picking up the thread of national politics. And, also, given the way that Ohio has been the, you know, the bell weather state for American politics. You know—

MARY PANZER: For a long time.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. For a long time. So, the idea being that whoever wins Ohio wins the nation. Also, Ohio was a big test market, which was something that was fascinating, because they—

MARY PANZER: Oh. Because of Proctor and Gamble?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, no, because it was supposedly demographically representative of the country.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: So, we had a kind of interactive cable television there in the early '80s, before anyone else did.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And you could vote on things and, you know, call plays in football games, and you know—and, that actually became the subject of the work I did there. But—so, it had a—Noël was fascinated, because he saw it as a kind of laboratory to study American media culture. And he had cable on his television, and, you know, access to—in those days an unthinkable 100 plus channels, you know. And, so, you could learn about the 700 Club, and pro wrestling, and, you know—

MARY PANZER: Oh. Well, he must have been—

ALLAN SEKULA: —endless hours of—

MARY PANZER: —bliss. It must have been bliss for him.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, and terrifying at the same time.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: And, in fact, Noel and I had made a—very quickly we worked on a video, which we called the *Reagan Tape*, where we—once Reagan was elected, and some of these channels started to bring out all the old Reagan films—

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —and, so, we were able to videotape them. And we cut a kind of montage of them with Reagan's—I think his second speech on economic policy which was delivered in March, or April of '81, before he was—he was shot.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: And we sort of cut this kind of montage of his films, and we used to take that videotape around and show it at protests using a car battery for power, you know, with the DC kind of converter—DC to AC converter.

MARY PANZER: And you'd project it onto a wall or something?

ALLAN SEKULA: No—just—we brought a TV set out.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: And we, you know, put a tarp up if it was raining, and—

MARY PANZER: [Laughs] Now, wait. Was this before or after your famous demonstration?

ALLAN SEKULA: This was after.

MARY PANZER: Oh, okay. So, sort of—so, you get called up before—

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, no. The video—yes, well no. Let me think. The demonstration—I'd have to check some clippings that I have. I mean I—it was all around the same time.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: But, anyways, there were calls for my being fired, apparently, at that time.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: At that point. Professor Clausen, who had—who's now deceased was the one who said that he had been told that there were these calls for my firing. And this all came out in kind of hearings. But—and the upshot was that over the next four years, three years, there was this attempt to get us all out of there. And the first move was that the dean deposed the chair, Ron Green, brought in another faculty member. And, so, it was kind of a state of siege, you know, for a long time.

MARY PANZER: So, it was you and Ron Green, and Noël Burch, were sort of the three targets?

ALLAN SEKULA: And Anderson—but also Jonathan Green, and an untenured photography professor named Jim Friedman.

MARY PANZER: Now, were—did you come with tenure?

ALLAN SEKULA: No. I was hired as an assistant professor.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: It was my first regular teaching job. Everything I'd had before had been, like, visiting lecturer, or something.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I bounced around for basically six years after grad school, you know, teaching here and there, like—as I said San Francisco, UC Irvine, UC San Diego, the NYU Cinema Studies for a year at the invitation of Annette Michelson. And, so, when I—the Rutgers job that I applied for had been, you know, also kind of tenure track position. But, then, when that didn't pan out, then the Ohio thing looked like it might have been a chance for Sally to have a job as well. It seemed like it made sense to go there. So this whole fight went on. But it was an interesting time, and it—one of the great things about Ohio State is that it had a pretty good library. And, unlike universities with more ambitious graduate students in the humanities, you know, a lot of key books weren't checked out.

MARY PANZER: Right [Laughs].

ALLAN SEKULA: And I began to really—well, I continued with research I'd been doing in New York, on the history of police photography, and the history of eugenics. Broad questions of—

MARY PANZER: Oh. So, *The Body and the Archive* got started in Ohio.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, I'd already started working on it in New York in 1980.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: But—yes. That was—that was kind of important. I mean I ended up finishing it after moving to California—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —back to California. And there was a crucial year where I was able to be in Washington D.C., and use the Library of Congress. But I also started working on the general question of the archives, because I'd gotten this invitation while I was in New York, to work on a book with the press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design on this mining archive from Nova Scotia. And then that launched me into this whole examination of the history of representations of mining, and of labor in general. And that led to this long essay, *Photography Between Labor and Capital*, really developing ideas about the instrumental realism that I'd first proposed in the essay about Steichen and that area of reconnaissance photography. So, that was sort of a, you know, series of stages of going from the aerial reconnaissance photograph, to a mining archive, and then on to the question of police photography and the kind of highly specific realist demands of identification photographs. So, yes. I did a lot of that work. And it was also a time, like the time in New York, where I was doing less art making.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Though, I'd also received the invitation from Benjamin Buchloh, the editor of the press of the Nova Scotia College of Art, and Design, at that time, to produce a book of my own work.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And I—and that was something I pulled together, you know, going back 10 years from '73 to '83, while I was in Ohio.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And, so, frequently, when I would leave Ohio—I mean I'd go to New York. In those days it was fairly—I mean, initially, it was—the only inexpensive way to do it was by Greyhound Bus.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: In the winter that was always grueling—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —Pennsylvania Turnpike. But then, with the deregulation of the airlines, people—an airline called People Express appeared.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And you could fly for \$35 to New York. And it was fairly—I would go to Toronto a lot, because it was close to the Canadian artists.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And I did have this connection to Nova Scotia, which had started with a visiting stint there in 1980, just as I was moving to New York. So, that also became, you know—I was sort of—those were my main trajectories, to New York, or to—

MARY PANZER: Toronto.

ALLAN SEKULA: —to Toronto, and on to Halifax. So, I worked on the, basically, two books that were published in Canada.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And in this, you know, obscure, but within the art world, highly regarded series of source documents on the contemporary arts, you know, that included—

MARY PANZER: Does it—is it—who else were they publishing at that time?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, they had published—it had started under Kasper Koenig's editorship.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: So, he'd run it at first. And they'd—over time they'd done Donald Judd's writing, Claes Oldenburg *Raw Notes* a book with Hans Haacke, *Framing and Being Framed*, a book with Simone Forti—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —a book with—did they do a book with Yvonne Rainer? I always get confused about that, because I know it was also NYU that did a book with her.

MARY PANZER: So, yes. So, I mean this sort of gets us to another question I wanted to be able to address in the course of our conversation, and we don't have to do it right now, but who were the—you know, if I had to put you in a room with, you know, like minded, or—if you were in a group, who would—who are the other people in your group if you had to identify sort of a group, either intellectually, or in terms of practice, or in terms of generation. I don't know. Because I'm like a historian, I'm always, you know—

ALLAN SEKULA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY PANZER: —I'm always like looking for who your influences are, who your colleagues are, or who your, you know. Where'd you come from, and where your thoughts are leading, or something like that. I'm always interested in genealogy, a kind of an intellectual genealogy. But that's—you don't have to address that. I mean that's one way of doing it. Who else is being published by this press, and those are the—

ALLAN SEKULA: Right. Well—and not—I mean—Dan—they did a book with Dan Graham.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I'm just trying to remember the actual date on the Dan Graham book. I remember meeting Dan up there—

MARY PANZER: Uh- huh. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —in Nova Scotia in the cafeteria, and we talked about Adorno, and Marcuse, and the like. And—

MARY PANZER: Must have seemed a long way from Ohio State, though.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, it was and it wasn't. I mean the mining connection wasn't that remote. I mean, you know, the fact that, you know, Southern Ohio was mining country, and—though mostly soft coal. And then you also had mining in Cape Breton.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I guess Ohio and West Virginia are pretty close together.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Especially, when you get down to the southern part of the more—closer to Appalachia.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And Columbus is kind of oddly closer culturally to the south than to the northern parts of the state—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —though it is an industrial town. It was—you know, it was kind of a railroad town that became the state capital by virtue of its logistical position.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: But not a river town. I mean the river is not a big factor there. It's a minor river. It's not like the Ohio, you know. Cincinnati—and obviously it's defined by being on the Ohio.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: It was the most developed metropolis of what was, in the 1840s, the west, you know?

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: But—yes. To go back to the kind of—well, you know, there was something a bit eclectic about it, because on the one side I was getting—I mean I knew Noël, but I hadn't known Thom Andersen's work until I got to Ohio. So, I was getting to know Thom. Then that became very significant, because once Thom and James Friedman were not renewed as faculty—you know, when they came up for tenure before me and were turned down, and then there was a kind of fight about it, with Friedman winning his case and getting an out of court

settlement, which is still to this day undisclosed, and Andersen just deciding to pack it in, and be unemployed for a while. But I was successful in bringing Thom to CalArts, and he went on to—from being a kind of visitor in the art program to being halfway between the art program and—or the—I'm sorry, the art school.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: The photo program—and then going where he more rightly belonged in the film school. And then becoming the head of the film school. Then he brought Hartmut Bitomsky. So, things sort of, you know—the connections sort of ebb and flow over time.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, Noël is someone that I returned to work with, you know, after knowing him for 30 years, essentially. Or 20 years.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: We started our work on the—on the most recent film project. So—but the art world, or photo world connections were—I mean I don't think in other circumstances I would have had the strongest affinity with someone like Jonathan Green, because he came from this kind of highly expressionist Minor White milieu. But he was an intellectually curious, and open, and in those circumstances absolutely an ally.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, and Jonathan played a key role in Ohio, because he's the person who initiated the Wexner Center.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. And there's a funny story there, because Ohio State had a reputation for not being the most Jewish friendly campus, you might say.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: The dental school was famous for not being so welcoming to nice Jewish mother's sons, who only wanted their sons to be dentists. I mean, you know.

MARY PANZER: Uh-Huh. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: There was a kind of anti-Semitic history. And it may have had something to do with the strong ethnic German presence in Ohio. But—which—I mean I was always impressed by how much—how much Nazi literature, I mean German National Socialist literature was in the collection, that the library was really acquiring up to date publications of Nazi race theory. All that stuff was getting ordered in the '30s.

MARY PANZER: Oh. In the '30s. I'm sorry.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, and the '20s. And '20s, you know—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —Hans—I mean I was really impressed that that material was there in ways that I hadn't seen it in other university libraries. But I'm not—

MARY PANZER: Yes, because Cincinnati, you know, is also very German, but then that's where there's a big reformed Jewish seminary, is in Cincinnati. So—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. I think Cincinnati has a bigger Jewish presence.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: But Columbus was a city with a very significant mercantile Jewish population—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: The store called "Schottenstein's" was there.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Wexner himself had the Limited—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —you know, which was I think launched in Columbus if I'm not mistaken. They had a big place out on the outskirts of the city, and many of the Jewish merchant families lived in a well to do suburb north of downtown Columbus called Bexley.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: But there'd never been—Jonathan was the first person to really bring that mercantile money and Jewish merchant, you know, department store money into the campus.

MARY PANZER: No kidding. It seems so late.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. I mean we're talking—this then is like 1983, '84—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —and when they do the architectural competition, because Jonathan had become the head of the art gallery.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: He'd managed to—as things sort of started to crumble and disintegrate and get very fractious in the photography and cinema department, and Jonathan was clearly, you know, a senior faculty member who opposed this dean, he was able to get a—move his appointment to the art school and became the director of the art gallery, which was named for the professor who had been Roy Lichtenstein's teacher. You know, because Lichtenstein was a graduate of Ohio State.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: Now, what was the name of this professor? What was the name of the gallery? I have to go back.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: It's in my resume somewhere, because I did—I did a show there. But I want the—Hoyt Sherman was this painter who had been the teacher of Lichtenstein.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Key figure in art teaching in Columbus. And, so, Jonathan basically came up with the idea of a competition for the Wexner design.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And they brought in, you know, Eisenman, and Michael Graves, and so on. There's a funny story about Michael Graves. He was given a tour of the campus and they showed him the dormitories, and Graves said to the tour guide, "Oh. Is this where you keep the autistic children?" That was his one comment on the existing campus architecture—

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —which was pretty dismal, especially the more, you know the '60s and '70s buildings.

MARY PANZER: Even though they had an architecture school, there wasn't—

ALLAN SEKULA: Oh. They did. Yes, but I—yes. But they came up with Eisenman as the architect who was selected for the project. And all of that was completed after I left.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —in December of 1984—

MARY PANZER: December '84 is when you left?

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. I left—well, the—there were hearings in the spring of '84 on the two cases—the tenure cases that had been denied.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: And I testified against the dean, you know—

MARY PANZER: Oh, my god.

ALLAN SEKULA: —against the chair of the department.

MARY PANZER: Oh. This is the suit that your colleague brought against—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. But this was more an academic senate hearing, you know.

MARY PANZER: I see. Inside the university.

ALLAN SEKULA: Inside the university. Yes. I was never party to—I might made a statement for—

MARY PANZER: But that must have been—that doesn't happen very often.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: Did that—

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, there was evidence of—there evidence of denial of academic freedom, and also—but also, oddly enough of anti-semitism. One of the faculty members, apparently—one of the ones who was voting on tenure, a senior faculty member, said at one point that there were too many Jews and Communists in the department and that—when reminded that neither Andersen nor I were Jewish, his response was, "But their wives are Jewish. So that makes them Jewish." You know, so—

MARY PANZER: And this was said in front of you?

ALLAN SEKULA: No. It wasn't said in front of me. It said in front of a group of senior faculty. So—

MARY PANZER: So, there were plenty of people to testify to this—

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, there was at least one faculty member, I think a senior faculty member who was willing to say something about this. But all of this contributed to the fact that Jim Friedman—James Friedman, was able to win his settlement for an undisclosed amount, and—

MARY PANZER: Did he go on to have an academic career after that?

ALLAN SEKULA: He stayed in Columbus, and—he was from Bexley. One point he wrote me asking if it would be a good idea to come to the graduate—he'd never gotten an MFA. He had an M.A.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: I mean he was a working photographer, but he thought he might want to get an MFA.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And I don't know really what's happened with Jim, and I'd have to ask, but he seemed kind of stuck in Columbus. And I'm hoping he got out of there, because it seemed like a horrible trap. And it's not good to stick around a town where you've been—I remember going with Jim, and Thom to the unemployment office and photographing them getting their benefits, and—

MARY PANZER: Oh, gosh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —with all these—you know, this was real was early '80s recession, and—that hit Ohio quite heavily. I mean we knew people that were involved in farmer activism around farm foreclosures and the like. I mean, once you knew the kind of dissident community in Columbus, you would get connected in that. So, the economy seemed quite grim. And I remember these two, you know, junior professors who'd been sacked going and collecting their unemployment, you know, with all these other unemployed blue collar workers around. And I still have photos of that.

MARY PANZER: So, this—

ALLAN SEKULA: I actually worked on a slide piece that I've never finished, but I'll do it someday. And it's called *Bad Ohio*.

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And it has a lot of the flavor of that time. I mean—and because our friends in German, who were on the left were bringing people like Christa Wolf, you know—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —to Ohio State. So, here you have the, you know—it's a kind of leftism that obviously is not just, you know—it's opened to the dissent within the socialist block, right?

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And Christa Wolf was there, I think almost a whole year. And that was '84. That was the last year I was there. And, toward the end of the year, when the Ohio State graduation was looming—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and Christa just died this past December. And she came with her husband, Gerhard, and—who's kind of a literature scholar, and I think dramaturge, by and large, and kind of involved in theater, certainly. She was nominated for an honorary degree, and when she learned that George Bush Sr. was the other honorary degree recipient, she refused to be on the same podium as he was. And the DDR officialdom wanted her to make a public case of this—and, so it could be used for propaganda purposes on their side.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: And she refused. And, so, she basically said, "A curse on both your houses." And I thought that was a really honorable and good thing. And I—of course, Bush had no problems. He showed up, and I remember—it's the one time I actually peered into the football stadium from the ground level. We had a protest down at the end, and trying to at least introduce some countervailing noise, you know, from the periphery of this huge stadium where the graduation was happening.

MARY PANZER: But that would have—so that would have been the spring, in like June or something.

ALLAN SEKULA: That was June of—

MARY PANZER: Eighty-four?

ALLAN SEKULA: Of '84. Yes. So, it was the—

MARY PANZER: May or June?

ALLAN SEKULA: Let's see. Reagan would have been winding up to win his second term then.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: You know. That was—

MARY PANZER: Morning in America.

ALLAN SEKULA: —and, you know, the full—the full charge, let's say—the electric charge of the Iran Contra Scandal hadn't broken yet, because that came in the—was it that autumn, or was it '85? I think it was '85.

MARY PANZER: I think it was '85.

ALLAN SEKULA: It was '85. It was like maybe October or November '85 when those stories began to break.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: I was already in California at that point, but the—yes. The slide piece has this kind of rhythm of—it would be a very easy piece for me to go back and finish. And I'm sort of waiting for an invitation back to Ohio State to—

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —in which case I'll either show the slide piece or turn into a pillar of salt.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: But Ann Hamilton's there now, and a number of people that are sympathetic, and they wanted me to come back and—in fact, oddly enough, ironically, the Columbus Museum of Art now has a very strong collection of—

MARY PANZER: Photo League.

ALLAN SEKULA: —of the Photo League work. It's currently showing here at the Guggenheim. And—at the Jewish Museum.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: And—

MARY PANZER: Catherine Evans started work here in the Photo Department at MoMA.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. And Sally's going to give a key note at that. So, I'm going to tag along, and maybe do—have informal meetings. Maybe I can meet up with Occupy Columbus people. That would be nice.

MARY PANZER: That's pretty funny. So, but the thing is—so, you testified in March, and there's this kind of—

ALLAN SEKULA: Or some—in or around that time frame. It might have been April.

MARY PANZER: In the spring. And then this protest couldn't have gone unnoticed by your dean in June.

ALLAN SEKULA: Oh. Well, there were—this is back in 1981 when that occurs.

MARY PANZER: Right. Oh. Yes. But, I mean—but '84 you're still out there on the street causing trouble. No?

ALLAN SEKULA: Oh, yes. But at that point I had already—I'd—the idea was that once it was kind of clear that Jim had taken his case to civil litigation—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and that Thom was going to pull out of any legal action against the university—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —the die was pretty much cast. But we thought we'd try just one third thing, and since I was going to be up for tenure the following autumn—

MARY PANZER: Eighty-four?

ALLAN SEKULA: —I was just behind them. In the autumn of '84. I—we figured out that what I ought to do is ask for early tenure.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Just to see what would happen.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And it seemed that my publication record was sufficient that, you know, I could bounce to that step. And, so, they convened a hurried meeting of all the senior faculty. People appeared who were tenured who had never—I'd never seen in the building. There was a guy who published a newsletter for the School of Engineering who apparently had his base in the Photography Department, but never taught a course, and seems to have been a kind of minor official in the dean's office.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: But suddenly here he was. He was a Navy reservist as I recall. And he appeared and I brought in a kind of suitcase with all my publications—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and they were all sitting around a conference table, and this particular kind of tenured faculty member who had appeared from nowhere, the Navy reservist, looked at me and said, "Oh. Are you packing to leave?"

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: And this was the one comment before I went out and hung out with some students for a while in the hallway—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —and went and had a coffee, or something. And, you know, within an hour or two they came back saying, "Well, it was just impossible to make a decision," and, you know, they couldn't really give me tenure, of course. If I wanted to stick around they would consider my case in due time according to the normal schedule. And since, in my back pocket, I had the offer of coming to CalArts to be the head of the photography program there, I knew sort of what that meant.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And I was lucky enough to have gotten a semester's leave already for the coming fall. So, I was able to go to Nova Scotia for the summer, and complete my—the first book of my own work, *Photography Against the Grain*, which involved a lot of hands on—the book was actually printed at the college—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —on an old Heidelberg press.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I was there, you know, into the—into the beginning of the September cold in Nova Scotia, and then able to go out to California in the autumn, delay my appointment at CalArts until January, and, you know, look for a place to live, and pack up the house. Sally had a fellowship in D.C., so she was gone a good part of that semester. That was sort of the exit from—

MARY PANZER: From Ohio.

ALLAN SEKULA: —from Ohio.

MARY PANZER: When did—when did you get the offer from CalArts, and who made it?

ALLAN SEKULA: The—it was Catherine Lord was the dean of the art school at that time.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: And my being hired there was contentious actually. I mean it just seemed to go from one—the head of the program was a photographer of a kind of conceptual bent, and a critic named John Brumfield, who'd come out of the rhetoric program at Berkeley—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —in the—I think he'd been at Berkeley in the—maybe as an older grad student in '68, or so.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Though his age was such that he wouldn't have been that old.

MARY PANZER: But he was older than you.

ALLAN SEKULA: Older than me. Yes. And he'd run the—basically CalArts had had a—it started out as a school of art, and design in '70, '71. You know, and—you know—I mean the history's quite familiar. There were five schools, music, dance, art, film/video, and theater, but it had been a school of art and design, with industrial design as a key part of the program. And photography had been somehow affiliated with the design program—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and was initially taught by Ben Lifson.

MARY PANZER: What? I'm sorry.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Who was famous for taking his clothes off at a trustees meeting early on when—Herb Blau's attempt to hire Herbert Marcuse hit the wall of animosity of Roy Disney. And Blau was forced to leave, and, you know, there was quite a bit of controversy about this effort to bring Marcuse to CalArts.

MARY PANZER: So, the most constructive thing to do would be to take your clothes off. Okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, that's what Ben did. Yes. But that was—but Ben had sort of started the photo program there, and then I think—I'm not sure when Brumfield arrived, but he had been the head of the program. They had Judy Fiskin there, Joanne Callas, John Divola—and Catherine had come—Doug Huebler had been—and this is now—the art school had gone through changes. Baldessari had come up from—early, from San Diego. And Baldessari tried to—I think I talked earlier about Baldessari trying to get me to come to CalArts as a grad student—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —back in '72.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: But you had the sort of Michael Asher version of conceptualism and the Baldessari version of conceptualism. They were seen as two somewhat competing models. Students were drawn differentially to each of them.

MARY PANZER: And the students—the students were getting MFAs and going off to teach or—

ALLAN SEKULA: Or having careers as artists.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I mean CalArts students were, many of them, quite successful. I mean John's—people who were in his classes back in '73, '74, when I did my show at John's invitation with Fred Lonidier up there, were—you know, it's like David Salle. People like this, you know?

MARY PANZER: Oh. Okay. I'm—

ALLAN SEKULA: So, the photo program was a bit less prominent, though—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —there were certainly well-known photographers who went through it. But Catherine Lord—So Doug Huebler, the other key figure in the kind of conceptual triumvirate of Baldessari, Huebler, Asher, had become the Dean of the Art School.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And then he was stepping down and they were looking for a new Dean and they hired Catherine Lord, who'd been the editor of *Afterimage* at Visual Studies Workshop—

MARY PANZER: In Rochester. Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: And Catherine—I brought Catherine to Ohio State at one point to give a lecture when I was programming the visitor's—the Photography Visitors Program there. And Catherine invited me to apply for the position of director of photography.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Brumfield was stepping down but it was pretty clear the faculty weren't super happy in my being the director.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And it was kind of a tricky thing at first to be hired. And I think it was more that the faculty had problems with Catherine. I mean she was seen as wanting to run her own agenda.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: But I don't know if—I mean no one has tenure at CalArts so people fear for their jobs.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: If they have an unsympathetic dean—but that—I made it clear to Catherine that I wasn't interested in firing people if I was going to be a program director.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: So that was a different sort of challenge, you know, to then be running a program and try to think about what could change in an art school. I mean there couldn't be a more different sort of environment after Ohio State than CalArts.

MARY PANZER: I guess not.

ALLAN SEKULA: Though certain things were similar. On certain levels. Yes.

MARY PANZER: Certain things were similar in terms of the conservatism of the word?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well it's very different because you have a board.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: And, you know—at Ohio State you could look up anybody's salary because it was a matter of state record.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: But, you know, CalArts was a private school with students who had the idea that they wanted to be artists, which you don't always find in a university.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: I mean you find people who maybe secretly want to be artists or think they could be artists but aren't sure and, you know, are often breaking away from other disciplines. I mean at Ohio State I did—I did something a little bit derived from my earlier school as a factory project—I did a show with the students where I just said, "Let's make the university our subject matter."

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And we did an exhibition called *University Exposed*, where we just went out and—I mean they went out and found things that interested them in the university.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: One of the film students made a really terrific time lapse film from the library tower of—you know, the crowds that are flowing across the quad according to the intervals between courses.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: A bit like one of William Whyte's, you know, urban studies—

MARY PANZER: Of—Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —of people in the Seagram's Plaza—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —here in mid-town. And then his—the second part of the—or intercut with that—no I think it was sort the first part and second part—they were divided. He did the same in the McDonalds just across the street from campus.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: He had a broken arm so he had his camera in the cast, and did time lapse photography of the flow of people into the McDonalds, which was apparently the highest volume McDonalds in the country. 50—52,000 burger hungry undergrads—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —flooding into this place. And probably eating a whole herd of cattle in one day.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, something right out of the—

MARY PANZER: So—

ALLAN SEKULA: —the *Iliad*, you know?

MARY PANZER: Yes, I guess.

ALLAN SEKULA: So—

MARY PANZER: Yes, there's not kind of subject matter waiting for you at CalArts.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Where—at CalArts—well on the other hand you had the idea of institutional critique, where—so there were students who did want to look at the school and—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —but.

MARY PANZER: Where they offering bachelor's degrees at CalArts?

ALLAN SEKULA: Oh yes. Yes. There's a BFA. There were BFAs in all the disciplines.

MARY PANZER: So you were able to leave Ohio State and go to CalArts and kind of land and continue your own work without much interruption.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: But like, I guess so you took—

ALLAN SEKULA: Well I—Can I—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: I want to tell one last anecdote.

MARY PANZER: Yes, please.

ALLAN SEKULA: Because the whole threat about anti-Semitism gets very bizarre. I—so I had arrived in January 4, 1980 in this bitterly cold weather, with the car window broken all the way from, you know—it wasn't Hershey, Pennsylvania but it was near Hershey.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Somewhere in, you know, Eastern Pennsylvania.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: Somewhere near Harrisburg. And I leave in the severely cold weather, but on People Express to New York because the cheapest flight across country was—

MARY PANZER: From New York to—

ALLAN SEKULA: —People Express 747 from New York to L.A.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: And—but when I get on board the flight from Columbus to J.F.K., I'm sitting next to an Asian-American woman who's reading Tzvetan Todorov.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And so I—Oh I said, "Oh you're reading Todorov." And it was discovered that she was a linguistics grad student. And she asked me what I did. And I said, "Well I'm actually leaving Columbus. I actually taught there for 4 years in the Department of Photography and Cinema." And she said, "Oh, yes. I heard about that." And then the man next to her in the window seat pipes up that—"Oh yes. That's the department that's had a lot of trouble." He seemed to know about it. And, so, in the course of the conversation, the three of us talking about the university, I—knowing—having found out that she was a linguistics grad student, it seemed right to ask him where he taught, if he taught.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And he said, "Yes I teach in the Department of Jewish Engineering." And I couldn't quite—I did a double take. My stomach turned a bit. And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I'm in the Management School, Business School." [Laughs.] It turned out he was married to a professor in the German Department who knew very well the details of everything that had happened—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —because the people in German were close to some of us.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And he was just making this sort of kind of stereotypical joke. Seemed very bizarre. And I felt, "God this is really the icing on the cake," you know?

MARY PANZER: That sounds so weird.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: I mean—was—it was supposed to be funny?

ALLAN SEKULA: It was supposed to be funny. Yes. And I suppose ironic. But—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: Jewish Engineering. Yes.

MARY PANZER: Did they have Jews in the Business School teaching?

ALLAN SEKULA: Probably. Some. I don't know how many.

MARY PANZER: Maybe that was where they, most Jews, were tenured at that moment.

ALLAN SEKULA: I don't know. I don't—no, I don't think so. I mean I—

MARY PANZER: I mean—

ALLAN SEKULA: I don't know. I had no idea the complexion of that faculty. Yes.

MARY PANZER: That's creepy.

ALLAN SEKULA: But this idea, yes. I mean it's just such a bizarre stereotype. It's not even correct, you know? I mean—

MARY PANZER: It's just—

ALLAN SEKULA: In terms of—

MARY PANZER: Well, it's funny. I don't really want to share this with the—well it doesn't matter. When I—

ALLAN SEKULA: We can cut it, right?

MARY PANZER: I guess we can cut it—turn it off but—when I was teaching in a tenure track job at the University of Kansas in 1989, and 1990, I ran into some kind of vestigial language like that.

ALLAN SEKULA: Like that. Yes.

MARY PANZER: Yes. From a person who would never consider themselves anti-Semitic in any way.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: But there it was, kind of the middle of the country, and was able to go unchallenged just—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: —because nobody took it seriously. Nobody heard it anymore.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: So anyway, I'm not surprised but I wish—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: —I was surprised.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well this was like the final insult, it seemed to me. Just so apt given the—what the history of everything that had happened. And he knew perfectly well what he was saying given, you know, he wouldn't have been ignorant about the details of these things. And I actually saw Helen Fehervary after all these years, just recently. And she came out to Los Angeles with her adopted daughter who was from El Salvador actually—

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —an orphan from El Salvador. And I reminded her of the story and she immediately remembered who this person was. You know?

MARY PANZER: Oh now I do want to ask you one thing. But you said that—who's teaching in the Photography Department at Ohio State now? You said—

ALLAN SEKULA: I think—I think Ben Fernandez is there [He means Cuban-American Tony Mendoza -SS]. He's been for some time.

MARY PANZER: So—

ALLAN SEKULA: But he came—well the department was moved to the art school.

MARY PANZER: That's what I wanted to ask you.

ALLAN SEKULA: So it wasn't completely dissolved.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: They dissolved certain parts of it.

MARY PANZER: But it didn't stay in engineering.

ALLAN SEKULA: But it didn't stay in engineering.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: So that was a good thing.

MARY PANZER: And then—

ALLAN SEKULA: And then some of the faculty moved to other—the faculty who were involved in the controversy on our side—like Ron Green was able to move to literature.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And then there were a number of other film scholars, like Judith Mayne in literature and—I'm not sure who's still there of that—of the group who were there among the photography people.

MARY PANZER: Right. No but that—now were you on *October's* editorial board at that point or not? Or—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, I think I was. I can't remember when they asked me. I'd have to go back and look at the issues to—

MARY PANZER: Right. But you were—so you were—now you were part of a—you were part of a refereed journal. I mean, so you were helping—

ALLAN SEKULA: Expect that that doesn't—isn't really refereed. I mean—

MARY PANZER: So it doesn't count?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well I suppose it is in one level. I mean I suppose that the senior—the editors—it's more edited. I mean it—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —the advisory board—I mean not living in New York for the years in which I've been on the advisory board, I haven't had a chance to go to meetings. I don't think there've been any meetings in recent years.

MARY PANZER: Yes. But in terms of—

ALLAN SEKULA: And in the case of the whole controversy around Douglas Crimp and his removal from the editorial staff, my advice was not taken. So, when I have had the chance to give advice it's been rejected. But that's the nature of these things, you know.

MARY PANZER: I see. So that—

ALLAN SEKULA: I supported Douglas and thought, you know. I didn't see the reason that the other editors wanted him out. But—and that's all happening around 1990. So I'm in California at that point.

MARY PANZER: At that point.

ALLAN SEKULA: And it had to do with Douglas doing the famous AIDS issue of *October*. And that gets quite controversial and I'm sure a lot of people would like to know about that. But—

MARY PANZER: Okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: It's—

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MARY PANZER: I'm just—I was curious. I wasn't sort of ramming into that wall exactly, but I was just thinking about in terms of how your influence was being exerted. Part of it would be in terms of bringing things to publication or—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: —or advising or—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: —being part of a board that was shaping the journal that was pretty influential.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Well, Thom Andersen had written a very good text on Hegel's philosophy of light.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And simplifying enormously, and this must have been a long time since I've read it, but what was key to it was that—I mean, one, he's reading closely what Hegel has to say about life, but he also is looking at the codes of lighting in Hollywood cinema—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —particularly highlighting—

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —and the idea that the spirit is sort of manifested through the light that is seen coming from the eye. So this gets into intromission/extramission, various things that have been you know, at the center of physiological optics that's—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —you know, Ibn al-Haythami [ph], you know.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: You can go way back to Arab optics. And I thought it was quite brilliant what he wrote, and I said it, and as far as I could tell it was never read.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: But I know Thom said that in one of his appearances in New York in the late '70s or early '80s, he

had a kind of—I think he presented a film maybe here at the Museum of Modern Art. Wrong and Annette Michelson was in the audience and acted very imperious.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And the fact of the matter is that a lot of stuff that was submitted just didn't get read. I mean, it was like kind of inside—you know, I think when Douglas was editing, the stuff would stack up, and he had his own agenda. In other words, there wasn't a good mechanism in *October* for the board to really act as referees if manuscripts had gone out and that had really been put in place. But it was much more played close to the vest on the part of the senior editors—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and whether Rosalind Krauss or Annette Michelson or Douglas as sort of a younger, other group.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And then when—as Douglas got more and more involved in AIDS politics, Annette and Rosalind were—kept their distance in a way. I mean, I remember Annette coming down to Washington, D.C. in '86 to make what was a terrific series of screenings of Weegee films.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, but I had dinner with her, and I was quite friendly with Annette, and we had dinner and we talked. And she said, "Well, what do you think. Do you think really the magazine should have an AIDS issue?" I said, "Why not?" And I said—and she said, "Well, don't you think it would be better to have an issue about the collapse of the incest taboo, and maybe AIDS could be part of that?"

MARY PANZER: I know.

ALLAN SEKULA: I mean, I'm not—

MARY PANZER: Yes, sort of trying to figure out a way around it.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, in other words, there were issues of sexuality that she was willing to address, but she didn't see any particular urgency around—I think the feeling was that Douglas was just going to get carried away with this and make it—maybe make kind of militant queer politics much more of a profile of the magazine.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And then the other thing—and then again, this is—we'll revisit this, and I don't know how we're—this is being structured in terms of—because it's archived as recordings, right, or as transcript?

MARY PANZER: It'll be archived as transcript.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, then we can think about this.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: But I'd rather just talk about it.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: And—because the history is so bizarre. And at one point—I mean, I'm sure Rosalind would deny this.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: But she did call me. I mean she was campaign—this was at a point when the advisory board was being telephoned.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Because if she called me, she certainly called the other people. I mean, she didn't—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And her claim was that there had been a group of professor at MIT, and the sciences had found the AIDS issue reprehensible and were about to make sure that MIT press journals would no longer—

MARY PANZER: Oh, oh, distribute—

ALLAN SEKULA: —distribute the magazine, and as far as I can tell, this is a completely invented story.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I'm just—I have a vague recollection in here. I'm just—I can't be terribly accurate about it, and—but that in—I might have said to her, reminded her of having said this, later and she said she never said it. So—

MARY PANZER: Right, yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, it's that kind of thing, and I'm sure that's what she would say if—

MARY PANZER: —asked.

ALLAN SEKULA: —if asked. But I felt you know, it was—this was sort of a public health crisis, and that Douglas was absolutely right to take that as a priority, and—but then I've always felt in some ways that *October*—in fact, I wrote a letter at the time, saying the same, well, let's just add another line to the masthead of the magazine, saying *October*, you know, "the movie, not the revolution." You know—

MARY PANZER: Yes. [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I mean, and that didn't—I mean, to this day, I don't think—and that was back in 1990.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: And so—and I've only published in the journal a few times, you know.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I mean, I—the person I'm closest to in the group is Benjamin. And I was quite close with Annette.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I mean, but—

MARY PANZER: Well, I like that issue with the body and the archive and the legs of the countess.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, with Abigail's essay.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, yes. But that—oh, I invited Rosalind to Ohio State to lecture. I did a kind of, a series with her Trachtenberg and Sander Gilman.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: They were sort of the three figures that I brought.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: So in some ways, I felt more involved in that kind of scholarly intellectual work at Ohio State than later at CalArts, where the pendulum swung to the art-making side.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: You know. I mean, I do think that if you're closest to allies and friends in an environment, are people doing you know, kind of scholarly intellectual work—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —then that reinforces the—if you have—you kind of split desires about—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —what you'd like to do and different paths that you find yourself following at different times,

then the sort of immediate group around you has some influence on which path you, you know, is reinforced.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: And so you go from conversations with—where your most stimulating conversations are with people doing kind of historical research—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and thinking about theory, and then you go to an environment where it's more artists. I mean, at CalArts—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —I was talking with people like Michael Asher.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: He's probably one of the people I was closest to there.

MARY PANZER: Well, and also you—

ALLAN SEKULA: And all the students, also—

MARY PANZER: Right, I was going to say your students.

ALLAN SEKULA: —are bringing the different sort of—yes, yes, although I've had an inordinate number of students at CalArts who want to write, and—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And in fact when Dick Hebdige started the criticism program, the initial group of students were in fact from photo.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, then we sort of helped him jumpstart that program—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —because there were a number of them—some of them working with me. And most of all of them were writing, working with me. We went over to [inaudible] State to do a conjoint degree with the writing program when we first started out, and then very quickly it took off on its own, and now it's taken another shape entirely. I mean, initially it was going to be more about criticism, I think.

MARY PANZER: And now, it's—

ALLAN SEKULA: It's more writing.

MARY PANZER: Like creative writing?

ALLAN SEKULA: Creative writing and—yes.

MARY PANZER: Well, right, I mean, well, it's—

ALLAN SEKULA: In that sense, it's an arts program—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —in the, you know.

MARY PANZER: Well, also, just the form that art publishing or criticism publishing has taken—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: —is a shape that you couldn't have possibly anticipated when the program began.

ALLAN SEKULA: Right. Yes, and people are writing things that are much more divergent from what we think of as classical art criticism—

MARY PANZER: Well, I mean, that's another—

ALLAN SEKULA: —for good of man.

MARY PANZER: I mean, that's another important topic, which has to do with sort of in the 21st century, how the shifting technology has influenced you, or led you in directions—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: —that you couldn't have anticipated. But I mean, that's the condition under which everybody who was alive in the 20th century works—

ALLAN SEKULA: Right.

MARY PANZER: —as I'm painfully aware.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. I mean, yes, now, we're in an age where you know, the really forest fire is J. Hoberman, and is a younger critic who is coming out of blogging about film to take over the job.

MARY PANZER: Right. But—so really, your practice was largely sort of text-based, until you got to CalArts, where there was sort of a big chunk where that was—

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, there was—there was kind of a hiatus between—and then in terms of my doing photographic projects, between say—I didn't do as many photographic projects between—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —say '74 and '84.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Well, I mean—

ALLAN SEKULA: But I did *School as a Factory*.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And then, in fact there were a whole bunch of these smaller projects that I did—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —that I never fully completed, and I just very recently went back and returned to those. I can't remember if we talked about that or not but—

MARY PANZER: Not really.

ALLAN SEKULA: No.

MARY PANZER: No. I mean, but obviously you don't come up with as many essays enough to fill *Photography Against the Grain* and the mining, if you've been sitting on your hands. So I mean, there's—it's pretty—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, well, and I was at CalArts when I—

MARY PANZER: —distinctive.

ALLAN SEKULA: —did *The Body and the Archive*.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Because I did get—that's when I got—well, actually, by the time I got a Guggenheim fellowship that got me a year off, I pretty much completed the work.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: But then I went back with the idea—to Washington with the idea of doing a kind of sequel to *The Body and the Archive*, which would be about physiognomy and modernism.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, and some of that sketched out at the very end of the first essay, but I never really completed that. I mean, I did a lot of the research. God knows what'll happen to it. I mean, I've done it—

MARY PANZER: Yes, so—

ALLAN SEKULA: It's part of my teaching and you know—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —just stuff about—well, it was more about Walker Evans. I did write an essay on Evans—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and you know—well, a lot of the critical writing I've done more recently is about individual artists, but there are pieces that are scattered.

MARY PANZER: So who else besides Evans?

ALLAN SEKULA: Oh, I've written—let's see, I've written essays on Evans. I was in a book on Walker Evans and Dan Graham—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —that Whitney ended up co-publishing with [inaudible] Dewitt. And that's just a—that's sort of a sketch of what I really wanted to do. I've written on—I'm not going to get these in the order of—

MARY PANZER: No, no, no, no. I'm just—

ALLAN SEKULA: I've written on Susan Meiselas, on James Benning—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: His film *RR, J.*—*RR by JB*, or the railroad film. I've written on Carole Conde and Karl Beveridge—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —Indian sort of conceptual stage photospheres who worked with trade unions who were involved in art and language and the Fox. I've written on Anthony Hernandez.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Written on Michael Asher, one particular piece of his. Usually, they're fairly small pieces.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I'm probably forgetting—oh, Annetta Kapon, sculpture in Los Angeles. It's kind of a feminist quasi minimalist of sort, but has a very interesting philosophical literary background.

MARY PANZER: What I'm—I guess where I'm—you know, as a historian, speaking as a historian, the notion of re-inventing documentary, or examining documentary, not simply as a historical moment that's passed but as a practice that goes on, how had—I'd be interested in knowing how your work—how you've been able to talk to your students about the practice of documentary and under this, you know, in the present day.

ALLAN SEKULA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY PANZER: And I don't know, how you go about working with them, and what kind of projects emerge, I guess.

ALLAN SEKULA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY PANZER: Because it's a set of ideas that I have a hard time bringing into focus, and I'd be very interested to know how you approach this problem, of what is documentary?

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Well, I don't—there's no formula, you know.

MARY PANZER: No.

ALLAN SEKULA: It's hard to—I mean, I often find when you're working with students who are photographing, you sometimes—you have to support them in very basic ways.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: Like, if they're terrified of human interaction, you might want to encourage them to take the chance to actually photograph people, you know.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: If their inhibitions are often—or if they feel that they only have their own lives and they live the lives of their parents—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: If they're young, to reflect upon and—

MARY PANZER: What do you—

ALLAN SEKULA: —you at least want them to try to begin to be able to establish a little bit of distance from all of that, because it's all so clawingly intimate.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: But I guess there's—especially teaching at an arts school, I think there's a reason to go back to the idea of the you know, the idea of the system of the arts—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —that there's a status hierarchy in the arts. And it's often exerting real pressures that are not acknowledged on the choices people make about what they think they can do, what's sanctioned and what is not sanctioned—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and what's likely to produce a reward for them.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: So I've tried in a kind of just pragmatic way to make use of that distinction, that notion that Paul Oskar Kristeller comes up with, you know, the Renaissance system of the arts, which of course, he regards as shifting, with you know—and of course, we know from the history of painting that it moves from being a artisanal practice to liberal art—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and that that's also very much the agenda of Alberti.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: His *Treatise on Painting* and so on. I mean, Michael Baxandall's also written about this, I mean, the shift from the value in pigment to the value in gauging that Baxandall talks about. All these things are—so this informs how I teach the history of photography, too. But basically, I take the position that photography is the —if there's a kind of Hegelian master slave dialectic in the arts—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —add yet another order of complication.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: Photography's in the position of the slave, that understands the relationship better than the master does, whereas art, as such, like the—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —fine arts as such—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —assume the kind of freedom to move, regardless of medium, to—you know, and all that leads to things like installations now—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —or the artist as painter, filmmaker, you know, sometimes with good results.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, Julian Schnabel, you know—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —is a better filmmaker than painter, so it's good he made that move.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: Sometimes with bad results. I mean, Matthew Barney is not a good filmmaker—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —how he should stick to sculpture.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: But now he's making long lugubrious infomercials for his sculptures which are called films. But you know, this idea that you're basically free once you arrive at a certain level of prominence to just pick and choose your medium—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —and whereas the photographer sort of nailed, you know, locked into the specificity of the medium. But that I think has given photography a kind of you know—the un-freedom of photography makes the concept of freedom the very thing for which one must struggle.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I think that's - may be a very crude reading of the master slave dialectic—and the phenomenology of mind. But I take that very seriously.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I actually will show—I mean, recently I've come to the point in teaching where I'll show a film like Pontecorvo's *Queimada*, you know, *Burn*—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —a film about a kind of Haitian revolution—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —you know, where you have a kind of [inaudible] sort of figure—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and you have a British agent played by Marlon Brando—

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —who's there to start the revolution when it's to the advantage of the British, and then to crush it when it becomes antagonistic to British imperial power.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And it's—I mean, Pontecorvo, who you know, knew the context of Paris reception of Hegel in the '30s, was aware of that moment of—he believed in the various French—he believed in—I'm sorry, I'm blocking the other one.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: There's John Abele's book on Hegel, and there's the other one, who's so important for our *End of History*, Fran Fukuyama.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: Kojeve.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: Kojeve, yes. I mean, hardly called a new—it's a kind of filmmaking, in some ways in very much the language of a kind of classical narrative cinema, a fiction cinema. It's kind of allegory of the master slave dialect. It's a beautiful, beautiful film. And I found for the first time I could somehow get to understand Hegel in relation to a particular film, you know, and also draw lessons about the hierarchy of the arts, you know. And yes, so I think photography, by virtue of its, you know, if you think of all those early examples, like Fontellard cartoon of you know, the *Digar Typist on the Roof*.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, talent through sleep—

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —comes through sleep—this idea of the unconscious—the machine doing the work—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —and the photographer being a mere snoozing appendage, you know.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: All of this seeming disempowerment that's part of the very definition of photography is also potential—it can be stood on its head dialectically, right.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And so then to understand that, and then to understand that within the institution of photography, documentary is the slave within the slave—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —that the slave status—so that the real photography—you know, is it art or is it documentary. This silly question—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —which gets repeated endlessly.

MARY PANZER: Endlessly.

ALLAN SEKULA: And much more vociferously, in still photography circles than in film, right.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: Because film doesn't have the claim to be art as—though, of course, we know there's the art cinema.—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: Right, that exerts an incredibly strong pull. But in the broader film culture, of course, artistic autonomy is not a given, or a priori condition.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Or an a priori goal—

MARY PANZER: Yes, that—

ALLAN SEKULA: —of the activity.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, yes, there's a telos that—the telos may be commercial success—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —you know, and a filmmaker who has good box office but hasn't received you know, the requisite number of academy award nominations—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —may well feel gratified by being someone able to appeal to mass taste. I mean, presumably—

MARY PANZER: Well, there's—at least there's that option.

ALLAN SEKULA: Right, right.

MARY PANZER: I mean—

ALLAN SEKULA: Which was not—which no artist would claim. I mean, because an artist who would claim that would have to be someone like, you know, the guy who paints those bucolic scenes—

MARY PANZER: Oh, that guy. Yes, I know who you mean, but I don't remember his name.

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, little houses and fantasies and—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: It was kind of a factory operation.

MARY PANZER: Right, but that's—but I'm thinking—but then what about say, what about Annie Leibovitz?

ALLAN SEKULA: I don't know. I'm just not interested. I mean, I'll look at the pictures—I mean, to the extent that I'm interested in all sorts of pictures, I'll look at them, but I don't know—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —but to aspire to want to be that? To be her and to make the—to feel that what you are is a living inch of photogenic transformation? You know?

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: I mean, I don't know, what is—I mean, I don't know how to do that.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: I mean, I—Harper Petoskey once wrote a couple of comments about my photographs, saying that what was evident in them is kind of the fact that objects resist being photographed.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And if you're—you have a whole toolkit that is about transforming things photogenically—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —so that they're luminous and all you've done is confirm the power of photography. You haven't said anything about the object.

MARY PANZER: Right. Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, I don't—

MARY PANZER: Whereas your interest is in the object.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, yes, I mean, I think photography should sort of be mediumistic, you know, and provide access to the object. But it's not in the end about itself.

MARY PANZER: But then it also—but in order to provide that access it doesn't need to become invisible, for example.

ALLAN SEKULA: No, no, no. I'm not arguing for sort of a false neutrality here, but what I'm arguing about is kind of modesty, I suppose, kind of—

MARY PANZER: Well, instrumentality? I mean, is it an instrument on—to aid to some other kind of insight?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, if it's—

MARY PANZER: Need or—I mean, the thing about access—

ALLAN SEKULA: But it's some mix of cognitive and affective—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —play. I mean, I just—where the thought and the feeling aren't easily separable. But I don't—what I'm—I don't think I'm saying anything that different from the position that Walker Evans took when he wrote *The Reappearance of Photography*, you know, when he said, let's—he's not interested in [inaudible], you know.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Are the - he wants—you know, at one point he says, "There's a corpse in a pool of blood," in italics, "because you like nice things." You know, he's—in other words, he's understanding that beatification is toxic in a commodified culture, I mean, and he does that without being Walter Benjamin.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: He's not bringing a whole Marxist apparatus to it—

MARY PANZER: No.

ALLAN SEKULA: He's bringing kind of early '30s, depression, Bohemian insights, you know, but—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: But his loathing of Steichen, I think, is not dissimilar to what I'm talking about here.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: Basically photographic treatment can transform anything—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —into something delectable and—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —consumable. And so the objects have an existence, whether it's you know, the speaker in this room.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, how do we not make an advertising photograph, I suppose?

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: And then how do we not—how do we—it's not just that. How do we not make an advertising photograph, but it's also how do we not let the rhetoric of advertising photography—and maybe rhetoric's not the adequate term here, but that the whole effect of sequestering of emotion—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and feeling toward things confiscate photographs that were made before they had entered the realm of fashionability, which is an issue when you teach Robert Frank. Because I have to say to my students, "You have to imagine—when you look at this picture of a rodeo cowboy in New York, you have to imagine a world before Guess Jeans ads."

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: You know?

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: Because these photographs have been wrung out by a process of appropriation.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: And to recover the directness with which those images were made—not the neutrality with which they were made, but the directness with which they were made is a huge challenge. And to get young people to see that, when all they've seen is this endless reiterations and you know, simulacra—

MARY PANZER: Appropriation, yes, right.

ALLAN SEKULA: The authentic, in the name of, style, in the name of hipness and coolness, or—

MARY PANZER: Yes. We're just simply the variety of the American scene.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: I mean to imagine how shocking it was to see any—

ALLAN SEKULA: Right.

MARY PANZER: —number of those pictures, just to be able to recover that ability to be surprised.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: —is—

ALLAN SEKULA: I've been looking the last week or so at news photos of the prisoner exchange at the end of the Korean War.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: And there are a lot of them, and they're quite extraordinary, because the—

MARY PANZER: Where have you been looking at them?

ALLAN SEKULA: People sell them on eBay.

MARY PANZER: Oh, okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: The *Chicago Tribune* stuff and—

MARY PANZER: Oh, that's right. There's a big *Chicago Tribune* archive that's gotten dumped onto eBay.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, yes. And what's extraordinary about those images is that—one of the things. There are many things that are extraordinary, you know, but you see these American prisoners and Greeks and Turks being repatriated. And they're dressed in Chinese clothing, you know, and they've—or North Korean clothing—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —you know, the sort of padded coats. And then you see the Chinese prisoners in their quilted coats, and sometimes you see the American GIs have put on a Korean vest because it's going to make them a little warmer in the bitter winter and this kind of thing. And you just kind of see this stuff that is not assemblable into anything that can be called fashion. It's too abject, too—it's not the imagery of Auschwitz or Dachau. It's still you know, people that are in the land of the living, you know—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —or the not—it's not bare life in [Georgio] Agamben's terms, but it's something close to it, you know. And those pictures—it would be very hard to work them through a fashion grinder, you know, but probably someone could do it.

MARY PANZER: Yes, oh, yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: You know if Vanessa Beecroft wasn't into nakedness, I can imagine she could do something with this.

MARY PANZER: [Laughs.]

ALLAN SEKULA: But in any event, so I keep thinking of photos that don't—you know, that have no photogenia to them.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: It's not that I want—I think photogenia is hard to avoid.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: You know, I mean, I—and sometimes it can be turned in interesting ways, and played with. But the other thing is I don't—I've never felt that one had to impart a signature style to every photograph one made —

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —you know, that sometimes, just as one might want to adopt different, radically different voices as a writer, I don't see why one wouldn't want to adopt varying photographic approaches, you know. And just not be—so as not to be serializing one's own production—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —you know, which I think is also a way of conceding to the market.

MARY PANZER: What, wait—oh, by continuing to—

ALLAN SEKULA: —produce the same thing.

MARY PANZER: Yes, imitate yourself. But then does that make you like Richter, Richter the abstract photographer, Richter the—I mean, Richter the abstract painter, Richter the—

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, no, because I do see the—for Richter, photographs are a means to an end.

MARY PANZER: Right, right, but I mean, but as a painter, he's all these different kinds of paint—you know, he has no one style of painting.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. Well, I don't—he's not—there are other artists like that.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: I mean, Robert Morris—

MARY PANZER: I'm—just as an example.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, yes, no, for pictorial artist, I mean Morris isn't a pictorial artist. He's more a sculptor.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: But you know, you can't find a consistent—Klee, I think Klee is an interesting split figure in the history of art, you know. The one side, the tendency toward abstraction, the other side, the fascination with scenography and—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —you know, pure music leading to abstraction and opera leading to figuration scenography.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: And that's a big split. I mean, there was a really terrific show at the Cité de la Musique at la Villette in Paris—

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: —of Klee and music. It was quite good.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: Where that really, I can see strongly. So I don't—but Richter, yes, I mean, clearly he's an example of someone with a variation on a much—it's not something bifurcated.

MARY PANZER: No.

ALLAN SEKULA: It's something multiple.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: And I guess the other thing is to shift—well, the question of style is vexed to begin with.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: I'm not sure it's primary, but the mode of operation of a work—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —is not necessarily the mode of operation of its component parts, you know. Some of the logic of —so when someone writes an article, I mean, I've seen younger critics, let's say, okay, let's do you know, Gursky and Sekula—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —and then they'll compare one of my photos with one of—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —one of Gursky's photos. And my mode of operation is not the level of single images—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —so I mean, wouldn't it be better to say, "Well, here's a guy who does this thing that involves ensembles, grouping of pictures—

MARY PANZER: And text.

ALLAN SEKULA: —some sort of writing—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —and then here's someone who seems to rely on the tableau."

MARY PANZER: Sort of like a history painting.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. But you know, there's a logical typing problem there.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: Is it - and then obviously to use the terms that are appropriate to Gursky, to—that I feel shoe boxed in in a very strange way there. So the operative logic is the logic of how the elements come together.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right, and so you choose to work in a form in which there is no one single object. I mean, it's never been.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: There is no one—

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: I mean, if somebody was going to collect your work, they would need to collect a group of images.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, that would be—

MARY PANZER: And—

ALLAN SEKULA: The more I make film—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: That's probably optimal.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, though, the more I've done film, the more I find myself able to think about the stillness and isolation of the still image, you know. And I think for a long time I was always thinking that photography was a way of pursuing film by much more modest and you know—

MARY PANZER: Well, autonomist—

ALLAN SEKULA: —cheaper means, a sort of bargain film—

MARY PANZER: —too, and then you could do it by yourself.

ALLAN SEKULA: —bargain film, yes. Yes, if you didn't have that background, that training, you could make things that were like little modest movies. I mean, there are filmmakers who have seen that. I mean, Santiago Alvarez, the great Cuban filmmaker, animated filmmaker, said, "Give me two photographs, I'll give you a movie."

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: He didn't say, 'Give me two photographs and I'll give you a John Heartfield—

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: —you know, a photo montage. He really had this idea of an animated dialogical montage relation. I mean, it's very Einsteinian sort of insight, you know.

MARY PANZER: Right. So once you started making movies, you were happier about making still images? Is that what you're saying?

ALLAN SEKULA: In a way, because I no longer felt like making still photos was a way of approaching cinema.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: I was—I could see the difference much more clearly.

MARY PANZER: So now you're making movies. I mean, have you foregone the still image or—

ALLAN SEKULA: No, not at all. I'm just saying sometimes I'm more willing to make a still image that can stand on its own, but not consistently. But—

MARY PANZER: And then what about black and white to color? Was that a—that was just—that just happened along the way as—

ALLAN SEKULA: Well—

MARY PANZER: —color became more accessible and cheaper?

ALLAN SEKULA: But I've done works with—working between black and white and color—

MARY PANZER: And color, yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —going quite a ways back. But the first time I really systematically set them against each other was in *Canadian Notes*, which was shot—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —between '85 and '86. And I had the idea that—

MARY PANZER: And that used to be—

ALLAN SEKULA: I set myself a rule that all the interior photos would be—

MARY PANZER: —black and white.

ALLAN SEKULA: —black and white, and the exteriors would be in color. However—and that had to do with film temperature and—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —color control and stuff like that. But then I broke the rule—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —in a couple of places, on purpose.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And but I mean, if you go back to *Meditations on a Triptych*, those original images are in color. They're family photos, but then—

MARY PANZER: Oh

ALLAN SEKULA: —a lot of the text is about the color, and the—

MARY PANZER: I guess I've only seen the publication in black and white.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: Would that be right?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, it's in color and—

MARY PANZER: But it has been published—

ALLAN SEKULA: —and then *Photography Against the Grain*, in—

MARY PANZER: It's in—

ALLAN SEKULA: —Generale book—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: —in—I think it's in the *Dismal Science* book—

MARY PANZER: But in—

ALLAN SEKULA: —in color.

MARY PANZER: But in *Against the Grain* it's in black and white?

ALLAN SEKULA: No, it's in color.

MARY PANZER: It is?

ALLAN SEKULA: It is in color. Yes, there's this bright red dress.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: There's something about the red dress.

MARY PANZER: See, there you can see how much I've—

ALLAN SEKULA: You just remember it in black and white.

MARY PANZER: Yes, I do.

ALLAN SEKULA: It was in *After Image* in black and white, in the wrong sequence, got the sequence wrong. That's ages ago.

MARY PANZER: [Laughs] That's a long time ago.

ALLAN SEKULA: Those things happened, yes.

MARY PANZER: That's a long time ago.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes.

MARY PANZER: Well, I'm really glad to have gotten to this, to talking about practice, you know.

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, it's funny, because it started with teaching, so it was—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: But it also relates to the context in CalArts, because one of the things that's been fun there is that we—okay, you have a photo—you have an arts school and then you have the art program and the art school. And the Dean is affiliated with the art program. Catherine Lord, when she was dean, was affiliated with photography.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And she felt that the art program was very dominant. I mean, it had the more famous artists. It had Baldessari and Huebler and Asher and so on. And she felt that—so the three programs, you have graphic design—what was called photography then, were now called photography and media.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: A change that I was ambivalent about, but you know, it's true.

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: We do more than photography. And then art. And it was very common for art faculty people to confuse the terms. And they'd say the art program when they meant the art school or they'd say the art school when they meant the art program.

MARY PANZER: All right, I don't understand the difference. Help me. The art school is the—are the people who teach painting?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, it's everything. I mean, painting conceptual art.

MARY PANZER: Okay.

ALLAN SEKULA: And then even, I mean, Connie Hatch who comes out of photography is on that faculty.

MARY PANZER: The art—

ALLAN SEKULA: The art school

MARY PANZER: The art school, so the—

ALLAN SEKULA: No, the art program within the art school.

MARY PANZER: I see, so the art school is—

ALLAN SEKULA: So you have the Institute—

MARY PANZER: Yes.

ALLAN SEKULA: —you have schools—

MARY PANZER: And then—

ALLAN SEKULA: —five schools, six schools, including critical studies, and then program in the schools.

MARY PANZER: In the schools.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes. So—

MARY PANZER: So the photo program is in the art school?

ALLAN SEKULA: Right, along with graphic design.

MARY PANZER: And then where is Baldessari?

ALLAN SEKULA: Well, he was in art. He's no longer at CalArts. He teaches—

MARY PANZER: I know. But when he was there—

ALLAN SEKULA: He was in art.

MARY PANZER: And you—and so was photography.

ALLAN SEKULA: No. He was in the art program. We were all in the art school, but he was in the art program.

MARY PANZER: I still don't see what's bigger and what's littler.

ALLAN SEKULA: What's bigger is the art school.

MARY PANZER: All right, so.—

ALLAN SEKULA: There's three programs, and now there's four—

MARY PANZER: I see.

ALLAN SEKULA: —because they have something called art and technology.

MARY PANZER: I see. So your students were not in the same program as Baldessari students?

ALLAN SEKULA: No, but I—but immediately when I came there, I had students meeting—the boundaries are very loose.

MARY PANZER: Right.

ALLAN SEKULA: And you don't have to declare, you know, that you're a painter or photographer. I mean, people can—

MARY PANZER: So like a program is like a major, or program is like a department?

ALLAN SEKULA: Roughly. Yes. You get your degree in your program.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And students rarely get a double degree between two programs in the same school, but they might do a double degree like film and photo or something like that.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And we had a number of those. So you're—but people are pretty mobile within their school.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: And then they can take stuff in other schools, depending on the degree of difficulty.

MARY PANZER: And the other schools are—

ALLAN SEKULA: Film, film video, music, theater, and dance.

MARY PANZER: Oh.

ALLAN SEKULA: And critical studies, which is also the basic kind of humanities and core curriculum, you know.

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALLAN SEKULA: Everything from—

MARY PANZER: Critical studies is more humanities stuff.

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, I mean—

MARY PANZER: Do your students have to take any classes in critical studies?

ALLAN SEKULA: The undergrads, yes.

MARY PANZER: They do?

ALLAN SEKULA: Yes, because we're accredited and we have to offer a broad undergraduate education, have to take some science. It's hard, because it's—and also because of all the arts. We have only one art historian on the faculty of CalArts, or historically we've only had one art historian. So unlike say the Chicago Art Institute or San Francisco, we don't have as many—but quite a number of the faculty are also writers. I mean, Tom Lawson

—

MARY PANZER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And you?

ALLAN SEKULA: And me, and some other people there, Ned—there's a new—I'm sorry, I'm blocking this out—they have a new critic.

MARY PANZER: Oh, okay.

[... -SS]

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]