IMPORTANT

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it.

NATIONAL LIFE STORY COLLECTION

ARTISTS' LIVES

Stuart Brisley

interviewed by Melanie Roberts

F5273 Side A

[This is an interview with Stuart Brisley at his home on 12th of September 1996. The interviewer is Melanie Roberts.]

Now Stuart, can you tell me when and where you were born?

I was born in Grayswood near Haslemere in Surrey on the 19th of October 1933.

And were you born at home?

Yes, I was born at home.

And do you think your father was present, or...?

I don't think my father was present, no. I mean I don't know that he wasn't present but I would have thought he wouldn't have been.

Right. What kind of parents did you have, were they quite elderly parents or young parents?

No, well, my father was 33 when I was born and my mother was 20.

And, are they still alive?

My father has been dead since 1965 and my mother is still alive.

Yes. So what memories do you have of...?

Well we lived in a small village, about 500 people, in a very sort of rural atmosphere, and quite agricultural in a way, so my earliest memories are sort of in a way I suppose quite idyllic, of, you know, country life, and a sort of freedom that one would have that went with it which I suppose has been with me ever since, in a way of feeling about landscape and how one is, could be, in it, even though I obviously no longer have the same innocent feelings about it.

Yes. And do you spend much time in the country as an adult, or have you been...?

I find that I have a desire to go into the country, but I'm not sure where it is any more, and when I go into what I think is the country I don't, I find myself quite alienated in it and want to get out of it again. So it's...there isn't a sort of consummation there at all.

Yes. I mean can you remember what your sort of early family home was like, can you describe it?

It was quite small, there was a small detached house with a garden, and at the back of the garden was a wood, and my father was a kind of gestural gardener, he would do bits and pieces, but it never really...you know, it wasn't fully formed as a garden. We kept animals, we had chickens and rabbits, and at a later stage when I was about sort of, I suppose about 10 I kept bantams and rabbits myself, so I was pretty much involved in animals, with animals. We didn't ever have a dog, much to my great regret, and we didn't have cats. But I suppose we had animals that were useful, you know, that laid eggs or they could be eaten.

So were the rabbits eaten?

Yes, the rabbits were eaten, yes. [LAUGHS]

Oh right.

Yes.

How times have changed! Did you have brothers and sisters?

I have one brother who is seven years younger than me. But we, at the time that I was growing up was during the war and we had both public and then private evacuees, we had, when I was about 6 we had two evacuees came from London, and I remember them fairly well.

And can you describe...

I also remember the... Pardon?

Can you describe the sort of impact they had on the family?

I don't think I can do that; I can just sort of... One of the things that seemed to be significant was the fact that they were Catholic and we were Protestant I seem to remember. Their mother used to come and visit them quite often, and at a...I'm not sure how long they stayed, they came in, I think in 1939 and they left in 1940, because there was that period when it was the sort of phoney war.

Oh yes.

And so they were called...I think they came from Battersea or somewhere, they were called back to Battersea, and then they were killed.

Gosh, oh that's very tragic.

Yes. And then we had private evacuees, relatives who came from Gravesend in Kent and stayed with us for three or four years, and another boy and a girl who were, I'm not exactly sure how they were related to me but they were related apparently and they were called cousins but I don't think they were strictly so. I'm not sure what their relationship exactly was. And they stayed for a long time, probably from about 1941 I would have thought, from 1940 until '44, '45. And the boy went back early, he was a rather sensitive person and I suppose our life was fairly robust. But the girl, she stayed until 1946 I think, she stayed, she really enjoyed it and liked living there. And so when it was, you know, when the war was kind of, well I guess when there was less danger, he went back, the boy, and she stayed.

Yes.

So there was always a, we had quite a lot of people in this house, and the house was very open with other children, and so it was a kind of children's house, a very public sort of children's house, because there were lots of evacuees in the village and there were lots of, you know, people, children who lived there anyway. And so it was a very lively kind of...

Sounds fun.

It was, it was good fun. It was very good, yes.

I mean how did you manage with sort of sleeping, did the children have to share bedrooms and so on?

I think, yes we did, we...but there was... I'm just trying to think how it worked. At some point, obviously boys were separated from girls at some point, yes, so we did, we all shared a room [INAUDIBLE], yes.

So do you remember your room?

I do remember my room, yes, and I remember my room because it had things in that I was very concerned about, like I was very concerned with birds' eggs I remember, and I had a chest of drawers where I kept my clothes in but the top two drawers were for eggs. And that was very important to me.

So how did you store them and think about them?

Eggs?

Mm.

Well, I was really interested, I still am I suppose, I was really interested in birds for some reason and I liked to draw them, and, I suppose, you know, being in the country there were all these birds flying about and then they nested and so, you know, like... At that point there wasn't the sort of restriction on egg collecting that there is now. It was a kind of, it was a thing that country kids did.

Yes I can imagine, yes.

And so that's what I did, and I got to the point where, I remember, I got...in fact my criminal life is a short one but it was quite intense. I got to about 80-something eggs, you know, different species, and they weren't all from that region, I mean I swapped eggs at school and things, and I had swans' eggs, an ostrich egg, and you know, I had all these. It was pretty extraordinary really and I was really proud of it. The thing was that in the local museum, Haslemere Museum, which is quite well-known, it's a very interesting sort of old-fashioned museum, there was a wonderful egg collection so I decided that I would take a few of theirs to add to mine, and that's when I got caught.

Oh dear.

And that finished the birds' egg collection, you know, that was it.

I mean was it a sort of strict parental ban, or...?

Yes, it was taken away from me.

Gosh, yes.

And I, you know, like I didn't...and I had to go and sort of do a sort of penance in the museum, which I think... Well it was very enlightened really, it was my education.

I mean what sort of penance?

What?

What sort of penance? Did you have to work Saturdays or something?

Well I had to work...yes... No, I was...sort of helped to do things, you know, in the museum, and you know, people were very friendly and talked to me, and I did that for about six months and that was it.

How extraordinary.

But it was certainly a lesson, it was one hell of a lesson, it was really...it really frightened me, and, I suppose it was at the point when I started going to grammar school, which was in Midhurst in Sussex, and for, not for the whole of my time at

Midhurst but for quite a long time I was frightened that they would find out what had happened, you know, and that I would be exposed as it were. And they used to have visits to the museum from the school, and I never ever went on them, so, I just was too, just was too scared to, you know, to go.

Yes, so it made quite an impact.

It did. [LAUGHS]

Now going back to your sort of earlier days, can you describe your parents, as you remember them as a young child?

Well they were very loving parents I think. My father was quite an emotional person, and my mother was in a way more distanced in a way. But they were very, very supportive and very caring. I don't know whether I can say much more about them really.

I mean were they quite...you know, was the general aura of the house one of rational discipline, or was it quite flexible or...?

There was discipline but there was a great tolerance, there was a great openness, and then at the back of that there was discipline. So they were very, we were very free as kids, you know, we were very free to do things. But there was also a strong, I guess a strong moral root to it that was, you know, that would come to the fore every now and again when things happened. [LAUGHS]

And, you say your father was emotional, I mean did he...was he a sort of cuddly father, or did he express himself quite openly?

Yes he was, he was a sort of cuddly... And he would take me places and, you know, he would do things with me, and you know, he was... And with other children, you know, with the others as well, I mean he was very sort of catholic in his caring of the people, of the kids who were there, you know. So, yes it was very positive I think. I look back on it in that positive way. And he was a very social person, he was very active in the village, and he was also very active in the union. He was a station master and he was very much involved with the unions, and so there was a strong socialist root to his life, and I guess his relations with people were, you know, a part of that in a way, and his thinking about, I suppose his children.

Was an extension of that.

Yes, and education was regarded as an important attribute, you know, thing. So we were very much encouraged educationally.

And were your parents actively involved in the Church?

No, no, my father was an atheist.

Oh right.

Yes. But I went to church. One of the bones of contention in my life was that I was required to go to church four times a week - no, three times, sometimes four times a week, and they didn't.

I see.

And they only, my father went to church on Easter Sunday because that was the one sermon that the vicar preached with reference to socialism, because he was a socialist as well so my father used to support him by going. But I went, I was in the choir and I also went to Sunday school, and I was required to do that until I was 16; Sunday school dropped off after, when I was about 8, but I was required to attend the choir until I was 16, which was a pretty poor thing because when I was 16 I stopped and that was it, I never went back to church.

Mm, yes. I mean...

I mean it was...

Your mother didn't go either?

Yes, she went very occasionally, but again she wasn't... She was...I mean she was quite different, she was rather, I think one would say she was a Conservative person, you know, so she would go sometimes with her friends to church in the evening, maybe once in a while, but...so there was a difference between their attitudes towards the Church. But the Church plays an important part in the life, you know, in the social life, I think, in the village.

Yes. So your father didn't mind going to social events connected with the Church, on a social level?

No, he...yes, yes, yes.

And did your...your mother presumably was fully occupied with hoards of evacuee children.

Yes she was, she was fully active doing that, yes.

But did she have a profession, you know, before she got married?

Well she was a nurse and she, after, when we were, when I was grown up and my brother was, I suppose in his teens, she returned to the hospital, and she worked for the National Health Service for a long time until the middle Seventies and then she moved from Haslemere to near Norwich where my brother lives who is also a doctor, and then she continued to work in private nursing until, you know, she got too old to do it, which was I suppose about, when she was about...she's about, how old was she? She's 83, it would have been about, I suppose about ten or, eight years ago that she retired from doing that.

Gosh, very energetic.

Yes she was pretty energetic, she was a very sort of full of energy person, yes.

Do you remember your grandparents, on either side?

Yes, my father's mother was still alive and she used to come and visit and stay with us sometimes; sometimes she stayed the winter. I remember her very well, I was very fond of her, and she was... She had been a kind of nanny to an aristocratic family, so she had a sort of sense of propriety that sometimes was in collision with our life. [LAUGHS]

But you respected it by the sound of it.

Yes. And my mother was an orphan, but her natural mother's sister brought her up, so I knew them as, her aunt and her husband as my grandparents, and they were tenant farmers in Lowestoft, just by Lowestoft in Suffolk.

Did you spend time there?

Yes, yes. I spent time perhaps... There was a gap because of the war, so I was there when I was very small on holidays and things, and then after the war for a few years until I got too old to be taken on holidays, and then my brother would go, it was a sort of annual event to go there. But it didn't happen in the war time.

I mean do you remember anything of the farming?

Not so much about the farming; I remember Lowestoft very well, and I remember much more to do with fishing, because part of my family, my mother's family were also fisher people, so, they were trawler skippers and, you know, people like that and their families that we used to visit. And so it was more the fishing part of it that I was attracted to than the farming, because it was more dramatic I suppose, you know, it was more exciting, more dangerous and, you know...

Yes. Did you get to sort of climb onto boats and things?

Yes, exactly. And Lowestoft was a very active trawling port, you know; it isn't now as far as I know but it was very... So almost my first memories are of great piles of fish on the quayside before the Second World War, I must have been about 3 or 4.

And do you remember the smell?

Yes all of that. And also that sort of fear of sort of vertigo I guess you know, kind of like falling into the...off the side of the...and I was absolutely petrified of falling in the sea, because of the quay, you know.

Yes.

Oh, you know, that.

A long drop for a 3-year-old.

Yes, absolutely.

So did you ever go out on one of the boats, or was that...?

Yes, I did used to go, but not far, I mean we only went out...and I remember getting seasick once, and you know, so... And I used to do a lot of swimming in Lowestoft and well, so, I had learnt to swim at school but I did an awful lot of swimming in the sea there, which was really also very good and exciting. So, it was very much to do with the sea and the boats and swimming and so forth. And at the back of where my grandparents lived, they lived outside of Lowestoft at Oulton Broad, so there was a vast... So it was a bit watery really the whole thing.

Mm. Sounds wonderful.

Yes it was, it was really good, mm.

Did you have to wear a life jacket?

No. No no. You know, all of that, together with, you know, living in the country, you know, I suppose that was sort of an idyllic background in a way, or one looks back on it I suppose with a certain amount of thinking how well, you know, like, it's such a sort of...it was almost a privilege to have such a... I mean even though there was war and all the rest of it, to have such an exciting and sort of...and at the same time safe, sort of environment.

Mm, it sounds as if you were very lucky.

Mm. Although, I mean there were times when we were bombed and things, you know, because it isn't that far from London, it was 43 miles, and, I think the bombers used to...if they didn't sort of complete their, drop everything where they wanted to, or if they couldn't get where they were going, they'd just drop them where they...and we were bombed on several occasions. And I remember somebody called Mr Mullard who lived not far from us, and one night a lot of incendiary bombs dropped, and they were very small, you know, little...and one went through the roof of this house and landed on his bed. And he was in...he threw the bed out of the window and the bed and the mattress were sort of taken across the sort of road, his house was against, next to a road, and I remember we all went next day to look at somebody called Murky Mullard's bed, which was all burnt from this incendiary bomb.

Very interesting insight.

Yes. [LAUGHS]

So did any actually land in your house?

No, nothing landed there, but I did see...we had wire netting and all of that, and sort of, you know, sort of things on the windows, and I remember that we...I had a, when the air raid warnings went my position was under the piano, and on this particular occasion it was an afternoon and a very grey afternoon, and I decided that I didn't want to be under the piano so I looked out of the window and there in the sky was this Messerschmitt in two pieces and a parachute and the whole thing just sort of, it was just amazing. And, if I had sort of, you know, sort of been a dutiful person I wouldn't have seen that, it was extraordinary.

Yes. Do you know what happened to the pilot of the...?

The pilot was OK, he was taken to hospital. And then there were sort of appeals for the return of parts of a machine gun and ammunition that people had sort of stolen.

Indeed. So did you manage to capture any war goodies, or was that...?

Yes, well I had lots of shrapnel, and also had a hand grenade and various other, bullets and various other things. Because, in 1944 when the invasion, the Normandy invasion was about to take place, or some, you know, two or three weeks before, there was a tremendous amount of movement of troops going to that part of the country, going through to Kent I guess, and we had near us for days, you know, these things were passing through, tanks and God knows what, and then, because they would stay the night, and so I used to have, along with all the other kids, kind of two or three dinners, you know, because we would get food from the Army and also food from home. So we had... And bullets and various other...

Trophies.

Yes. So we got all kinds of things like that, which we would then swap, and so, it was pretty exciting really. And then, there was another occasion at that time when the sky seemed, I remember this so well, the sky seemed to be filled with planes, with gliders,

just absolutely filled, it was fantastic. I guess they were all going, you know, to Normandy or somewhere, well it would have been to Normandy, yes. So those memories are quite strong, you know. And so, you know, the nice idyllic childhood was also kind of interspersed with this other sort of thing.

In terms of your domestic environment, I mean did you have lots of books at home, or...?

Yes we did have books, and there was also, also there was a travelling library and we all went onto the library every week, so yes, there was a lot of, there were books and things, yes.

What did you read?

I can't remember to tell you the truth. I mean I can remember reading...when I was 8 I got terribly involved with a squirrel story, I remember, and had dreams about squirrels and desperately wanted to have a squirrel, and used to go out into the woods and think to myself, how can I get a squirrel, and there they all were up there, and the nests were always too high up. And I did get one in the end, because there were lot in the trees. There were a lot of foresters around in that area and it just so happened they chopped some trees down and there was a squirrel's nest in it and I got a baby squirrel. But it was some years after, you know, it wasn't at that point that I... So, I can't... Rupert Bear was very...do you know Rupert Bear?

Oh yes.

Yes, everybody knows Rupert Bear. Rupert Bear was important at a point.

I mean you didn't read these sort of, I suppose war magazines and things, they were later weren't they?

Things like `Illustrated' and...

Yes.

We had them all the time, the `Illustrated Picture Post', they were every week, yes. And then...

Yes. I was thinking more of the sort of cartoony things. My father was always engrossed in sort of...

No, we didn't, no.

Stories of derring-do.

[LAUGHS] No. I guess the derring-do was for real, you know, because, like next door, the guy was in a Japanese war camp, and you know, things like that, you know, people were dying, and being a choir boy I was having to go to funerals all the time and getting half-a-crown for singing while, you know...

I mean did you ever hear any stories sort of directly of the war from people coming back, as a child?

No, not particularly. But, I mean it was very interesting, there's a woman writer, I've forgotten her name, she's about my age, and, I'd forgotten all about this, but I read something in one of the newspapers that she was quoted as saying that when she was a child she was required, this was just, what, '45, that sort of time, she was required to, her school was taken to see films of the concentration camps, and that happened to me, and I had forgotten, I mean I had wiped it out of my memory.

How extraordinary.

And, this was only about a year ago, I suddenly realised that I had sort of done that as well, that we had all gone off to...or they all come to the school, you know, I can't remember how it was. So, the war, I mean in 1944 of course news about concentration camps was actually public, it was sort of like filtering out, so one...and then when one heard about it on the news, and then one saw the...then there were pictures in the newspapers and then we saw film. So that was an immensely affecting thing, no doubt about it. Because it came at the time, you know, when one was so impressionable.

In terms of that sense of war, was the radio sort of, you know, largely on in the house during that time, do you remember?

Yes that's right, radio was really very important.

And did you listen to it as a child?

Yes I did, yes, listen to it. And the news was very important. I mean I made work related to that, it was something like, I can't remember but I made a piece based on the village of Lidice, I don't know if you know about the village of Lidice. It was when, I've forgotten his name, he was the Nazi in charge of Czechoslovakia, I've forgotten his name, and he was...two Czech soldiers or spies or whatever were trained in England to go and assassinate him, and they bungled the job and he died very badly, well I think weeks after. And because of...the Nazis then just went into a village called Lidice and wiped it out, everything. And that has become a, that became a real symbol, a very powerful symbol of, you know, inhumanity and so on. And I heard that on the radio in 1942 or '43, so one did hear things like that through the radio.

And that stayed in your mind until you were an adult?

Oh absolutely, yes, but then Lidice, I mean if we were talking twenty years ago we would both know exactly what that was, Lidice.

Yes.

But it's gone out of, you know, it's sort of faded somehow, you know, like lots of things. I mean quite rightly probably, yes, it's life. And, so the radio was really very important in that respect, and it was very influential. And also things like `Children's Hour', Uncle Mac and all that stuff.

Yes it all seems, `Children's Hour' seems so extraordinary, kind of, unbelievable now in retrospect. So innocent in a way.

Yes, yes, yes.

Did you have favourites?

Well, I don't know that I really liked Uncle Mac so much, but there were...I always...I wanted to listen to it because there were things that I...I can't remember what they were but there were things I wanted to listen to, and there were other things I was less interested in. But, yes, I mean it did hold my attention, `Children's Hour', yes.

Just in terms of all those children, and the domestic pattern of the day, was there quite a timetable, or was it.....

End of F5273 Side A

F5273 Side B

Yes, tell me about the pattern of your day.

Well I suppose as a child it was intimately connected with school, and we were going, how many of us were there? One, two, three, four, four of us; I can't remember where one...one went to Godalming, which is a small town a few miles to the north; I went to Midhurst, which is sort of twelve miles to the south; my brother was going to the local primary school which was just up the road; and I can't remember where the other person went. So there were different, you know, we were going off in different directions every day, and we weren't necessarily having breakfast all at the same time. But it would start about 7 o'clock, because I used to have to leave at half-past 7 to get to Midhurst by 9, six days a week, five and a half days a week that is, Saturday mornings. So all of that had to be organised I guess.

Yes. And how on earth did children get to school in those days, was that on the bus?

There were buses, yes, yes, there was a school bus from... I mean I caught the regular bus to Haslemere station and then there was a regular bus service to Midhurst but there was also a school bus to Midhurst, so I would catch the school bus, or the regular depending which one. And then the others would go, the one going to Godalming would go by train, and going to the local primary would just walk up the road, you know, which wasn't far away. But I just...it was very interesting catching the bus because I had another interesting sort of meeting with somebody on the bus who was a man called General, I think his name was Markiewicz, and he was the Quartermaster-General of the Free Polish Army I think, and he lived in, just on the outskirts of the village, and numbers of other Poles, we had a big Polish army around us. And, so he used to tell me about Poland and Warsaw, and years later when I went, I went to Berlin, I was sort of 40 I think, I went to Berlin for a year on a particular programme, the very first thing I did was to go to Warsaw, because I had, you know, it had sort of been inculcated into me this sort of fascination for Poland.

And what kind of stories did he tell you, can you remember?

Well not particularly, he would just say, you know, Poland, he would talk about, describe Warsaw and say what a beautiful city it was, and that really I should go there and it would be nice, you know, after the war, and you know, like I guess he...he was probably homesick, you know. He was terribly nice. He was also a friend of my

father, and he was a very sociable guy. And so that actually was quite influential perhaps, you know, perhaps more than going to school in a way, you know, it sort of...it set me up for going to Poland. And then it set me up for going to Poland often, between then and now, between what, 1974 and now.

Yes.

And so the pattern of the day would be that, you know, and then we would all come home I guess at different times, and then, there wouldn't...we would have had tea, or high tea, and then we would have had supper, you know, we wouldn't have much for supper but we would have had high tea, and we would have had to do our homework.

Yes. Is that before or after high tea?

That would be after high tea, we had to do our homework. And then we might be allowed out to play or whatever for a certain amount of time, and then we would have to go to bed. And, what was high tea, just out of interest? I mean high tea is...

Well I don't know if it was high tea. It was sandwiches, sometimes they were savoury, sometimes they weren't, and then a piece of cake, or as many pieces of cake as you could get, and tea, or lemonade or what have you. And also seasonal things, you know. Food was very seasonal, because, you know, of the war and so on. But my father, latterly in the war, was sort of organising troop movements and naval movements of, you know, on the railways, so we used to get an awful lot of sort of sweets and food from the military, you know, they would give him on our behalf. [LAUGHS] So we were pretty well fed, you know, and got sort of all kinds of treats and things through that I suppose.

And did your parents grow their own vegetables and fruit and...?

Yes they did, not their own fruit but mostly their own vegetables, yes, yes. We had quite a big... But my father, as I said, was a bit spontaneous about gardening. I mean it was all right but it wasn't as good as, you know, he didn't...he wasn't sort of obsessed by it in any way, and I guess it was a bit of a chore, and digging was a pain, and if things grew that was nice but, you know, there wasn't...it wasn't exactly terribly well organised.

So did your parents have hobbies, did he have a hobby that he was particularly fond of, other than, presumably not gardening?

No, no he didn't, no, no. I mean I think his hobby was probably being social, you know, like, you know, he did a lot of things in the village, and I think that was probably, you know, like, well, his... And the village was very cohered, you know, as a body of people, and... I mean even at the point when I was, possibly even a teenager, the people would go and help on the harvest, you know, like everybody would go and help the farmers with the harvest; I guess that's never done now, but you know, it was like a thing to do, you'd all go, and everybody did.

Do you remember doing that?

Yes, oh all the time, yes, wonderful.

The workers generally [INAUDIBLE] just in the way.

Yes, and, you know, playing with horses, and you know, sitting on the top of the cart when it was being carted around, did all of that, yes. So that was very, it was a very cohesive place. And at Christmas there were all kinds of, there was like a sort of entertainment, it was like a, I think that's where I got into performance really, it was like an entertainment but there were all kinds...it was so exciting, there were all different sorts of things, and people would sing and others would, you know, and people would write plays, and you know, and there were all that, this was the end of the war and a bit after. And there would be scenery painted, and it was all...and everybody would go, and it was inevitably absolutely hilarious, you know, it was absolutely wonderful. I don't want to make it sound too idyllic, but it was pretty... There were bound to people who didn't go to it, but it was, the majority of people did, and this was done in the village school.

I mean did you get involved in the theatrical side at that stage?

Oh yes, yes. Because there was a family who lived quite nearby, they were very much involved in it, and two of them were in the Army and one came out and he became a scene designer, in fact the head scene designer at the BBC at one stage, so, you know, they moved from doing things, you know, in a kind of amateurish way to becoming professional. And so, it was quite intense, you know, quite an intense thing.

At Christmas did they have pantomime or theatrical performance or...?

Yes, that, it would be...yes, but it would...there would be sort of like different acts as it were, you know, and there would be, you know, things to eat and so on, and people would...yes, so it was... And then it sort of died I guess, you know, it just, you know, but for a while it...

It didn't die in the time you were there?

It died for me.

Are you were saying this was part of the war?

It certainly died for me, but whether it died while I was there, I can't remember, you know, I got bored with it. I guess I grew out of it, or, you know, was no longer interested in it.

And going back to sort of the extended family that came out of the evacuation process. Have you kept in touch with any of those children, or did they just drift out of your life again?

No, no, no. My mother did for a while, but... And she knows, I think, where they are, but you know, there isn't any... But there are other people which, I'm not, but she's in contact with from that village, you know, who were friends of mine. I mean I've met one or two of them visiting my mother believe it or not. So yes, she keeps in contact but I don't. I kind of got to the point where I wanted to get out of it, I mean you know, as much as one, you know, said what a wonderful idyllic life, when I got to being a teenager the last thing I wanted to do was be there, it was so dull and boring, and I just wanted to get out really very, and really quite intensively did I want to get out. [LAUGHS]

Very normal emotions for a teenager.

Yes. [LAUGHS]

Did you get a chance to go up to London or to big towns from there?

Yes, mm.

And do you have any particular memories?

I went to the Lyric Theatre I remember in Hammersmith to see...that was a sort of strange experience because I don't think I really understood it properly or, you know, in any kind of full sense, and yet it sticks in my memory, and that was `The Merchant of Venice' which I was taken by the school, you know. And that was probably in retrospect quite important, but at the time it seemed sort of like outside my...you know, quite what I could sort of... I mean it was out of my experience completely.

What sort of age were you?

I would be about 13, something like that. And I was very much into...well I had an interest in nature and birds and animals and things like that. I was very much into sport, football and cricket and things like that. And my academic studies, I was sort of regarded as being somebody who didn't pull their weight properly and was capable of far more than ever did, too lazy and sort of cheeky and things like that. So, academically I was pretty sort of patchy I suppose; like the curate's egg I was a bit sort of... But there were these other things that were sort of like really at the time very important, you know, like...

Going back a bit to the sort of primary school stage...

Yes.

Was this a sort of classic, you know, one- or two-roomed village school that you went to?

Yes, that's right, yes. It was one, two, three rooms, it was the infants, the juniors and the seniors, because it went up to 14 at the time.

Can you remember any of the teachers or...?

I can, yes, yes.

Can you describe them?

Well Miss Jones, who was the head teacher, lived sort of very close to us, about a hundred yards away - no less than that, 80 yards away, and she was a big, very heavy woman who, had a dog called Toby I remember and a big brown fur coat, and she came from Bristol, and she was a very...she had a very strong personality. And she was...she maintained she had...she obviously had a hell of a job because of the evacuees and the, you know, like it was clearly very very difficult. So she, I can see that she had a big struggle to maintain discipline, which she did with a damn great stick, and also there was a whip I seem to remember, or maybe it was a rumour.

Was it often used?

Yes, it was used, yes absolutely, yes it was. And so, she was, she ran the top school as it were, and then there were others who, you know, the infants school teacher I liked very much, and she had a bit of a hard life because her husband was captured by the Japanese and she didn't know anything about him for two or three years, so there was a bit of a desperation there. And then the middle school, there were changes I seem to remember of staff, and you know, some were better than others. I remember a particularly nasty one but I can't remember her name. You see they were women mostly, they were all women.

Were there men in the school before the war, do you remember?

Ah that I don't know because I was, you know, I wasn't...so they were all women as far as I remember, yes. Men used to come to the school, it was a Church of England school and so I guess they were governors who would sort of like come every so often. But the discipline could be quite horrendous, you know. I remember somebody who was a son of a friend of my mother's on his first day sort of like, he was a bit of a cry-baby and you know, there were prayers and all of that, and he sort of started to howl, and I remember him being wiped up and down the piano and given a whack, and, quite brutal, you know, it was quite...I mean, primitive probably, but...

And how did it make you feel? Did it frighten you?

Yes, it was frightening, yes it was. Yes it certainly was.

Did it ever come your way or were you [INAUDIBLE]?

Oh sure it did, yes. It did very much so, yes. I got two four and six with this great stick in one day, and I came home and I declined to sit down and my mother sort of realised, had a look, and said, `When your father comes home he will undoubtedly sort this out.' And he came home and he had a look, and he said, `Come with me,' and we were marched over to Miss Jones, because she was the one that had done it, marched over to her house, knocked on the door, and he said, `I understand that you've chastised my son'. She said, `Yes,' and blah blah blah. And he said, `Well, if he needs it, just give it to him.' [LAUGHS]

Gracious. How did you feel?

I was really...I was so angry.

I'm not surprised.

I was really angry about that.

Oh dear.

But, you know...

But did it help, did you then not do anything wrong ever again?

No, of course I didn't, no no. No it didn't do any good at all probably.

And what kind of things were selected for punishment?

I don't know really, I can't remember too well. My particular two four and six escalated I know, because, I put a book down my pants, when she went to get the stick I... [LAUGHS]

Known to be a fatal error. Oh dear. [LAUGHING]

[LAUGHING] And you know, that...so that sort of escalated it, but I can't remember how it worked in relation to two four and six, and I can't remember what the, you know, what the cause was. I'm sure she was right, but...

Just out of interest, did you ever stop respecting her, did you ever...did you accept that this is just a normal pattern?

I used to get really very antagonistic to her when she used to sort of stand up in, you know, at the...you know, there would be this prayer thing and singing hymns and then there would be the headmistress's kind of like speech for the day or whatever, and she would then recount what she had seen me do the night before looking out of her window, and that really... Because, you know, I...

In front of the school?

Yes, you know, because she...

Outrageous.

Yes, it was outrageous, I thought it was too, I was really fed up with it. Because we were playing, you know, we were playing out in the...and she saw us, and, I remember, she did that on more than one occasion and I was not...I didn't respect that at all.

No.

No way did I. But, and also I kept one hell of a distance from her for a long time, I mean much too long really, and then I got to know her much later and, you know, everything was fine, because she lived very close by and she was, you know, she was absolutely OK.

When you were a teenager or when you were an adult?

Yes, I mean much later on, yes, when I was, yes, that's right. I got over my, you know, the relationship that I'd had with her. I mean, I don't think mine was particularly unusual at all, I mean she had much tougher people to deal with, and in the village there were periods when the, for whatever reason, I mean there weren't necessarily reasons, you know, that the village children and the evacuees would really have fights and it was, you know, sometimes it was difficult to get home, you know, because they would be waiting, the evacuees would be waiting to get the village kids.

So did they kind of form groups?

Yes, there was...at times, and then it would break apart again, you know. And I couldn't say why, you know, there was this sort of, this thing would arise, but it did.

In terms of sort of, the evacuee children and your family unit, when it came to kind of demonstrations of affection and so on, was that all kind of equally shared?

Oh yes, absolutely, yes, sure, yes. I didn't ever get a sense of, you know...

So they were more like brothers and sisters really?

Yes, that's right, yes, yes, yes. And we had, people would be coming to the house all the time, you know, like, not just children but also other people, like soldiers and people would be there, you know. I also had the feeling I could bring anyone home at any time, there would be no problem about it, it would be absolutely accepted completely.

And did your parents stay in that house well into your adulthood?

Yes they did.

Or did you go back to it as an adult?

Yes. They rented it. And then there was a house quite nearby they bought, I don't know when, I wasn't living there any more, but they bought one nearby. And my father really didn't want to do that, he wanted to live in Battersea, he had some idea he wanted to live in...he wanted to live in the...he wanted an urban life, and at that point he was travelling, you know, to London and working at Waterloo and, you know. I think he, you know, like this kind of rural village life, it was far too conservative for him, and he really wanted to get out of it, but my mother wouldn't. So, you know, there was a conflict there.

Yes, I mean, did you ever have any kind of sense of what it...what he thought he was going to get in the urban life that he wasn't going to get in a rural life?

I think it's...I think it's all connected with, to the union and the people he knew and, you know, like... You know, his involvement with the union and socialism and all of that, and the fact he had strong, you know, a lot of sort of social life around what he

did, and these people were all living in, you know, in London or, you know, because...and he was travelling back and forth. And I think he wanted to be part of that.

Was he active, very active politically?

Yes he was active politically, and later it calmed off towards the end of his life, but yes, he was, yes. We walked around at some point with...not...I don't know whether they were red stars or hammers and sickles. But you know, it was, when Russia joined the war, so it was, you know, like...it was entirely, you know, a positive thing to do. I remember having my Russian badge.

Did he take a full role in the union that he belonged to?

Yes he did, yes, yes, yes.

And did he talk about that at home or did he keep that very much to himself?

Yes he did, he would, yes, yes, yes.

Did it influence you?

Oh yes. Oh yes, without a doubt. And also not just him but also his friends did.

Yes, from listening to conversations and...?

Yes, yes, and they were always very open, you know, sort of with me, so, in fact I don't think I could...you know, there were points where I didn't understand what was going on, but nonetheless, yes, there was undoubtedly a strong influence there. There's one particular guy who was an ex-miner from South Wales who my father was very friendly with who ran a sweet shop and my father did his accounts for him, so you know, he... He was very, very self-conscious as a socialist, and, very conscious, and so he was always talking to me about it. And there were others, so, yes.

And did you get any kind of, sort of obvious political education at school?

I think there were attempts, but, we had political debates, sort of like, around the period of general elections I seem to remember. And we had, generally the staff were dyed-in-the-wool Conservatives, as I remember, because they were, I mean in other words they were actually abusing their position probably in, you know, in stating it. I mean I had what I would regard as two good teachers, two very good teachers, but there were others who were really quite prejudiced in the way they presented, you know, the way they expressed their views.

Yes, in sort of historical influence on you.

Yes, and as far as I remember there was one teacher who was regarded as a socialist. So when it came to political debate it wasn't, you know, exactly...how to describe it...

I mean did you feel free to express your viewpoint?

Oh yes, yes, yes.

Yes, so you weren't inhibited?

Yes it was a liberal school, it was a liberal school, but it was nonetheless, for that it was...

I mean tell me about the school, what sort of size and what kind of building?

It was about, I think it was founded about 1732 I think as a grammar school, and it was quite...with a boarding part to it, a boarding school part to it. So, some of the buildings were original so, and being in Midhurst and made of sandstone, so they were rather beautiful buildings. And then there were sort of, you know, contemporary buildings which weren't anywhere near so interesting. And there was a section to the school, but it was sort of in a way divided off, and that was where the boarders lived. I was a day boy, and so, it was probably more than half the school were probably day boys and, you know, probably about, between a third and a half were boarders, and we were all mixed up together in the classes. And then, there were a lot of Jewish people in the school, both, there were some people on the staff who were refugees, you know, from Nazi Germany, and then there were Jewish pupils, and they were mostly, as far as I know, perhaps exclusively, but certainly mostly, boarders. And so, and then...and then there were some others, there were French Canadians, a few French Canadians, there were a few other people like that, and then there were a lot of

local, the local catchment area went right through West Sussex and into the bit of Surrey that I was in. So its kind of range was rather, it was a very interesting school insofar as it was quite...it had a sort of liberal argument about it, and I guess it was anti-racist within the terms as it would have been understood.

I mean do you think the Jewish children were sort of refugees in effect?

I don't think all of them were, but I think possibly some of them were, yes, yes.

But you weren't conscious of refugee children there sort of being...?

Well I wasn't... Frankly I wasn't conscious that they were Jewish. They just had names like Michaelis and Sylvester. It's only subsequently that I realised that there was a strong Jewish, you know, because of the names. And so they were just, you know, they were just there like all the rest of us. So, there was at times, just like in the village there was a sort of day boy/boarder kind of rivalry that used to raise itself and then collapse again, you know, maybe once a term or something. But apart from that there didn't seem to be, you know, any particularly...there were no difficulties between the two bodies of people.

Did you sort of run with a big pack, or did you have, you know, sort of, several close friends? I mean what was your social style within the school?

Oh, no, quite a lot of, I had sort of quite a big pack of people, and then also close friends I suppose, one of whom died at the age of 13 I remember very well, of asthma.

Gosh.

There were quite a lot of deaths at the school with things like people getting into threshing machines, and horrible, suffocating in hayricks, you know. Sort of every year there were some sort of agricultural deaths, they were pretty nasty. I mean I remember that very well.

And do you...do you remember the sort of impact it had on you, was it...?

Yes, I mean it was...it was...it was sort of a bit frightening really I suppose, you know, that people would suddenly be gone, you know, doing the sort of things that I do, you know, that I would be...play around in hayricks and round the threshing machine, and

you know... Illness was something else, I mean it wasn't something that... You know, like the friend of mine who died, you know, sort of, he was terribly thin and sort of looked very ill, you know, and he was...

Might have been tubercular.

And he was just not my friend, he was a very...people liked him a lot, he was a nice person, you know, and he just died, you know, it was very sad. It was a boys' school, it wasn't a mixed school. There was a swimming pool, which was important.

Unusual in those days I would have thought.

Yes, yes.

Was that outdoor?

Yes, yes. And rugby wasn't allowed, it was regarded as being too dangerous. [LAUGHS]

A very liberal school. Do you remember it as a happy experience though, on the whole?

Yes, oh yes, sure. Yes.

And did art play a sort of part in that?

Yes it did, yes, yes. A sort of strange part in that we had...there was an art club and art classes, and the art classes were run by a man who was also the physical education teacher, so, I remember it was restricted to how to draw a box, and it was incredible, it was just utterly painful, you know. It was all to do with perspective in a box, you know, and this went on, you know, sort of term after term until you... This was really so deadly. And then there was an art club run by the English teacher who was a Welshman, and that was very much more imaginative, you know. And, yes, it was much better. So I, you know, I... My part, in school I had, I was also in the gardening club; it was, the gardening club was a sort of... Well what happened was, I joined the Army Cadet Force, and we went, the very first day we went for a march up Midhurst High Street, and I lost my shoe, and I, you know, jumped out of line, because my, something happened to my shoe, maybe that, you know, it just slipped off, or this

person behind had done... And so I slipped out of the thing to get it and I was pushed back in, you know, and told, and I thought, well I'm.....

End of F5273 Side B

F5274 Side A

[This is Tape Two with Stuart Brisley on the 12th of September 1996.]

Tell me about your most enjoyable memory of the art club.

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Well I...I think it was... It's difficult to think of a most enjoyable memory. I think what it did for me, it was kind of like a space, it was sort of, it was an area away from the rigours of academic study, and it was... Like the gardening club, I mean they were sort of free spaces that one could sort of, like, be in if you see what I mean, without an awful lot of pressure and constraint. And I think that's what I really enjoyed about both of those, and at the time I didn't have any pretensions to be artistic in any particular way, so, I enjoyed I think mostly for that reason, you know, that it was...it was just a more sympathetic environment, you know. The thing was that I, when I went to that school I was 10, and I was put into a class, I was a year below the average age, and there was a discussion I think about the end of the first year as to whether I should be held back a year so that I would be with my, you know, the people of my own age or whether I should go on. It was decided that I should go on, and I suspect that was a mistake, because I always felt not quite...I always felt a struggle, it to be a struggle academically, and I think if I had, you know, sort of been in where I was an average age it would have been probably a little bit better, somewhat better. Maybe that's a conceit on my part, but I like to think that. So, I suppose, the art club and the gardening club was an escape really, an enjoyable escape.

I mean just going briefly back to the gardening club.

Yes.

Did you get any flack from your peers for opting out of the kind of, the Army option and going for the gardening club, or it was just an option?

No, no, no.

Sounds like a splendid school.

Yes. Well, one joined another club if you see what I mean. Yes.

Yes, yes.

Another club of us, you know, who sort of like, did erratic weeding or whatever.

I mean just amongst the boys, were there sort of political or class rivalries, or was it all very even?

There were. I don't know whether there were class rivalries; you mean classes in terms of form four and form five, or you mean social classes?

No no, social class, yes.

I think there were differences undoubtedly, because the actual social range was probably quite extensive, I suspect, from, you know, some of the boarders to some of the day boys, and... I think it was probably, it would be more...there might have been perceptions by a group about, you know, the penury of, you know, some other group or some other individual. But it's a bit like, I mean children are curious aren't they, it's a bit like, I remember this boy breaking down, he was a real tough kid, breaking down because his father had died, and he was sort of like, his father was a farm labourer or something, and I remember feeling sort of like, watching this almost as though it was a sort of performance if you know what I mean. I mean sympathy, sympathy was there, but it's sort of objective, not...curious, I mean not... And that was also partly related to class, I think, you know. So there was definitely a perception I think from my perspective of people who were of a lower class to me, but there wasn't so much of a perception as to who was higher. It was different, you know. But certainly I was very sharply aware of people who were...people who were poor, let's say, or people who were in a lower class, and I was also very aware of that in the village as well.

Yes, I mean that's interesting. I mean the two did go together you found?

Yes, and more aware in the village of people who were from a higher class as well, but not in school so much. In fact I don't think it...I think it's not clear at school, because, you know, if the richer people were mostly boarders then what was their background? Their background wasn't really visible in the same way.

And you didn't ever make friends with a boarder and sort of go home with them or anything like that, did you?

No, but I had friends with people from a place called Frensham School, which, who used to come home quite often, but then I met them differently, you know, not through school but through people in the village. I can't remember how that worked, but yes, there was, you know, this is rather interesting how this sort of thing works. So, people did come home with me who were clearly from a higher class, and people came home with me who were from a lower class.

And did you ever go the other way as it were?

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Yes I was very friendly with somebody whose father was a gamekeeper for example, and as far as the sort of higher...yes, I mean I can't remember anything... It wouldn't be...you see you wouldn't work as far as the boarders were concerned but it would work in the village with other people, and some places were not available and others were [INAUDIBLE].

Yes. And what did you feel about the ones that were not available?

Nothing particular of any...

It didn't impinge?

Not particularly. Well it was of no interest really in the end, you know, like, one was getting on with what one was doing.

Did you ever kind of stalk round the fields with the gamekeeper? It sounds fun.

No. I did with his son a lot, you know, and that was really very interesting, because he could climb trees much better than I could; I mean I thought I was pretty good but he was...he was pretty extraordinary. So he could get to nests that I could never get to.

Oh right, good for him.

[LAUGHS] So I got, I got some eggs at some point, you know.

What did happen to that collection?

I don't know.

It would be interesting, wouldn't it. I wonder if your parents gave it to the museum.

It was all taken away.

Oh, very hard.

Yes.

Going back to the grammar school, there must have been some moment during that period when you started moving yourself and your mind towards the idea of being an artist, or not?

No.

No, so that came later?

Well there was a certain amount of discussion about what I was, at home about what I was going to do, you know, and, it was quite interesting really, I mean...

Anxious discussion?

Should I join the railway, which I definitely didn't want to do, no interest in that. Should I try to be a professional footballer, which I was quite interested in, but you know, I wasn't good enough, but you know, that was an option, or was a possible option. And then my grandmother thought I should be a draughtsman because I did a lot of drawing, and she made this sort of rather neat relation between the two. And my mother thought I should be an architect, because I was drawing, and so, she contacted the local art school - no, a local architectural firm, and they suggested that I go to the local art school, which had an architectural qualification, that was Guildford School of Art. And so she contacted them, and I then had to do some drawings and things, which I did, and I got in, with no interest in architecture whatsoever really.

Yes, well...

And something really kind of sort of, I can't exactly remember but probably because I...because it's too difficult, but, after a short time on the architectural course I transferred to the art course but I didn't tell my parents.

What?

[LAUGHS] And I remember being asked to design a bus station, a bus shelter, and then I remember having to do some drawings of drainpipes, and I was just so bored quite honestly, and I had no, not an inkling of a sense about what a bus shelter should be, you know, I mean, it was something that was completely uninteresting to me. I had no curiosity about it, nothing, so I thought, this is just hopeless, I'm just this... And my maths was very bad as well, it was one of the weakest subjects at school.

Yes that's rather unfortunate for architecture.

Yes, exactly. So after a short time, I think it was two or three weeks, I don't know, or a month, I transferred to the art thing.

And before we go on to art school, just remind me, what was the sort of qualification in those days, was it Higher Certificate or something that one took? It wasn't O'levels was it?

I took the Cambridge School Certificate.

The School Certificate, right. And was your brother in the same school as you?

No, no, he went to Godalming, I think it was called County Grammar School at the time, yes, he went to a different school. And that was because the Education Act actually required that one, the 1944 Education Act required that one I think went to school in the sort of area, in the district or...

Oh right, so you were sort of sent over the boundaries as it were.

And so I went over the boundaries, because we lived just in Surrey, so I went to West Sussex. So when that all changed I was OK. For some reason I my brother had to go to Godalming, which was a sort of much more conventional, you know, sort of county grammar school.

And were you conscious of that difference while you were both at school? I mean I know there's quite a big age gap.

I was conscious of the difference, I didn't know what it was but certainly I was conscious of the difference, yes.

And did you feel grateful to be on the liberal side as it were?

Yes I did, yes, yes, and I felt...yes, sure.

But presumably he was quite academic if he went on to be a doctor.

Yes, yes he was, yes, yes.

And do you still get on with him?

Oh yes, yes we do, yes, from a distance.

Where does he live?

He lives just outside Norwich.

Oh right, yes, quite a distance.

Yes.

So when you made your switch, how long before you told your parents?

I think it was about nine months or something like that.

How did it go down?

It was OK, it didn't go down terribly well. My father was sort of somewhat antagonistic about it, my mother wasn't but my father was. Because he had views about what artists were and what they, you know, what they represented, and you know, he found it sort of, like, unacceptable I suppose.

I mean did he ever, you know, voice precisely what he did think artists represented at the time?

Well, I mean it was a class issue really I think for him, you know, it was...you know, one should be, I suppose... I mean I don't want to put words in his mouth, you know. You know, it's difficult. He was quite unsympathetic about it. Later it was all right, but, you know, in the beginning it wasn't.

Yes. So describe your, how art education was at that time.

Well, I had to do something called the Intermediate, which was a two-year course which involved sampling all kinds of art forms. I suppose in a way it's bit like the Foundation course now, except it was over a two year basis, and it was rather more vigorous. So, I think within that sort of, as far as I remember within that broad sampling it was possible to also select to a limited extent as far as I remember. So I did things like history of architecture, Bannister Fletcher I seem to remember, a book, was a rather important book in that respect. Anatomy, both the skeleton and all the muscles for the Intermediate had to be drawn by memory. Pretty difficult I seem to remember.

Yes.

Yes, it was. Lettering, you know, all of that. Drawing and so on. And on the basis of that... I failed actually, I failed my Intermediate the first time, and the reason was that I had done, I did a series of life drawings but I hadn't done it with a point, I did it with a brush, and you had to actually draw with a point and I was disqualified and I had to take another year. So I took another year. So I did three years of the Intermediate and then two years painting, it was called Painting Special, because I had no... I did do lettering for a while, and I know the lettering teacher wanted me to be a letterer, and I did enjoy it a lot and I think I learnt how to draw, so far as I can draw, I learnt how to draw from doing lettering for three years. Because it's so, you know, the difference between a pencil line and a pencil line right next to it can be quite radical as far as lettering is concerned, you know, it's so precise. And I got to be quite reasonable I suppose at it, and he was very enthusiastic, and I just didn't want to do it, I was much more interested in being a painter. And so I dropped it as a secondary subject and did something called Painting Special, which is just painting, because that's what I wanted to do. And at that point I dropped... At 16 I had stopped going to the church, right; at a certain point I stopped football and cricket, just like that,

because I was going to be a painter, right? That, all went just like that, I just stopped the whole thing and concentrated on what I wanted to do, because I then knew what I wanted to do, and there was absolutely no point in fiddling about with balls, you know, well you know, games and teams and all that stuff, I mean one had to actually concentrate. So I did it.

So what age were you when you made that decision?

I was probably about, I mean I can't tell you exactly but if I was 21 when I finished I was probably about 18 or 19 when I decided all that.

So can you remember the kind of, sort of emotional input into making that decision? Because it must have been quite major to leave these things behind that had been so much a part of your life.

Well I was quite good at both of those things and I was actually, you know, I was very...I mean I was, you know, pretty athletic, and I also I enjoyed team games, and I was, you know, there's a social thing attached to all of that. I just, yes, I just decided that that was it, and I suppose that's...in a way that's how I am, you know. If I decide I'm going to do something, I'm going to do it.

No regrets?

No. Well, no regrets.

And the sort of, you know, the friends and things from the team aspect, did you keep in touch with them or was it a real...?

No, I just dropped it completely.

Yes, and presumably you were in with the kind of art crowd.

Yes, yes.

So it was just a different world in effect.

That's it, absolutely, yes, yes. I mean I used to play for, there was a Guildford Technical College cricket, and, you know, I was good enough to sort of have, to be

thought about in relation to going on to Surrey, but just, I just didn't go...I didn't actually try to push that at all, I just stopped.

And what did your parents say, were they worried?

No, at that point they weren't, you know, that was it. When I decided what I was going to do, I was going to do it, and that was all right. My father wanted me very much to become a professional footballer, because I was also playing football a lot, and I, you know, I really didn't want to do that, I just had no...it was uninteresting.

Of the teachers in that kind of formative few years, do you have any particularly strong memories or...?

Well I had a very good, there was a man called Leonard Stoppani who was Head of Painting at Guildford, and he was very good.

Sorry to interrupt you but you can't just spell his second name can you?

Yes, S-T-O-P-P-A-N-I, Stoppani. And he was really very good for me. And, I mean at Guildford he was the one I remember, you know, as being influential. There were others, but, Peter Startup was teaching there for a while and he was also... But there was another man who didn't teach me but I got on very well with, I liked him a lot, and his name was Ifor Thomas, and he was Head of Photography. Photography in Guildford at that time was internationally known and there were students coming from all over the world to study there, and he was an extraordinarily charismatic Welshman who was a close friend of Dylan Thomas. So, and he...and, you know, he just happened to be around in the school and he was just a very open, very supportive kind of a person, you know, albeit an alcoholic with an enormous capacity to drink, but he was very good. He also introduced me to Dylan Thomas poetry and, you know, and he used to give readings.

What, in the college?

Yes, in the college, it was...

Oh wonderful.

Yes it was wonderful, yes, yes. So, and the school then was, the college was really interesting, because, you know, here I had come from this little village and, you know, and then the school, and here I was in the art school, and there were so many people from out of the Army, you know, from the war or just after the war. There were refugees, people with numbers on their arms, there were, you know, there were just a whole range of people. And then there were all these people from Egypt and Africa studying photography, because this was where you came to study photography, it was a very high, it was probably the best course in the country. And I remember Sybil Maholy-Nagy coming, because she was looking for a job, you know, there. You know, it was...it had a certain...it was bohemian I suppose you'd say, and a very exciting sort of place. And the head of the art school was a man called Dudley Holland who was a much more acerbic kind of guy, but even he had his moments, he used to mend his motorbike in his office and drive it up the corridor to see if worked and... You know, there was a sort of, had that...there was a sort of atmosphere I guess of art schools of the time, you know. And the other interesting thing was, all the people who came in from the local community to paint in the evenings. So there was all of that, you know, and so it was a very...I liked it very much, it was a good, very good sort of, like mixing of people, and I learnt a hell of a lot and had friends who had been captains in the Army and, you know, been fighting the Japanese, and you know, all of...you know. So for me, you know, completely green and raw, this was an education beyond one's dream in a way, you know; although I wouldn't have thought of it like that at the time, that's what it was. And I felt great, I liked being with older people.

I mean what was the balance between the young students and the ones coming over from those...the war?

Well there were more older people than younger ones, I mean, yes, because there weren't that terribly many people, there weren't that very many young people going into the art school then. There were lots of people coming out of the Army, or the forces, both, men and women actually, not just... And then there was this other dimension of sort of, sort of callow youths.

I mean by old, you mean kind of university age plus more in effect, so it was a sort of...

Yes, quite a lot of people in their twenties probably, I mean people who had been captains in the Army at 20 and were 24, or, you know, that sort of...

Yes. But old to your eye.

Yes, I mean yes, I mean I was 17 or, you know, I mean that was old to me.

So they were very tolerant of you, and...?

Yes, not always but, yes. It was generally good, it was a very good atmosphere, I really liked it, you know. And it's like no...I guess it was typical of art schools of the time, but... By the time I got to the Royal College everything had changed, you know, because that dimension had sort of died out really.

It hadn't carried on for that second level then?

It might have done, but you know, that must have been a relatively short time that those people went into art schools, and then that quickly dried up if you see what I mean, and so... I spent two years in the Army between going to Guildford and going to the Royal College, and by the time I got to the Royal College then we were all, or most of us were conscripts, who had come out of the Army. [LAUGHS]

No, how interesting.

Yes.

Was this a very different creature?

[LAUGHS] I think it was.

It sounds it.

Absolutely. Yes.

Yes that really is interesting. I mean, try and describe the kind of atmosphere of a day's working in this kind of rather mixed environment.

Well, I'm not entirely sure but I think most days we were life drawing, and we were probably, we would do probably three hours' life drawing a day, and so, that would be, it would either be in the morning or it would be in the afternoon that that's what

one do. And by the time I'd got to, you know, to doing the National Diploma, Design Diploma in Painting, then it would have been painting the rest of the time. There would have been very little art history, there were some attempts made but you know, there were... The sort of contextualisation of art was very poor, you know, it didn't exist really in any real sense as far as I can remember. But it was more, it was sort of more based on practice and then, `Why don't you go off and see Munch, because he's on at the Tate,' you know. Or...

So what was your personal contextualisation for art, I mean, how did you see it?

Well, I just, I was probably completely irrational, I just got completely engaged with people, you know, artists, and I got to know as much as I could about their work. Because I was really, like, Goya I was, you know, like very much involved with Goya; Blake, I was very much involved with Blake.

With the visual imagery or all their ideas as well?

No, visual imagery, very much the visual imagery. And, Blake, Goya, and then later on, you know, Bacon, Freud - Freud less - certainly Sutherland, Sutherland was very important at the time. You see it was really interesting because, I think there were certain prejudices in art schools, there must have been, or certainly in that one, you know, like...

Fairly common.

Yes, some things were OK and others weren't, and as much as, you know, I think Stoppani was interesting, I can remember, you know, like, being stopped from doing certain things, you know, because you're too young to do that, you know, you do that later.

I mean can you remember what?

Yes, it was, you know, I was painting a loom actually, I was making a painting of a loom, and I had sort of freely interpreted it, so it became a sort of structure, and he came up to me and said, `That's, you know, you can't do that, you don't have enough experience to do that, you know, you've got to learn how to paint before you can do that'.

And what was your feeling when he said that?

Well I was really fed up, but...

That you weren't able to... I mean, well how freely could you express yourself to art school teachers?

Well there was...so in other words there was a strong discipline for, you know, to paint realistically. I mean learning how to paint was like an apprenticeship in a, I guess an interpretation of Realism, and that life drawing went along with it, you learnt how to draw, you know. And that took a lot, you know, you really had to struggle to do it, and, you know, it could sustain you for the rest of your life.

So was the perception was that having done this very real apprenticeship you could then travel in quite different territories later?

Yes, that's right, that was the...that's my understanding of what he meant. And I, I mean for example I'd did a Methods and Materials course, a very intensive one with, you know, like...out of which I learnt a really important thing which is how to wash your brushes.

A rare skill.

[LAUGHS] Which we, three-quarters of the class was about that, how to wash your brushes.

Yes. I mean in retrospect, how valuable do you see that training, that early training?

It was very valuable. I'm not...I wouldn't put it up as a model, to say that this is what people should do at art schools, but at that point in time it was very valuable to me, and I think to others. And, you know, what it did do was to concentrate, concentrate the mind, and there were other, you know, having...there were other limitations, you know, contextualisation was sort of [INAUDIBLE] set[??], you know, it didn't really exist in any real sense. But, there was this kind of encouragement to believe that what one was doing was important and that one might fail.....

End of F5274 Side A

F5274 Side B

That one might fail, but that the aim was, you know, the aim was laudable and there was...and that one was in a way becoming party to a great canon, you know. So there was a certain humility required.

Yes.

Which I suppose I didn't have, but you know... You know, it was...there was something...it was regarded as a sort of really serious activity, and that if you chose to do it you had to really go into it fully and that there weren't necessarily going to be any, you know, great rewards.

Can you remember the way in which the teacher taught, if you see what I mean; I know this sounds a terribly straight, sort of daft question but I think it's quite an important one. I mean did they come in and give some sort of introductory speech, or personal guidance as you worked, or what kind of thing?

As far as life drawing was concerned it was done by example, and then comments, so that the teacher would move round the class, from one person to the next, sit down where the student had been sitting, and draw, not necessarily on the drawing but draw another drawing to show what was wrong with the, or an aspect of what was wrong with the students' drawing.

So did he have a kind of independent pad, or was there room on the...?

No, it would be done on the side, mostly on the side.

Right.

And then there would be some comments about, you know, how, what the intention of this drawing was and pointing out what was missing in the other, right, and this would...this is hard work, they would go around every one, right. I think that's probably still done in life drawings. Painting, sometimes they would actually paint on the painting, you know, to get...well because it would be to get the tone in relation to the colour, you know, like, you know, they would mix maybe and say, `Well look, that's the...the tone is there, not...it's not that, it's like this'. So that, or, you know, then there will be discussions about, you know, then I'd be required to make a painting

without, of a still life, without using black or white or, you know, using black, yellow ochre, burnt amber and black, or making a monochrome painting, you know. And so all these would be exercises that one be required to do, so it wasn't necessarily the subject, it was a certain limitation of the range of the palette in order to, you know, kind of, like maybe concentrate on tone for example in terms of what one saw.

In terms of the physical environment where you worked in the painting studio and the life drawing, I mean, let's take the life drawings first.

Yes.

Give me an idea of how big the classes were and what sort of physical set up...

There would be about thirty people, twenty to thirty people in quite a big room, and they would fit round, and there would be a reasonable size room, probably, I don't know, thirty feet, I don't know, thirty feet by thirty feet or whatever. And then there would be a model's podium, you know, and then the model. And, so it would be quite large, you know, quite large.

And did you stand up when you were drawing?

You could either stand up or sit down, you know, there were donkeys, called donkeys, that you would sit on, you know, and do...

Describe a donkey.

A donkey is sort of like a long...it's like a plank of wood at about that height.

Which is about, what, a...

About 18 inches off the floor, something like that. And it's got an angled frame that goes out from it in the front that you rest the drawing board on, so you would sit straddled on this thing, which was probably about 3 feet to 3 feet 6 long, and, you know, then you would draw, you know, sitting down.

And did you use pencils or charcoal?

Pencil. There would be exercises as well, you would be required to draw with X or Y or, you know, with Conté or with, or draw with a brush or draw with ink or draw with a pencil or, you know... Or it would be free. Or you would, there would be poses where you would draw with your eyes closed, or there would be poses where you would look at the pose and the model would go away and you would have to draw it from memory. And there would be, you know, all kinds of things like that, you know, to sort of like try and get people to be sort of in a way more attuned and flexible about the approach to drawing.

And did you have time limitations?

Time limitations, yes.

Short and long?

Yes, short and long, yes.

And did you provide your own materials or were they...?

I think they were very cheap materials, yes.

Bought them at the school?

Yes, yes, we bought them, but they were very cheap. I think maybe some paper was supplied, I'm not sure. I think it was certainly pre the Summerson/Coldstream, you know, after the Summerson/Coldstream Report there was a certain amount of, there were free supplies, you know. And so one had to be a bit frugal with paint and so on, paintings were small.

Did that worry you?

No it didn't actually, no, I was perfectly happy with it, you know. I mean, I work small a lot anyway, so, I did then and do now.

Do you mean one might be the consequence of the other?

Yes, it could be, could be.

And what was a typical sort of period of time to work?

You mean in the day?

In a session, yes, or, you know, however many sessions were in a day, whatever.

About half-past 9 to about 5, half-past 5, that sort of thing.

And did people attend regularly?

Oh yes, yes.

So it really was quite disciplined?

Yes, oh yes, yes it was very regular, yes, yes.

And they didn't have anything as formal as a register did they?

There was a register, yes, yes. There would be a register for the life drawing, yes, yes.

Tell me about the models, did you get a mixture of men and women?

Oh yes, they were wonderful. I knew Quentin Crisp quite well because he was a model who came quite often. He was very interesting. And there were numbers of others, yes. They were professional models, then, I don't know whether they...I don't think they are today, you know. So they were people who saw themselves as, you know, models, and they would, some of them would be specialists, you know, like in holding certain poses, and... And I would have thought there would be about twenty, you know, in the London region, and they would probably be doing the rounds of the art schools, you know. And they were young, old, they were all kinds, fat, thin, you name it, they were... There was one man who specialised in tennis shots I seem to remember, absolutely ghastly he was.

In the nude. [LAUGHING] Sounds wonderful.

[LAUGHS] Yes. And there was one man who was so thin you could see his heart sort of, well one thought one could see his heart beating, you know, and you sort of, from the sort of skeletal to enormously fat ones.

Did you have a preference, or was it just a little exercise?

I think some models were...I think some models were good to draw somehow and others were just impossible, you know, I don't know what that is, whether it's one's own perception, you know, that, or sympathy or something. But yes, some models were really really good to draw. And also I think if sexuality comes into it then that's very inhibiting, you know, it stops the drawing, you know, it's... And some models were clearly very aware of their sexuality and they were difficult to draw.

Oh that's interesting. What, they sort of generated...

Yes, I mean, yes, yes, which I always found sort of... I mean I didn't know, I mean at the time I wasn't aware, you know, oh my God! I'm doing a bad drawing. But I think, that doesn't mean to say that, you know, I think there were just some who were more, I don't know, sympathetic in the way they just were and the way they...you know, they weren't actually trying to represent anything or to project anything.

And did it work better if they were in a kind of ego-less state in effect?

Yes, exactly, that's, I think it's something like that, yes, yes. So I think, there probably was such a thing as a good model, you know.

Mm, yes I'm sure.

Yes.

I mean on the subject of sexuality, going to your sort of boys' grammar school, did you...any of that come into your life, or not?

Sex, oh yes, in the...yes, I mean in the village and so on.

From what sort of age?

Oh well, about 15, something like that, 16, 15 I think, yes.

And did you have a sort of steady girlfriend in the village, or...?

No, no, no. But what...the first naked woman I saw was a terrifying shock to me. [LAUGHS]

And how old were you?

I was about 16 I think. Because I, you know, because I was young, I was that year, you know, I was a year below average, I left the grammar school when I was fifteen-and-three-quarters, so I went to art school, when I went to art school I was just about to be 16, so I was very young as well.

My gosh, yes, that's quite an initiation.

I was very young, yes. So it was a bit of a shock I must say, and I didn't know whether... Because I can remember the morning when it happened, and you know, like, I didn't know whether I was going to be able to sort of, like survive this or not, but I did. I mean it was not...I mean it was just the initial shock when she took her dressing-gown off, and after that it was all right, you know, it was just a, it was just the sort of first confrontation, you know.

And did you anticipate that it might cause you anxiety?

Yes, well I didn't know, I mean, well I felt anxious about it, I mean, but, you know, I did feel anxious about it, it's true.

Yes. So did she have an attractive body, or was it an unpleasant shock?

No, it was...she had black pubic hair but she had blonde hair at the top, the head, and so that was a shock.

Oh very confusing.

But she was probably in her, she was probably about 50.

And you had never seen anyone in the nude at home?

No, no. I mean I'd seen loads of boys in the nude because we all swam nude in the swimming pools. So I think it was probably was, that shock probably has a lot to do with, you know, being in a boys' school, yes, you know, and sort of being segregated in that way. Although, you see at home and when, you know they had lots of, there were girls around all the time, you know, but not in states of undress, you know, so, it was a shock, yes.

Yes. Getting back to the painting class, did you do a lot of sort of painting from a model as well?

Yes, yes, did painting from a model, yes.

And did you find that much more difficult than drawing, or...?

No, I... I did...what I...I did a lot of still lifes at Guildford, a certain amount of painting from a model, and I did a certain number of self portraits, and some what I would regard as sort of imaginative works, which were probably bad misinterpretations of people like Sutherland at the time, because I was, you know, sort of, like, complete...I was very engaged with Sutherland at one stage. And it seemed to connect with my own experience in, you know, in woods and things like that, you know, because if you look at his Pembroke period, right, that always...it was... And not so much, I didn't know the work he had done in the war so much, and it was then, after that it was sort of paintings that seemed to have a strong influence from Picasso done in the South of France, sort of, you know, there was a sort of dry and sort of sharp kind of feel to it all that I found... And things like hedges or bits of hedges. And that interested me a lot because of, you know, wandering about in the landscape. And there wasn't even an exact co-relation, but nonetheless there was enough of a connection to interest me. I also painted animals for a bit, I remember painting a cow, and I painted a chicken, because we used to keep chickens.

Have you kept any of this work?

I've got the cow, my sister-in-law's got, yes, it's actually quite a nice one, you know, and I got into, I remember at the time, it got into the Young Contemporaries, and somebody said, `This artist has really seen this cow'. I remember, it was sort of like, I thought, fame at last, you know, or fame so soon. And it was actually in the same, in the next sentence was a description of a painting by Anthea Alley, do you remember her? She painted cats. Well she was, I suppose in the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies

she was known everywhere, Anthea Alley. So it was me and my cow, and Anthea Alley and her cats.

Oh right. [LAUGHS] I don't know who actually has got into the Young Contemporaries, I'm very impressed.

[LAUGHS] Well that was then let me tell you, that was then, yes.

Yes, quite.

Yes, nice one.

Was there much competition between the students?

Very, yes, highly competitive, very highly competitive. Yes, very.

How was it sort of felt and expressed?

Well I think, you know, there was a certain sort of bitchiness about it all, you know, no doubt about that. And...and also I guess there would have been some contempt for those, you know, that one might think was, you know, they weren't doing very well or their work was poor or bad, so yes, there was a very strong, highly competitive thing going on.

And the judgements that were made in that, at that stage, were they sort of purely formal judgements?

No, I think they were more than formal; I think they would have been also to do with the subject, you know, and also the actual kind of, how would you describe it? Like the genre, the whole genre, it would have been also to do with that, so there would have been people doing things that were regarded as, you know, kind of outside the canon. Either decorative or, you know, I mean, so there would have been a strong antagonism to sort of, like the decorative and so on. I think this was all misplaced actually, I mean, but nonetheless there it all was, and it was connected to this thing of purpose and intention and high seriousness and so on.

And in terms of models that as students you look to, how influenced were you by European art?

Well it was really interesting because, you know, 1949 wasn't...I think it was Munnings who said, `If I saw Picasso in the street I'd kick him in the bum' or something. And there was, you know, that was a prevalent view, and so, the school of Paris, you know, which would have been the high model at the time, it didn't sort of, didn't play a part in, not where I was working anyway.

So did you discuss it, or it simply didn't come into your field of vision.

It didn't come into the field of vision, it didn't come in.

So you were looking really at British painting?

Yes, exactly, yes, yes. British painting and then of course, you know, the reverence of the history of painting, you know, in a European sense, and with the usual models, you know.

And was there a library at the college that you could use?

Yes, there was a library, yes.

You don't remember what was it in, do you?

No I don't, I can't remember at all.

Did you look at magazines at the time?

Yes, looked at magazines. And went to exhibitions, used to go to London quite a lot. I mean the two most powerful exhibitions that I can remember when I first was at art school was the Munch exhibition at the Tate, which was, which I thought was absolutely extraordinary, and that, you know the adolescent girl one, that was, I couldn't get over that painting, I thought that was really powerful, and there were some ones of a sick child also that were very powerful.

You don't remember why, what sort of, the nature of the impact they made on you?

It obviously had to do with the sense of the human, you know, this kind of, this sort of vulnerability and this...and I mean probably I was vulnerable, I don't know, I sort of

really... And also this kind of awful sense of sickness or the, you know, the deathliness, I mean, of Munch, that was what really hit me I think. And the sort of, at that time a way of painting that I couldn't understand, you know. I mean the painting was so wild, do you know?

Yes. How did you feel about that?

Well I couldn't...quite...

Were you offended that he had got to the Tate and doing this wild painting?

Well it was so wild. You know, it was a mystery to me if you know what I mean; I was really engaged with it but I couldn't, you know, how to deal with it, you know, because like, you know, my work was very precise, or tried to be, very precise.

I mean did you find yourself attracted to it, or repelled by it?

Oh yes, yes, very much so, yes, yes. And this curious colour, you know like, the sort of, this really powerful colour. And the other exhibition was a Mexican exhibition, an exhibition of Mexican art which was a bit like, you know, all the Mexican exhibitions you get, it's got the sort of crystal [INAUDIBLE], and Siqueiros and Orozco and, you know, and all of that. And that was also, I don't think that was on at the Tate, that was very powerful; that was about 1951 or '52, that was extraordinarily powerful. But again it was, you know, like... I mean Siqueiros, you know, I...you know, at that age, confronted with Siqueiros; I can't stand Siqueiros now, but, God! it was so...and I couldn't work out what, you know, why it was there, what it was doing, and it was...you know, in other words I didn't have the confidence to challenge it and say, well I don't like it, you know, it sort of hit me.

Mm. Do you think you didn't like it then or...?

Well I subsequently haven't, I've really, you know... Although, you know, there was something really, the surreal aspect of Siqueiros was sort of grabbing me in some sort of way, but I...yes, it was... And Tamayo was also interesting. And who else is there? Rivera I was not so...I mean, I've been to Mexico quite recently and seen all those murals, and that's all been a revelation. When I saw this exhibition much earlier on it was, you know, it was...this sort of... Because Siqueiros has got a tremendous amount of force in it; I don't know that it's power, it's force, you know, it's kind of forced in

some way, and it's kind of, it's like an act of will everything, you know, and... And I suppose, I wanted to... You see I wanted to really make very powerful things, and so there was that sort of connection with it but I couldn't with it at all, I didn't know what, you know...

Yes, sort of beyond your vocabulary...

Yes, and not something I ever experienced, you know, like, where would one see it?

So having sort of picked up that emotional and that kind of physical element, then you went back to art school.

Well then you see...

And were you able to use it in any way?

Well there was, you know, that... I mean Sutherland also, there was a certain intensity in Sutherland's work, and so, you know, so that there was a, in a sense I had a desire to sort of, you know, to try and make things, make intense and powerful things. But work I was doing was in a sense like very, it was still the apprenticeship of learning how to paint and actually being very careful, and very tonal and you know, with...I mean in... And I also think I...I had a misunderstanding as to how, you know, as to how one... This sounds completely mad, but I had a, I think I had this complete misunderstanding about how to see something, because I used to think, well if I really stare at it, it will, you know, the intensity will, you know, I will...

Yes.

You know, and it never worked of course.

Oh, well keep trying, who knows? [LAUGHS].

[LAUGHS] You know, it just didn't work, it just didn't work, just looking at it.

Yes. I mean was there any room in the system that you were working in, like a kind of room, if you're going to be bad in, or did you always have to stay within this apprenticeship framework?

Well I don't think anyone said anything about it being... You know, it's like a kind of, an unspoken accepted, you know, common frame, and you went there and that's what you did, and you know, like... And then if you transgressed it, then, you know, like, it would become really difficult in a way. Although I didn't think about transgressing, and I didn't think about transgressing, I wasn't interested in that. I really wanted to do the things I wanted to do through, you know, learning how to paint.

Yes, sort of going through it all.

Yes, that's what I really wanted to do.

[INAUDIBLE].

Yes, yes. And so I had a certain respect for Stoppani, you know, who was teaching, and, you know, I wanted to, I really wanted to learn, you know, like, how, you know, what happened, all the technical procedures and all of that. And at the same time I didn't want to, you know, I didn't want to become too technical or anything, it was a waste of time, but at the same time one needs to have a certain knowledge, or one, I thought one had, and I still do of course. And, so in that sense it was a very specific sort of education, training, really, and the life drawing, you know, was really fundamental to it. And, I don't know whether, you know, it's been useful or not. [LAUGHS] It's like all education isn't it, you know, like you go through it, and you know, you can't look to it and say, oh well, you know, it was very useful because of this and this; you can only really say, well, it was a set of disciplines that I went through, and maybe the nature of discipline is something I've learnt which, you know, is useful at different times.

Well I think quite often that discipline is what in the end gives you your...that's how you find your individuality.

Yes, exactly.

But, I'm just sort of, quite interested to know whether any of your fellow students kind of broke the reins early, I mean particularly of the more mature students who must have found it quite restricting.

Well I think a lot of them dropped out.

Really?

A lot of them definitely dropped out. There was one man who was there who was, a man called Corviello, Peter Corviello, who became very prominent in London and then emigrated to Canada, and he was probably...and he was somewhat older than me, and I remember the year I left he was doing these sort of rather, probably what, sort of like paintings of autumn, well, or perhaps...no, I must have still been there because it was the autumn time he was doing it, and they were sort of, I remember them, I really disliked them because they were so competent in a sort of rather banal way. But he went on and became an Abstract painter in the Sixties, because this, we're talking about the middle Fifties now, and was quite prominent in London. Well I've forgotten the nature of your question, I've just drifted.

Breaking through the boundaries.

Yes, so he did, he broke through, but somewhere else. And I don't think there would have been anyone breaking through there, I don't think it was in the nature of it to... I think, it's almost like a time capsule, I don't think it would have happened. I think, when you get to the late Fifties as, we're talking about the early Fifties, then it all changes, at least, I can't say that that's generally true, it's certainly true in the case of when I went to the Royal College and what was going on, and the attitudes of the people teaching, and the attitudes of the students working, you know, then the confrontation was acute, and lots of things were being broken. But that was also probably due to, you know, there was a kind of, a greater awareness of international art in a way, I mean, you think about '56 was a point when, you know, the Abstract Expressionists were first shown at the Tate I seem to remember, and so on, you know, like the British artists having been to the States, coming back and, you know, people like Heron, Scott, and Scott painting in a certain way, obviously aware of what's going... So, you know, there's a general opening up it seems to me in the sort of middle to later Fifties which doesn't necessarily influence the students but is part of the same ethos that induce the students to actually rebel, I suspect. And then, you know, it comes together in another sort of way, you know, the contextualisation and what is actually being done by students. I'm thinking of people like Denny and Smith and, this is after Blake, and Tilson and Riley, you know, who were in an earlier frame, and Auerbach and Kossoff.

Just going back to Guildford, I mean, do you remember who the Head of School was when you were there?

Head of the School, yes, Dudley Holland was Head of the School, yes.

And did he involve himself with the students?

Yes, very much so. He was...he was a kind of, a rather...I don't know how to describe it, he was a sceptical kind of a guy, and so he... And it was very...he was very good in that, you know, he was...he used it very well in relation to education.

I'm going to stop you there.

End of F5274 Side B

F5275 Side A

[Tape Three of the interview with Stuart Brisley on the 12th of September 1996.]

Now Stuart, can we pick up on the sceptical Mr Holland.

[LAUGHS] Well, Mr Holland his scepticism. He applied it to me with a certain amount of intensity in relation to my work, and he occasionally would call me in to his office and dress me down in relation to what he thought of my work and the way it was going and how arrogant I was etcetera etcetera, so... I think he was...he was right of course, I mean that was the interesting thing, he was right in the way that he saw, you know, he saw through me, put it that way, in what I was doing, and so it was a very good experience for me.

So did you experience it as constructive criticism at the time?

It was pretty difficult and tough, but yes, I actually tried to come to terms with it, yes. It, you know, it happened every so often. So it was clear that, he knew what was going on, he knew what people were doing and how they were doing it, and so he was...he had his eye on everything.

I mean do you know what he saw as arrogant in your work?

I think there was...I think there was a sort of narcissism about it in a way, I think, he objected to it quite a lot, and I was...yes, I think there was an aspect of that. And there was also a kind of, there was a sort of a desire to be spectacular or to be, I mean in relation to all of this high seriousness and so forth there's, you know, obviously there's...and a desire to be really intense and so on, you know, one wants to... And so I think I forced a few things and tried things that were probably rather cheap.

Ah, so you were transgressing of sorts but maybe...

Yes, I mean, you know, so I guess I was, yes, yes.

I mean did he paint himself?

I don't think so, I think he might have done once, yes.

You don't know his background?

No I don't know his background, no. But he was a kind of...you see Stoppani was sort of sympathetic and kind of, more...yes, more...he would allow things to happen more, whereas Holland was much more critical. So I guess it's a duo, it's kind of...I mean [INAUDIBLE], you know...

Nice and nasty.

And Holland was also distanced, he wasn't, you know, he was the Head of the School and he was quite distanced, so to be called in was, you know, hauled in and have your work looked at was a bit heavy-going, but it was fine, I mean I didn't see anything wrong with that.

Yes. I mean was that just part of the programme or...?

I don't know, I mean that's how it...I don't think there probably was a programme to tell you the truth, I just think it was all, you know, kind of, oh, you know, that this is all, you know, `I don't like the look of that, come in and I'll give you a going over,' you know, `and tell you what I think'.

I'm quite interested in your options early on, that you picked the history of architecture.

No I didn't pick it, I think I was required to do it.

Oh I see, sort of...oh right.

Yes, yes I was required to do it.

Yes. I thought it was a slightly surprising choice for you. [INAUDIBLE].

[LAUGHS] No, I was required to do it.

Oh right. So did they continue with any sort of art historical path through the time that you were at Guildford?

I think there was some sort of...we did one or two, but you know, I think I was so out of it, it was just...you know, it didn't mean anything. I don't think...it would be interesting to look back and see whether, you know, what sort of structure there was, and I suspect that it was a sort of afterthought if there was anything. But there was one thing which I didn't attend, which was interesting. There was a guy called Kashdan, I think his name was John Kashdan, and he did a sort of, a kind of exploration of the body and movement and light and dance and sound, and this is, we're talking about 1953/54, and people went to that in, you know, as sort of...I don't know how he saw it, in what terms he saw it, but it seems to sort of have, in my memory, something connected to the sort of, like, performance or... And students went to that a lot, but I didn't go.

Oh that's...

I saw no reason for it.

Yes, you thought it was just a rather bizarre item on the agenda?

Yes. No, because I was rather, I was this single-minded person who wanted to paint.

Sounds rather Bauhausy.

Yes, it probably was, yes.

And you don't remember how his name was spelt do you?

Yes. Kashdan, K-A-S-H-D-A-N, Kashdan.

Where was he from? Sounds foreign.

Yes I think it is. I think, it could be Iranian or... He was dark, a dark person. His son, the last time I met his son was teaching at Nottingham, Trent Polytechnic, and I can't remember whether he was called John or whether his son is called John. But yes, there was quite an intense event, you know, that went on for, you know, well over a year I seem to remember, sort of...sort of self-expression.

Very un-1950s.

Yes, yes, exactly.

I mean do you remember other students talking about it?

Yes, they really liked it, and you know, I mean some of them, you know.

Yes. I mean could you identify the kinds that might be keen on such things, were they particular personalities, or...?

No I couldn't do that. There were some young women who seemed to like it. [LAUGHS] I didn't ever go, no. Perhaps I should have done.

Yes, that would have been a major...

That would have stopped me doing performance at the very beginning. [LAUGHS]

I'm surprised you didn't go with all those young women there. It' so obvious. [LAUGHS] On the magazine front, do you remember what you did read?

I don't know if, was `Studio' around at that time? Yes, so it would have been `Studio', yes. And, there was something else, a sort of, like a newspaper, sort of small newspaper sort of thing, like `Art News' or something.

Yes, I can't remember.

No. Something like that.

`Studio' was definitely around. It was quite a small format, sort of A4, quite dull I have to say.

Yes, yes. And the other thing that, while I was at Guildford, the AIA were in contact with me, so I used to go to the AIA quite a bit which was...very much... So that would have been the period of time when they, just before they sort of had their demise, because I think it was, wasn't it '55 when, I think there was some issue that Henry Moore didn't support or wasn't going to [INAUDIBLE].

Yes. I mean did you go to that because of your father's sort of influence?

No, no I went to it... No, I didn't actually make a connection particularly in that way, I mean, it's because they had actually contacted me on the grounds of, you know, like the cow painting. [LAUGHS]

So you were exhibiting with them?

I didn't ever exhibit with them; they invited me to but I didn't.

Right.

But I went to the gallery quite a bit, because as I said I used to go to London quite a bit, go to the Tate and, you know, the National and... And I don't know whether the Beaux Arts was going on then, that would have been a bit later, I don't know whether it was later.

I'm not sure.

And Marlborough and so on.

Yes. Do you have any sort of memories of AIA exhibitions particularly that stay in your mind?

No I can't say that I do, I can't say that I do.

I mean I think their sort of main political moment might have been over by then.

I think it was over really, yes.

Yes, so it was more just a kind of showing only.

Yes, that's it, yes, yes.

Were there any group activities at the college, I mean were you ever taken to exhibitions as a group and the work discussed, or was it...that was a personal initiative?

Not that I can remember, no. No.

So it was quite an insular set-up?

Yes, yes it was, yes. Yes. Probably not unlike numbers of regional art schools now I would have thought, you know, with lack of money and, you know, so everything shrunk to a certain scale. Except, you know, information technology offers a lot more than was available then.

Did they bring guest speakers into the college, or artists, you know, well-known artists at the time?

Yes they did, yes, every so often. I remember William Townsend from the Slade coming to, we had an exhibition in the local Guildford gallery and he came to open it, I remember that. But you see these things are few and far between.

And did you have any sort of, I mean I appreciate that it was a well-known school for the photography and so on, but, you know, did you have any kind of hankering after the idea of the London art schools from Guildford?

Yes, yes definitely, yes, and there were people that left Guildford and went to Chelsea and St. Martin's; I mean it was seen as, you know, like a more critical place to go. Chelsea was particularly. I mean the person who, you know, and also Elizabeth Frink had just left Guildford just before I arrived and gone to Chelsea, so, you know, there was that as well, you know, and she got to be known rather quickly I seem to remember. So, yes there was a desire to get into London definitely, yes.

Just sort of describe for the record if you can what your work looked like at the end of that apprenticeship and how fully completed, at what stage of your overall sort of artistic apprenticeship you felt you were at; I mean was that a finite point, and then you moved on into the kind of adult world when you went to the Royal College, or...?

No, it didn't work like that. I think, well by the time I had left, by the time I got to the end of that Guildford period there would have been some few interesting works which would have been relatively small and quite, and maybe painted in tempera and quite, very very descriptive sort of, like Realist works, but quite fluently painted. And then there would have been some very heavy kind of like turgid numbers where I would have experimented with things like glazes or in oil paint, glazing, and I would have tried to make something look in a sense as illusionistic as I possibly could, and wasn't quite succeeding, and so the whole thing looked sort of, it looked sort of like

overworked and... And that, so there would have been some of those. And then there would have been one or two that sort of had some sort of promise of something else, paintings. I remember painting a chicken. And I remember going to the Royal College interview and all these paintings were sort of, the ones I had selected were sort of sitting around the walls, and one of the things they asked me was, what did I think the difference was between illustration and painting? And you know, like clearly I think they thought that there was, you know, like the descriptive mode was perhaps too illustrational, I suspect they thought that, and I remember having difficulty in answering the question. So I think the work would have been probably quite withdrawn in a way, quite...quite...as though painted from a distance, sort of suppressed perhaps, quite suppressed I think, and with this ambition to make things as real as possible in terms of paint.

Yes.

And I don't think I understood that thoroughly, what that was. And then I...yes, so that's what they would have looked like.

So that kind of...sort of metaphorical quality in Sutherland's work, or the kind of rather psychological thing of Munch, I mean that hadn't sort of found its way into your work at that time?

I think it did, but I think it was...I mean it was all out of control, you know, it wasn't...out of control sounds peculiar, but I mean, but it wasn't...it was quite crude when it happened, and it was perhaps forced, and you know, it wasn't...it didn't work. So really what worked in the end were probably these very simple responses to a stimulus, you know, like a dead bird or something, that was painted outside the college, you know, at home, you know, and so I felt freer to...freer to work, and it was more...it was more fluent and open, and more expressive actually, and still quite Realistic.

And you were living at home still at that point, were you?

No I wasn't living...I had lived at home and then I lived in Guildford, I had a room and lived as a student in Guildford.

Well can you describe that, the room and the house and the sort of...?

Yes, I lived in a room with, there was a guy who was a photography student and I had a room in his house, at the top in a flat, and, it was much easier because I could just go back and forth to work and so on, and I used to go home every so often. I mean, it was important to get away from home, you know. And the room was quite small, you know, and I had access to a kitchen and that was that, you know. I didn't sort of cook anything particularly. And so, it was sort of one of those little rooms, you know. But it was all right, you know, it was...

And you could paint there?

Yes, and I could paint there, yes. And so, and my family life had, my home life had sort of like got to a very difficult point, and so it was better to get out of it, you know. It was just too difficult really.

I mean why was that, just age and stage or...?

I think they just, I think we just didn't get on with each other at a later stage, you know, I was about 18 or 19, we just didn't see eye to eye about most things, and it was better to get away from them, get away from there. And in a way I, you know, there was a period of estrangement in a sense, for quite a long time.

How long?

For about, oh, no, from probably about 1953 to about 1964.

On the sort of financial front, what happened about grants and so on at that time, were you fully funded?

Yes, I got a grant, yes, yes.

And that covered fees and keeping?

That's right.

Keeping you alive as it were.

Yes, yes, yes.

And it was enough?

Well yes, it was. I mean I've never really been interested in, you know, having lots of money, so yes, sure it was enough, you know, it was. I seem to remember, I was having this kind of fantasy or desire not to go in the Army, and it was getting...I remember I got my money for the last term and I had something like £60 and there was a boat that was for sale on the Isle of Skomer, and I remember it was £60-something, and I was thinking, oh, if only I can get that boat I can get, you know, I can get it and I can live on it. This is a sort of obvious fantasy. And of course every week the money went down, and so it eventually became... [LAUGHS]

Terrifying.

But that's...you know, and the Army loomed closer, and you know, there we are, that's how it was. But I really wanted to do that, it was 22 feet long, I remember it very well, you know. What an escape, what a dream of an escape.

Absolutely, yes. Probably just as well you served your apprenticeship. The other apprenticeship.

Yes.

So that sort of certainty of going into National Service, did that start to kind of prey quietly on your mind as you got to the end of your art course?

Well I'd been lucky because if I hadn't been a student I would have been in the Korean war at the age of 18, and I'm really damn glad I, you know, that I wasn't.

Yes.

So, yes it did, yes, it got...yes, yes, because it was going to happen to all of us, you know, or those of us that were male it was going to happen to, and there was no escape from it, because if you applied to the Royal College and got in you still had to do the two years.

Before you went?

Before you went.

Gosh.

So it was a condition. I was invited to become a conscientious objector by some friends who were, I don't know if you know the Dolmetsches, they make...the Haslemere Festival deals with Elizabethan...urrh...recorder music, and the Dolmetsches are a part of that, and they make recorders nd so on, and they were friends of my father and they suggested that, they would actually sponsor me to be a conscientious objector, and I refused, because I'm not, and I wasn't, a conscientious objector. On the other hand I had an operation on my ear when I was 18 months old, so when I went for the medical I objected to them examining my ear on the grounds that it was not, that this ear was sick, and they send me to a specialist and he very quickly found out that this was just all bullshit, and so I was sort of taken in as it were. [LAUGHS]

Bad luck.

So I did make an effort, but not a very effective one.

I mean knowing that your fate was coming quietly towards you, did you have any preference for which force you went into?

I wanted to go in the Army.

Did you have reasons for that?

No, none whatsoever, I just wanted to go in the Army.

So how old were you when you were finally conscripted?

21 when I... I was actually 20 and I was very quickly 21 after that; I went in on August the 5th 1954 and I was 21 on the 19th of October. So on my birthday I did a night's guard duty I remember.

Oh, how mean.

[LAUGHS]

So describe, you know, what it must have felt like sort of packing up and going to this very different environment. Well, did you have a break, did you have a holiday, or you just...from one to the other?

No, I... I didn't have holidays, I used to work in the holiday periods, either as a postman or in summer on farms, and so I didn't have... And in 1952 I did go to France I remember for a short time, which was the first time I'd been abroad. So, I remember having a very short haircut prior to going in, thinking that it would, you know, kind of... Because you know, hair was important, and military barbers are renowned for, you know, cutting hair very short. So I just waited and then I went in, and went, you know... I felt awful, I felt really funny inside as I left home, and I remember waiting on King's Cross Station. And I remember wearing a sweater, strange, this was in August and I was wearing a sweater, it was a home-knit sweater I remember. And I walked up and down the train, I began to see other people, I could see that they were doing the same thing as me, and we did actually all get out at Darlington. [LAUGHS] And then we were herded into a truck and that was it, you know, we were taken off to Catterick, and by that time it was late afternoon I remember, and we were then, you know, kind of, that was it. It was...given clothes and...yes.

Before you actually sort of set off, I mean presumably you went home to say goodbye to your parents.

Yes, I was at home, yes.

Did you have any kind of sense of what they felt about National Service? Did they just accept it absolutely and...?

Yes, they accepted it, yes, they accepted it. They would have preferred it if I didn't do it, but they accepted it.

Yes.

Yes.

Well I think we might stop there, Stuart.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

[This is the second interview with Stuart Brisley on the 27th of September 1996, at his home in London, with Melanie Roberts.]

Well I just want to go back, Stuart, to a couple of things connected to your Guildford period. You mentioned that William Townsend opened an exhibition of students' work, and I wondered if you could tell me what you remembered of him at that time.

I think it was probably about 1953 or possibly the beginning of 1954, and there was a student exhibition and it was in a gallery in Guildford itself, quite near the Royal Grammar School, and, I guess this was an unusual event, it was something that didn't happen, or hadn't happened before for some time. And William Townsend was invited to open it, so he made a speech, which I can't remember too much of, or perhaps anything of really, and talked a little bit about the works. But I do remember that he didn't mention mine. And, that's really in a way all that I can remember. I think he might have been invited because one of the ex-students of the Guildford School of Art was Victor Willing, and he had become a quite conspicuous student at the Slade, so I suspect, although I don't know, that that invitation probably came through Victor Willing, because he came back to Guildford every so often, quite often, and was obviously friendly with some members of staff. So I think that's probably how it came about. And I can't remember particularly the content of the speech, unfortunately.

Right. I mean I'm interested in the Victor Willing connection. Did he come and talk to students and so on?

No, I think he was... I think at that time, you know, at least my impression is that we saw people like William Townsend or Victor Willing, they were kind of like heroes in a way, they were...they might not have been...we wouldn't know who they were but they would have seemed like really important people, and there was a sort of distance between them and us as students in a way that perhaps there wouldn't be now.

Yes.

So I think we tended to look upon them with a certain amount of awe. And Vic Willing was a very elegant person, very...yes, he was...he had a sort of very strong sense of dress, and so he looked very elegant at that time. I got to know him much

later on, you know, when he was suffering from his illness, and, he wasn't elegant in the same way. [LAUGHS]

Thinking about that exhibition, I would be interested to know what your feelings about exhibiting in the immediate term, but also how you perceived, you know, your future exhibiting career, what your perception of exhibiting was.

Yes. I suppose... I don't think I really ever had a sense of career to tell you the truth, I mean I think I still don't really have a sense of career, but I did have a sort of, I really wanted to make good works, so I don't know what, how that relates. I mean, it's not that I was naive about it particularly, it was just that I was sort of uninterested in it, and so when I... I mean at that point I was, it was probably '53, '54, I was what, 20, yes, 20 years old, and I had shown at the Young Contemporaries, but I didn't particularly think very much about it, and I had had a review which, I'd been picked out from loads of others, and I suppose I was pleased about that but it didn't, you know, sort of effect me too much. I think it was not so much a sense of career as a sense of, that I wanted to go on doing what I was doing as a painter, and so my ambition at that point would have been to be able to continue as a student, because I had no money and I wouldn't have known what, and I didn't want to be a teacher, I knew that for sure, and...

A perennial student.

Yes. So, I had already applied to the Slade and been turned down at that point I seem to remember. So it was about going on doing what one was doing but as a student.

Yes. Can you describe the circumstances in which you had applied to the Slade and...?

It's slightly unclear in my mind. I think that what happened was that I... In a curious way I was, this sounds quite contradictory, I was also very ambitious, sort of, probably stupidly ambitious, so, the year before I got into my, the year before my final year at Guildford I wanted to apply.....

<u>End of F5275 Side A</u>

F5275 Side B

[Interview with Stuart Brisley, Tape Two Side 2(sic - ACTUALLY TAPE 3 SIDE 2)].]

Yes I think I was in my penultimate year at Guildford and I wanted to apply to the Slade, and it's unclear in my mind as to whether I did at the time. I can remember that the staff, or Leonard Stoppani, who was the Head of Painting, sort of advised me not to and thought it was too early, and I think, I can't remember whether I did or didn't apply at that point, but if I did I got turned down. And then in the last year I applied to both the Slade and the Royal College, but I...the best work I, it may have been because the College interview and application came first, went to the Royal College, and I sent off some other stuff to the Slade, so I didn't get in to the Slade but I got into the Royal College.

I mean, can you remember what your perceptions were of the two different colleges from your viewpoint?

No, I didn't have too much of an idea as to what the differences were. I mean they were just regarded as being, you know, the two places that one would apply to if one wanted to go to graduate, continue studying. But what the actual differences were, and of course they were quite different, at that time I didn't know, so it was like a speculation, you know, out of ignorance. Even though, you know, I mean this sounds ridiculous, but even though people like Victor Willing were, you know, coming back to Guildford and so on, there wasn't the sort of... One, I wasn't curious enough; two, you know, there wasn't that much information as to what the differences would have been.

And you didn't get any feedback from people like Leonard Stoppani?

No, he just encouraged me to apply.

Yes, that's interesting. So just to take you back to the exhibition, that was your...that was after the Young Contemporaries?

Yes, that would have been after the Young Contemporaries, yes, yes it would have been, yes. That came quite early on when I was, I had started painting; I hadn't been painting for long, and I think I remember saying on the tape I painted this cow in sort

of like ochre and mauve I seem to remember, sort of ghastly colours they were, and I've still got that painting, or some member of my family has, and it looks a bit like a piece of furniture, this cow, it's kind of so...you know, its legs are like table legs somehow. And, I mean you can see that it's a cow, but it's quite wooden in its way, quite sculptural I suppose.

I shall, I hope I see it one day. Well I think we'll sort of draw a close to the Guildford period and move on now to National Service.

Yes. National Service. Well it was August the 5th when I arrived in Catterick, and, I mean that was a sort of a bit of a trauma in a way, I mean it was...the sort of disruption of everything, and, although I been...in a sense I was very lucky because if I hadn't have been a student I would have probably been off to the Korean war, so, and I was aware of having avoided that, so getting into the Army at that point was probably more acceptable than it would have been a few years previously. But nonetheless it was sort of like really horrendous, the sort of, you know, the shock of coming from being a student, and although there was, you know, like a certain amount of discipline there was also the encouragement to use the imagination and so on. So this was like the opposite. I remember the, you know, like the sort of drill ground, and you know, the ghastly things that went on there. A certain amount of brutality, a certain amount of sadism. I mean basically I suppose the whole thing was, well it's obvious, it was sort of designed to reduce the individuality of each person to a point where individuals would obey without question whatever was asked of them. And, there was a sort of brutal introduction to all of that, you know, it starts the minute you arrive. And, basic training, which I think lasted about six weeks up in Catterick, was based on that, and I remember it being sort of like rather horrendous.

And, you know, while that was going on, the other young people that you were with must have come from similar backgrounds?

Yes, well, and different as well; I mean from all over the place. And different classes and so on. And then we were separated. For some reason I was looked upon as being officer material and was... I always remember this, we were separated out and we were sent home for a weekend's leave and they said, `On return, bring your tennis racket,' and I thought, but I haven't got a tennis racket, and what the hell does that mean? And I was immediately kind of alienated from the whole thing. And I did two weeks - I don't know, maybe I did less than that, I did about a week of officer training and I just said I didn't want to be one, and I think I was probably right, I didn't want to

be one, I didn't want to be an officer. I didn't want to be a soldier, I didn't want to participate and I didn't want to collaborate. So...

And did they accept that?

Well, I was interviewed, and I remember them saying, `What are you interested in?' and I said, `Nothing, I'm interested in nothing'. And so that, you know, that sort of in a way did it, you know, like, so... I was invited to re-apply to be an officer when I became interested in something, actually I remember that. So then, so that meant that I was then sent back to the, you know, whatever it was that I had come from, this kind of catchment area of large numbers of recruits, and then I went through the process of being selected for one sort of activity or another. And I remember a friend of mine, somebody I had met there who was also an art student, had...he was going to be, not a wireless operator but a Morse code interpreter as it were, and I kind of quite fancied that, so, I remember going into the interview, and there was a captain or somebody, an old guy, an old man, probably in his last years I would have thought as a... And he said to me that he was going to sort of send me off to be driver, and I said I didn't want to do it, and then there was a certain amount of discussion and I said, `Well what have you got to offer me?' and he said, `You have got a lot to learn, you have got one hell of a lot to learn, you know, what do you mean, what have I got to offer you?' etcetera etcetera. Anyway, so I then made a plea to be one of these Morse code people, and he said, `Well I don't think it's going to happen to you,' you know, and that was it, and so I left the room without knowing what I was going to be, but he very kindly sort of had put me into that category. So, I then was sent to, near Loughborough, Woodhouse Eaves, a village near the Quorn Hunt I seem to remember, and for six months did a training in learning Morse code. And then three-quarters of the way through that I decided that I didn't really want to...I wanted to stay, I didn't want...because there were only three places you could go; you went I think...I forget. One didn't stay in England on this Morse code thing, one went to Cyprus, Malaya or Germany - no sorry, Cyprus, Austria or Germany, and I decided I didn't want to go anywhere. So I then re-applied to be an officer. And I remember, so, that was accepted and I went off to Andover on a selection thing and then I flunked that one because I didn't really want to, I just wanted to sort of stretch out the time. I remember giving a lecture on Graham Sutherland. [LAUGHS] Because we were all required to, you know, talk about the things we were interested and so on, and at that point I was prepared to be interested I guess, you know. This all sounds terribly arrogant in a way but that's how it was. So, that passed, and I, you know, like I clearly was not going to be an officer, and they turned me down, and I went back to

Loughborough and then was sent to Germany, and I arrived in Germany on, something like the 3rd of May 1955 I think it was. And on the, I forget the exact date but three days, three days after I arrived, I was going to cease to be a member of the Army of Occupation and become something else, British Army of the Rhine as a guest in the... In other words at that point the actual category of, you know, of the Army being an army of occupation changed; I guess Germany became an ally or whatever. So I actually did three days of active service, and I should have a medal or whatever it is, or a ribbon, but I haven't got one. Anyway, three days after. And we, after, it changed its status. So I went to Münster, I was in Münster, and was there for a few weeks, probably about three weeks to a month. It was a very difficult situation because the people in Münster were, for whatever reason, very hostile to the British Army, and I remember being, along with other people being spat at in the street and so on. It was really very difficult to walk about, a very cold atmosphere. And we were then sent to a camp on the Dutch-German border near Roermond in Holland, and I think the nearest big town in Germany would have been München-Gladbach, and I stayed there, I can't remember how long I stayed there, and then I, probably the summer or... And then I was sent to a place called Langeleben near Braunschweig, which is on the East German border. And of course the thing is that the job that I was doing, which was listening to, listening for alien or enemy Morse code transmissions, that would have been the Warsaw Pact, being on the East German was, obviously there were certain advantages to doing this. Although back at the other end, on the Dutch border, the operation continued more or less in the same way, because there was a hell of a lot of stuff that just was being sent 24 hours a day, you would have masses and masses of numbers just going on all the time, and apparently one of...they would come in groups of five, and one of those sequences of numbers maybe every 24 hours would actually contain a message hidden amongst them. And so all this stuff would be sent off to be de-coded, and also the, what do you call it, the position in the radio space, what do you call it, wavelength or something? No not wavelength, the...

Oh I know what you mean, sort of, FM and kilohertz.

Yes, where the, you know, exactly where the station, that would change every 24 hours. And the Intelligence Corps had broken the code so they would then send what the new, that new place would be, and then we would all shift there one minute before midnight and sort of look for this station and then find it and then it would go for another 24 hours. But, I did that for a while and it's the most boring thing in the world to do, absolutely mindless. And they went at a certain speed, you know, so it was actually rather, you know, you could get into a sort of rhythm with it, but it was

quite quick and you had to, you write these things down all the time, and... That was probably the most tense sort of way of working. And we worked on shifts, so, the worst shift would probably have been a night shift from midnight to 8 in the morning, there was 8 hours of that; then it would be, 11 at night to 8 in the morning, something like 3 to 11 at night, and then the next morning 8 until 12, and then a day and a half off and then... And it was designed so that they got the maximum amount of work out of people so that one was absolutely shattered at the end of that, and you know, by the time the day and a half went by one was just about back in condition to start it all over again. So it was very carefully designed to keep one occupied. In Langeleben, which is the other side, on the East German border, and also back, I had moved from this big number sort of thing to what's called Free Search, and for some reason or other, by luck or whatever, I became sort of adept at that and I became sort of, I could pick out Polish and Hungarian Morse believe it or not. I mean just, I don't know from where it was sent or what, or, there's a slightly different rhythm, and I could detect the difference. And I suppose some people would be, you know, susceptible to doing that and others not. So I became quite susceptible, or rather quite adept, at doing that, so that's what I did, and it was much more interesting, you know, because one could, you know, one could float around on it, you know, it was a freer thing to do.

Use your brain.

Yes, a little bit more. And then I went to Langeleben, and I had been promoted, I had become a lance-corporal, then I became a corporal. And then they put me in charge of food guns and things, cigarettes, and things like that. All the kind of edible and consumable things I was in charge of, with one assistant, and so I had a truck and everything and I would drive to Braunschweig and pick up all the provisions and so forth, go to the quartermaster's store and do all of that. So, that became, you know, a much more sort of, it was an easier life altogether. And being in the East German, on the East German border, the discipline that was imposed on the Dutch border, it was much more relaxed because actually it was active service in a sense, because one was doing the job that one would be doing in war. And there was a certain point in 1955 when there was what turned out to be a huge military exercise where the Iron Country, Iron Countries' armies all moved west, and we tracked for example a Polish tank regiment that ended up three kilometres from us, and it got extremely tense because nobody knew what was going on, whether they were going to stop or whether they weren't going to stop. And at a certain point the trucks which contained the wireless equipment, the radio equipment, the engines were kept going 24 hours a day, in case of, you know, like, because the plan was that the British Army would move

back behind the Rhine if there was an assault. And so it got very tense, and some...one or two people actually had breakdowns because of it. And, the captain in charge of this little outpost unit, there were 60 of us altogether including Intelligence Corps and so on, called me in one day and said, `I have to tell you that in the case of an emergency and we withdraw behind the lines, you and two cooks are going to be the rear guard.' So I was going to be left behind with these two cooks, and we were going to fight the rear guard. And I couldn't believe, I sort of said, `Yes Sir of course.' And so, I spoke to the two cooks and said, `What shall we do?' And they said, `Well...' So we decided that we would sit in the camp with all the cigarettes and all the chocolates and everything and just wait, in the event, and so, whoever came in they could have whatever they wanted, you know, there was going to be no resistance from us. And so, I mean it was all...it was...I mean it was both kind of like completely, seemed to be completely absurd that three people were going to be left behind to fight a rear guard, and also there was a certain reality to it because the situation was so tense, and we were getting information every day about this tank regiment coming straight for us. And eventually we could hear guns, because they were, you know, they were doing this sort of practice firing and things, I guess. So, that was a fairly sort of intense sort of time, you know, in my period in the Army. And then it sort of passed away. Most of the time I have to say in that place, Langeleben, was spent drinking, because we were in the middle of a huge forest in a clearing, and there was the forest master's house, you know, like chief game keeper or whatever, and there were lots of wild boar about and deer and so on. And the 1955 winter was extremely cold as well, it was very bitter, and there was a Gasthaus, and the Gasthaus, you know, I mean a pub I guess you would call it. So there was us, the forest master's house, a pub, and then there was a, believe it or not, some sort of a hostel for kids from East Germany. I never understood what that was, and very strange. So this was the little sort of hamlet that we... So we...what did we do, you know? We spent all our money drinking, and we were not allowed to fraternise, not supposedly, but I mean, and I mean the German economy was obviously pretty low at the time, and I spent a lot of time selling cigarettes to the Germans, you know, and making money that way and then, you know, we would drink, that's what we did, you know, like what everybody did. Occasionally, I went to the opera in - sorry, the ballet, in Braunschweig; I wanted to go to the art school but was not allowed to. You used to have weekends off in Braunschweig and stay in some bunker that the Luftwaffe used to have, so it was, we used to stay in this sort of strange place on the side of a hill with big steel gates and things that you would go through and go into this sort of cave in a way, you know, sort of highly developed sort of technological cave and have a weekend. Very curious. I went to Wolfsburg to see the Volkswagon

factory and things like that. But mostly it was, I mean leisure time was just spent playing table tennis, football, I did a certain amount of drawing, and drinking.

I'm going to have to be really boring and ask you to spell some of those names.

Yes, fine, if I can, yes.

So can you remember, Langeleben?

Langeleben would have been L-A-N-G-E-L-E-B-E-N, Langeleben.

Braunschweig.

Braunschweig would have been B-R-A-U-N-S-C-H-W-E-I-G, Braunschweig.

And if you can think of any others, it does help.

Roermond, R-O-E-R-M-O-N-D. München-Gladbach would have been M-Ü-N-C-H-E-N, Gladbach would have been G-L-A-D-B-A-C-H, and there would be a hyphen in between München and Gladbach.

I'm just going back to when you were making your sort of decisions about where if you were lucky you might place yourself in the Army system. Why didn't you want to travel, initially?

I had a relationship with, I had a girlfriend, and I decided that I would, you know, I would much sooner, you know, sort of have, be able to see her than move... That's why, quite simple.

Wonderfully simple.

It was absolutely, biological I guess you'd call it.

So was the girlfriend sort of close to the Army side, or back home?

She lived in Surrey, in Camberley. She did come to, she did come to Germany at one point, we went to Cologne and you know, we... You know, so I had time, I had leave, and so, I didn't come back to England, I spent it in Germany with her. I forget when

that was. The other thing that I've just remembered which I thought, which was really fascinating in retrospect, was that when I was on the Dutch border, and it was sort of summer time, I got a job on my day off, you know, I had a day and a half off, I got a job on the day off on a farm with another soldier from Manchester I remember, and we did farm work. And I remember eating with the family, and it was so interesting because we had, I remember, a bowl, and we all sat...it's a bit like the Van Gogh `The Potato Eaters', we sat round this table, all these people, I guess they were peasants, I don't know, and took things out of this bowl with our hands, you know, I mean it was just...it was amazing, you know. And we had wonderful, we had wonderful but very simple food with them, and it was great, I really enjoyed that, it was such good fun, to work on the farm, you know, it was really good. Now...

Now why did you think of getting a job?

What to do, you know, what to do. I mean you know, like, with this same man I dug a hole, we dug a hole, and we decided to dig a hole as deep as we could until we couldn't get out of it, you know, so, you know, we did... I mean things like that, you know, like what do you do?

Your first work of performance.

I mean you're young, you know, you're in this ridiculous situation, you know, and everybody has to be there, they don't want to be there, so different people did different things. He was a professional racing cyclist so you know, I guess he wanted to keep fit, and I just liked the idea, the absurd idea of digging holes, you know. I did, I became a lance-corporal in that camp on the Dutch border, and the sort of nadir of my career was the fact that, just after I had become a lance-corporal I was put in charge of burning something called secret waste, which is all... You see all the paper that was no longer required from this had to be burnt because you know, it could contain secrets and all the rest of it. And so, that morning, very soon after I became a lance-corporal, I was in charge of burning secret waste, and I had no idea, you know, that there was a way of doing it. So, they said to me, `You will burn the secret waste'. So I saw these two privates and said, `You will burn the secret waste.' And they said, `Where?' And I don't give a damn where, just burn it.' And they took it... And this camp was a new camp built by the Germans, and we had just moved into it from Münster, if you remember we went from Münster, and it was brand new. And I remember that afternoon we were going on these, what we call watches, and we were marching up to the place where all these, where we did all this work with the radio

sets, and there were all these sirens going, and there was a huge fire, and fire engines, and we were so pleased that the place was on fire, we thought it was wonderful, you know. And, I didn't think anything more of it. And a week later I was sleeping during the day between the night shift and the one, it was 11 to 8 remember and then 3 to 12, so, between 8 or 9 and 2 one would be sleeping. And I remember being woken up by Sergeant-Major Ford, who was a sadist of the first order, and prodded in the back, woken up, asked my name, and then made to get dressed and was marched off to the Colonel, who charged me with, whatever it was, I can't remember. I was going to be court-martialled, but they changed the charge after a while. It was all a bit sort of traumatic. They changed the charge and I was severely reprimanded for, you know, causing this fire, because these two privates had just taken the stuff out into the woods and set fire to it and it set fire to the forest, and you know, caused this enormous conflagration and all these, you know, fire engines had come from God knows where, you know, and then I was the one who was found to be responsible for it. So, and then, and so I was reprimanded, severely reprimanded. And three weeks after that I was promoted to being a corporal and sent off to the east part of, you know, to the east border. It's really fascinating, I mean I don't know how the Army works really, or how it did work, you know, like, one would have thought one would be demoted. [LAUGHS]

Well there are lots of theories in business about this sort of promoting. [LAUGHS]

[LAUGHS] Yes. Yes I'm sure there are. Anyway I was unaware of them, and went off to... And then, I'm just trying to remember all the sort of ghastly things that happened. During the winter of '55 it was terribly cold on the East German border, it was amazingly, really bitter, and I think it was cold everywhere, and the deer started to, the deer were starving and they were coming out of the forest, and so we, I got a pet deer out of that and looked after it for about three weeks, three weeks to a month, and unfortunately it died, it had some sort of ghastly disease and died. But you know, it was, that was rather... Maybe it was longer than a month, maybe it was two months or...but it was a beautiful animal. And you know, there were things like that that happened in the, which sort of alleviated the sort of, the utter kind of like boredom of this sort of really banal kind of life, you know, that one was living. And then, about a month before the end of, before I was due to leave I got alcoholic poisoning, and I remember the doctor saying to me, I was sent back from the...because it was, you know, like, I was.....

<u>End of F5275 Side B</u>

F5276 Side A

[.....in London. Tape Four Side A.]

Just before I talk about my own alcoholic poisoning I should say that I was the assistant to a sergeant-major in this camp in Langeleben, and he was undoubtedly an alcoholic and was at a certain point sent back to, I think it was Portsmouth, to a hospital that catered for alcoholics from, amongst other things from the British Army of the Rhine. And I was appointed to do his work in his place, and I remember the captain in charge of the camp saying to me, `Look, there is a real problem here, there's 75 per cent drunkenness in the camp and we have to do something about it.' And of course this was, I was entirely the wrong person to say this to, because I was one of the 75 per cent, but, whether that was true or not it certainly indicated, you know, the level of, a level, an extraordinary level of drunkenness amongst the soldiers. Anyway, I got rather ill, I didn't know what it was, and I was being sent back prior to being demobbed, and when I came...I was sent back in a truck from Langeleben to right on the Dutch border, I mean literally on the Dutch border, to the camp that I had unfortunately inadvertently apparently set fire to. And by the time I had arrived back, it took several hours to go, it's basically across Western Germany by truck, and I was in the back of this thing, when I came...I sort of fell out of the back when I arrived at this major, at this camp back on the Dutch border, and was immediately taken to the health place and I had a temperature of 104 or something, and I was put to bed and the doctor said to me, `You can either go to hospital, in which case you'll have to stay in the Army beyond your de-mob date,' and I said, `No way'. So I stayed in the dormitory as it were, or the barracks, and I just stayed in bed until I was, you know, slowly got better. And I left the Army still quite ill, and I couldn't drink or anything for about a year after that, I was...

And what was it, jaundice or something?

Yes, I was jaundiced, yes. I mean it obviously affected the liver and I went very yellow. I was obviously affected, you know, by just drinking too much, which was probably the most prevalent occupation amongst the, you know, the people in that camp on the East German border.

I mean was there any kind of social outlet outside the camp at all if you couldn't fraternise?

Well you could sort of fraternise, I mean I think that was probably not quite accurate of me. I think non-fraternisation was earlier on, you know, and I think that, you know, that the atmosphere in Münster kind of, you know, that was appalling anyway when we first arrived, and by the time I arrived in Langeleben it was much more relaxed it seemed to me, and we did go to a small town called Konigslutter, spelt K-O-N-I-G-S-L-U-T-T-E-R, which is renowned for having I think a mental institution there, or institutions, people who are mentally ill. And we did, we had a sort of patrol that was organised with the local German police to sort of pick up all the soldiers at night, you know, and take them back to the camp, and I can remember most of them we had to carry, stretchers and things, you know, dump them on their beds. I mean just the most appalling situation, really, when you think about it. And I mean it is because, I suppose... I mean these are...we're talking about, most of these people would have been either university students, either going to be university students, had been university students, art students... I mean most of them would have been, would have either been middle-class or would be aspiring middle-class because of their education, so, it was not, most of these people were not, you know, kind of from...their education was not restricted, it was really quite... So it's really interesting to see, you know, the effect of, you know, being conscripted and then, you know, the kind of, the sort of limitations there were, you now, for...and the way in which people found a kind of level of behaviour, you know, that was of that order.

I mean did any of the group come up with, you know, the sort of concentration camp or the village answer to unnatural communities, which was the kind of things you describe in your childhood, like the Christmas pantomime or so on; there was no sign of that, it was just, hit the bottle?

Not really, no, no, no. I don't think...you see I think, the problem was one of, you know, the notion of conscription, you know, everybody was...I mean most people, not everybody, most people were highly reluctant and collaborated as it were or agreed to do it, you know, because they were compelled. So there was an element of compulsion. So, the reaction to that I suspect, the reactions to that took particular sorts of forms. And then amongst that group would be other disaffected groups, like boy soldiers, people who had been boy soldiers, who had been forced into the Army by their parents or by...or out of, you know, children's homes, who had been, who couldn't afford to buy themselves out of the Army, who had signed on for 22 years, and you know. So there was all of that as well amongst, you know, the few people who would be regarded as regular soldiers who were, some of whom were so deeply institutionalised, you know, a bit like being in, you know, any other sort of institution,

like maybe even a mental institution. And then there were the career soldiers. So, I mean it wasn't the sort of atmosphere that was terribly conducive to, you know, a kind of... And also it was basically one-gender as well, masculine, very masculine.

Was that a problem?

Yes, I think it was a problem, I'm sure it would have been a problem. I mean the levels of violence etcetera, and the...so, the sort of, the kind of escape from that would take the sort of forms that were available. Next to us was a Gasthaus, right; we could go down town to Konigslutter and there we would meet the Americans in the summer, because their camp was...they were doing the same things as us but they were...they would move south in the winter, we always thought it was because they couldn't stand the cold so they were given... It was actually because the American sector was, you know, in the south of Germany, and I don't know what they were doing next to us in the summer. So there was a certain amount of fraternisation with women and so forth, but it was... And you know, some of that would have been very crude, and others wasn't, it was much more, how would one put it, sort of equable. But at the same time the context was pubs and boozing and, you know, drinking, and then there would be violence, and then occasionally there was violence between soldiers and local males, and that was...that would just rise and fall, you know, and it wasn't sort of endemic in the sense that it was taking place all the time, but it would rise occasionally. Maybe it was, there was an underlying thing maybe but it just wouldn't raise its head that way very often, not where I was anyway.

I mean, did any sort of intellectual or political things come out of it, or did people literally respond very directly?

No, they would respond very very directly, yes, yes, to a very large extent, I would say. There may have been individuals who, you know, who saw it more, you know, who were aware in that sense, but I would say the majority of us didn't. It was a kind of, it was very much this kind of being contained and being controlled and being restricted, and reacting against it, and you know, that, because that... Because it was all the time, you know, I mean it wasn't just...it was all the time. It was like being in prison in a way.

In the Army training period, was it just all about, you know, struggling with your individuality, or did they also educate you politically in terms...?

No, not really, no. No it was much more... There was an education service, but that I think was much more to do with people that, you know, maybe needed to learn how to write or, you know, like, it was at a certain level. And I think that the basic training course was very short and you know, if they were going to get a bunch of, you know, disparate individuals together to act as one unit and you know, and go and, you know, put themselves ready to die without question - well, that's what it comes down to, that, you know, that needed a certain sort of introduction I think, and that's what we got. I mean, we were just hopeless, I mean, just absolutely hopeless. I mean I remember going on to the firing range and all that happened was that a boil burst in my arm, you know, at the time, and I remember shooting at this other person's target. You know...you know, it's nothing, you know, it couldn't really... I mean, there just wasn't, we weren't the right material, not at all, absolutely not. Most of us weren't.

Did you think about your art during this time, or practise it?

Yes, I did a certain amount of drawing, did quite a lot of drawing, and I had got into the Royal College and I was, you know, like really looking forward to getting out of it and getting on with it. But you know, like everybody had to do this, so I was with people I met later at the Royal College for example, and the person who had me promoted to a lance-corporal went to the Royal College the year before me, so I met him afterwards. You know, there were these connections, and they persist actually, it's rather interesting how they persist, some of them.

So is this like going to some ghastly boarding school or something, it sort of stays in the memory?

Yes, it certainly does, yes. I mean I did have nightmares about it, you know, but I mean, I haven't had one for a while but yes, and I think the reason for that was that I came out on July, I don't know, the 22nd, I can't remember the exact date, 1956, and that was very shortly before Suez, and - or maybe it was shortly after Suez, I can't remember, but the point was that at that stage there was a very real question as to whether those people who were in the Army were going to be required to stay longer, and some people were recalled who had done National Service. So I was very anxious about that, you know, no way did I want to perpetuate that. But I got out, I think it was two weeks before the next lot that would go into the Army in two-week batches and then come out in two-week batches as it were, after your two years, and I think I was the batch before there was a stoppage for a while, so I was just extremely lucky that... I did subsequently had nightmares about it, and it had an awful lot to do

with, you know, like, anxiety dreams about, have you got, you know, all your bayonet and gun and clothes and, you know, like, and all of that, because you had to have all this stuff in a proper order and, you know, and all of that. So, it was...yes.

I mean in some ways you were very well prepared for it because of your interest in sports and that kind of thing.

Yes, yes, yes.

At least physically presumably you were well up to it.

Yes. But not with the drinking of course, you know, like, I mean that didn't... I was probably well up, you know, to sort of start all that. No. Yes, I should have been in a way, but I think psychologically I was sort of, like, not prepared to accept it. You know, I had to endure it...

It's the lack of choice.

...but I was not prepared to accept it. And also I had, I think I said before on this tape, Dolmetsch, you know, the musicians, they had actually offered to support me to be a conscientious objector, but you know, in conscience I am not, so, I wasn't then and I am not now. So, you know, I tried to get out with that sort of stupid thing with the ear. If I could have got out by subterfuge that would have been it, but certainly not on the grounds of morality or ethics. [BREAK IN RECORDING] I remember the day that I left the Army, and I arrived by train at the Hook of Holland, and I approached the ship and got into it, and I could see that the hold of the ship was absolutely full of people, and so I decided that I would get onto the next deck, and the sergeant in charge of this operation said to me, `You go down there'. And I said, `No.' And he said, `You go down there or you get off the ship.' And I went down and I got the last berth, which was on the ground sort of, there were bunks one above the other, and this was the worst possible position you could get, and it was like, I was quite claustrophobic, there were I don't know how many hundred people down there. And I slept with the body of someone just above my head as it were, you know, in this awful space, and with all these kit-bags around, so that everything was blocked. And right near something to do with the engine. And it was a really quite awful experience. And the next day, we arrived at 6 o'clock and it said, there was a loudspeaker said that those people in the hold will be the first off the ship followed by X Y and Z, but actually we were the last people off. So, right to the very last moment they were

deceitful; at the very last moment, they broadcast what they were going to do, just in order to keep us in a way quiet. We docked at 6 o'clock, and I remember coming up out of that hold at half-past 10. Got on the train and came to London, that was from Harwich, crossed London and got on a train to go to Haslemere, which is near where the village I grew up in, Grayswood, got on the train and sat next to a priest or a vicar who was sitting opposite me. And there was a sailor, because of Portsmouth and, you know, a lot of activity. And he said to me, the priest said to me, `I've just got to tell someone, I've got to.' I said, `Well, what is it?' And he said, `I have been at a dig, and I've just discovered, we've just seen this wonderful Roman...' They'd just discovered some Roman artifact, and he was on the train and he just couldn't contain himself he was so excited, so I remember that. I got off the train at Haslemere, went to Grayswood and arrived at my home, and the house where my parents lived was on a small hill and the front garden sort of sloped down, and I remember arriving and getting onto the sort of porch at the front door and taking everything out of my kit-bag and throwing it over the garden, and then going upstairs to my room, which I still had then, and taking all my clothes off, getting into civilian clothes, and then throwing all these clothes out of the window, much to my...not to my mother's amusement, she was rather upset about it. And then I went round and picked them all up and shoved them all back in the bag and felt a lot happier.

A ritual burning as it were.

Yes.

So how did you adjust to coming back to civilian life, and how quickly did you carry on with your, you know, your earlier intentions?

Well very quickly because I came out in July and in September I was at the Royal College of Art, so I didn't have much time to sort of, in a way concern...you know, to sort of be that concerned about adjustment; I had to quickly re-establish the connection with the Royal College, go and find a place to live, and think about starting the three-year graduate programme.

Now before you start on your time at the Royal College, can we just go back to the interview. Perhaps you could, you know, tell us who you were interviewed by and how you prepared for it, and what course it took.

Well I was very...I suppose I was really quite intense about the work that I had been doing, and I had a lot of support from, you know, the school, Guildford, and from Stoppani and so forth, I mean, I suppose they thought I had talent and all of that. So I was very...in a way I was very sort of, hoping very much that I would able to do this, that this was something I could do that would be [INAUDIBLE]. So the interview was not so much a preparation as a kind of desperate, you know, there was a desperate desire to want to go there. I had actually also applied to Brighton, some place in Brighton to do a teachers' training course if I didn't get in to the Royal College. And the interview was not just an interview, it was also, it was a three-day affair where one actually had to do life drawing and one had to do a composition, I seem to remember `The Flight Into Egypt' was the subject, one of them anyway. And then there was the interview. So it was actually, it may even have been a week, I can't remember; it was at least three days, I'm pretty sure it was about three days. So the interview came as a kind of apogee of all of that, and they would have seen, you know, the work that one had done, both as... So, one was sort of plunged back in to visual work as it were in a... No sorry, that's not right, I mean I was still...I hadn't come out of the Army, it was before, obviously. So I was clearly well versed in, you know, working like that. So, we did the life drawing thing and the composition, which I found really difficult because I didn't like doing subjects, you know, being given subjects, but I did it. And then came the interview and all my work was there, you know, the work that I'd put in. And I remember there was one sort of, there was one question that I remember stuck in my mind, because it was probably something that I couldn't cope with or, you know, there was some sort of internal debate going on in me about it, and that was, they looked at the work and they said, `What is...can you define the difference between illustration and representation?' And I don't think I could. On the other hand I knew what the difference was. And I think there was...because of the realistic nature of my work and the, you know, I couldn't possibly have painted anything away from there being a source that I could see, hence the difficulty with, you know, composition and so forth, I was absolutely fixed to the notion of, you know, that one had to look at something in order to paint it. And, I was really convinced by that. So the question of its voracity as painting or illustration, you know, that distinction becomes quite a critical one, and I remember sort of, like, being quite concerned about that, and it was all around a painting of a chicken that I'd done, because I grew up with chickens, I might have told you that before, and so chickens were on my mind I guess. And chicken flying, wings and birds, and you know, things like that. So, but this question, I don't think I probably answered in any critical way. And you now, they would, I suppose... That's the only question I can remember.

Can you remember who they were?

Yes, there was Colin Hayes, Rodrigo Moynihan, there would have been Ruskin Spear, I think John Minton was there but I'm not sure, Robert Buhler. I can't think who else was there at the time. I remember Colin Hayes because Colin Hayes, I don't know, looked so elegant, you know, seemed extraordinarily elegant, and something I suppose I was concerned about because I remember Vic Willing as being extraordinarily elegant. But he was so elegant in a very particular way because his shirt was frayed and you know, the collar was... But you know, there was a certain sort of sense about him that I really found very conservative in a way and yet, but falling apart and yet very elegant. Very curious. And the sort of saturnine figure, sort of... I never got on with him actually, I mean this was just an image from the interview; he didn't ever, you know, he's not somebody I actually had much to do with at the Royal College. What else do I remember? I don't remember much else. And then, but I can remember getting the letter to say that I had got in, and that was an immense sort of surprise to me in a way, you know, and, I really hoped that I would get in but I didn't...I had no idea whether I would get in or not. So it was all, you know, a great celebration for me when it actually happened. And, I guess that's all I can remember about it.

I mean just going back to the, having to do work as part of the what's it, was that done with the students in the college or were you with other candidates?

No, all candidates. I remember doing the composition with somebody called Richard Smith who became very prominent later on, and also I became friendly with William Green the bicycle painter at the time, you know, just during the interview, during the interviewing process and the working process; both of those I bumped into then.

So how many were there altogether?

I can't remember, perhaps 20, 30, something like that. It was a pretty sort of strenuous kind of thing to do. I mean also to go to London, you know, to do it, and luckily, I mean I travelled, you know, up and down, you know, I mean I hadn't come from a great long distance as some other people had so it wasn't... But nonetheless I mean it's still quite a thing to do. I mean, you've got to think about the, you know, travel wasn't that, you know, people didn't travel that much, you know, and, as much

as I'd gone up and down to London once in a while the idea of going to the college and doing it was a big deal, you know, it is a big thing.

Mm.

Strange to say.

So did you stay friends with the people that subsequently joined you from that interview?

I stayed friendly with William Green, and Richard Smith, though what happened was that he had already been in the Air Force so he was older than me and so he went to the Royal College I guess in 1954; I went into the Army. I came out in '56 and he was in his last year, so, you know, there's a hierarchy, there was a hierarchy and I guess there still is. So, as much as we said hello, we didn't ever become really friendly. William Green was a different sort of person really. I mean he was more...less concerned about that sort of thing, you know, and... But subsequently I telephoned Richard Smith when we were in the States, both in the States later on, and he was very famous and I wasn't, and he didn't really want to have much to do with it. More recently, just in the last few months, we've become quite friendly. LAUGHS]

How funny.

Life is.

Yes. So you got in and said your farewells to your family.

Yes.

Where did you set up home?

In a place called, number 13 Evelyn Gardens, SW7, off the, I think it's the Fulham Road, I'm not sure it's the Fulham Road. Yes, I think it's the Fulham Road. And, it was a house owned by a Polish admiral, and I lived in what had been a corridor in the basement; I don't know how they'd done it but it sort of, I could touch both sides of the wall with my hands, and there was a sort of army cot in there, and it was very drab, I thought it was really...if it was...like an example of miserableness, that was it. And I lived there for about four or five months and then moved, as I got married the

beginning of 1957. So I only lasted out in that corridor for a short, relatively short time. But I did learn how to say `Cancel my milk please' in Polish, because the admiral's wife didn't actually speak English really, and the guy in the room next door was from Gdansk and he had been in the German and the Russian army and God knows what during the war, he'd been sort of, like swapped sides and, you know, he was a really interesting person. And of course, the war, you know, and the aftermath of the war and its influence, you know, on how, the social life as it were, you now, like, what was so fascinating at Guildford School of Art, and it continued to be, was that, one's connection with people who had such extraordinary and peculiar experiences. And this man had, well had been severely shot up, was a waiter who worked in, I think in the Polish Club, and there was one close by, and I became very friendly with him and, he was somewhat older than me. But that sort of war experience was something, you know, I suppose I was fascinated by, you know, this...and the way hate had played its game with him, you know.

Sort of random aspect of life.

Yes, you know, because he was Polish but had been put into the German army and then had been, then had sort of become a prisoner of the Russians and got, I forget, somewhere in.....

End of F5276 Side A

F5276 Side B

[Continuing the interview with Stuart Brisley, Tape Four Side B.]

And did you find the relationship between your time abroad sort of connected to all this Cold War activity and these people who had experienced the sort of major active war? How did you sort those out in your mind and relate them to your own experience?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I don't know. I can't answer...I think it's a difficult question to answer.

I mean I'm asking that...

I mean I had, you see, what was...I suppose I was... I like listening, I think I like hearing stories, I have a feeling, I don't know what that really means, what would be at the back of that, but, like, so when I had been in the Army in Germany I had for example become friendly with a man who had been a German paratrooper and had fought through Poland, and because we were, you know, we became really friendly he told me an awful lot about life in the German army as a paratrooper and what happed to him and so on. So, the issue...it was more, for me it was more to do with this kind of, sort of imagination of, you know, like, life and death and the sort of way fate actually determines, you know, like it's one's life in a sense, you know, how people become just, sort of like, just elements that are shifted or moved according to much bigger forces and so on. And I guess I found that really fascinating. And also the fact that I, you know, had come from a very small place, a very, you know, a very tiny village and so forth. So the sort of, the imagination about `other' took on this sort of, I think took on this kind of perspective. So I was all, as a student I was always fascinated by people who were older who had done things beyond what they were doing in the art school; at Guildford this was very, you know, people had been in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps and, you know, blah blah blah, concentration camps and so forth. So, this was...it was this context that, these circumstances that I was sort of hooked into. And I suppose I was...because I had...there was a desire for me to not be contained by my own background and circumstances, these sorts of reminiscences and views and experiences sort of filled my imagination; some of it was horrific and you know, because I had a propensity I suspect to morbidity in a way, you know, for, you know, to think about violence and so on. So all of this was grist to that mill. It wasn't so much the broader perspective of, you know, like the, you know, like at that

point about the communist and socialist world as opposed to capitalism etcetera, you know; these enormous contextualising, you know, ideological circumstances, conditions, were not so much in my mind as this sort of, like, these personal connections, you know. I suppose it could be described as being sort of like apolitical in that sense, you know, although I had been brought up in this socialist, you know, with a desire, you know, for socialism and so forth. I think it's more like that.

And if you had this sort of very rich life of the imagination through these very real experiences of these people, I mean how did that relate to your very subject-oriented, realistic work? Did you not begin to want to make a sort of relationship between the two?

That's why I'd been interested in artists like Bacon and Sutherland and also to a certain extent Freud, and Goya, and so there was a connection there I think. But also there was, you know, being a student there was this sort of sense that one had to learn, and so there was an imposed sense of discipline and also the desire for a sort of self-discipline in a way. And also there were lots of assumptions around, as there always are at any one given point in time, and there were kind of sacred cow kind of notions as to what was and what wasn't possible to do. And you know, the sensational was sort of deeply, was regarded with deep suspicion, and you know, there was...there was a virtue in a kind of modesty and, you know, and a kind of modest vision of things. So... And also there was a kind of, a sense that if it was sensational it was empty, it was kind of vacuous, you know, it had no deep basis. And I think these views or these attitudes were quite prevalent at the time.

Were they consciously at the Royal College of Art at the time you were still...?

I think they were, yes, I think they were. I mean you've got to...think of the people that have come out of the, I mean apart from Riley, but then Riley was painting realistically probably round about that time, you know, the Kitchen Sink School had just appeared, Auerbach had just left, Tilson. The Pop thing hadn't broken. So the Royal College of Art actually did represent in that sense a kind of, an approach to representation, albeit strongly attached to the Academy. And, I mean and I guess the Slade would have represented it in a rather different way, you know, back through the Euston Road and so on. So, there it was. And so, it was the right place for me, you know, on the face of it it was the right place for me, and I entered into it in that spirit, you know, of...I mean I really wanted to be, I was a representational, I wanted to be a representational artist, or a figurative artist, there was absolutely no way it could be

anything else. And I remember saying that, saying that very strongly, that it would be impossible for me to be anything other than a figurative artist. And, so, and also because I was limited to painting only those things that I could see in front of me, you know, that was also a kind of, there was a limitation there. So I painted mostly still lifes and things, and then I started to paint the figure. And I had a very mixed but productive first years at the Royal College. And I was very strongly, from my memory very strongly supported in what I was doing by Rodrigo Moynihan, who you know, kind of, interestingly enough played a rather interesting game between figurative and non-figurative painting. But, you know, he was very supportive of the sort of figuration that I was trying to do, and very helpful. And at the end of that year he resigned.

Do you know why?

I think he got married to someone and they went off to Paris, I've forgotten her name, but, she was a painter. And, that was a blow to me actually, because, although I, you know...because I did feel that I was learning a lot from him.

So he was actually a direct teacher at that time?

He was head of the thing, of the Painting Department, but he also did teaching, he did a lot of teaching, well he must have done because... And so that was a bit of a blow to me I must say. And I think that if he had stayed my work might have, you know, had a different trajectory, it's possible.

I mean can you remember his style of teaching?

Yes, I remember him saying things like, you know, don't bother about this idea of composition, you know, it's a waste of time. That if something, if you really feel something strong enough and you put it in a certain position, then that's its right place. So, you know, like all of that baggage about, you know, like the golden mean and you know, compositions and how things balance and how they don't balance, he just wiped it out of the window, for me, and I was, that was a great, you know, that was a tremendous help, you know, because that meant that one could commit oneself to, you know, well I mean this, and I mean it to this extent that it's going to be there, you know. And so, you know, things like that, and I remember that one really quite strongly. And so, you know, he was very good, for me.

Who else was in that first class?

Other students you mean?

I mean who stayed in the profession is probably what I mean.

Not many, very few people stayed in, that I know of; in fact I...I probably can't think of anyone.

Gosh.

It's very strange, because we were a year, we were almost an in-between year. I mean before us had been, well there was Denny, Smith, in the two years previously, William Green and so on, and then there was Alan Green, I don't know if you know Alan Green, he was, yes, he was in the year before me, one year before me. And then before, then there was Tilson and you know, and Auerbach and, I don't know whether Kossoff went to the Royal College, I think he probably did. Peter Blake, who at that point I suppose was a kind of pre-Pop artist in a way, you know, but it wasn't sort of internationalised, you know, it was more local in a sense. And then after comes Hockney and, you know, comes the great sort of Pop explosion. So we were the kind of, you know, a rather drab, in-between, and what I suspect, in fact I...it's my prejudice, is that because in 1956 there was this very important show of American painting at the Tate, and painters like Denny and Smith, and there were others, embraced non-figurative work; this went right against the sort of policy and ideas of the staff at the Royal College of Art, and they were damned sure that we weren't going to follow that path, I have a suspicion, and I'm sure that they were so delighted, you know, when the Pop artists all appeared because they were all figurative. So we, you know, we were in this sort of interim period, because at a certain stage in my three-year period I actually went completely non-figurative, so all these sort of great statements about, you know, never being anything than a figurative artist went straight out of the window, or appeared to do so.

I mean where you conscious of the tensions between the staff and that earlier generation?

No, not until later, not...then I was, yes. Later in my...not in the first year, but in the second year, and I had a very bad second year at the Royal College, very difficult, the difficulty was that Carel Weight was appointed and we just didn't sort of, like, I had

no connection with Carel Weight, although I think he was probably a very good teacher, I've no idea, and I think he's a very interesting artist, but you know, that's another matter. As someone that, you know, that I would have had something to do with, it just didn't work, and I tended to withdraw from, and to work at home. And my work was then sort of like, you know, in a very difficult period, you know, and... Because I was being introduced to new ideas I think. And Bratby had quite an influence on me, and Smith - not...

Jack Smith?

Jack Smith. Or rather, let's say the Kitchen Sink had a certain influence on me for a short time. And I was beginning to want to, you know, kind of like become freer in what I was doing. Six weeks after we arrived at the Royal College, after the beginning of term, Minton gave a, John Minton gave his last lecture, or discussion, and maybe just before that he gave a criticism; it might have been at the same thing, I don't know. He made a criticism of work, and he was very critical of my work, I remember it very well, and I presented a painting of a skull that I had painted at Guildford and put for the interview, and you know, when we arrived of course I didn't have anything so I put that in. And he was...and I thought it was really good, I was very proud of it, and other people had liked it and so on, and he really damned it and said it was like a map, you know, it had no...you know, it was drab and dry and it had no feeling in it and it was just like mapping out something, you know. And it probably was, I mean I think I think he was probably right. And in the course of this last kind of, like, public event in the Royal College, you know, it was very curious, he talked himself and he got into a corner of the room, and it was like he was cornered; it was so weird. And then he committed suicide. So that was an extraordinary event in a way.

Can you remember what he said?

No I can't particularly, no, no. I wish I...but there will be people who can I'm sure.

But how did you feel, were you conscious of how...?

I was conscious of, I had a sense of someone... You know, it was like, it was a bit like looking at someone in a glass jar, you know, it was a bit like that. And, it was fascinating and sort of difficult, you know, and of course, you know, you were trying to understand yourself as everybody else, and what one...you know, it was really

tense, very tense. But it wasn't exactly, there wasn't...I mean it clearly, you know, had aspects to it which were not being spoken, there were numbers of things going on simultaneously I suspect, you know, body language and everything, which produced this sort of strange and rather disturbing event.

Did the students sort of talk about it afterwards?

Yes, there was a certain amount of discussion, you know, about it. Of course there was much more after he died, you know, because that was the last time we all saw him.

So how close was that to when he died?

Well it was very close to his suicide; I don't know whether it would have been two weeks afterwards or, something like that. But you know, that was another sort of rather powerful thing that happened. I think other things happened in the first year. There were students there whose work I didn't like who were very highly thought of by some of the staff and I couldn't understand why. You know, things like that, you know.

You can't remember who they were can you?

Yes, there was a painter called Anne Martin who was...I mean I can see it now but I couldn't see it then. And you know, because I had this, and I still have it, this kind of sense of voracity, you know, between, and her painting was very sensitive and sort of loose, and sort of like, not scientific in the sense of being Impressionist but more personally lyrical, and she was regarded as the sort of star in our year, you know, at that, the end of the year, and I just didn't see it, you know, I couldn't see it, I thought, I just didn't understand why. But I can see now, and I think I was probably right.

How structured was the teaching?

Well, one was required to do life drawing, and one did get tutors, you know, and, I can't remember my... I mean, I eventually got somebody called Robert Buhler, who I was very, got to be very fond of, and who was rather, a very generous person, but not, I mean he wasn't particularly sort of engaged with my work but you know, but he was very generous and supportive in a social sort of way, you know, in relation to things. So people that I got to be really... The Royal College of Art for me was, in the first

year it was definitely Moynihan, and then in my last year I had one person who was Ceri Richards who was the strongest influence on me probably at the Royal College, and he introduced me to William Scott, who was also, I had some teaching with him, but basically it was Ceri Richards.

Can you say why?

Yes, because, it was quite obvious, it was very clear, he knew what I was doing. Most of the others hadn't a clue; he actually knew what was going on, and more than that, he...he was able to, or I thought, because of, you know, just... My memory is that he anticipated what I would be doing, and he also sort of encouraged me when I wasn't sure quite what I was going to do; it's like he, it's like he was able to sort of project if you see what I mean, look at what one was doing and project and say, well, why don't you do that? And of course the very thing I'd been thinking about was, should I or shouldn't I or would I or wouldn't I, and I was able at one point to just pull something out of the back and do precisely... And that was, you know... So he was very intuitive it seemed to me and very supportive, and he wasn't in any way, there was nothing hierarchical about him, he was...he had a sort of straightforward directness, and easy, you know, like, he wasn't a...there was nothing complicated, there was nothing difficult in his personality, it seemed to me. So I responded to him the strongest of all the people that have taught me actually.

And were you conscious of his work at the time?

Yes, sure.

And how did you respond to that?

Not particularly that strongly. But I mean I respected him an awful lot, and there are some things I really liked of his work and other things I didn't like so much. I suppose because I had become, by the time I was with him I was entirely non-figurative, and his work always had that, you know, sort of interpretive, you know, kind of aspect to it, you know, but very lyrical I thought, you know, and very... I mean he's another sort of sensibility altogether, and so did William Scott. But they were both in their different ways, but you know, Ceri was undoubtedly the person for me. Is that surprising? [LAUGHS]

Well thinking about Anne Martin's lyricism and Ceri Richard's lyricism, and wondering how, whether you drew a distinction between the older generation of artists...

One is in competition with one and not with the other. That's one way of looking at it. And they were very different, it was a different sort of thing, you know, because I think that in a way Anne Martin's work at that time was more sort of direct intuitive response to something seen, you know? And I suppose that's where I have the difficulty, because how could this rather broad brush stroke really stand for that, which was so complex in my mind? Whereas Ceri's work, or Ceri Richard's work, was really rather different, I mean it had a...there was always, would be a subject as it were, you know, that...and the lyricism was in a way more conceptual if you see what I mean, you know, I think. And also, the other thing that I really liked about him was his sense of colour, the sort of blues he used to use and things, absolutely amazing. I mean those, there was such a quality in the way the colour was, you know, and the...and also he had a kind of, a sort of lucidity with shape, you know, sort of, they were very fluent and lucid and surprising and sort of musical and all of that, that I liked, I liked in his work. But more than any of that it was, for me, because you know, I was a student and he was one of these part-time teachers coming in, it was because he really, he seemed to know what I was up to. And other people didn't at all, had no idea.

Were you ever asked to explain what you thought you were up to?

Yes of course, yes, sure. But you know, there was such a level of scepticism, you know, because, at this point, if one was non-figurative, you know, the staff had become, you know, I think they really wanted to wipe it out, and you know, so, and we had come after Denny and Smith and co., and they had had this success and so they were, I'm sure, or my prejudice is, that they really wanted to suppress all that, and, I had a relatively tough time there. I think I was equally sort of unpleasant, I mean I don't think...

Not an easy student.

I was a really horrible student I'm sure, you know, but then, so what?

Why did you move from this figuration that you believed in so firmly? How did you come to move out of it?

Well I think, you know, having bumped into the, you know, American Abstract Expressionism, that was all of a big shock, and that was in '56, and I suspect that what it did was introduce, you know, like, the possibility of other, you know, of there being other possibilities, certainly in relation to this idea of being intense and being, you know, like really committed and all of that, that sort of view of being an artist, you know, being absolutely sort of totally committed to what one was doing. And you know, one sort of had the sense of that in some of that work. And at the same time I couldn't cope with it at all, you know, I found it way... I mean it was like, you know, not being able to swim really, you know, you'd jump in and, you know, it's all over the place. And so, it took me...and this happened to me time and again actually, you know, bumping into new things, and you don't know what the hell's going on and then slowly you kind of find out what it's all about, and probably when it's too late. And so in the course of my second year I think I was, it was a sort of, eventually it had to do with the thickness of paint, and... I started to paint more thickly, and then it got very...not in, nothing to do with Auerbach and Kossoff, absolutely nothing, but it started to get thick. And then, I don't know whether I had that sort of notion at the time, but the idea was that the paint as...it's very Tachiste, very, you know, like conventionally Tachiste, that the paint was the substance and the subject of the work as opposed to the... So rather than, you know, the paint being manipulated to, you know, in terms of a representation of something seen, the paint became the thing in itself or the substance became the thing in itself. And at that point I began to look at people like Burri and...

How do you spell that?

B-U-R-R-I, Italian. I guess he was a sort of collagist, using sacking and things like that. And so, in a way collage began to sort of, it was another interpretation of collage, although I had never really looked at collage and it had never interested me. And so I moved from, as I say, the subject of the painting being the matter. But, what I didn't realise was that the manipulation of all the shapes were very figurative, and...but it was sort of unconscious, it was as though I was still dealing with the body, but I was thinking that this was entirely non-figurative, you know. So the surface of the canvas became like a sort of a skin and, you know, thickness and thinness became important; the colour was still there but you know there was a sort of... And also gesture became important. So it became sort of, it opened up in that sort of way, right, probably towards the end of my second year. I mean and this was, by the time I got into the third year I was completely alienated from most of the staff apart from

Ceri Richards, a part-time member of staff, and William Scott, who, and William Scott was very supportive in the sense of thinking about... I remember him, because I still had to do life drawing and so forth and I was saying, what the...you know, what is all this? And he was saying, `Well, think of it as a map, you know, think of it as, you know, landscape, you know, think of it as something else,' you know, blah blah. I remember all this. That was also very useful, you know, at the time. So, I left the Royal College sort of, you know, like a complete...I suppose... The staff didn't really want to know, you know, about any of this, you know, this had gone all wrong, you know, which was not...

Were you the only one they failed with by the way, in this sort of intermediate year?

No, no no no. There were, there were three of this in this condition, one Polish woman called Astrid Balinska, and a guy, another guy who wasn't going down this road but was equally in a difficult position called Ray Fawcett, and we had, we shared the same studio and we worked together. I mean you know, it wasn't all bitter and vicious but some of it was, and Ruskin Spear used to make jokes about it, and you know, like, it was, you know, about not knowing what the hell you were doing and all of this, you know, because... But with him there wasn't anything, it was kind of like more like a kind of, a way of actually talking to one from not knowing what the hell is going on, you know. He maintained a certain generous view. And Robert Buhler was very supportive too, although again you know as a figurative painter and he was nothing to do with it. So really the only one was Ceri Richards and supported by William Scott.

What sort of size are we talking about with these works? Are you getting larger at this point?

Yes, they got... Then I was...there was some... I used to live next to the Albert Hall because there were student flats there before the Royal College of Art, and.....

<u>End of F5276 Side B</u>

F5277 Side A

[Interview with Stuart Brisley on the 27th of September 1996 at his home in London, with Melanie Roberts.]

Well you were at the Royal Albert Hall picking up big bits of plywood.

Well yes, you were asking me about the size of the works, and, I had become very friendly with another student from Christchurch in New Zealand, Bill Culbert, and we both lived in these student flats, and I suppose having a kind of post-colonial sort of background, Bill was always looking at things to use and adapt, and he was the one that bumped into all this plywood and exhibition boards, and so, and so we collaborated and got a lot of it, and I started working on them, and I had a lot of them. So for the rest of my time at the Royal College I was painting on things that were 6 x 4 or 4 x 8 made of plywood and with sort of, strongly supported at the back; they were rather good. So they were quite big, I mean relatively big; not gigantic, but probably big in the way that paintings were being done at the Royal College then, they would have been about, the biggest size I suppose...

I mean could you describe how you physically prepared but also prepared to tackle works on that size after this small period, and also what sort of, how you laid on the paint and how you thought about it as you laid it on?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I can't remember how I started, but, there certainly would have been an absence of a preconceived idea; on the other hand they would have been ultimately sort of, a kind of structure that was, you know, that...a set of limitations really to do with me, you know, because...and I guess I would be...I wouldn't have been necessarily surprised by that structure; I suppose in a way it was quite important. So that the works of that period, they have a certain repetitive, relatively close repetitive look to each other because of trying to avoid structure and trying to avoid having any preconceptions as to what one should be doing, which is pretty much of an impossibility, but nonetheless trying to do that. So in the end you end up with something that's unconsciously structured if you see what I mean, you know, you just do. And, there was an awful lot of violence in the work, and I had the idea that, you know, I sort of relatively perversely thought that the final act on a painting should be the most radical, rather than, you know, like painting, my painting previous to that would have been, you know, you end up with details, so it was the opposite. So I would actually attack them with hammers and things. So I reversed in a sense the

process that I had been, or aspects of the process I had been working on before, and they would contain all kinds of things, like bits of cigarette and match-sticks and bits of cotton wool and Evostick, which is a form of Neoprene. And there was just a whole load of different bits of... But interesting, because there was no paper, because I probably thought it was too fragile, but there were bits of cloth and sacking, because I was influenced by Burri, this guy Burri who used it a lot. Occasional attempts at text, very...but that was definitely an influence coming from Denny, Robin Denny. So you know, around...and there were things coming in from immediately around and from, you know, looking at art magazines and from talking to people, and so the whole thing sort of opened up in that sort of way, whereas previously it had been, you know, this rather serious and sort of dour kind of approach to figuration, you know, which sort of in a way split apart and broke down. But the works were very physical, you know, and they were very physical in the way that I approached the whole act of doing it, so, I did all kinds of things, I set fire to them, I would, you know, scrape them and, you know... And then eventually, you know, something would arise out of it, and... They did have a range of colour, and one would have a different mood to another, and I remember one in particular which sort of like, I got strongly a sense of sort of like snow and landscape for some reason. So they...it was almost, they began to sort of approach a kind of possibility of being representational without having any reference, or appearing to have any reference; it would be the, you know, just the mood of it all. But there was no attempt to do that, conscious attempt to do that.

I mean using things like cigarettes, I mean they are referents, do you see what I mean?

Yes.

Did you select those?

No. I just used to use whatever was there, just, you know, whatever. I still do that actually at times, yes.

So did you see this, this work, as a break from the canon and your arrival at your sort of independence in effect?

Yes, in some senses yes. I certainly saw it as a...I saw it as a sort of response to, you know, like bigger and better and bolder things as it were, you know, like coming from elsewhere, you know. I guess it sort of, it sort of in a way echoes, you know, like the idea of being fascinated by people's stories because they're from somewhere else, you

know, it's the same sort of... There's a romanticism in it I suspect, a kind of, yes, a sort of romanticism. But at the same time it had to be to do with, it had to do with my own experience, you know, it had to be authentic, in inverted commas, whatever that meant. And it was very much, it was very bodily, you know, it was very physical and bodily work. And you know, I guess in some ways it prefaced, you know, like, performance work in a way, although, you know, I had absolutely no idea about that at the time, any more than I would have had any idea about that when I was painting figuratively.

It's interesting that when you started describing it, it sounded like, you know, Clement Greenberg's[ph] sort of dream of Modernism.

Yes.

This completely self-contained thing.

Yes.

And yet by the time you finish describing it, you can tell that there's an awful lot of personality and imagination and so on in it. I mean did you intellectualise that at the time?

No.

Or is it just, it's one of these conundrums that got thrown up?

Yes. I didn't at all. No I didn't at all, no. No. And I suppose...you know, I can remember going to the Young Contemporaries, probably 1950...19...yes, probably 1959, and I remember having some works in there, four works or something, which had been nailed to the wall upside-down by my friend Professor Carel Weight, and I always thought he did it deliberately because I couldn't get them off and put them the right way up.

Did you sign those works?

What?

Did you sign those works?

Yes, well yes, they were all marked at the back, `This Way Up' and everything. Anyway, he said to me after, I'll never forget this, he said to me in the corridor, `You'll be very pleased to hear that you have some works in the Young... He must have been on the selection panel. `You've had some works in the Young Contemporaries, and I have personally seen them being hung.' And when I got there, they were upside-down and I couldn't get them off. [INAUDIBLE]

It sounds very suspect.

Then I thought, you know...and I did, because my relations with him were not good, I thought that he did it deliberately, but I don't know, perhaps that's being paranoiac, you know, but I suspect he did. I probably deserved it. Anyway... And there was a big discussion with, I remember Denny speaking, and Denny speaking about the picturesque and being very critical of the picturesque, and me thinking that he was directly relating that to my work, because of the nature of, you know, the way he described it. Because his work at the time was very much more, had become, was on the way to becoming very ordered, you know, very architectural, architectonic and so on, and he was certainly thinking in a more conceptual fashion about field painting and so forth, whereas I was thinking... I mean it was almost like, in a way like the clean versus the dirty, you know; one was being really dirty, you know, in what I had done and you know, I think he had a sort of, there was a sort of orthodoxy about his position, you know, relative to the radical position he wanted to take at the time. And I found that sort of difficult at the time, I remember. But that was quite a critical sort of debate in a way, but I didn't say anything, but listened to... And there was also, Lawrence Alloway was there, and I think Coleman, Roger Coleman, Denny, and I can't think of anyone else.

Was that a sort of thing for the students?

Yes, it was for the, yes, that's right, it was a sort of forum, yes.

And Denny was still a student at that time?

Denny would have...no, he would have just sort of left, he would have been out a year or something. That's right, yes, I think he would have been out a year.

So what did Lawrence Alloway say, do you remember?

I can't remember.

What a pity.

I just literally can't remember.

Yes. I mean do you remember having any sort of feelings about that sort of other generation back again, of Richard Hamilton and Alloway and Rayner Banham; were these sort of names in your...?

That didn't enter into my sort of area at all while I was a student at the Royal College, I left in '59, they were what, 54, 55, 56. I seem to remember that that was taking place and going on, but it had no reference to me. My reference were Abstract Expressionism and what was going on on the Continent, not what was taking place, you know, like in any critical way in England, you know, because, I don't know, I mean maybe I had this sort of ambition, you know, about being bigger and broader and, you know, I mean, maybe arrogance as well, not actually really engaging with what was taking place, you know, within the London scene itself.

Did you have art history or any sort of contextualising...?

Yes, this man called...I've forgotten his first name, Taylor. We all used to go to sleep. It sounds terrible but it's true. I mean I think we were so... I don't think any, you know, like, because of this Army experience and all the rest of it, and because of the previous education and so forth, it was very difficult for us to be disciplined in that way, or to discipline ourselves. I think we were not in a condition to receive any of that; I think we were...it's not just me, I think, you know, as a body of people, unless you had a particular sort of education or whatever, you know, I think it just didn't mean anything. You know, my greatest desire was actually not to have anything to do with any of that. But at the same time to be, you know, to sort of do things that one was really concerned with, and connect with those things that one chose to be connected with. So it was a sort of wilful refusal to...it was a kind of desire to break all the canons, get away from all the canons and, just break away. And I suspect that's probably quite common with people at that time.

This is a question I'm probably going to keep asking you because I think it's an important one. I mean, where did you see this work in the world? Did you still see it in this very focused personal circle, or did you see it...?

I saw it flying out of the window of my flat on the third floor out there and crashing to the ground before I went to Germany to study in Munich. In other words, as far as I was concerned it, you know, like, what the hell, you know. And then I didn't have any of it. I had bits of it left and I've got one or two pieces left. And so when I was asked for a show, you know, later on, I left without knowing that people wanted me to...I left to go to Germany, and people had been interested in my exam, you know, what do you call it, show at the Royal College of Art, but the connection hadn't been made. So I went away to Germany, because I won some scholarships and things, and I had absolutely no idea, so I just dumped it all. What the hell was I going to do with it, you know, so I just threw it out the window, and watched it fly, you know, through the air, literally down to the ground and crash, and then went off. And I've got one or two pieces left, just one or two, that I must have saved, you know, like... But, so I didn't actually see any, I didn't see a future. It's not that I was going to stop, I was going somewhere else, I was off to Germany, because I had won a British Council - no, I had won a Bavarian Stipendium to go to the academy in Munich for a year. But I also won an Abbey Minor scholarship to go to Rome, and also I had also got a Fulbright scholarship to go to the States, and I had also been invited to teach at Florida State University. So, what the hell, you know.

Yes. So that was just in your final year?

That was in my final year. And I remember when all these things happened to me Carel Weight came up to me and said, `Congratulations...' Whispered in my ear, `Congratulations. Don't win anything else.'

You were getting a bit unpopular. [LAUGHS]

It was very unpopular. No, anyway, so, there we are, you know. So the idea of being, you know, being an artist in England didn't occur to me because I was not going to be here, quite frankly, and I did go away for five years. And I was also not going to come back.

Why not?

Mm?

Why not?

I just wanted to get away from this place, I just really seriously wanted to get away. I don't know why, I mean I probably always wanted to get away; perhaps it was, you know, I don't know what it was an escape from. From me probably. I really wanted to get away. And so, I firstly went to Germany and did that year, and then I went to Florida, and some difficulties happened there. I stayed in the States for four years, so I was five years out of England altogether.

You were married at this point?

Yes, yes.

And, was this the girlfriend who visited Germany?

Yes that's right, yes, yes. Yes.

And she enjoyed travelling presumably.

I don't think she was keen on it like me, I don't think she was, no. In fact we broke up after a while, and I think it was because, basically because we had rather different perceptions of life, you know, I think she really wanted... I think she wanted me to be more stable, you know, as a sort of family life person, and I just wasn't, you know. I am now but I wasn't then. And so I think, we got on very well, but I think she found it difficult, you know. I don't know that she really wanted to...I think she really wanted to come home, but she didn't say so.

Did she have a profession of any kind, or was she just sort of trailing in your wake?

At the time she was working...no, she was working, I mean she had...I don't know what she'd done. She'd been to Guildford Polytechnic where I met her. And, she did various things, she did secretarial work, she was a personnel assistant, she worked for `Time Life' magazine, she worked for `Business International', she worked for a printing company, you know, she did, she was...she was the administrator for a music school in Switzerland. You know, she...yes she's done lots and lots of different things. I mean I think that there was a sort of contradiction in her in a way; I think

she was very able and very bright and very critical, and I think it was something to do with wanting not to have to do all that, and also being frustrated at not having, you know, power, you know, to do things, because she was really very capable. So you know, it was a sort of, probably a lot of women have that sort of contradiction, you know, and it's difficult, you know.

Yes.

And I, you know, I suppose I...I needed a sort of stable relationship I guess, I've always needed stable relationships, and so, you know, it was...it was difficult when it all broke down you know, because, you know, it was the sort of ideologies or different attitudes which kind of broke it rather than anything else.

Did you have children?

Yes, well we have one, there's an adopted child, yes, who's now 28 I think, 26. He's taking me to see Liverpool versus West Ham on Sunday, which I can't...the whole thing, I mean, I'm not interested in it, but you know, like, you know, it's because he is desperately interested in football, and I used to take him all the time, he thinks I'm really interested in it and I can't sort of disabuse him of it really because it would be unfair, do you know what I...you know, because the whole of his teenage life was about me taking him to football matches, and he got so keen on it, he still is. So, I'm going to the football. Anyway, that's another story isn't it.

Just going back to the Royal College period, with the mixture of students of different ages, quite a lot must have been married and had family life. How did that affect the normal student life of the college?

Well I think there was a very active student life in the college, because as much as there would have been those who had families as it were, there were plenty who didn't, and there was a very active night life and so on. I don't know quite where it was, whether it was the Students' Union or whatever it was, but it was certainly very active. But I think, it wasn't so much that; the family life I think sort of, certainly as far as I was concerned and I suspect with some others, sort of, in a way affected what it meant to be in full-time education. So, in my second year I tended to work at home for example. I found it easier to work at home. I needed, I thought I needed...although I suppose the subjects I was concerned with were, you know, I could find there which I couldn't find in the college. And also I was not getting on

very well with, you know, the teaching and so on. So I think family life in a way sort of influences the way that full-time studentship is, but doesn't necessarily so much impinge on social, the student's social life.

So did you join in with the social life?

Yes, on and off yes, not all the time but yes, sure, mm.

And what were the relationships between the younger students and the older ones?

There was, you could say that the males were all, you know, like two years out of their...because they had all either been, or most of them, almost all of them, had either been in the Army or else they'd been doing the alternative to it, whatever it was called, you know, that service thing. So, there was a slight difference, and a sort of very big difference in experience of course. And then on top of that there would have been older students, some of whom, you know, came from... Like for example Adrian Berg who was in the year after me had been I think to Oxford before, and he was older. So there were some people who had come from different experiences. But they were all in a way, you know, the problem of younger and older is more apparent at the lower level of, the earlier levels of art education than it is later on. By the time you get the graduate area, you know, those differences are not quite so apparent, it seems to me.

And, within the student body, I mean do you remember anything of the ideas that were actually verbalised about art?

Well in a way we were curiously fixed by years, you know, it was, you know, the thing ran on a...the Painting Department ran on a yearly... And there was undoubtedly some, not much, not much debate but a lot of difference between people who subscribed to one mode of operations as opposed to others, and also there was a lot of difference between those who were ostensibly there to become teachers and those who weren't. So, you know, there were those sorts of differences within it, and so that, discussion would have, sort of like devolved to groups of people with similar interests as it were, you know, in spite of, or rather than because of, anything actually encouraged to take place. So you know, for example I found myself with numbers of people who shared certain views about things, not...and some disagreements. So there was a lot of discussion in that respect, but informal and in social circumstances.

I mean can you remember, you know, what kinds of things were discussed and who was in the group?

Well a lot of it revolved around the, you know, figuration as opposed to non-figuration, that would have been one of them. And then it would have... Those who still subscribed to a kind of, you know, the importance of, a sort of tradition, a set of traditions or history, and within that certain models. So, I can remember having lots of conversations about Cézanne for example, who I never understood at the time, or certainly at the time and probably still don't, and you know, like other people who subscribed very strongly to Cézanne as a sort of father of Modernism and all the rest of it. So there were those sorts of discussions. And then there was a kind of, I suppose a sort of, an avant-garde as it were, you know, a kind of avant-garde which I suppose I was a part of, not of but sometimes, and then, at different times. A sense of avant-garde, a sense of being at the forefront of something, you know, and that had its... You know, so that one would make associations with sort of, like, a new international experience, set of experiences that were coming, you know, which actually presaged our entry into the Royal College anyway with the Abstract Expressionist show at the Tate. So, and then, after that, you know, finding that, you know, there were individuals who were important to all of those people, like Alan Davie, Ceri Richards and so on, and then younger people like Damien Smith and, you know, who were also subscribing as it were to, you know, like, a kind of sense of internationalism, you know, that was going to transform as it were how we thought about art and so on, or how we thought about painting, let's make it more specific, how we thought about painting and what painting should be, could be, what it might be. And also influences would be coming in, like contemporary artists from my perspective, people like Burri and various other people.

I mean how did you tune into people like Burri?

I can't remember. I'm just trying to remember how...it probably was someone like Ceri Richards who, I suspect it was...I suspect it came from the staff. And also Denis Bowen was around at the time, you know, Denis Bowen, he ran the New Vision Centre and was also teaching in the College but not in the Painting Department, he was an important sort of mystical figure, you know, or, not exactly mystical but you know, a sort of, a slightly mysterious figure who appeared to be influential but you didn't quite know why, and he was running the New Vision Centre. And he was very...he was a South African guy, and he...he was the first person to introduce German artists into Britain as far as I know after the Second World War, people like

Piene and Macke and Ucker[ph] and various others. So you know, that was all part of this sort of ethos as it were.

I mean what exactly was the New Vision Centre?

It was a gallery near Marble Arch. It was there for years.

Big or small?

Small, very small, and sort of run on no money, you know, he ran it sort of... And so, I mean it was the ICA, the New Vision Centre, you know, certain kinds of groupings as it were. And then of course there was, you know, the Beaux Arts Gallery with its kind of art, you know. So, I didn't, I mean, like I guess other people, I didn't find myself in one camp, I found myself sort of, like, not fitting anything in a way, you know, sort of...sort of influenced by lots of things but not, you know, without a sense of connection to a movement or, you know, or a set of ideas that, you know, would be coherent and would be supported by a number of people. It wasn't like that, I mean, it might have been like that later, I mean, what was the exhibition that came in 1960, '61, I've forgotten, when non-figurative artists, there was a big show. I've forgotten its name suddenly. It had people like Denny and.....

End of F5277 Side A

F5277 Side B

[Interview with Stuart Brisley on the 27th of September, at his home in London. Tape Five, Side A (sic - ACTUALLY SIDE B).]

We've both failed to remember the name of this exhibition, but...

The point was that, I think I was suggesting that there wasn't a sort of particular movement or group or anything that I could sort of find myself subscribed to, but there might have been later, you know, in terms of that particular manifestation. I think it was 1961, which was, or '60, where a lot of young artists subscribed to this one big show, which I think was quite an influential one in revealing, you know, particular positions, or one position.

I mean subsequent, you know, I know that most artists absolutely loathe labels, but if you were to find one for your work of that period, could you find one?

Well it probably would have been slightly inaccurate but it would have been Tachiste I suppose, or Matter, Matter painting I think was something that might have been, but certainly I would have thought between the two. And also I would have thought very European as opposed to American, you know, because there was this strong sense of American influences and so forth, but I always sort of recognised a difference in what I was doing, and much more, in a way connection to the Continent.

I mean did you give any thought when you were doing this work to sort of early British Abstraction?

I came across that later. If you mean the Objective Abstraction movement, that I discovered somewhat later and found it really very fascinating, because you know, there was a kind of programme that I could have, you know, kind of subscribed to to a certain extent I think. Very short-lived wasn't it, just...yes, but I didn't know about it at the time and nobody mentioned it to me. It came later. And it might have come when I was teaching at the Slade I suspect.

At the time at which you were suddenly sort of showered with all these awards, how did this come about? Were you put forward by members of staff, or...?

No, no no no. I just applied for everything that I... Because I... I wanted to continue working, and I suppose, I didn't think in any commercial sense, I had no sense of, although I had approached galleries and I had, you know, like, and there had been some connection and so on, I didn't see it in those terms at all; I saw it much more, I wanted to move, I wanted to get out of England, and so I applied for British Council scholarships, I remember I applied for Germany, France, Belgium and Italy, for the British Council scholarship. And the German one came up first, and so, I remember at the interview they said to me, you know, `Do you really want to come to Germany?' And I said, `Yes, it's definitely the one I really want to come to,' but if any of them had come up first it would have been the same answer. And then they said to me, `Well what do you want to do in Germany?' And I said, `Well I really want to study the work of Grünewald in Colmar.' And of course they all burst out laughing and said, `But that's in France.' And I said, `Yes, but it must have been in Germany at some point.' And they said, `Well in that case we think you should go to Munich.' So I actually won the scholarship to go, and I got a Bavarian sort of, whatever it was, stipend, for a year to study in Munich so I could get to Colmar, which I didn't go, but I did later, and, I should have gone at the time because it's such a phenomenal thing, that Crucifixion and the other works around it, absolutely amazing. Anyway, I applied, as everybody else did, for the Rome scholarship and won an Abbey Minor scholarship, which is part of that Rome thing, in painting. I don't know how I got into contact with Florida State University; actually I'm pretty sure now. I got a list of, yes I remember, I got a list of universities from the American Embassy and I picked them out according to the names. And Albuquerque was on my list, and Tallahassee was on my list. So I wrote off to the Florida State University in Tallahassee, and lo and behold I got an answer and I was offered a lectureship there, you know, when I'd done the year in Germany. And then I applied for a Fulbright scholarship and I won that, so I got a Fulbright scholarship; that meant I could sort of get money to go to the States and so on. So all these things got put together, the Abbey Minor money went into me going to Munich, and I got the stipend as well, and it wasn't much, so we were very poor, and my wife got a job with an American company, and that's how we survived. So we had it sort of programmed, you know, that two of these things would, you know, fit the one year and then the other two would fit the, you know, the following years.

I mean what sort of requirements did you have to come with? Did you have to send photographs of work, or explain your work, or...?

Interviews and things like that, yes, and...

Can you describe any of that?

Well, yes, I just did the British Council scholarship one, and, there were about twelve people on the panel, and, I had learnt a little bit of German and they tried me out and I was utterly useless, but you know, what the hell. And, very generously I got that scholarship, it was really good. I had been in Germany before, because in the Army, so, you know, there were, there was a sort of precedent for being there and, you know, I could... You know, I didn't have a strong sense of anything, contemporary German art, because nobody else did particularly, you know, there was still that separation after the war, you know, but I had some sense of historical...of German painting, or, you know, northern European painting with German painting in particular. So, you know, that's why I talked about Grünewald because Grünewald, I had been really interested in Grünewald and I had done some transcriptions of Grünewald, and so, you know, I did have a, you know, a sort of a hook as it were or a purchase to go there. Going to the States was all about really following up, you know, a kind of opening for art as it were in a new world and you know, Abstract Expressionism and everything that it seemed to represent, probably completely misunderstood by me I suspect. But nonetheless, you know, that's why I wanted to go there. Yes, that's how it worked. It didn't work out like that but that's how it was intended.

So you planned quite carefully for keeping your hand in as it were?

Yes, yes.

So what was the response of your fellow students at the Royal College when you suddenly...?

Well all that came at the end, you know, and so there wasn't particularly... I mean other, another, a friend of mine won the Prix de Rome, so he went off to Rome. I mean we were very close friends.

Who was that?

A man called Peter Morrell. So he won the Prix de Rome in painting. And other people went off and, you know, did, you know, whatever they were doing, and I haven't seen most of them since. One went back to the Isle of Mull and set up a

school, you know, for students I seem to remember. Astrid Balinska I think went to Bilbao in Spain, I don't know why. Other people got jobs, you know, teaching.

I mean what was your feeling about teaching at this stage, when you...you know you...?

I had absolutely no interest in it whatsoever, I had no desire for it at all. And I really wanted to go on making work and I wanted to travel and I wanted to, you know, I wanted to leave actually, leave, get out of here, is what I really wanted to do.

When you said that there were, the student body was split between teachers and artists who wanted to be practising artists...

Yes.

How enormous a divide was that?

That was pretty big, yes. There was a sort of contempt for those who wanted a comfortable life. I mean that would be a way of putting it, that was probably a way of putting it then; I'm not saying I would think necessarily that now, but that was a way of thinking about it. These were people who were, you know, kind of giving up and going for soft options and what the hell were they doing, you know, because we were utterly committed, you know, like a vocation, you know.

And did you have to declare your hand, was there special teacher training or...?

No, you didn't have to declare your hand, it was just, you could see it. Well you know, you could. It's like Catholics and Protestants, you know, if you're in Ireland I guess or Northern Ireland you could see it, you could tell.

In what way?

I can see them now, standing there, you know. You know, go home for the weekend, blah blah blah blah, you know, they weren't committed to the...they didn't have a total... There were other people that did, you know.

So it was a different way of approaching the work altogether?

Yes, like I would say that Anne Martin, the person I spoke to, had a complete commitment to the idea of being an artist, being a painter. Peter Morrell the same. Yes, sure. And you know, so that's how it would have divided itself. And it was all so simple you see. [LAUGHS]

When you applied to teach in America, did you see that as a different thing, that was a way of achieving your end?

As a way of going...yes, sure. And there was a man called Mr McDonough came to see me who was the Head of Department and we had a long conversation about it, and it was, you know, I was going to be, like, two days a week teaching and you know... You know, own studio, you know, all of that, you know, like a...it was, you know, a sort of panacea, you know. Yes. But I went off to Germany before.

So tell me about your German experience.

Well that was really very good, that was really very interesting. I mean my German was more or less non-existent. We had very little money, you know, we were really... We had difficulty in finding a place to live. When we first arrived in Munich we hadn't arranged anything and it happened to be the Bierfest, you know, September, so there was nowhere to stay, we had to leave Munich and go further south into, I forget where it was but not very far from Munich, for the weekends, because everything was booked. After about two weeks we found somewhere to stay in a house not far from the Academy which was the house of somebody called Count Von Steinhart, who was an Austrian, and his wife Maria and her mother, Herr Bauer - no, Frau Bauer, Frau Bauer, whose husband had been responsible for building the Autobahns before the Second World War. And they were a very interesting group of people, you know, I mean he was obviously an aristocrat but he was Austrian and he had been in the German army and he had deserted in 1944 and hidden himself in the Austrian Alps. And you know, they were very sort of like liberal people. I don't know what he did, I don't think he particularly did anything. And we had a room in their house and they were exceedingly generous to us. And so that was how we, where we lived, in a, I've forgotten the name of the area. It's sort of like the bohemian, what would have been called the bohemian area of Munich, I'll remember it in a minute. And then I started in the Academy, but when I got there, having been accepted they said, `You can't come because you have to take an entrance examination.' And I said, but I've, you know, been a student for, you know, like, what was it, eight years, I mean you know, like, this is all a bit peculiar. And they said, `Oh well, you know, it's just a formality.'

And so I had to present work, and then the professors would look at it and decide whether they wanted, you know, to have me or not. And a really, really interesting guy selected me out. God! what was his name? Professor Geitlinger, who had been a...

You're going to have to spell some of these names.

Professor Geitlinger, G-E-I-T-L-I-N-G-E-R. Professor Geitlinger had spent 22 years in the States during and after the First World War. He had been a British Army camp commandant, a British prisoner-of-war camp commandant in the Second World War, and he had had a, what is it, is it a...you know, when you...one of the lobes of the brain...

A lobotomy?

A lobotomy, he had had a lobotomy, so he was a very...and this had made him into a very easy-going man. So, when...I went to his class the first morning it was open, and there were, not a terribly big room and there were something like 55 students in there, mostly German but from all over, they were also from Chile and various other places. And when he came in, I shall never forget it, there was an American guy standing next to me and we were having a chat, and anyway he came in and there was a sort of silence, and then, he went round and shook hands with everyone, and there were those who clicked their heels together and said, `Guten Morgen Herr Professor,' you know. I thought, my God! it was so extraordinary. And he came up to me and I was about to say...and he said, `Don't worry man, I was in the States for 22 years. Hi, how are you?' And so, that's how it started, you know, and so, it went on like that. And I said to him, you know, like, `There's a hell of a lot of people.' He said, `Just don't worry about it, they'll be gone before long.' And sure enough, you know...he said...and I said, `Well how much space can we have?' He said, `Take what you need.' He said, `If you end up with it all, that's up to you,' you know, because you know, if you can do that you'll be pretty amazing. We got, the American guy and I got a third of it, eventually, you know, because we worked all the time and we were there all the time, and the others just came and went, or they didn't, you know, like. And that was the German system at that time, you know, they would subscribe to a course but they may or may not turn up. And the only other thing he had was a model, a woman, who used to sit there all day, but it was a non-figurative class.

She was a life model?

Yes.

How very mysterious.

Yes. He said, `She is the muse.' [LAUGHS]

Moral support.

Yes. So there she was, so there's this woman sitting in this class, and there was [INAUDIBLE], `But she's paid'. [LAUGHS] He was an interesting man. But the students were very interesting. There was a man there called, oh God! what was his name? Von...not Geitlinger, Von something-or-other. He actually curated the Pier and Ocean show, if you remember the Pier and Ocean show at the Hayward, I'll remember his name in a minute. But he was the Meisterschule, you know, the monitor, and he was a little bit older. And, they were very much into concrete art at the time in that particular class, and... Von Gravenitz was his name. And he left after a year and went to Paris and started with a number of other people group - my French is as bad as Gummer's - Groupe Recherche d'Art Visuel, which was, you know... And so, he was already quite well known in Germany when he was a student there. And then there were others around. So, I sort of joined that group as it were; although I wasn't committed to what they were committed to, nonetheless I was influenced by it, and there was a lot of discussion about the nature of art and, you know, the issue of, you know, like Concrete art and so forth.

What do you mean by Concrete art?

I suppose, it's connected in some sense to...that's what it was called at the time, there. And it was kind of like Matter art if you see what I mean; it was very much to do with material and substance. So there was a reference, but it was very programmatic. It would have, certain works by Manzoni would sort of like connect to it, you know. I mean the interesting thing about Munich was the connection to Milan and Zurich, and in Zurich of course, you know, there's Max Bill and so forth, the new Bauhaus was in, oh, not far from Munich, and so there was a kind of circuit as it were. And, for example I knew a rather interesting Brazilian artist called Almir Mavignier who was working in Ulm. Almir Mavignier, A-L-M-I-R, Mavignier, M-A-V-I-G-N-I-E-R, Mavignier, Almir Malvignier. I think he's probably retired now but he was Professor in the Academy in Munich - sorry, in Hamburg, but he, at the time I met him he was

in the New Bauhaus in Ulm, and he was working in the typography department, although he was a painter. So there were lots of connections that were interesting, and the class was sort of international, you know, apart from the Americans, and, the American friend of mine, and myself, and the Chilean, and there was a Norwegian and there were Italians. I can't remember really, Portuguese, and then all the Germans. And I suppose I learnt, I learnt a sort of German there, just because that's what people spoke, you know, and...

So was that the common language in the international group as well?

No, it would have been English, it would have been English, it was English. And also Geitlinger, you know, his English was perfect anyway. But there was again a lot of social activity, very much to do with the sort of Concrete art group and the people around it, and, so I had really a very interesting year, not just because of that but also living in Munich it was sort of, you know, still the scars from the war and so on. And some of my German friends from the class were sort of heavily anti militaristic, you know, a very strong reaction to any sort of militarism. So that it was an interesting time. For example, every, I think every week or every month cinemas used to show films of the concentration camps, and I remember going to one or two of these, and it was difficult because of the smell in the cinema, you know, because of, the sort of smell of sweat and you know, people really reacting, you know, to this, all this information.

It sounds so fascinating, you know, they were really kind of exposing themselves in that very direct way.

Yes, yes. And people of my generation were very very heavily anti militaristic, as far as I could see. And the family we lived in, the grandmother's husband who was dead had been a friend of General Jodl, who was hung, you know, after the Nuremburg trials. And so, I was invited with my wife to spend a weekend at their farmhouse in between Munich and Salzburg, and she was unfortunately an alcoholic, although I didn't know it, and so she proceeded to drink during the weekend. And I had at that point sort of like learnt sufficient German to sort of begin to under...or to begin to either understand or fundamentally misunderstand more or less everything. So, she began to talk about, you know, her son who was killed at the Warsaw Uprising, and then it all sort of progressed, you know, and I, of course I... It was sort of like rivetting for me, absolutely rivetting, and I discovered that her husband had been a friend of Jodl during the First World War and had saved him from death on the

battlefield, and that in 1944 he had come to see his friend, Jodl had come to see this guy, Herr Bauer, and they had had a conversation about, you know, clearly they were losing the war, and apparently Bauer said to him, `I saved you in the last one but you will not survive this war'. And he said, `I disagree with you, because I am a professional soldier.' And, you know, of course he was prosecuted and hung at Nuremburg. So there were these curious touches to sort of, you know, a kind of history and people that was really very rivetting. And that happened again later when I was in Florida. At that time I, my work was...I had no money, you know, it was really difficult, and so I began to sort of look for materials in the street, and I got a lot of sand and sort of, I found a sack that had a Nazi insignia on it, which I didn't want to use so I sold that bit to the American. But I began to use things I found in the street. Then I began to steal things, you know, from, you know, like, go onto building sites and take buckets of sand or tar, I used tar a lot, I found bits of tar where they were building the road and so on. So my work took on this very materialistic sort of like appearance, and this was really...and it was becoming more relief orientated because of the...and the idea of the matter as the subject was beginning to sort of, like, become too limited a concept in relation to what was going on, because of the way in which these materials were, I was manipulating these materials. I was still using this sort of idea of finishing the work, you know, with some sort of violent act, or acts, that were still going on.

Well what was it...I'm fascinated by this. Was it your way of saying, this is the moment of final definition, or was it more...?

No, it's sort of like the opposite as well isn't it. I mean it's like the impossibility of it too, so, you know, it's two in one in a way, it's a sort of paradox or a contradiction, you know, like you destroy, you destroy something and at the same time you're saying it's the completion, you know. It's a kind of, it's an impossibility it seems to me, sort of an impossibility. I think it presages performance as well, you know, like, I'm sure of it.

But how did you recognise the right moment to do it?

I don't know, I mean I would get to the point where it would reach that sort of stage and I would think, you know, like now is the time to do this. I mean I would be making quite rigourous, you know, sort of acts on them anyway, you know, up to that point, and then the last thing would be some sort of blow on it, you know. You know, and I guess in the end it became sort of too programmatic and I sort of, you know, I

moved in...it moved into another way of dealing. It naturally moved actually into sculpture is what happened. But at that point it was still quite flat, although it was a depth that was sort of like pushed that way but also coming that way, so, it was like the picture plane was...the picture plane was there, but there was a physical act that pushed it behind and allowed it to develop in front. And the colours were reduced to natural colour, like sand colours and so on, tar, black and so on, and eventually they arrived at being all black, so a skin of black was given to the whole thing. Or I would mix black in amongst the sand, and I used PVA, you know, to make these things. And I would put sand on quite thick with PVA and when it was still wet I would hit it from behind with a hammer and some of it would fall off and some of it wouldn't, and so you would get these sorts of... So in the end it became to look perhaps more like Tàpies, you know, like, it didn't look like Tàpies but you could see that there was a reference to Tàpies. And also a Dutch painter called Waagemaker, W-A-A-G-E-M-A-K-E-R, Waagemaker, Dutch, yes. So there was Waagemaker, Burri, B-U-R-R-I, Tàpies, T-A-P-I-E-S; these were the figures that I was interested in. And also a Polish artist called Kobjez, K-O-B-J-E-Z, who was working on wood. And also numbers of Spanish artists, like Cruixart, C-R-U-I-X-A-R-T, all of whom were using sort of matter and material in these sorts of ways. So when I was in Munich I found lots of, more associations, European associations, and also from surprising places like in Poland, because I saw this big Polish in Munich; I also saw the Spanish in Munich. And so, the sort of area of activity was becoming more focused in a way because of these other associations.

I mean in this international context where, you know, you're sharing a sort of artistic language, were you still conscious of, you know, nationalistic tendencies of some kind, or was it really a free territory?

Yes, I think, you could see that in, you could see that in all of the work in a way, even though, you know, you could call it an international language. So yes, I mean, I don't think one can avoid that. Although it would be difficult to, perhaps to say that about the Poles for example, but I didn't have enough, you know... But you could see it clearly between, say, Waagemaker from Holland and Cruixart from Spain, or actually between Burri and Tàpies, because although, they're quite different even though you could put them into the same, could have put them into the same context, and I'm sure they were at the time, you know. And this was very European-orientated activity, this was quite separate from, you know, what was going on in the States, and the influence from the States was, it didn't have the same impact as it had in Britain at all. Britain was much more open to it I think than the Continent appeared to be.

I mean can you think why, as you have this unique experience of working in both parts of the world?

Well I came to the conclusion there is an underlying political context to it. I mean you know, it probably goes back to the, you know, the Empire, the American Revolution, the...you know? And it goes through, that we have this sort of relationship with the States, following through to the First World War when they bailed us out, you know, and into the Second World War. And so there's a kind of, there is a kind of continuing relationship I would have thought which.....

End of F5277 Side B

F5278 Side A

[Continuing the interview with Stuart Brisley on the 27th of September 1996 at his home in London. Tape Six Side A.]

Yes, well, and after the war I think, you know, with the oncoming of the Cold War there as that sense of the Allies being, you know, the superior forces as it were, and so I think that the relationship between Britain and America, you know, and the sort of cultural expansion coming from the States, you know, as, it's been asserted that it was a CIA, you know, kind of operation and all of that, whether true or not, nonetheless it actually, you know, I would have thought that Britain would have been very receptive to anything coming from the States, you know, because of its historical connections, and in relation to Britain's position of power within the aegis of the American power. So I think it's a bit like that. Whereas on the Continent it was very different, certainly in Germany, I mean, a defeated country, and one that at that point in time, you know, what were the terms of reference, you know, for, you know, cultural activity? It was only in 1959 I think that the, wasn't it the Ford Foundation, I don't whether it was Ford but actually, Documenta was introduced to reintroduce Germany to Western civilisation. So, you know, there had been a period of, there was a period of sort of Germany being a sort of a pariah, and I had arrived at the end point of it I think in a way, and had been a soldier, you know, at some point through it. So I think, you know, the sort of reception of American expansion as it were, you know, as represented by that was not as effective as it might have been, or was not as well received as it might have been; hence this sort of sense of something Continental or European which Britain appeared to be separate from. I don't know, that's how I kind of see it now, relative to that.

I mean were you conscious enough, or do you remember being conscious enough, of this sort of, these sort of connections, to discuss it with the other European and international students, and the German students, at the time?

I don't think so. I think it would have been...we wouldn't have put it in those terms, I wouldn't have put it in those terms I don't think. I think it's what I've subsequently understood. And it's rather interesting, this idea of, you know, like Matter, you know, there is something very minimal about it as it were. I mean it sits within a notion of activity that's not complicated, complicating in any way relative to value structures and so on, you know, I mean it's very artistic let's say, you know.

Sort of apolitical.

Pardon?

Apolitical.

Yes, in that sense I think it probably...I mean, yes. I mean I hadn't thought of it like that then, but, you know, I can sort of, like, have a sense of that now.

But it does sound as if you were in that territory while you were still in Britain.

Well yes, but maybe from my own perspective and as an individual without understanding, without having a sense, a strong sense of the context. And also having a strong sense of influence, although as I said I didn't really understand it when I first bumped into it, of, you know, like what was coming from the States, and then finding later that, you know, that I had these Continental, there were these Continental references I found interesting before I went to Germany, and then finding when I got to Germany there was a lot more, and as my...plus there were contemporaries who were dealing with issues that were sort of related or connected. So you know, it was like step by step, I moved into a context that was much bigger than just an individualistic, you know, kind of unknowing sort of set of speculations.

And did you find that releasing, or were you...?

Yes, I found that very interesting, yes, I found that...and I found it really, you know, stimulating, it was really stimulating. And I suppose I could have stayed there.

I'm going to have to stop you there, Stuart.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

[Continuing the interview on Tape Six on the 4th of October 1996 with Stuart Brisley at his home in London.]

Now Stuart, I think we've left Germany, and you're moving on to America.

Yes. Well I'd... I think I said earlier that I had actually written to various institutions in the States and I picked them out according to the sound of the name, Albuquerque,

Tallahassee. And I had written to Florida State University, to the fine art department, and had a reply from, I can't remember his name, I think it was McDonough possibly, and he came to see me, and he offered me a lectureship in Florida, at Florida State University, a year, to start the year after I left the Royal College, because I went to Germany after I left the Royal College. So having come back from Germany I had about six weeks in England before we left to go to Tallahassee.

I think you're going to have to spell Tallahassee and McDonough, I'm sorry.

McDonough, I'm not sure it was McDonough but, McDonough was M-C-D-O-N-O-U-G-H. And Tallahassee is spelt T-A-L-L-A-H-A-S-S-E-E, Tallahassee. And we went by boat, by the Queen Elizabeth 2, which was an experience because it encountered one of those summer storms about half-way across to two-thirds of the way across, and I remember, there were about 500 passengers in the, what would have been the economy class, and I remember going to dinner when the storm had been, when the ship had encountered the storm for a few hours, and I remember there were eight of us out of the 500 who arrived for dinner. And there were mountains of balloons, because it was some sort of festive dinner, so there were mountains of balloons, eight guests and loads of waiters. And after the first course I left because I was beginning to feel rather queasy. And, that went on for a good 24 hours, and eventually we arrived off the coast of New York, it was extremely hot and humid which I hadn't expected, and we arrived at the dock and went straight from there to, I think it was Pennsylvania railway station and missed the train to Tallahassee by half an hour so we had to stay in new York for another 24 hours or so, which was my, probably the only time I was in New York until two years later. This sounds completely stupid but I thought that I was going to California. I had the idea that Florida was, I mean I hadn't bothered particularly, I mean, I really hadn't bothered to look the geography, and my geography was pretty weak as far as the States was concerned, and so, I really thought we were going west, but for some strange reason we went south. And the next morning we arrived in Jacksonville where the train, there was a change of trains, got out at Jacksonville and had some breakfast, and I remember having eggs sunny side up and hominy grits, which I had never heard of before. And then got into a sort of small train I guess it would be, to go to Tallahassee, which was about a hundred odd miles west of Jacksonville. And I remember sitting in the compartment before the train left Jacksonville, it was extremely hot but in the train there was air conditioning, and there was a little boy aged about four sitting opposite me with his mother, and I'll never forget, I had this kind of straight shock when he said, it was a little white boy, and he said to his

mother, `Mamma, when's the choo choo train gonna go?' And suddenly all those, all the sort of idea of what the Deep South was about sort of came flooding up to the surface. And from there we went through what turned, eventually I found out, were turpentine forests of pines, more or less all the say to Tallahassee where I was met by a student adviser who took me and Deborah to his house where there was a banana tree growing outside, which was also rather exotic and my first sort of view of a banana tree. 24 hours later we moved into a duplex, which is a sort of, half a bungalow, and I went to, we were both taken to something called the Wakulla Springs where the original Tarzan films were made and got very heavily burnt by the sun, swimming when the sun was actually behind clouds. So that was the first mistake that we made in Florida was to get badly burnt. And then I met the new Head of Department called Dr Gulnar Bosch, B-O-S-C-H, that was her married name, and she was an Egyptian-born Oriental art historian who had taken over the Head of Department because unfortunately the previous incumbent, I think it was Mr McDonough, had died. And she said to me, `We don't accept your qualifications from the Royal College of Art, and therefore you will have to do an M.A.'

Oh dear.

So I had already lost, I had just lost the job, you know, like, as soon as I got there. And so I had an argument, I argued my case and said that the ARCA was the equivalent of an M.A., and this would be accepted in American institutions, and she said, well, that I was at liberty to write to Federal authorities to find out, which I did, and sure enough they wrote back and said yes, the ARCA is the equivalent of an M.A. as far as the Federal educational service was concerned. And she then turned around to me and said, `Yes, but it's not in the State of Florida.' So, I was stuck, and I thought, well, I can either, you know, go home, go back to England, or, I can't...because I was on a Fulbright scholarship I couldn't just leave the institution because I had no institution to go to, so I was a bit stuck as to what to do. It was either to go to another country, like Canada, or to go back to England. So I decided that I would do the M.A., I don't know whether that was a good or bad thing, but I did, and spent two very hot sweaty years in north Florida in the Bible Belt where, it was a dry county where I was when we first arrived. And so we stuck it out for two years, I got the M.A., and then...

Can I just interrupt there. How did the Fulbright Scholarship, that sort of funded you to survive doing the M.A. in effect?

No, it funded me...no, it funded my travel; I didn't get a Fulbright, you know, stipend, I got a Fulbright travel award. And so I had a, I was offered a graduate, what it is called, a graduate assistantship, and I became the assistant to a man called Karl Zerbe, who had been a painter in Munich, so I had just come from Munich and he was from Munich, and he had been a rather prominent young artist in Munich up until 1934 when he had left and had come to the States. I to this day don't know whether he was Jewish or not, I was not under the impression that he was. Nonetheless he was, his work was pilloried in the, what is it, the Entartete Kunst exhibition that Hitler organised in 1937. So he was regarded as a degenerate artist by the Nazis and he had gone to the States and started living I think in Boston and then he became the Professor of Painting at Florida State University after the Second World War, sometime. And I became his assistant. And that was very interesting, that was...he was a very engaging person and we got on very well, and I learnt a lot from him.

Oh good.

And that's when I started, you know, I guess a certain amount of teaching.

So the graduate assistantship, that did pay you some money to live on, did it?

Yes, and then, my wife also worked as well, so we survived reasonably well in Florida. It was rather different to Munich where we had survived not so reasonably well, sort of at a much sort of lower level.

So what did you feel you learnt from this man?

I don't think it was so much anything...it was more a kind of approach to life and being an artist, and the kind of self-discipline that he had, the kind of...and the sort of belief he had in what he was doing, which was sort of intense. It was more, you know, general in that kind of way. I suppose he was very, he was...although he was a sort of, he was rather, he had a very strong personality and was rather sort of imposing as a person, he was also a very kind kind of person, and he, for whatever reason, he really took to me, and so he was...he wasn't sort of superior in any way, he was much more open and sort of regarded me as a colleague rather than a student. And so I suppose I responded to that. And I think the fact that I had been in Munich was quite important to him, because he refused ever to go back to Germany but he wanted to know, you know, were those streets, what was that street like, and what was it like, you know, etcetera etcetera. And he told me some sort of rather sort of

interesting stories about how, what happened when, just before the Nazis came to power, which I found really fascinating. And every spring, early spring in Munich there's something called Fasching, which is a kind of sort of party season in a way; it's like a festival, and like, I guess like the Chelsea Arts Ball would have been a highlight of it. So that he in one particular year was on the committee to organise and make the decorations for this big Faschings ball. And they used to meet in an area called Schwabing, and that's the name of the area I lived in in Munich but I couldn't remember last week, so it was Schwabing, that's S-C-H-W-A-B-I-N-G, which was at that time the kind of bohemian area where lots of artists lived and so on. And there were lots, there were little restaurants there, and was a very pleasant sort of area. And the committee used to meet in a particular restaurant, this was, I think it was 1931 or '32, and then discuss what the committee would discuss about decorations, decorating this Faschings ball. And on one particular night Hitler and his entourage came in, because one of his entourage was the boyfriend of a waitress, and amongst the artists who were sitting at the table was a sculptor, a rather big man, and, it appeared that Hitler had bad table manners, from a German sense, and picked his teeth with his fork. And so, at one point the sculptor sort of turned around and sort of looked at the table where Hitler was at and started to make a parody of Hitler picking his teeth with his fork, whereupon there was a charge of people from that table to the artists' table and there was a sort of a fight, and the waitress sort of tried to, who was the boyfriend, girlfriend of one of these Nazis, sort of tried to sort of cool it all down. And I mean eventually it sort of simmered down etcetera. But at the back of that was, you know, of course that the artists were heavily anti-Nazi to a person, and there was...and the Nazis at that point I guess would have been quite aggressive in their, you know, in their behaviour, you know, because they were getting close to a kind of takeover in 1932. So, I found it rather fascinating to have these sorts of, this sort of connection to a place that I'd just been to, where, before I had been in the Army and before that as a child I had been in the war; suddenly these things have become personal. I think in a way he really, it was as though he really wanted to go back, but he just couldn't, he just couldn't bring himself to think it was possible. I think emotionally he was so antagonised, so separated from it that it was not possible. At the same time here he was in a, you know, having been in a new country, and there was always that sense of being part of it and yet not part of it, you know; being accepted, being a professor and all of the rest of it, being an artist, being celebrated as an artist, but at the same time not being part of it. And he knew people like Beckmann. Apparently he didn't even learn English when they arrived, after they arrived in the States. I mean so there was that sort of sense of alienation in a way. And the fact that I was also not American, I suppose we had something, although

generations apart - yes, two generations apart, there was something sympathetic about that condition.

Did he already speak English?

Yes, he spoke English very well, yes, or American English he spoke, yes, yes.

So what kind of work did you do there? Did this M.A. differ from the Royal College?

I think that my work actually sort of took on some very peculiar aspects in Florida. I mean the climate was so completely different, and the landscape was so completely different. Everything was different. The approach to art was completely different, it was quite regional in a way. And then there was this, you know, that sense of, where I...before I had...I'd never been in a place I suppose where, apart from Guildford, where there was a sense of being parochial, or a sort of parochial sense about things. And allied to that was the feeling I got, or understanding I got, not necessarily there but later, that Florida State, at least the fine art department, had a sort of sense of being inferior to other institutions, and hence they, in a way they made the programmes as intense as they could, to try to sort of, in a way to compensate themselves for the fact that they were, you know, like in this rather peculiar place right down in the Deep South, one thousand miles or so from New York. And New York was kind of like the sort of, the place, the sort of centre of the world as it were as far as art was concerned. So, and I guess, people who lived far away from centres, perhaps less so now but certainly then, you know, there would be almost a sort of pilgrimage, a sense of pilgrimage. I mean I noticed it later when I went to New Zealand, and now I'm living in London and people come to London quite often, I see perhaps more people from New Zealand than I do, you know, other people that I might know who live in Glasgow or live in Leeds or, there is a desire to sort of compensate for feeling as though one is on the edge somewhere, and at the same time there's a desire to be on the edge for some people.

So, I mean did you feel frustrated, having sort of gone out into this wider world again, in the sort of sense of internationalism, and then discovered in fact you were in a place that's feeling quite regional?

No, no not at all. In fact, I don't know if I mentioned before, but, if I hadn't have won all those scholarships, I did have the idea of going to Stornoway, so, I really wanted to go somewhere like that, in a way, without quite knowing what it...without knowing

what it was like, you know, I just wanted to go somewhere sort of, that was on the edge or extreme or, you know. So, I'd made a choice about that in a funny way, to go...yes, it's something I really wanted to do.

Can you think why now, in retrospect?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I still get the desire to do that actually. [LAUGHS] I do, I get, I still get that desire. I suppose then I could make a decision, whether to sort of go to, say, to a place like New York, or try to go to New York, or to stay in London or, you know, to stay in what one perceived to be a centre, or to have a completely different sort of experience, to go, you know, to go the other end of the world as it were, I mean, metaphorically as well as... I mean of course one doesn't by just going to, you know, a place that would be perhaps defined or categorised more by nature than by, you know, than by a sort of civilisation, but nonetheless, you know, there are similarities still. So I did deliberately do that, and I didn't pick it out...chance is always something as well that, you know, I like the idea of chance and taking a risk. And so, the idea of picking these names out, you know, because of the way they sounded, and then not knowing where they were, you know, was all part of it in a sense. It was also connected with the way I work in a way. So I arrived there and then I had to live with it, and you know, it was, in retrospect it was extremely, it was very good and interesting.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

What were your responsibilities as a graduate assistant?

As far as I can remember I had two classes that I taught. I didn't actually teach at the same time as Karl Zerbe, he had his own programme to run, but I was employed, I think there were two classes in the undergraduate department. And that would have been probably two afternoons a week or something like that, or a day basically.

I mean, I have this kind of fascination, having never been to art school myself, as to how, you know, one teaches art, how you hand on the discipline as it were.

Well I found something quite... I mean a lot of this is in retrospect. In retrospect I found that there were great, there was one major difference between teaching in England and teaching in the States, and this was also true when I taught later elsewhere in the States, and that, what would happen, and I don't know whether it's to

do with me or to do with the fact that I was young at the time, or whether this happens generally, but what I found was, in every class I took, that there would be a kind of, fairly early on in the class there would be a sort of crisis, and the students would sort of engineer a kind of crisis, and if one survived it they would become sort of, they would heroise one.

It was a sort of challenging of authority?

Yes, but if you failed it I suspect it would have been a disaster. And when it happened to me the first time I was completely shocked, because I hadn't had experience of teaching; when it happened I couldn't... You know, they asked some question or other I couldn't answer it, so I left the room. And then I realised what the answer was, I came back, and, you know, after two or three minutes, and apparently I had passed the test, because after that they became sort of dependent, which I... And this happened, I mean I had several classes in the States and this happened every time, you know, in one way or another. And it certainly doesn't happen in England, it's a very different...I think, I suspect it's got something to do with the way people are brought up, how the culture is and so on, you know. This sort of notion of dependency, of sort of heroising, is sort of, a bit embarrassing really. And thank God it didn't happen later, you now. Like, on the other hand other things happened later in England with students, you know, they're far more sceptical of authority and the teacher, and far more questioning. I mean it's not to say that challenges didn't happen but they didn't happen for the same reasons. So, I found that rather, not exactly interesting but I was glad I found out about it so I could...I knew after a while that it was going to come, and I could deal with it. But I didn't really like the aftermath of this sort of heroisation.

End of F5278 Side A

F5278 Side B

[.....on 4th of October 1996. Tape Six Side Two.]

I suppose in some ways though you were an expert. I mean you must have had a considerably larger experience of...

Well I had a different, I had some very different experiences. I mean all the other members of staff, with the exception of Karl Zerbe, were American-born as far as I remember, although, no that's not true, because Head of Department, Gulnar Bosch, was originally Egyptian. So, you know, the sort of immigrant aspect of that was, it was there but it was quite distant and past, and most people were, most of the staff were, you know, second, third, fourth or whatever, generation Americans, which meant they were really American. [BREAK IN RECORDING] Anyway, the programme I ran, I sort of organised for myself, was half art history and half studio practice, so it was a bit like, well the way some of the courses here in the past have run, like Reading or Nottingham and so on. So, that was very useful to me because I did...I concentrated on American art history from sort of 19th into the 20th century, so I did get a grounding in American art and architecture which I found very interesting and very useful. And it also kind of, sort of in a way focused my attention and challenged me in ways that hadn't happened before in British education, where I had to start thinking probably for the, you know, one of the, maybe even for the first time. And that was difficult but very challenging, and very useful to me. When I was getting towards the end of my time there, I suppose in the sort of speculative way I started to think about what I wanted to do, and I wanted to go north, I wanted to go as close to New York as I could get, and I started writing to various universities and so on. And the, not Karl Zerbe but other people in the department said, `You'll never get a job in the North, because you're from you're from the South.' And this sort of sense of inferiority was sort of rising again, as though the fact that I'd been there for a couple of years made me one of them, and that, you know, that that was that and that you weren't going to make it if you went north. Anyway, I applied for a job in Raleigh, North Carolina, and there was a school there run by a man who had employed Buckminster Fuller, and it was very highly regarded as an architectural college, and it had a fine art department, and it was regarded as one of the best architectural schools outside of large cities and so on. So, I applied for the job, was offered it and turned it down, and the head of the school was so angry that he wrote a letter across the States trying to blackball me and saying, `Don't employ this person'. Whereupon Cornell picked it up and phoned me up, and on the telephone offered me a

job. And when I got to Cornell I said to them, well, you know, like, `How did you...you know, why did you offer me the job?' And they said, `Well, two things. One, anyone that that man blackballs has got to be interesting, that's the first thing; and secondly, you didn't say "actually" once in your telephone conversation.' So I thought, I don't know what that meant, but I suppose, you know, they had some view of how the English are, and I sort of passed the test as it were. And I became an assistant professor in Cornell, and my...and I started to teach architects drawing and painting, and also fine art students. So that's how I moved from the South into the North, against all the expectations of the others who weren't applying to, or who weren't thinking of going north at all, because they just wouldn't make it.

He who dares wins.

He who dares, he who dares wins, and loses in another way perhaps.

So how did your work carry on while you were teaching, how did you integrate it?

Oh, well, I only taught two days a week, and I had a studio. When I got to Cornell I was offered, I had a big studio, and, it was very generous kind of living, and, two days a week teaching. And, you know, it was very...it was on the face of it very promising as a...but it wasn't as simple as that unfortunately, and, if only it had been. So I was having, I was actually having a lot of difficulties sort of with my work, and I think I had, I had a lot of struggle in Florida to... I mean because in a sense I had, my work had, in the way that it had evolved, I could understand it very much in relation to what was going on around me as it were, and you know, like having gone from England to Germany, that was almost seamless in the, you know, in the transition. But going to the States was not, was very disruptive and difficult. I had had...in Florida there was, half-way down Florida on the west coast, is a place called Sarasota, S-A-R-, I think's A, Sara, sota, S-A-R-A-S-O-T-A, a very beautiful place, and there's a museum called the Ringling Museum, and there was a kind of university, State-wide university symposia where, symposium, took place annually, and people, there would be, you know, much like conferences would be here I suppose, there was a sort of conference aspect to it, there were exhibitions and so on. And people were invited from, you know, all over the place, and I remember meeting, or rather listening to Philip Guston speaking, and he then, we all had our work there, the graduate students, and he then had a look at all our work and he had, you know, I had a tutorial with Guston about what I was doing and so forth. He was very, you know, sort of supportive and so on. This particular symposium was very important annually, I

mean it was the...out of the events that took place in Florida they were probably the two most important events for me, because I began to get a sort of sense of a broader and a bigger world, because people were coming from, you know, from New York and, and the whole thing had a certain sort of intensity about it, especially when you think of American art at that time, we're talking about 1960 to '62, Abstract Expressionism was very prominent, but then of course Pop was just about appearing and... So there was a kind of urgency about the whole thing which was rather exciting, and it was reflected in the symposiums. So that was important. When I got to Ithaca, which is about what, 300 miles I think north of New York, I began to go to New York quite a lot, and I began to sort of...and a lot of people were coming to Cornell, there were a lot of artists visiting Cornell, so I became friendly with various artists of my generation and older. And also some of the students who had just left Cornell and become prominent. And then there were students in the architecture school who became artists later and became quite prominent, and I was working with them. So, Cornell was rather different to Florida in this respect, that there was a lot of interchange between New York and artists from New York, and a lot of, and a certain... In a way, because of the, I suppose the reputation of the school, there was a tendency for there to be more talent, more talented people in the same place; not that there weren't talented people in Florida but perhaps they were a little bit fewer and far between, and the whole context would have been different. So, Cornell was still part of New York in a way, you know, I mean it was a very big campus, there were very important people academically working there, not, I don't mean necessarily in architecture and fine art but in general. So, it had a much bigger sense about itself. And I was only there one year. I suppose I was just beginning to get a real sense of it when I was invited to take the final year painters to New York and run a programme there in what was called the Architectural League on East 42nd Street, which I did for the second year that I was at Cornell. And so I ended up on my own in New York with a bunch of students with occasional visits from the Dean to see how things were going, and there we were and, you know, it was wonderful, it was really very interesting. And I had a studio in the Architectural League itself. And I just met loads of people, lots of people, lots of artists, the whole, I had a very active life.

I mean can you think who?

Well... [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Some of these people, you know, I'd not known at all, you know, they were artists at the time and they probably are now but, you know, and they were just part of the general milieu. I knew a lot of people who seemed to be around, somebody called Peter Agostini, and he was a sculptor who was

very well known in the States at that time; and Jo Stefanelli is another person I knew very well, who was a second generation Abstract Expressionist, and so there were connections through him. I mean I suppose they...and there was another man whose name I've forgotten who was a figurative painter who was also very well known who had been painting in black and white for twenty years and had decided that it was time to just start using colour. It was...I mean it was...these people had immense sense of sort of vocation really about, you know, the seriousness of doing something. Yes, those are the people that come to mind I suppose immediately. I mean they are not necessarily names that one would know internationally, but they would have been very highly regarded, you know, in the national scene as it were, in New York. I met lots of other people, you know, casually.

Who did you admire on the American scene at that time yourself, or, and also who might have influenced you in any way?

I was very influenced by a sculptor called Gabriel Kohn, K-O-H-N, who also came to the symposium in Florida. But I was really interested in his work before that, before he arrived, I mean I knew of him. And I made it my task to really try and know what was going on in New York, through all the magazines and so on, so I was much more informed about New York life then than I am about London life now, because it seems to me to be relatively, you know, sort of unimportant. But then it wasn't, it was absolutely vital. So Gabriel Kohn, he made works out of wood and they were sort of laminations, and, they weren't very big. I remember one very big piece he made which was a `Homage to Dylan Thomas' which was, I found very interesting. And the other artist that Kohn could be related to is a man called Peter Startup who also used wood and laminations and so on, who had taught me very briefly at Guildford. Although I could see a connection between these two, you know, it was only incidental. And, there was something, there was a sort of rigour about Kohn's work, and I really liked the, I liked the way as it were the process was described, there were indications of the process in the final object, you know, the way... I was very influenced by Robert Morris's Box, Box I think with the sound of its own making; I can't remember the exact title. That's a similar sort of... So it was this area that I was beginning to get really engaged with when I was in New York. I mean I saw, you know, early work of Oldenburg which didn't particularly interest me. I was very engaged with the ideas that Guston had actually put forward at the symposium, but I wasn't...I don't know how they would have translated in terms of my own work, but, what I...I remember him talking about the painting where you have the picture plane, and something behind the picture plane moving towards the picture plane which

would have been like something identifiable as something seen but with the skin taken off so you couldn't identify it. So something raw which was not quite identifiable moving towards the surface of the picture plane from the back as it were. And, really quite engaging. That interested me a lot about Guston, and Guston later of course became figurative, again, because he was in his, you know, I don't know what his third or fourth phase, and he had been, you know, did all those WPA things during the Thirties, murals and so forth, and then, you know, he, I guess about '46 or '47 began to work in a more non-figurative fashion. And it was almost as though, having done that and then working for quite a long time non-figuratively, the figuration was beginning to sort of, almost sort of emerge again but hadn't, and he was in a way I suspect sort of like describing something that was taking place internally, that, you know, that hadn't yet emerged, and that would have been about five years I suppose, or six years, before the first sort of almost, like comic type paintings of the Ku Klux Klan appeared, about '67 I think, when they appeared, '68, and then his last period was... So, that I was really interested in and engaged with. Probably because he was there, you know, and I bumped into him, you know. I'm sure that there would have been others who would have been equally interesting if not more. I also was working with an architect at the time, because I was very interested, my thesis in Florida had been to do with the relationship between art and architecture, and I had written on English Constructivists, people like Pasmore and so on, and I had also, was interested in his work at Peterlee, and, you know, that relationship between art and architecture where he had actually I think directed a team of architects at a certain point in Peterlee New Town. Anyway we'll come to that maybe later. But I had written about that, so I was really interested in the relationship between art and architecture, and so moving to the college of architecture in Cornell, in the department of fine art but the college of architecture, I was in a school that, you know, that was sort of, had a strong sense of the architectural and so on. I remember just when the Cuban Missile Crisis was on and I remember having dinner with the head of sculpture at the time, Jack Squires, and a visiting Colombian architect, whose name I can't remember but who was the cousin of the President of Colombia at the time, and, this was the night of the Cuban Crisis, and they, you know, they were discussing, we were all discussing what the implications were, and the next day we had a staff meeting of the college of architecture whereupon one of the architects stood up and, I don't... Cornell in Ithaca is in a very interesting sort of geographical point, because it's situated on the top, a sort of plateau, and then, there's a sort of, very steep roads go down with chasms in between and waterfalls, and down to the city below, which is quite small, about 30,000 people, and then there's a huge lake, finger lake, Lake Cayuga. It's very beautiful. And this architect stood up and proposed that

these chasms should be covered over in order that they would be used either as air-raid shelters or, you know, like refuges. In other words the sense of crisis that hit them in such a way, this person who was a military architect had actually responded, you know, and I couldn't believe it, I thought it was so completely absurd, you know, that, you know...there was a sort of paranoia flying around as it were, you know, I was just amazed at all that. That was extraordinary. Anyway, it passed, and I don't think that ever happened, I don't think they covered them over; I think they just left these wonderful waterfalls to, you know, in the way they were. So I was...I suppose it was, you know, socially one was in contact with architects a lot, as well as artists, and that was expanding as it were to me, and so I was...when I got to New York and I began to, you know, work and think about galleries or some sort of representation, I can't remember, I met this particular architect who was quite well known and he then incorporated my work in some of his projects, and so I had quite an on-going sort of connection with him for a while, until I left, until I came back to London.

Can you describe in what way? Were these sort of site pieces or...?

Well some pieces were hanging pieces, they were... What I haven't actually said is that, when I was in Munich I used to steal materials, because I had no money essentially, and that then sort of became almost like a mode of operation, so I continued that in Florida and I used to sort of climb under people's houses, they were built on stilts and pull-out chairs, old rotting chairs and things. And so I began to use, it was a sort of, I began to use things I found, or, you know, could purloin. I used to go to the city dump and look for things. And so I began to use bits of furniture actually to make constructions, and the work at that point, it stopped being relief, it actually became fully three-dimensional, and then it started to sort of hang as it were in space. And then, when I got to New York I was making objects which actually could be...they were kind of like open structures but they didn't have just one configuration; they could, because of the way they joined together they could be put together in different ways. So there would have been a finite number of ways this thing could be used or placed.

So could someone else reconfigure it?

It could...yes, yes. And they also used primary colours, I mean they were painted, they were wood and resin and painted with resin, fibreglass resin. And they were quite strongly coloured, and they were very big, I mean they would be the length of this room and you know, the size of this room, you know, so they...

What's that, about 20...?

They would...that's about 20-something, about 20 feet, something like that, and you know... Those pieces, I didn't make many of them because there wasn't, you know... In a way my ambition expanded with arriving in New York, you know, like it sort of, I guess like with lots of people. On the other hand space, there were space problems about working. And the architect began to use, was using my work, not these gigantic pieces but smaller pieces that also could be hung, and they were made of bits of furniture that also could be slotted together in different ways, so they were... And there isn't, I don't think...maybe Tatlin is the nearest, you know, one could get to, but they weren't...they were more organic, you know, they were more sort of, they weren't...they didn't deal with a sort of frontal, being frontal in any way, they were much more in the round as it were, and they were like, they were a bit like calligraphy in space but made of wood. And so, it was a bit like putting different parts of a person together if you see what I mean, because chairs, chairs can...they all fulfil the same function but if you don't have two identifiable chairs you get different shapes of legs and different shapes of... So they, you know, it was the way these things would fit together and would be joined together, but by slotting, not by, you know, by screwing, nails or... Some were dowelled but I didn't use any nails at all. And I also used glue as well. So, this is where Gabriel Kohn came in to play as it were, my influences from him were more in the process of making something than in the way his work finally looked, it was much more made of blocks of things that connected, and they were quite small, apart from this big one I was talking about. Whereas these were more linear and more kind of, they were more fragile looking, as though they would fall apart at any minute: they probably would have. So those, that's what I was doing in New York.

So what did you perceive the relationship of the art object to a building to be?

Well I was very...because I was working with architects and architecture students, not all, but also with fine art students, you know, this kind of sense of space and sense of public space, and sense of how the artist could, or, you know, artists could collaborate with architects, this was something that I was interested in, because I wanted to do that. And so it was about, I had a view that most public art, and I certainly see it around here, most public art is like, you know, you build a building, you stick a badge on the end, you know, so, you know, stick something on it or put something in front of it, or... Normally landscape artists, landscape architects who have got some

problem with breasts, sort of make lumps, breast lumps and they get architects, artists, to stick something on the top of it, and you see them all over the place. And so I found that sort of very unimaginative and I thought that the architecture and the art should be integrated at a much earlier state in the concept of what a building is for, you know, like how, what its purpose is, what its function is, and then how an artist could work in relation to the way that would evolve, you know. So, it was claiming a rather important role for the artist, other than as a decorator or someone who, you know, like, is employed to stick the badge on at the end. And I mean there were plenty of bad examples of this in New York, like there's a piece on the U.N. building that I used to take students and say, `Well this is precisely what we should not be doing'. On the other hand there were pieces, there were other pieces in New York which were more interesting, you know, and you know, where one could say that whatever one thought about, you know, the outcome, there was clearly some intention of integration and that the, in a sense the sort of finite condition of the art has sort of broken a bit, you know, as it became much more an integral part of the sense of the architecture. And I was interested in all of that.

Did you see it as a permanent structure within a structure, or something that could be changed or...?

Well I saw it as being something that could be changed, yes, as well, as well it could be permanent, it could be changed, yes, sure. Because, again because of the nature of my work at the time, you know. So this was a sort...I guess, I mean this had sort of evolved I suppose out of, I mean, interest in all of this must have started probably in Germany I would have thought, you know, and sort of slowly evolved through Florida and then sort of developed at Cornell and then into New York. And the M.A., the theoretical, or the art historical part of my M.A. which involved American architecture had sort of really, was one of the key factors in sort of providing a lot more information and sort of ideas about the nature of architecture, which were very influential, you know, like timber-frame houses, you know, that went along with Levi jeans, you know, the idea that, you know, you buy a kit as it were, like you could buy these, you know, ready-made trousers, you know, what, the 19th century. So there were sort of, there were ideas like that that, you know, were influential in the way one was thinking about working.

And did you have any regrets about not taking art history more seriously during your Royal College days as a resource as opposed to...? No.

No, no. No I didn't, because I found that, I was able to choose the courses I wanted to do at Florida, and therefore, and there were things available that, you know, like, became very important to me, very interesting to me, and so that, you know, it was... So going to Tallahassee had been retrospectively a good choice.

I'm going to stop you there Stuart.
End of F5278 Side B

F5279 Side A

[.....Side A of the interview with Stuart Brisley on the 4th of October 1996 at his home in London.]

Well during that, during my year in...actually I'm slightly unclear as to when it was, but at a certain point in time Deborah got a visit on, I don't know what she was doing at the time, but anyway she got a visit from the FBI, and then I got a visit from the FBI. It was in, that's right it was in, it was actually in Ithaca, that's right, because Deborah was working in the university and the FBI were there looking for people who had passed their sell-by date, i.e. they had gone past their visa times, and I was coming to the end of my visa time. So they came to see me and said, `You...' Because I had got this contract at Cornell I was clearly not going to leave the country, and on a Fulbright scholarship you were required to leave after two years, although I had had extensions because of what I was doing. And so, however it came about, I was at home in, I think it was Schuler[ph] Place, or Schyler Place, S-C-H-Y-L-E-R Place, Ithaca, one morning, and Deborah was at work, and there was a knock on the door and I remember I went to the door and it was as though there was no light outside, because this enormous man was standing there in a huge overcoat. And the result of that was that I had to write a letter to say that I would leave the country by a certain date, and I was given another extension which enabled me to work in New York and so on. So on the 14th I think it was, or, it was in February some point, we had to leave, which we did, and came back to London. So, I would really, if that hadn't have happened I would probably be an American citizen I suspect. Although, I mean what had happened was, when I got to the States and I felt very open about the whole thing and really thought, well yes, I'd really like to be an American citizen, as time went by in Florida I got less and less sort of enamoured of that possibility, and finally by the time I got to New York it was sort of fairly, I was fairly alienated from small town American life, be it on a nice campus in, you know, at Cornell or, you know, in Florida. So arriving in New York City was a bit like coming home in a way, it was like, it certainly wasn't like the States, you know, it was sort of like a city state all of its own, and people I knew there, the artists and so forth, I think we all more or less felt the same about it, you know, that crossing the Hudson to go to New Jersey was a bit like, God! it was like going to hell really. And so, I would have stayed but not because, you know, I was so enamoured of American life but because New York was such an extraordinary place, and the art world was so powerful, and I felt that I, you know, that this was a place where I could really work and so on. But it wasn't to be, because I was actually more or less thrown out, I mean I had to...I was required to

leave. I did try to go to Canada but I didn't, you know, I didn't try very hard, it was a gesture and nothing happened, so, in February of 1964 we came back on another big ship and arrived at Southampton. I had a Volkswagon bus and I put all the work and everything inside the bus with some other boxes and that was all shipped on the boat, and so we arrived with everything we chose to bring with us on this Volkswagon bus and drove to Deborah's parents in Camberley. And I remember, well two things. One, I vomited, I think it was seventeen times, on the sight of the French coast, which sort of like made me realise that it was a bit traumatic coming back, you know, it was a really terrible wrench to leave, and I really didn't want to and, but on the other hand there I was. And so I had this kind of like awful experience of seasickness which, you know, I think was probably more than that, it was, you know, sort of, really a kind of trauma. I remember driving from Southampton to Camberley and looking at these little houses, and everything was so small and like, you know, everything looked like dolls' houses, and it was so depressing, it was so depressing the whole thing. And I arrived at this place, and it was, you know, like, everybody was terribly, you know, everyone was very nice and welcoming, but it was as like, they behaved as though we had never been anywhere, away, it was like, you know, all of that was sort of like nothing, and that, you know, the seamless life or the continuity was between the day we left and now it was the day we came back and all that you can forget. I found that all very very difficult really. And also, I then sort of started to look around to see if I could get a job, and I ended up getting a job one day a week teaching at Hammersmith College of Art and Building. And I went in the first day and they were the foundation students, and they were doing a project on architecture, and it was...I tell you it was so mindless this project, I could not believe it. And I thought, what has happened, you know, from, you know, like running this thing in New York and you know, like being, having this full sort of life, I was now commuting between Camberley and Hammersmith and being faced with these sort of unutterably kind of like, unimaginative sort of teaching. It was a deep shock in a way, it was...or rather the shock continued. And I think I...I stuck that out for one term and I resigned, I had no job, I just thought, this is impossible, I can't...I will not do this, this is just hopeless. So I just resigned. And three weeks... And I had no job, so, I mean we needed money, I mean Maya had got a job but nonetheless, you know, here I was unemployed, and, it wasn't the best of... Anyway, three weeks after that somebody phoned me up from Hornsey who had been a student with me and said would I like to teach at Hornsey; they had heard that I was back, blah blah. So, I was given, I forget, what, two days or something, at Hornsey, and this would have been September 1964, and I think they were implementing the, probably, if my memory is right, parts of the Summerson/Coldstream Report, which eventually required all art schools to have, for

all students to have some sort of visual research, and there to be drawing and so. And so this Department of Visual Research was being developed, and I was in, that's where I started to teach. So I taught visual research.

What does that mean?

What is visual research? I asked myself. Yes, I'll try and answer that, I don't think I can. Anyway, visual research, I taught there from 1964 to 1968, and with occasional visits to other places, but, and eventually I was doing three days a week on this, I ran a Visual Research programme and had a group of students in. The Hornsey College of Art was an interesting place at the time, because it seemed to be expanding by leaps and bounds, you know, all over the place. There were 1,000 students in the end and 300 members of staff, or roughly 1,000 students, and on eight campuses. So, it was a gigantic sort of thing that seemed to have its own sort of volition as it were of generating itself. And because of the Coldstream/Summerson Report there was also a complementary studies programme developing as well as visual research. Now all students from all different departments were required to do both these, so, students were required to do either two I think it was, two days a week visual research as well as shoe design or painting or sculpture or graphic design, furniture design or whatever it was, and there would be a mixture of students doing visual research. Visual research involved, I suppose sort of thinking about, you know, what are the bases of visual languages, or trying to investigate that, and at that time there seemed to be two basic arguments which were used. One was the notion of non-figurative language, which actually comes from the cabbala, although I didn't know it at the time, which deals with the point/line/plane/form/movement, you know, the various dimensions. So you start with a point in space and two points makes a line, you know; two lines, one of two lines then make a plane; and three, then you get into three dimensions and then you get into four dimensions and so on. But that was one sort of argument. And the other was that all visual language actually stems from the visual appearance of things, which was called the Picassoid kind of approach for whatever reason. Now these two sort of, as far as I remember these two arguments would be, we would investigate them as it were in one way or another, and with variations and you know, the introduction of colour and so on, you know, the introduction of the movement and light and all of these things. Out of this came a not entirely coherent but at times very exciting programme of events, you know, educational events. And it started in a way for me certain thoughts about performance for example; I mean I remember having a model between two mirrors and the model rolled slowly between one mirror and the other, and the students were required to draw, yes, an impossibility if you think about

it, because as, you know, depending on what you stood, you're either moving towards or away from the mirror, and both sides, so, how do you cope with this, how do you cope with this idea, or, you know... So it was dealing with sort of, you know, trying to get people to sort of be imaginative about something that was not...it was not obvious as to what the kind of image could be. So if you take that sort of idea, you know, you've got to...you actually have to construct some sort of concept which actually accommodates one or other aspect of this particular event, you know. And that was my particular interest in sort of trying to stimulate people to think, to sort of come to solutions about problems which didn't have a solution but had maybe multiple solutions.

And were the students also able to, you know, invent the experiment in effect, and trigger...?

Yes. Yes, they would all be...we would discuss it, and so, it was really rather... And in that way one would build a strong kind of interest in the whole process, and it would also open, theoretically it should have opened up people's notions as to what they were doing in the shoe design or what they were doing in the furniture, or what they were doing in sculpture, or, you know... There was a certain amount of sort of disaffection with this programme from the various specialist departments.

From the tutors or from the students?

Yes, from the tutors. And some students would not have been interested, and others were very interested and very engaged. And so, that was, it was very demanding actually as a method, as a process of teaching. And if you think then of all the complementary studies that were going on and people coming in, like Jonathan Miller and all kinds of people who at the point, at that time were young and, you know, this was... So the thing was in a sense out of control, the whole, the school was sort of, like, developing its own kinds of areas, and some of those areas didn't have a precedent as it were, although, you know, one could go back to the idea of basic design as conceived by Pasmore and Hamilton at Newcastle, or, you know, like, or what was being done in Cardiff, I've forgotten his name at the moment.

Tom Hudson.

Tom Hudson. What Tom Hudson was doing in Cardiff, you know. So there were other examples of approaches to visual language, maybe for different reasons, basic

design and so forth. So it wasn't as though it was being done purely alone and was just some peculiar invention; it did have these other...I mean the Bauhaus and all the rest of it. So, it was, in that sense it had a sort of coherence about it I think, kinds of[??] intention.

I mean, the Coldstream/Summerson Report, that must have been directed at more than just Hornsey, presumably?

Oh yes, it was general, yes.

So...

I don't know what other schools did. This was what happened at Hornsey, you know.

I mean did you as a teacher read the Report and then interpret it?

No no.

No, I see.

No I was employed by someone called Ian Simpson, who subsequently became the Principal of St. Martin's, and he, I guess he would have understood what the thing was about, and then he employed teams of people to... We're talking about 1,000 students, I mean so that a lot of, not necessarily 1,000 but lots of students would have been doing this. So there was, you know, like numbers of rooms devoted to it, and then there would be teams of people employed to work with groups of students. So we would have, maybe we would have one group for a term, we'd go through a term's programme, whatever, not necessarily knowing what that programme was going to be, you know, we would as it were allow it to evolve as it went on. So you start with something and then, you know, it would...and then there would be a certain amount of discussion and then we would maybe introduce something else, and the students would respond and say they, you know, they'd like to do this or that, and so it would sort of grow.

Would the start point come from you or Ian Simpson?

Yes, we would start it, yes, yes, yes. And we might then stop it at some point and start something else, because, you know, we were employed to lead it as it were, you

know. But it had to work, I mean that was the point. So I think it was really rather interesting as a...it was sort of an experiment in a way, although I don't think it as intended as such. I think it was intended to be that every student should have some fine art experience, and it was interpreted at Hornsey in this way, I think that's what it was. Now you know, every graphics student, every furniture design student should have some fine art experience. So there was I think an assumption that fine art had contained within it some sort of, although not defined, some sort of, like, basic, some sort of sense of where the basis of visual language lie, as opposed to shoe design or, you know, as opposed to furniture design or whatever, and that all students should be required to experience this, which would inform the specialisation that they had chosen to take part in.

I mean it does sound very interesting. How did you feel, you know, looking back to your much more rigourous and static experience, did you ever think about that as a teacher?

You mean at Guildford?

Mm.

Well I knew that that's what we... You know, we... No I didn't really, I mean I... [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I mean I think this was new, this was...I mean, it wasn't new but you know, for me it was...it was a sort of a live challenge, there was something real about it, you know. And the references wouldn't have been to Guildford, they would have been other references, you know, like, which were perhaps, some would have been less understood than others, you know, would have been back to the Bauhaus to a certain extent, would be basic design. We would have been aware of certain things that Tom Hudson was up to, you know, or had been, all of that, so... And there was quite a large team of people who were doing this with different... I mean some of them were architects, most of them were painters, some were sculptors, some were, I remember Harry Baines who was, you know, like a strong socialist. I remember somebody who had been a boxer who was a painter from the Royal Academy. You know, a very wide range of people, therefore their interpretations of this would be quite wide, and so, if you looked at the, you know, the programme it would have contained such a wide set of terms, all contextualised by the term Visual Research. And some students would have been very much more sympathetic shall we say to David Tindall, you know, as opposed to me or Marc Vaux or Tess Jaray or whoever it might have been.

Could they pick?

No, not... They probably could, not entirely but yes they could to a certain extent, you know, yes, I seem to remember.

You say, you know, it sort of triggered ideas about performance art; when did you actually start using performance in your work?

Well, I mean there is a point, there is a definite point where I had made what was a first performance, although it wasn't called that, but, it didn't come out of the blue, and there were things that I was doing which sort of in a way presaged it, you know, kind of like anticipated it without me knowing. And I think this visual research thing was part of that but not entirely. What was happening, when I got back from the States I had, you know, like, the sense of implosion as it were, of everything sort of shrinking; shrinking to fit is always painful I think, and it took me a good two years to shrink to fit the seam as it were, having been in this expansive New York, you know, scene, which was the opposite in a way, you know, sort of, you know, how far do you want to go and how big do you want to be, you know, how...and age has got nothing to do with it. So, I found, you know, my work actually ground to a halt, and it sort of ground to a halt on a sort of philosophical point that's really very curious, which was connected to the point/line/plane argument. And if I had known then what I found out last year it wouldn't have been such a critical difficulty; it was because the point/line/plane argument is only part of a much bigger argument that I had difficulty, and I'll try and explain it. So I...I was very interested in work which actually showed the history of its own making, was one of the... So the process became as it were the subject, and at the same time I suppose I had certain sort of intuitive feelings about what sorts of forms this should take, and so these works were in a way, they were all laminated, were pieces of wood that were laminated, but they were also cognisant of what was going on in British art, and so I found myself sort of influenced by people like William Tucker, Philip King, people I hadn't known until I had come back, you know, I had no idea what was going on. So, but at the same time, with this influence of, you know, kind of people like Robert Morris and Gabriel Kohn, a curious combination but, you know, where... So making the work which produced the, was a summation of the history of its making as it were, the process was revealed in the end result, also the shapes and the forms were sort of influenced by things I have seen by other artists here to a certain extent. And that was all manifestly unsatisfactory as it was getting...it was all beginning to...it was all kind of becoming reductive and more

reductive and more reductive. And eventually I got to the point where I had ceased to be interested in making an object and was only interested in demonstrating in a sense an idea or a theory. I guess it's very common to other artists at the time. And I began to use perspex, and I began to think about directions in space rather than making forms in space. And then, so I began to make these things out of perspex which demonstrated as it were, you know, like the X Y Z coordinate, you know, like one vertical, two horizontals, to make a cube there are three combinations, four combinations of these three elements that makes up a cube because it has twelve edges. So, you know, I got really interested in...the thing had actually got itself down to this as it were. But then I began to realise that everything I made was more than that, you know? It was...because you would only see it from one side and there were all the other sides, and then there was light and then there was height, you know, and all the rest of it, so, it actually was full of complications, and so I couldn't reduce it to being essentially an idea. And I began to realise that the idea was out of time as it were, you know, it was a sort of ideal, an ideal, and I began to think that these things had to be sent to outer space really where there wasn't such a thing as gravity, and if there wasn't such a thing as gravity would there be, would the three coordinates operate in the same way, or was it only because they were...you know, so... I actually stopped, I completely came to an end, you know.

The dangers of conceptual art.

Yes, just completely, it was... It was very disturbing actually because you know, I'd had this great ambition to be an artist and here I was, you know, at the end as it were, not knowing what to do.

I mean I'm just really intrigued, I mean it's sort of terribly unfair to ever ask this of an artist, but, at this point, I mean do you have any idea of how you conceived the relationship of, you know, the ideas underlying this sort of art and any kind of access to an external public, or were you simply still pursuing the artistic idea for your own self as it were?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Well I think, you know, I had had that interest in the relationship between, you know, the artist and the public through the relationship of the art and architecture and so on, although that's an indirect response as it were. And so...and also I was interested in, you know, like, I began to be really interested in something which was de-mystified, if you see what I mean, you know, like...

Not entirely. [LAUGHS]

A thing in itself, you know. What?

I mean the idea is so sort of intellectual in a way, I would have said that for most people it would have been truly mysterious.

Yes, but I mean if you...I mean if you say, well something which has the...the subject of this work is the process by which it came about, right?

Mm.

This is an understandable idea; you may not like it but it's, or you may not like its effect as it were, but it's quite logical, you know, there's a logic in it. So, there was, in other words there was a purpose to it in the sense that it had a logic. Now, at that point audience doesn't come into it, right?

Right.

Nonetheless, you know, it's understandable, so that means there is some sort of relation as it were between the thing in itself, the idea, and its reception. In other words somebody can say yes, I understand that; it doesn't mean to say that it was art or not art, or you know, what it was. I mean I...at this point, I had reached this point of not knowing probably what art was, or not caring what art was, because I had got to this, I had got to this sort of... Because it was a crisis, you know, it was a sort of...I had go to this point of, everything had become so reductive. And then I realised that, you know, like, as with Minimalism, you an focus everything down, but then it suddenly does that; in other words you reach a point, but the directions actually shoot the other side of the point, and all kinds of other things happen that are not... So you may want to be in control, to be absolutely clear about this, and for this seemed to be as objective as possible, but it never happens because it hits a focal point and everything shoots the other side and it almost like mirrors the complexity in the front in another way. And so, you know, there wasn't an answer to this in any way. There was no answer to it. And I found it really disturbing. And then, at this time, it was 1966, there was the Symposium of Destructive Art on in London organised by Gustav Metzger who subsequently became a friend of mine, and I went to see some of those performances, and I'd had absolutely...I mean I can say that what they did was to make me feel numb really, I was sort of numbed by them in a curious... I mean I

didn't think that I...I didn't think that I would do anything like that. I mean it didn't even occur to me to think to do anything like that, but I, you know, because it was going on and I knew people who were engaged, you know, who were interested in it, I also wanted to see it, some of those things. People like Otto Muehl and Al Hansen.

End of F5279 Side A

F5279 Side B

[Continuing the interview with Stuart Brisley on the 4th of October 1996 at his home in London. Tape Seven Side B.]

I'd be interested in hearing about, you know, what you felt about the performances at the Destruction in Art Symposium.

Well, you know, like, I'm beginning to realise, hearing myself respond to these questions, that I've been on the sidelines most of the time, I mean, and it was equally true with this, that, it was well publicised, I knew that it was taking place, I knew people who were really interested in it, and I wasn't actually particularly interested in it. Nonetheless I went to...there was one I went to that I remember quite strongly so, I don't have an overview or any sort of coherent view of the symposium as a whole. And I didn't know at the time quite what auto-destructive art, what it really represented, what it meant, although I had probably reached it at that point. And I went to see, I think it was at the ICA, I'm not sure, I went to see films by Otto Muehl which were very much sort of material orientated, a kind of general mixing of materials including the human body, and it was sort of like a very sexual kind of set of activities, and it... I don't know whether, it was probably shocking to me, I don't know. I mean, I can remember feeling quite numbed by it, so maybe it was, and sort of, in a way I didn't...you know, I wanted to get away from it I suppose, I didn't want to sort of go further into it or think about it particularly. Nevertheless within a few weeks or months I did my first performance. So, quite exactly how influential that symposium was I don't know. I also read things in the papers about the more, about its effects, you know, the more, the scandals and so on. But around about that time, probably, I can't locate it quite clearly enough, there were some students at Hornsey who, there was a man called Peter Cuttner and another one called Peter Dockley, and they were both in the fine art department, and they, I knew them through Visual Research, and they wanted to organise kind of like a night of activities at a nightclub called the Middle Earth in Covent Garden, and they obviously had numbers of contacts and so forth, and they invited me to do something. And, I mean if we sort of like drop the Symposium of Destructive Art out of the equation at the moment, this crisis that I'd, what I call a crisis, maybe it wasn't, this sort of coming to a stop as an artist, or coming to a stop in terms of making objects as an artist... [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] When I got that invitation, I was beginning, I was then, had to think, well what, you know, what am I going to do with it, what am I going to do? I don't quite remember how this worked, but, in my mind at some point, either after this first

performance or before it, was the idea that, I think it was probably, had to be before, because, was the idea that if it wasn't possible to represent the ideal, because whatever was done just didn't rise to the level of the ideal, it kept insisting on being kind of like complicating itself in one way or another with a set of complications, and if I thought that the only way that I could proceed in that direction was to throw things beyond gravity as it were, there was only one...either I gave up or else I had to recognise that I was in the world, you know, I was not outside it, I was in it, and therefore I had to start thinking about what that meant for me. And so I started thinking, well, you know, what is...what comes first in living in terms of survival, you know, like, what is it, breathing, eating, sleeping, you know; there are some sort of fundamental basic, you know, things you can't get away from that you've got to do if you want to live, and breathing is the first one I suppose. And so I, what I decided to do was to do a performance which was like a demonstration, it wasn't a performance in my mind because performance was the term that was used. At that point we called them, they were called events I seem to remember, and in Germany I guess they were called actions. So, and I wanted to demonstrate as it were the act of eating, and in order to do this I thought that, I got another person, so there was going to be a meal between two people. So in order to try to concentrate on eating itself, I wanted to make everything the same, have the same consistency as it were visually, so everything was white, the food was white, so, all food that was...there were three courses, and they were white food. I can't remember what it was, but you know, it was almost white, like chicken I guess, which I hate. And we were dressed in white and we had white faces and, you know, like an archetypal beginners' sort of performance really. And this was part of an evening of events in which there were something like forty different things taking place in this huge sort of, like, underground warehouse place in Covent Garden, and, you know, with all kinds of activities, and some things were programmed to go on simultaneously, others, one would follow after another. There was a general sort of order of events that was organised by Peter Cuttner and whoever else, but you know, anything could happen really, because it was...it was a kind of, it was a kind of mix between high and popular culture as well so it was a kind of, quite an iconoclastic affair in that sense. And I remember this particular occasion this thing took place, I was very frightened of the whole thing. Anyway, sat down at the table with Deborah and we proceeded to have this meal, but we couldn't see because you know, we... Anyway, we proceeded to have...we had the meal, it was perfectly, it went quite well, except some people stole some of the food and, you know, I guess it worked in its own terms. And then, I had a cigarette at the end of the meal, I was smoking Gauloises at the time I remember, had a Gaulloise, put the match down, set fire to the table and everything went up in flames. And it was, everything about that

work was in retrospect so exhilarating and liberating, that I realised that this was the start of something new, you know, this was actually kind of like out of, this was like the Phoenix, you know, like, out... [LAUGHING] Having reached this terribly dour point of, you know, like, you know, statis and you know, and all that, this kind of, the impossibility of the ideal, and then suddenly this, it had a tremendous, it was so liberating, I guess it was cathartic, you know. And it led me on, from then I just, that was it, the whole thing started, you know, and... And at that point I had, you know, I mean, I had those views that if this is not art, I don't give a damn, you know, I really had no idea what it was, what, you know, what...I had no interest in what it was, I was really interested in the fact of doing it as it were, you know, it was a kind of, it was a sort of release from sort of all kinds of, I suppose preconceptions about what art should be and how one operated as an artist, and you know, like, and the complexity, you know, of all of that. More connected to the act of making art and being, you know, not so much related to the context, i.e. what happens to it afterwards and all the rest of it, but very much connected to... I mean it was just like, well, you know, it doesn't matter what this is, you know, it's of no consequence to me, because this is what I'm going to do. So it jumped as it...I mean, you could look at now and say, well yes, it was a piece of, it was a rather boring piece of performance, or it was, you know, whatever it was.

I'm sure it was riveting at the time.

Yes, you know, it was... But at the time I had literally no idea, I mean was it theatre, was it... You know, it had...I had no...I had no need to try to sort of conceptualise it, right at the beginning, and then slowly the whole thing became a lot more complex, and so after about the second or third thing I'd done it all, everything started to sort of, like, open up and become a lot more difficult.

Because you were intellectualising it?

Well, because I was having to, yes, I was having to think about it, because I was being confronted with aspects of it that I hadn't expected, I hadn't realised, you know, would occur. So, you know, it was a bit like jumping in the deep end on something, you know, and then having to start to learn to swim, and eventually, you know, when you're swimming you realise, you know, like, you know, there's all kinds of aspects to that, you know, as to what keeps you going as a swimmer, you know, what keeps you going. So at the very beginning it was, you know, it was like that, and I suppose that's almost like, in retrospect it's like thinking of the other side of the thing being a

complete stop, you know, where...and then, you know, the next thing is to accept that, you know, and then... So it was like being born again, you know, not Christian-wise but...

How, given that you were kind of now going into something completely new, how did you find places to be with it, and did you find other people who were doing it? How did you kind of integrate yourself into that world?

Well, I found myself with a lot of other people who were, probably for different reasons or other reasons or similar reasons, engaged in the same wide activity. And a lot of this was actually coming out of Hornsey, it was...I mean these were students from Hornsey who organised it. But then I found, because of what...because of the way they sort of set it up, I then found myself in contact with other people, some of whom were older than me, who, people like Latham, John Latham for example, who took part in this, and then I found, you know, there were some people I knew who, you know, working in other ways, I suggested they become part of it and they brought other people. So, you know, there were lots of people coming to it, film makers, Bruce Lacey was part of it at times. And it wasn't a...there was no organisation as such, you know, there was no group as such, but there were at different times groups of people who got together to do this, and we did about, I suppose about four of them. The last one was done in 1969 outside, you know, not in this particular place. I directed one of them, because sometimes, you know, they would say, we would just have a meeting and say, well shall we do this again, what shall we do? And, who's going to organise it? And the organisation would basically be, how do you conceive of having fifty people doing different things over a period of three hours, and how do you associate it. And it was sort of like a laboratory in a way, a site for, you know, kind of speculation, with huge crowds, I mean huge audiences, big audiences.

Do you know who the audiences were?

Well no but I keep meeting them.

I was there. [LAUGHS]

Yes, `I was there when you did X', and I'd forgotten all about it. So it was, I mean it was... I mean Yoko Ono and Lennon were there at one point, and Pink Floyd did something there, and you know, like, it was very open, you know, and people who maybe were never known at all as artists did things there, you know, it was... It was

like part, it was a sort of spirit of the time I guess, or, you know, a sort of feeling of the time.

And what kind of practical considerations came into it, about money or recording it or anything...?

Nothing, no.

No, it was just absolutely of the moment?

Yes, it was of...yes, yes. And it only lasted a short, you know, a relatively short time, you know. And through that I think people then started to be seen as it were and then asked to do other things, and then it, you know, sort of became, it became the site for, you know, people to sort of jump off from as it were, or they were invited to do other things, including me, and that's how it sort of, that's how it sort of developed.

How did you approach those early performances, how did you kind of plan them, at the creative level, how much effort went into it before you actually did it is what I'm trying to say?

Well, yes there was a lot really. I mean there were a lot of things had to be prepared, and, I mean I suppose what I realised is that that preparation would have, there would have been two kinds of preparation; one would have been a sort of, almost you could call an unconscious preparation, a kind of, I guess other people would call it psyching-up or something, you know, but I wouldn't put it like that. Certainly a sort of, psychologically a kind of, attuning to the fact that something was going to happen at a certain time; and concomitantly organising the material that was going to be needed for this in some way. I did two or three things that were anti-racist for example which involved white grey and black, and it also involved black people and white people and, you know, all that had to be sort of organised. So that, there was quite a lot of organisation involved. I got to the point where eventually I didn't want to have any, I didn't want to have any organisation.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

In terms of what you've just described about your performance work, it sounds as if that's the first time that you're clearly using sort of political ideas in your work, is that right?

I think probably...

Or socially conscious ideas.

I think probably, yes, I think so, mm.

And where did that desire come from, the context of the symposium or...?

No, no, certainly not. [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I can't answer that in any sort of easy way. I mean, you know, we go all the way back to my father being a socialist and, you know, I suppose I...and also me being a socialist, and then probably, if one thinks of the Guildford studies and the, you know, there were certain imperative things that one was required to do as it were as to what...related to what the nature of art was supposed to be, and not others. Going through the Royal College of Art which was largely kind of contextualised by the American invasion, and then... So I think it's only, it only comes at a point where, you know, there was some sort of a crisis, where...

Do you mean for yourself or in a more general sense?

Yes, for me, yes, there was a personal one, and it came relatively late I suppose because I would have been 30-something years old, 33. And so things became as it were more critical, and... I mean, at around that point I had been part of a gallery, McRoberts & Tunnard, and I can't quite remember how this fits in but it's around that period, and also the work was perspex structures they took and showed and so on. And one Boxing Day one of the directors was out riding to hounds and was slightly inebriated, fell of his horse, the horse rolled on him and he was killed and the gallery was closed, and, I mean not that quickly but it was closed. And I suppose, along with other people who were in that gallery or associated with that gallery there was a tremendous sense of irony about the whole thing, you know, that here we all were without, you know, any sort of agent, you know, as a result of this sort of rather sort of idiosyncratic event. And so that did actually focus the mind, and it certainly focused, it focused the mind of somebody called Peter Sedgley as well as myself. He was a key figure in founding both SPACE studios and Art Information Registry in a, not just in relation to that but certainly, you know, the fact that, you know, that the gallery had closed in the way that it had was sort of partly instrumental in us all thinking, well we actually have now got, perhaps we have to be independent, and so

we should start organising ourselves and so on. And he had, he was an architect amongst other things, and he took it upon himself to really push that part of things, and I think about 1967, you know, these, both SPACE and then Art Information Registry was formed, which eventually got a gallery, the Air Gallery and, you know, like, there's a whole long history to it, and Space Studios still exists, but it had a sort of pretty lively and radical beginning to it.

Can you just explain in brief what both, what the institutions were for?

Yes. Space is for what it says, you know, space for artists, studios for artists. And I remember for example working in Marshalsea prison, well the old Marshalsea prison building, which we took over before it was knocked down. And then, I forget the name of it but right by the Mint there's a something docks, it's a big dock area, and they became artists' studios for several years before they were taken over by commercial interests.

St. Catharine?

St. Catharine's Dock, yes. That was a big Space Studio situation. It was supported by the local council and all the rest of it. So, I mean it took a certain amount of organisation. And there were numbers of artists were involved, Peter Sedgley, Bridget Riley and other people, I remember John Hoyland and various others at the time who had different parts to play in it, and I was involved in it too, as well. And along with that was something, Peter proposed the idea of Artists' Information Registry, which was basically like a service of, you know, for artists to have, you know, slides and all the rest of it sort of held in one place, and it moved around a bit, its location, and was at the Royal Academy for a short time; it was always looking for space to locate itself. And then it was sort of somewhere near Cambridge Circus for a while, the Air Gallery was there, and then it, I think it moved to, near Theobald Road, and then, I don't think it exists any more. But Space Studios continues to exist. So at some point it was decided that the Registry should have a gallery and, you know, that was developed as well.

And was that an artist-led gallery or did it have its own curator?

It eventually had a curator, I think it might have been at the beginning. So out of, you know, the sort of seemingly sort of idiosyncratic event of someone falling off a horse and being killed, you know, these things were partly instrumental in sort of getting us

to think perhaps more broadly and more, in terms of becoming independent and therefore, you know, you have to politicise yourself in order to do that.

And in that respect, how did you see yourself in the commercial sense, that a commercial gallery would have? Did you relate your activities to that kind of thing, or not?

Well, I mean having sort of, I think I should probably sort of say this really, having sort of had this crisis and, you know, starting performance, the other part of my work didn't cease immediately, and I, for several years I collaborated with a New Zealand artist called Bill Culbert, and we both taught together at Hornsey, but I'd also been a student with him at the Royal College, so we'd known each other for a long time and were very friendly, and also we shared certain ideas. We were also friendly with Peter Sedgley and Bridget Riley at the time. So, there was an aspect of my work which was collaborative which dealt with light, the use of light and time, which was essentially articulated by me in relation to demonstrating directions in space as being, directions being sort of like points in movement, if you see what I mean, points in movement, you know, one following another, a bit like a film, which would presage the idea of an object. So you could, for example, set up a system, which we did, of several cubes with, or structures, cubic structures, open structures, with neon on every edge, and then by switching you could actually demonstrate the three directions which actually made up the twelve sides of a cube, and you could do that, and we had maybe, I can't remember how many of those we had, maybe nine, and they would all work - no, we would have it, no it wouldn't have been that, there would have been three...I don't know how many there would have been, there are too many arguments to actually... There could have been either four or eight or whatever, there were numbers of these... They were about 4 feet tall and they switched in concert with each other. And at one point I used one of those with a dancer, four dancers, so there were, if there were three directions, one colour, and there are four of those elements of three directions, each in a different colour, and I had four dancers each in a different colour, and the dancer would work according to a colour. So a red dancer would work with red, but would work very differently than, say, blue or green or yellow.

Do you mean a live dancer?

Yes, mm. Yes.

So how...and so it was a cross between a performance and an object-based...?

Yes, yes. Yes this was done, and I had a choreographer as well, and we did one at The Place, you know, we did one of these performances at The Place and another at one of these Middle Earth performances. This was sort of like fairly early on, probably about 1967. And then we made other things, you know, Bill and I, numbers of things, and then we didn't, you know. And then I didn't, you know, make any more things. I did make some objects later but not...but they were much more related to performative events, you know. So that first phase as it were of the sort of more Minimalist Conceptual part sort of dribbled to an end rather than suddenly stopped.

Yes.

And then out of it came the performance and then a more, the developing consciousness of a kind of social.....

End of F5279 Side B

F5280 Side A

[Stuart Brisley, continuing the interview with Stuart Brisley on the 4th of October 1996. Tape Eight Side A.]

As your political consciousness started to emerge in your work, I mean can you remember if that relationship was any part of the discussion with the other artists that you were dealing with in the Space Studios?

Yes, there would have been a lot of discussion about all of that, yes, very much. Especially because we were...I mean it would have been connected with, you know, practical affairs as well. And as a result of that, you know, sort of, associations were developed or dropped, or broken. For example I was one of the very early people involved with Space and Air but very quickly I was not a part of it because I had a different view as to what it was about, and then some of the others...

In what sense?

Well, I think it had something to do with the way, forms of management, and I had I think rather different views as to, probably utopian views I suspect, as to how that should be realised. In other words I suppose I was thinking that the, you know, like since we were doing new things then it should be consistent all the way through, and that...and there are other people who are much more practical who were saying, you know, like, `In order to do this we have to go and see Lord X', and I was really fundamentally opposed to that way of, that form of patronage. And so I quickly was seen to be unreliable, I suppose, in relation to the way these things developed. So I left Marshalsea and was no longer directly connected to those things. Although I was still very friendly with Peter Sedgley, who was one of those people who kind of, who was a sort of pivotal figure in all of this, and who was also quite a practical person, and you know, who was more prepared to be pragmatic than I was, but he wasn't pragmatic in, he wasn't pragmatic to the extent that I found offensive if you see what I mean in terms of my position. But there were others I did find their views were, and the way they behaved or what they chose to do relative to all this, to be rather overbearing and overriding and somewhat patronising, and I really resisted that.

You mean they wanted to kind of stay in the hierarchy, whilst appearing radical?

They did, they did do that.

They did?

Yes.

You're not naming names I notice.

Well, you know, I don't...well, I guess whoever heard this would know who they were but they won't be listening to it. [LAUGHS]

Oh I don't know. So how did these more political ideas develop at this point?

I think they were probably quite connected again to education in a way. I think, you know... I suppose I began to feel sort of more frustrated by my experiences in education in terms of the way, in terms of the way things were controlled and managed, and so I began to feel, you know that... I suppose that was the sort of direct experience that sort of led me to become more concerned as it were. And also, you know, like having moved into events, you know, one had to start thinking about what is the relationship between this and people, because what...the key to this was that from moving from regarding a middle-man or an agent as the figure who was going to sort of in a sense represent one's interests, to taking responsibility oneself, this then meant that one had to take responsibility in relation to public, and therefore the whole thing starts to operate in those terms, what is the purpose of art etcetera etcetera, how does it relate, blah blah blah. And performance, or events as it was called then, was sort of seen, at least by me in a utopian sense of actually being a direct form of communication, you know, unhindered by middle parties. I don't think this in any way is an adequate view, but that's the view that I held and I think other people held at the time. And so, you know, it's as though we had taken responsibility for ourselves as artists and therefore we were very conscious of hierarchy, you know, and the way it operated I suppose elsewhere, certainly in education. And part of the experience of, part of the process of working as an artist was actually being educational, and I saw no difference between the two, I thought they were part and parcel of the same activity as it were, so they weren't actually separated. And a lot of other artists would have thought they were and would have said, well, you know, like, I do this in order to be in my studio for example, and I could probably say that now. But then I wouldn't have said that at all, I would have said, these two things are actually part and parcel of the whole process and that, you know, there is no way that you can actually break them apart or separate elements. So within an event could be,

you know, the same elements, some of the same elements that were in, shall we say, working in education in some way, you know, could involve discussion, could involve discussion of ideas as part of the process of making work.

And are you referring to your experience as an educator throughout all of your time in education, or particularly to the Hornsey?

Yes, at Hornsey then.

Yes. Oh that's interesting.

I mean I then later, but I mean, but then, you know, situations changed, you know, the climate changed, and one's view of what performance was had changed, and therefore, you know, that idea of there being no essential difference between doing this and doing that, that changed as well. But at the time it was more like that. So, you know, therefore there was a kind of real commitment towards it, as part of the whole, really we're talking about education, as part of a total process. And therefore it had a lot of meaning.

I mean it's interesting. When you talk about the hierarchy in the education system, I mean Summerson and Coldstream were old boys in effect and yet they seemed to be extraordinary facilitators whether they expected to be or not, of the kind that they became.

Yes. I think really, I suppose, my memory of it would be that they...they grasped an opportunity to, in a sense to educate artists, from training... Put crudely it probably went from notions of training to notions of education, and we use that argument a lot, you know, that this is an education, this is not a training, and there's a great difference between the two. So that you could say that at Guildford it would have been very much more concerned with training, i.e. you became proficient, you know, lots of life drawing, lots of this and that, and you became better at doing what you were doing.

Yes.

We were concerned with education, you know, and education I guess would have incorporated within it, for me, the possibility that one would choose the medium according to the purpose to which one wanted to use it in relation to the public, and therefore the idea of training, you know, was anathema or was, you know, was

uninteresting. And to be an artist meant that one wasn't a specialist necessarily, you know, and so, you know, like the department of painting and the department of sculpture would be a specific way of being a particular kind of artist, but there was another notion about, that the artist might be somebody who, you know, at one point made paintings, another sculpture, at another point made...you know, did whatever, according to, you know, like what was necessary.

And what was your conception of the public, or your audience, at this time?

Well it was not terribly developed at that point because it was early days I think, and, not that it was necessarily much developed after, but, no it was pretty... I mean, at that point it would have been restricted to, you know, to those people, you know, it would have been a kind of alternative arts sort of audience if you see what I mean. The audience was there, you know, they were not...one didn't have to fight for an audience, one didn't actually have to...there were already lots and lots of people who were engaged in this, if you see what I mean, and so the idea of having to think about the audience came later when, you know, because that sort of period of relative euphoria was over and one was then speculating in different areas of audiences, you know, or people, you know, coming to witness or participate or, depending on what it was, you know, that became a lot more complicated and complex, because you could, you know, you could easily have had nobody, or you could have too many, I mean you know, like, there's all kinds of, it all becomes really very... In relation to performance it becomes like that, specifically like that; in relation to other things, painting, whatever, it's different.

I mean did you ever think of extending your audience out into a much more general arena?

Well we did, I mean for example the last collective event we did... These events at the Middle Earth were called Whsht, W-H-S-H-T, and the idea was that, you know, just like, [WHISTLE], they're gone, right? And they didn't last long, they lasted for a few years. And the last one was called Nodnol, which is London backwards, and we did a whole series of events throughout London. Bruce Lacey had a picnic I remember in Hyde Park, a big sort of performance event, and I did something at Marble Arch under the arch thing. There were lots of things went on. I mean I didn't see them all because I was having to do my own thing, but, I did see Bruce's picnic. And that was actually done in different parts of London, and it was also programmed,

you know, to last a day, so people would move from one to the other, and that was the last Whsht event. Went outside and just disappeared.

Was it successful?

It was yes, it was very, yes it was good. And...I mean yes, it was very very good.

So where would you say you derived your most intense sort of satisfaction in this? Was it in the preparation or the performance or the feedback or...?

Oh I think it's in the performance, you know. I mean one of the things I did which was before, I think it was before the Whsht event was the Hyde Park Corner event which was, I took a chair to Hyde Park Corner and I stood on the chair and said, `Anybody can stand on this chair and say what they like for a minute'. And we had an alarm clock. `And if you want to speak for more than a minute you've got to get off the chair and if there's a queue you wait and then you get on the chair and you can continue it.' So you can say whatever you like for a minute, you know. So this is kind of like, this was my idea of, you know, like, freedom, you know, like you can... It was a joke really, but it was also amusing. And my God! it was absolutely packed, it was extraordinary, and I mean so many people wanted to get up and say things. And it went on and on and on, and then in the end I got so bored with it I then said, `Look, I'm leaving, but I'm prepared to leave the chair behind, and I will auction the chair, so whoever buys the chair can keep it going, you know, since there's a lot of people who still want to do this.' And so, we auctioned the chair, and it got to something like £15,000. [LAUGHING]

So you took the money and ran. [LAUGHS]

[INAUDIBLE]. It was very amusing. And so I thought, oh hell with it, I took the alarm clock and left, I left the chair behind. I don't know what on earth happened. But that was part of, you know, the whole, this whole idea of, you know, like, people actually being able to... Because since I had, not just me but you know, I had actually taken responsibility for myself as it were, and there were no middle men, and I demonstrated my own commitment to what I was doing by putting myself in the middle of it and taking whatever came, it was, I wanted to sort of like show that this is possible to do, you know, that you can take responsibility for your... Not that, you know, performance is a joke, it isn't, I mean to say that that does it in actuality; it was a representation of taking responsibility for yourself, and that one could actually

present that as an idea to other people and a place to do that would have been in Hyde Park Corner, you know, where people come to heckle or listen but they don't necessarily come to speak. So you can reverse it and say, `Actually you can speak too if you want to and here's the opportunity; why don't you get up and say something if you want to?' You know, so it was a way of demonstrating, you know, that as an idea.

And did people say incredibly silly things, or did anyone say anything serious?

Yes, I mean like you get it everywhere, some people were just, you know, outrageous; some people were outrageous, some people were brilliant, and some people were absolutely, you know, boring as hell, you know, I mean that's how it would be wouldn't it really, I mean you know, out of any group of people. Yes, it was...I'd forgotten all about it till now.

Well it would be really interesting to, you know, advertise in all the papers in the country to say, `Whose life had it changed?' I mean it could be very liberating.

Yes, yes, yes. Yes, that was around the period of time when I did this thing in Marble Arch, you know, as part of the Nodnol event. And then, by that time people were being invited to do things elsewhere, you know, like lots of, I mean people were being picked up as it were and sort of asked to do this and that, out of the Whsht events, and of course I'd been doing other things as well with Bill Culbert and, you know. So, you know, it was as though the reason for those things to come together at Whsht had ceased to really exist, you know, it had lost its kind of urgency, and the last one was kind of, really quite lyrical in its way, you know, like in the park and, it was very nice and all the rest of it but there wasn't actually any sort of urgency to continue it. And also there were other things happening, like this studio thing was starting with Space and Air was starting, and it wasn't long before the Serpentine Gallery opened and, you know, there were other possibilities.

I mean at that time, how did you see the different parts of the art system in quotes, you know, Arts Council funded galleries, or commercial galleries?

Well the commercial galleries I've had no interest in, absolutely none, because they represented what I actually decided not to be a part of. So you know, like, that didn't mean to say that I didn't go and look at art works in the galleries but as a sort of institution I wasn't interested in them. I was really very interested in extending things

beyond any institutional frame, and the idea of working in the street was something I was interested in, but it didn't last for long because...because there is an interesting sort of dilemma attached to all of that, you know, which has got to do with a perception, perceptions as to what constitutes art when it's not contained within an institutional frame. And that's a major kind of difficulty. So you've either got to sort of construct a frame as it were and operate within it, in other words you create your own institution in a sense, or else it moves into another set of activities altogether, it ceases to be art, and you could call it madness on one level, but if you are actually dealing with direct communication of people it very quickly moves in to, I don't know, a form of politics or whatever. It certainly ceases. So the real problem is how to...how...if you want to use art as a vehicle which always seems to be dealing with notions of representation as it were, you've either got to construct that frame which I was trying to break out of, or else you've got to recognise the institutional frame in which to operate. So I didn't last long on the street for that reason, you know, I didn't want to put another frame round it in order to be able to work within it to call it art.

So did you turn to the institutional frame in effect?

Well, no, I started to be invited to do things, and that was, you know, like, I never... So... At that point I had contacts with Artist Placement Group in 1967, I'd been to one or two of their...and so I started to be involved with John Latham and Barbara Stevini and Jeffrey Shaw and Barry Flanagan and Ian Breakwell and one or two other people whose names escape me at the moment. And Artist Placement Group was making a proposal that artists work in institutions but be given a certain lassitude or certain freedom over and above other people within it, those institutions. In other words that the argument went that artists could operate laterally in imaginative ways which would be beneficial to the institution, or the industry or the company, and so on. And I was interested in that idea, only I was not interested in making companies more efficient. I was not a capitalist, or was not - well I certainly wasn't a capitalist; I was not supportive of capital and capitalism, I was a socialist. So, my view was in some ways at odds with Artist Placement Group right from the beginning because I saw much more...I saw much more possibility of operating in relation to unions than, not that they're particularly socialist but nonetheless they represented the work force. So I was much more interested in that than, you know... So there was a discussion going on in Art Placement Group for a while until I left in 1961, which dealt with this issue of artists in society, artists working beyond the, you know, the sort of traditional frames in which they had worked before. And Metzger was also part of that as well.

And so, yes, that was all sort of part of, you know, the sort of general milieu that I was sort of operating in which was leading me to think in certain ways.

I mean can you remember one of the things you did with the Artist Placement Group?

Well I...yes I did several things with them. Well, two things I did with them. One, I did six months, nine months' work in a factory near Haverhill in Suffolk, Hille Furniture, I worked there. And also I...that was about 1961, round about the point I left APG. And then years afterwards, 1976 to '77, for eighteen months, or thereabouts, I was artist in New Town Peterlee where Victor Pasmore had been. So, those are the two placements that I took that APG had proposed. But, I took them not because I believed what APG were proposing was either practical nor desirable.

So why did you take them?

Well because I realised that there was an opportunity to do it for other reasons.

And can you explain?

Yes. Well, Latham's idea was that, as far as I understand it, that the artist should be given the freedom to operate within, let's say any institution as the artist chose, and that as a result of this the institution would be enhanced in some way. And he had a philosophical argument behind that which put very briefly suggested that rather than concentrating on one part of an equation which was the idea of the object, we should concentrate instead on the process, and that is on time, and that if we shift that argument then the sort of, the kind of uncreative part of the way institutions become rigidified would be opened in a much more creative way and you know, there would be a different sort of life around the utopian idea. I didn't...I didn't sort of believe this, and I didn't agree with it either.

I mean did they offer any sort of preparation, or were you just meant to find a way of...?

No, you were invited, you know, as an artist you were...I mean I just didn't believe all this stuff. Mind you, my view might be prejudiced, I mean my description of what Latham represents might be quite partial and not as he would argue it; nonetheless this is how I saw it. And so, I was much more interested to get into industry and work from a shop floor related to where I thought, you know, the... Because my view of

industrial relations was one of permanent conflict, and so I saw working with the work force as being far more interesting than working with any management, because the management would be there to suppress and control the work force. And so, as, I think it was the head of Hille, I've forgotten his name, Julius, said after I'd left Haverhill, `Well you wouldn't invite a rapist into your home, would you?' I mean I thought that was rather overdoing it, because what I'd done in the Hille factory was entirely in a sense innocuous, it merely pointed out that the work force had far more creativity collectively than management had given them credit for.

So how had you demonstrated this?

Well we, well very simply, because what happened was that I went into the...APG proposed this, it was accepted by Hille, I was interviewed by Hille, I agreed to work in a factory where they were completing various tasks, making chairs; some of them were very simple chairs, you know, stacking chairs, Robin Day stacking chairs, classic of its kind. Others, they were making other things like Breuer chairs, Marcel Breuer chairs, parts of Breuer chairs. And within that factory there would have been for example a polishing section of metal. And just at the point that I arrived they doubled the work force, and there were sort of all kinds of problems in relation to the quality control, the quality control manager had been able to hold in his head where everything was but suddenly it had all doubled and he couldn't find it. He had a sort of breakdown because, you know like, because the old system didn't work any more. So they were in the process of real change and they built part of this new factory, or a new part of the factory, and they put in the polishing part of it, and I chose to work in that place because it was the least, it was where people had the least choice in terms of what they did. And so I spent time, you know, in there doing very simple things. I mean the first thing I did was to have some of their machines painted according to the colours they chose, and they were inevitably football colours. Very simple things. And then slowly I got to know them and they got to know me and they started to say, `Look, this...' I said, `Well how do you find it in here?' And they'd say, `Well it's absolute crap, because, you know, this is so badly organised. Look, if you put this there and put this here, everything's going to be much more efficient. If you did...' You know, they had so many ideas about how to make it work better. And I said, `Well why don't you tell the management?' They said, `To hell with the bloody management, they never walk in here.'

End of F5280 Side A

F5280 Side B

[Continuing the interview with Stuart Brisley on the 4th of October 1996. Tape Eight Side B.]

So, I mean, as a result of that, you know, I did actually, I did suggest that they contact the union and, you know, that maybe there's ways in which their lot could be improved, and I wanted to know why the windows were so high up, and the management said so they can't see out, look out of the window. And you know, there were sort of like very basic sorts of things which were rather sort of antipathetic to human beings that, you know, like, this would have been regarded as a good family firm and probably with a good, you know, probably had a good management structure but, you know, like, the level of it was like this, and...

You didn't feel that it was appropriate to take on the role of intermediary yourself?

No, certainly not, no.

Why not?

What? Because I thought that the really most important part about this was to get people to start to think for themselves and to represent themselves. This was my whole, this is what I...it's my job in education, is not to lead them but to actually, you know, to open up things if I possibly can in such a way that they take on, they take responsibility for themselves in ways that they perhaps hadn't thought of before and would assume that they had done it themselves. So they wouldn't think that I had actually in some sense assisted them. So this was my, how I saw my role there. And I also set up movable sort of like notice boards so, you know, one section could communicate with another about anything, football matches, marriages, anything. As soon as they were built they were used by the management for their own purposes. I mean you could see, it was an impossibility, the whole thing was a sort of, you know, was set in such a way that whatever was introduced which was, you know, to deal with communication across, it was usurped in a way and used by the management down. And I saw this as being sort of essentially very uncreative really.

What was the arrangement between...how did sort of APG introduce you into the firm, and did the company pay you or...?

Yes, I was paid, yes, I was paid as an artist to work there. I also made a piece of work there which was, what I noticed was that when they stacked the metal chair bottoms for the Hille, it went on a curve, so I just, I arranged with the company that I would make one piece that went round in a complete circle, which was actually a comment on the, what do you call it, the factory belts, you know, like, went round in on itself. I mean I found for example that people were machining and cleaning bits of metal who knew nothing about Marcel Breuer, nothing about what they were doing, absolutely hadn't a clue what they were doing. `What's this for?' `I don't know.' I mean, `Do you realise that, you know, like, this is actually really a classic piece of furniture?' `No.' And all of this. You know, so there was sort of like... I'm not...you know, this is not to be critical of Hille in a sense, and saying, why didn't they do it? This is actually to suggest that, you know, in those kinds of circumstances it's probably true that management doesn't think of providing information that might actually increase the engagement of people who are working there; this could be good business practice if you see what I mean, in itself, but they didn't. So I, you know, that was a relatively mild kind of involvement with...and I suppose my first, my sort of introduction to that kind of work. And, I mean there was one really interesting case of a man who had been working on the shop floor and had actually risen up, and I forget what his position was, it wasn't quality control manager, it was something else, he was...but he was still in the work force, and during the nine months or so that I was there, about half-way through, the management offered him a job which would have meant he would have joined management, and he had a sort of crisis of, didn't know what to do. And he used to come and talk to me about it all the time and saying, `I don't know what to do, you know. Like, my wife is telling me I've got to do this, but I can't, I can't do this because, like, all my friends are here, you know. How can I actually suddenly, you know, I've been working with them, suddenly tell them what to do? It's not possible.' And he turned it down, it was really...and it was a sort of class jump that was so interesting, you know, that it was absolutely kind of like focused on, you know, his, on this particular offer. Very very sad I thought because it indicated this sort of, this terrible gap as it were between the work force and the management.

What year was that?

So I didn't...that was, I don't know, it was 1971 or something like that. So I, you know, I didn't, I didn't see the artist's role to sort of hang around with management and, you know, play nice games, you know, that might have made it seem as though the whole situation was more civilised; I was much more interested in going in at the bottom level and actually, and having some communication with those people, trying

to see how things could be improved for them, how their life could be better, how it could be...how they could enhance it themselves.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

I think just to keep the chronology under control we're going to go back to Hornsey and then come back to your APG activities and Peterlee a little bit later. So we're about 1967, and this political side is coming into your work. How did that reflect back into the students' lives, were you conscious of feeding that back to them as a possibility?

No, no not really. I think, it would have...I mean that sort of sense of the political would have been part of my understanding of how it would be for me to work in education; in other words it would...there would be a political aspect to that, not insofar as I was going to proselytise, you know, on any sort of political ideological position, but that...other than the attempt to get people to think for themselves and to become more...which is a straightforward educational aim, you know, for people to become self aware and to take responsibility for the opportunity that they had found themselves with. I mean that's very complicated and it doesn't always work, and you know, it takes all kinds of different ways of operating, but you know, and there's nothing essentially different between that and what education should be about in my view, I think that's what it is about.

I mean in that context, can you explain the process that led up to the 1968 Hornsey Affair as it's known, where the students staged a sit-in in the college?

I can't really but I can actually, perhaps I can put a personal perspective onto it. I mean, firstly there was the, you know, the sort of international event that was taking place in 1968, the Paris uprising and so on, the Prague Spring, there was all of that. So there seemed to be a sort of climate in which there was a sort of cry for more democracy in one way or another internationally. And I think, the Hornsey thing has to be seen in a broader context other than, you know, just the internal pressures and tensions that were within the college, and there were a lot in the college because of its sort of quick growth; because of the numbers of students and staff; because of the dynamism of some of the teaching practices; because of the interaction between people who had come, students who had come to the school with different sorts of aspirations, bumping into each other through this educational process; because of the kind of lively atmosphere of London itself, both through student perspective and

alternative street scene, alternative arts and all of that, allied to this sort of international trend towards greater democracy in certain areas, seems to me that all this comes together in some way. And Hornsey is triggered by two events, one really internal, that is the withdrawal of funds from the Student Union, and two, by the, you know, the international context, this sort of live event in Paris which, you know, was sort of like dramatic and powerful. So you have these two things sort of like, the much bigger one acting on the smaller one, and the smaller one having its own internal impetus for a protest to be made. And within, when the Students Union called the meeting on the 28th of May, I think about 6 o'clock, something like that, the place, the school was packed, the hall was packed with probably, I mean I don't think there would have been many students who were not there, and the staff, and within about an hour the demands had moved from that of being given, the money being returned to the Students Union to a demand for the educational process to be democratised and opened. And I can remember making, I think, I think it was probably the first, or the second, staff speech in support of that, at the time, and I remember being invited to, you know, being asked to sort of stand as the staff - this is always my life - and I turned it down, I didn't want to lead it in any way, I just wanted to be part of it.

Before you go much further, can you just briefly say why the student funds were withheld?

I can't remember why the student funds were withheld, I'm afraid.

I mean was there...

It had been...it was sort of like a sore point and it had been dribbling on for a long time, and you know, it eventually got to this point, you know, where the union wanted to make a stand, and the president of the union was a guy called Wright, I think it was Nick Wright, I think he was...I think he was a member of the Communist Party, I mean obviously, you know, like, uses the situation to, you know, exploited it to its greatest extent. I mean the idea was to get the money back; it wasn't to have a revolution or anything, it was to get the money back, you know, for the Students Union to do whatever they wanted to do, however radical it was. And you know, within a very short space of time it had turned itself into this demand for, you know, for a whole sort of new educational approach to the school, and the students took over the building, they went to Covent Garden and bought all the food for the...they ran the canteen 24 hours a day, there was a megaphone system applied because, then people

started to come to the school, all kinds of people started to come. The Hornsey Association was formed, that is of staff and students. Those people who feared for their jobs, you know, sort of kept out and those people who didn't stayed, were involved with the students and...

What was the percentage of staff that hung in there?

I don't know, I think a great proportion of staff associated themselves with the Hornsey Association as far as I know, not all by any means. And then there were negotiations with the local authority and the school and so on. And there were various sort of means employed to try and stop the sit-in. I mean they sent in Securicor guards with Alsatians at one point, and the students went out and bought dog food and the Securicor guards refused to, then refused to do the job and said the students were perfectly all right and that their dogs were, you know... I mean there were things like that. This was fairly late on. Eventually they, I mean the point was, this sort of event could only occur during term time so when it got to the end of term all the students went home and the authorities got back in the school and then they isolated the electricity and the water mains etcetera, so if, in the light of any future event they could turn it off from the outside, and they put sort of like, sort of riot doors in, in the corridors and so on. And the school was shut until November. I was offered a day back actually, I had actually had three days there and I lost some days. A lot of people were fired, but I was not completely fired, I was just reduced. And I was then teaching in the furniture department dealing with ergonomics, for some strange reason. One of the programmes that we had started just before the sit-in through the Visual Research was a project with Normansfield Hospital, I don't know if you know Normansfield, it's closed down now, and it was a mental hospital near Richmond somewhere. It just closed down a few weeks ago. And we had, this is through Theo Crosby's wife; Theo Crosby was an architect and somebody involved a lot with the Arts Council, exhibition designer and so on. And his wife, they had a Down's syndrome child, and they proposed that we might actually do a project, or rather his wife proposed, we might do a project with mental patients in Normansfield, and I took that on with a number of students, and we did that during the sit-in as well. We went there every week and we had about half a dozen patients. We had patients who were so inert as to almost be not moving, to severely, what would you call them, palsied people, severely. And out of that students developed projects. Now one of those students was a guy called Jim Singh Sandhu, that became his life's work and he's been working for the U.N. I think very...he went to the Royal College and after that he has worked for the U.N. So that, you know, that took him into that direction.

One of the students actually invented a magnetised alphabet for a man who was, a young man about 20, who was so severely spastic that, you know, it would take him a minute to get his hand to his eye or, you know, and so he could actually communicate with... So, you know, there were...this was a really very interesting project I think which was part of the, actually part of the sit-in in a way, you know, it was associated with it.

In what way?

Well I mean insofar as, you know, it demonstrated a way of thinking about how one might be useful in society. It was a sort of an example. Although it was started before, but it was started only just before, and you know, I suppose, you know, you couldn't say it came out of the sit-in but you could say that, you know, it was a kind of educational programme that of its nature was something that a lot of students would have been interested in. I mean, not just that, not just for those social reasons, you know, but in all kinds of other ways. And we did eventually propose a kind of structure for an art school which would have, very simply would have had a sort of resource centre and then, a kind of resource centre, maybe a layered resource centre, and so that you would come to the resource centre and go out as it were, so it was a question of a relationship between the centre and outside rather than, you know, having these isolated departments and a hierarchy on the top. So, I mean, that's just my memory, and I'm sure that there are...there's evidence that will sort of flesh that all out in much more detail.

You're talking about that idea emerging during the sit-in?

Yes, yes, yes.

Yes. Just before you go on, the Visual Resource centre sounded like a very enlightened idea, and sounded in a way as if it had some of that same potential. I mean obviously not going outside the college, but in terms of extending the students' sort of base from which they could act.

That's right.

So how did that relate to the sit-in?

Well this came out of it, this was...you know, because there were a lot of, there were lots of discussions about what sort of an education do we want? You know, I mean, it went on for days, you know, and there were different groups dealing with different aspects and so on, and finally, you know, there was a sort of coming together. And at the same time there were negotiations going on and discussions with, like for example Shirley Williams who was the Minister of Education, and at one point there was a serious discussion as to whether Hornsey College of Art would be given the status of being an experimental institution whereby these things could be, you know, kind of opened out to see whether they worked or not. And at the time there was a man called Wolfheim, who was, I think the then Head of the Department of Philosophy at UCL, University College London, and he was one of the people who actually advised her against it, because he believed in, you know, that art... Because part of this has also got to do the notion of process, you know, and you know like, that actually one drop the idea of product and deal with the idea of process perhaps, and that once you open it up in that way there's all kinds of ways of operating, you know, laterally, from within to without and back and so on, of the institution. And his argument was opposed to that on the basis of the, as far as I remember the...was to do with, you know, the support for the idea of object as it were as opposed to process. I mean it's probably a bit of a cliché now but it was, you know, it was around that argument that he was in opposition to these proposals. And it was turned down eventually by the Minister of Education.

They still sound quite sophisticated ideas to be emerging from a student body. I mean what role did they...?

Yes, but we're talking about 1,000 people, and also like, of wide-ranging experiences and some mature students, some young, and a lot of very bright people, you know, who were, you know, trying to...

And were the teachers part of that discussion?

Yes, oh, because the Association was students and staff. And also, I mean people were coming to this place, I mean Buckminster Fuller was there for a week as far as I remember, you know, like all kinds of people came, you know, because they... I mean a lot of people couldn't keep away, and it was open 24 hours a day.

So after it had finally reopened and the riot doors were in place, I mean that must have been a very depressing moment for the staff and the students.

Well, from what I was told, and there's no...I mean I don't have any concrete evidence for it, by February of the next year, that would have been February 1969, there were over 40 Hornsey students or ex-students in the mental hospital up the road, what was it, Friern Barnet is it? I think it was, yes. Yes I think there were a lot of casualties. I think, you know, I mean a lot of people put tremendous sort of faith in the whole thing and you know, some of them, you know, were perhaps, it was too much for some of them.

When you went back as a teacher, did life at a sort of practical level just carry on pretty much as before?

Yes, I mean we were all in different situations. I mean there were those who were no longer there who had been completely got rid of, and I was then dealing with this ergonomic thing. And I lasted I think for less than a year and then I resigned and, because one of the people who had been fired got a job as head of fine art at Maidstone and then invited us all who had been involved, who he felt he would like to invite, you know, to Maidstone, so we all trotted off to Maidstone. And I had also got a job at the Slade in 1968, because, what had happened was, I think Coldstream, who was rather a sharp guy, had decided that, you know, the Slade hadn't had any of this, although they had at Brighton and Hornsey and - sorry, Brighton and Guildford and various other schools had, you know, kind of like had their own events, somewhat more brutal at Guildford than at Hornsey by the way, the way the authorities actually played it, and he...the students wanted a student adviser. And anyway, I got the job, so I was appointed as Student Adviser, which mean, basically the job was to invite, I had a budget of £500, was to invite people to the school to deal with alternative educational opportunities which were not provided by the body of staff at the time, which was actually quite a difficult thing to do. But that's what I did for a year. And he then, at the end of that year, doubled my time for two days, and I did it for another year, and then he offered me to stay in the school, and that's how I got there, to the Slade. And I started being a studio teacher as opposed to a student adviser.

That sounds very enlightened.

He was, yes, he was really good. Coldstream was a very good man I think, very.

Can you describe him at that time?

Yes, what he looked like or how he...?

Well no, how he...you know...

Coldstream, well, I mean other...people have different views of him, but my view of him was of a kind of, of a sort of, like a, as William Burroughs said, if you really want to be subversive, dress up in a suit. And I think mentally Coldstream must have taken that on, you know, because, you know, he was so mischievous as a...his mind was so mischievous and he was so witty and sharp. And, I suppose that's how I remember him, as being someone that you, one would sort of like meet him and never be sure which way it was going to go, you know, whether one was... But always be sure that one was at a disadvantage, you know, intellectually, because he was so acute, really so sharp, and a very generous person. So he was both sort of ironic, you know, witty. But the thing, I learnt a lot from Coldstream but the essential thing that I think I learnt from him was that he...his notion of what the education was about, and he said, you know, like, `Undergraduate education in the Slade is to find out, if you want to be an artist, you know, and if you don't, well that's fine'. And he would be very sympathetic to people who were in doubt, you know, who didn't know what to do. I mean he was, in that sense I think he was very enlightened as an educator.

Yes, I mean that's very interesting. And, I can't quite work out the kind of aura I have of the Slade as being a very direct place, and the territory... I mean old-fashioned is what I mean really. And the territory that your work was in and...

Well I never understood that, and I said to, one day I said that to Euan Uglow who as you know is a Euston Road, or was a Euston Road painter, I mean perhaps that's maligning what he does to a certain extent, but anyway he's a figurative painter of some distinction I would have thought, and I said to him I could never understand why Coldstream employed me. He said, `What do you mean? Of course, it's obvious.' And I said, `Well what do you mean?' He said, `Coldstream could never finish any work, it was always an unfinished process.' And he said, `And here you are making performances,' he said, `they're never finished, I mean they're just things that take place and then, you know...' He said, `It's so obvious what that connection is.' And I still don't understand it properly but that's what he thought.

Oh, that's quite intriguing. I think that makes sense. He had a sort of empathy.

I did used to, I mean because I used to do a certain amount of teaching and occasionally I'd bump up against people who were from that studio dealing with what loosely could be called Euston Road, and what was so interesting about it was that all the successful paintings had unfinished parts to them, and my argument would always be, if you complete it, you'll kill it, but why can't you complete it, if you see what I mean, like, what...? So it's really, it was really very intriguing that. I mean, that was not said in relation to what Uglow said, I mean I just sort of intuitively came across that, you know, you would have, you know, this kind of like very carefully measured and sometimes utterly mannered kind of way of dealing with something, because a lot of students, you know, like, took on the manner and not the rest of it. And there would always be this sort of like lumps that were left, you know, like...and it would be as...it was almost as though the gas, you know, if you closed it all up, any life would just be closed off it, you know, it would become completely dead. And I think Coldstream's work, if you look at Coldstream's work it's never completely closed, it's always open.

Yes you're right. And I think on that rather intriguing and surprising note, art historically, we're going to stop for today.

Right, OK.

End of F5280 Side B

F5281 Side A

[Continuing the tape with Stuart Brisley on the 10th of October 1996 at his home in London. Tape Nine Side A.]

I'm just going to go back briefly on our last meeting, and perhaps you could tell me who it was at Maidstone that set up as head of department after his departure from Hornsey.

It was Keith Grant who was, well he is a painter, very much involved with northern landscapes, Iceland and Norway etcetera. And he was a very active person in the Hornsey sit-in, and I think it was sort of rather interesting that he moved to Maidstone subsequently, and having got to Maidstone he then invited some people from Hornsey to work in Maidstone.

Which included you.

Included me, yes.

I mean, can you remember how he carried the sort of Hornsey ethos over to Maidstone, or did he not?

Yes, I can remember, yes he did, and you know, it was to do with the way the school was run, it was to do with student participation etcetera. And I remember that he had meetings where the head cleaner was invited to participate, and the head cleaner had had a very strong personality and sort of dominated the meetings. And so after a while he was not invited, I think he was rather too powerful a person, both, you know, in terms of personality and also what he knew about the school.

Oh that's interesting, you mean he was sort of, was he bringing union thinking as it were of a rather more radical kind to bear, or...?

Oh no, no no, it was just, he was a very sharp, street-wise man. And there was a lot of student participation, students involved in interviews and selection of other students, which is at University College to this day. So it was quite radical in that respect, and I think it was probably quite common as well. And so, those were the sorts of things that he, you know, that he introduced at Maidstone.

And, did you enjoy teaching there?

Yes I did, yes. Well I've always enjoyed teaching anyway. I mean I've never enjoyed, I don't think I've ever really enjoyed the idea of the institution, you know, the ethos of the arts particularly, but I've always enjoyed working with students. So, from that perspective it was really very, it was very good.

The other question I wanted to ask you was about your time as a student adviser at the Slade. Can you remember who you did invite and what happened as a result of it?

Well I was a student adviser for two years before I was invited onto the studio staff as it were, and, it was a very difficult thing to do because one had a limited budget and a student body that had all kinds of expectations. I had regular meetings with them, and out of that we would devise, you know, a stage of the programme, maybe for the next month or something like that. And it's difficult for me to remember exactly, you know, all of the people I invited, but I can certainly remember for example students coming to me, must have been, well between 1968 and '70, and saying, a German student came to me and said that she was very friendly with two ex-students from St. Martin's and she very much wanted to invite them to do a performance, and their names were Gilbert and George. And they were not known at the time at all. And I was somewhat reluctant, because one, I didn't know who they were, and two, it was just one person's invitation, or rather suggestion. So anyway we had a meeting with the students and they agreed that these people, these two artists should be invited, and so I did. And met them, and, they didn't tell me...they didn't tell me what they were going to do as far as I remember, but they were extremely professional in the way that they approached the whole invitation. And as the days, as it got close to the time they were going to do what they were going to do, and they had arranged to, through the students, to use a particular lecture theatre, I can't remember which one, in the University College, but not in the Slade, I began to realise that there was an awful lot of attention beginning to be paid to this event and I began to get rather nervous. And, on the day of the event they stood outside the entrance to the Slade and they were offering marshmallows to everybody that came in, and it appeared that they had contacted all the sort of, in a way the important people who were connected to the sort of governing of the Slade, the Slade Committee, which is like a board of governors. And when I discovered this I was getting really rather, very nervous about the whole thing. At 2 o'clock in the afternoon the place was absolutely packed, that is the lecture theatre. And then the performance began when they stood on the sort of table at the bottom of the lecture theatre and proceeded to sing `Underneath the Arches',

whereupon I left and thought, this is the end. [LAUGHS] So you can see how enlightened I was at the time. And I was wandering about in the Slade a couple of hours afterwards and I bumped into Coldstream who said to me with a sort of look in his eye, `That was a remarkably innocent way to spend a few minutes.' [LAUGHS] And that was that. So, I think that was probably a high point in a way, not insofar as it was terribly, you know, kind of influential or anything; it's only a high point insofar as subsequently, you know, Gilbert and George became, you know, very prominent as artists. So I suppose I could claim to be one of the few, one of these people who had actually helped them on their way at a very early stage. They subsequently sent me invitations to things they did for a time. I remember inviting David Hockney. Students always want to, you know, there's always a desire to have a contact with people who are sort of very conspicuous and maybe quite, and young; I mean this continues to the present day, there's always that desire, and quite natural as well. And Hockney at that point, between '68 and '70, would have been sort of, a major hero in a way. And so I invited him to give a lecture, and I remember something like 500 people turned up, and this was in the Slade and it was in the evening, 5 o'clock or something. And there was a slide projector. And a mass of students, not just from the Slade but from everywhere else, and... Hockney hadn't got his slides in the carousel tray so he asked if he could have some assistance and nobody volunteered, they were all so...they seemed to be all so in awe of this person. So he sort of mumbled away to himself and said, `Oh well I'll do it myself,' and sort of, you know, you know that sort of very dead beat sort of voice he can project. So he put all the slides in, that took about five minutes, and deep silence. And then the slides, he proceeded to show the slides, and as the slides came up he would say, `That is an upside-down drawing of a tree.' `That's a sideways version of...' you know, whatever her name is, Entwistle. And there was this just sort of, there was just silence, just absolutely deep silence. And then, this went on, just went on and on and on and on, and then it was over and he said, `Well thank you very much,' and there was violent applause. And that was that. Well, the following week I had arranged, there was, I remember this very well because there was a Swedish show on at the Camden Arts Centre and I had arranged with the director of the time, I think it might have been Zuleika Dobson, I can't remember, I think it was, to bring some students up to meet the artists in the process of putting up the show, which I thought might be an interesting thing to do, a lot of these people were from Scandinavia and some of them were very prominent, I mean, there was a man there called Per Olav Utveldt[ph] I think who... Yes, P-E-R, O-L-A-V [sic - ACTUALLY OLOF], Ultvedt would be U-L-V-E-L-D-T[sic], was a rather prominent, older artist. And also somebody called Lars England, England as you spell England. And others. And, I thought this would be a really interesting thing to,

you know, for the students to meet these people, both, you know, in terms of how the exhibition was being put up, also what the work was and where they were from and so forth. No students turned up at all. And this is the sort of, this was the sort of contrast that would occur, you know, like, who were these Swedish artists? Well to the students they were no one, it was outside their frame of reference and therefore they didn't go. And this used to happen time and again, so I used to in a way try to balance the, try to persuade people to go to things that were, that could be interesting, and then bring in other things that, you know, that were obviously going to be big hits. So it was trying a way of balancing the whole thing, to try to get the students to have a, widen their sense of curiosity, you know, about what was going on. And this is what the bridge was in a way from the Slade, you know, to offer access to people and ideas that weren't common to the education at the time, or easily available. I can remember bringing in an anarchist for example. I can remember bringing in Ron Hunt who was then a librarian at, I think he was a librarian in the University of Newcastle, and he had just curated a show a the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm called `Poetry Must Be Made By All', and it was an appraisal of the relationship between the art coming out of the Russian Revolution, Surrealism and also connected to 1968, the events of '68. So it had a rather, it had both an historical and also contemporary kind of significance. And I invited him two or three times. I invited Gustav Metzger who has just sort of re-emerged here, who was very prominent then, and I invited him two or three times. And I remember one of the times I invited him, I don't know whether it was the first time, but Coldstream called me in to his office and he said to me, `I see that you've invited that man in.' And said, `Yes, Gustav Metzger.' He said, `Yes. Don't let him out of your sight. He's an arsonist.'

What did he base that on? [LAUGHING]

[LAUGHING] I don't know. It was so funny. And at another point, I remember that I invited students from Guildford School of Art to meet students from the Slade, and, I forget exactly what the reason was but there was something to do with what was going on with the sit-in and the after effects of the sit-in in Guildford, which was, there were some very sort of negative aspects to the aftermath of the Guildford sit-in in 1968. So, it must have been as a result of discussing this with the students, and so I invited students to come, and, it was really rather extraordinary, because I was standing in the Slade and a policeman came in and interrogated me as to what I was doing, and told me that this was actually something that I should not be seen to be doing again. Whereupon I went straight to Coldstream and said that I think this is

really, you know, outrageous, you know, that the police have, you know, kind of intervened in this way. And he said, `Don't think a thing of it dear boy'. But I did.

Yes, how alarming.

Yes, it was. So, I don't know whether that gives a sort of, a kind of view of the sort of range of things. There were people invited in who weren't artists; there were people invited in who were very conspicuous as artists; there were people invited in who curated shows; there were...you know, there was a whole range of different things, different people and people maybe representing different ideas, you know, that would open up, hopefully, you know, get the students all interested and widen their terms of reference, this is what I was trying to do.

When you moved to the studio staff, were you replaced or did this...?

Yes, the studio, the student adviser, that role lasted for probably about ten years, and then, because of the nature of the education, the way the teaching was sort of developing at the Slade, there came a point where it seemed unnecessary as it were, you know, it was almost like, there was a duplication, a tendency for there to be a duplication. So the job was eventually stopped. So, during the Seventies, the person that came after me was somebody called, I've forgotten his first...Paul Harris, who had also been at Hornsey, and he lasted a year, and then I think, I forget who the next one was. David Medalla was one; Conrad Atkinson; a critic, Morris, now what was...Linda, Linda Morris. Those were the people that followed on. And these were all...the interesting thing about this, I may have mentioned it before, was that this was the only position that had students on the selection, to select the person, it was the only one, so, although, and I suspect it's not common practice at all at University College, but it was agreed that this should be. So for example when I was appointed there was a staff candidate as it were and there was a student candidate, and the staff candidate was Frank Whitford and I was the student candidate, and for some reason I got the job, but Frank was offered a day to work in the studios as an art historian, something that I think we should reintroduce. And, so in a way we both won, you know, in different ways.

Yes. Are you saying there is no art history taught at the Slade now?

Oh no, I'm not saying that; what I'm saying is that the...perhaps we should get into this later, but just briefly, that there is a gap as it were between studio practice and

theoretical activity, certainly at the M.A. level, and this is felt, you know, my students sort of feel this quite strongly. And I also run seminars, and so there's plenty of opportunity really for, you know, there to be that, a bridge to be made. And also I read all the papers of the M.A. students so I have some kind of knowledge of what they're doing, some reference as to what they're doing in theoretical studies. So, I think that should be strengthened and this is resisted actually at the moment within the school.

Mm, yes, I would be interested in going back to that, as an art historian, but...

[INAUDIBLE], yes, that's a current debate anyway, that's one of them, there are several.

Yes, I mean I don't imagine there's room for it on this tape but it would be very interesting to sort of explore the evolving student through a teacher like you who has been placed in so many different situations, but...

Yes.

Going back to sort of 1970, which I think is about where we were when we stopped, can you sort of say how your career developed at this point?

Well, after...I was very much involved, as I said before, with the Whsht events, and I think a lot of, and I was also working outside of that as well, but I was getting sort of increased, more offers were coming to work rather than me generating. I'm particularly sort of unprofessional about generating things, so it was just as well. And I...I was involved with APG at the time, and I think it was through APG when I got an invitation to do something at the Brighton Festival, which is a big sort of performance work. And then, but I think, perhaps the more critical work to talk about, which would be representative of that time and the sort of ideas and confusions around it, would be something I did at the Royal Court Theatre in a festival called `Come Together' organised by somebody called Bill Gascoigne and Bill Bryden. Numbers of artists and theatre people were invited to make new work. And, I suppose what I did exemplifies the way I was thinking about working at the time and actually goes back to something I said about Otto Muehl where in his work there appeared to be no distinction between, you know, any different sorts of materials, like human material or, you know, paper or water or whatever it might be. So everything was given the same sort of status. And I actually had, through my own sort of performance work,

begun to sort of think in those sorts of terms, but then also differently as well, because when I was invited to do this thing at the Royal Court I...I didn't...I wanted to do something that was sort of built in to the way the theatre is used, but also was something that was, you know, that I could believe in or that I was, you know, felt was an effective subject as it were. And I picked on the National Anthem, because at that point the National Anthem was played before every play, before every performance, and everybody would stand up and everybody would sit down and then the play would take place. And so I, it was like to use a... And I had been a stage hand at the Royal Court Theatre anyway so I knew it as a place, and I'd also been fired as a stage hand there as well, I don't know if I mentioned this before but, anyway. So it was an interesting place to go back to, to do something, and the stage had been kind of projected out into the stalls as it were, so it wasn't a kind of proscenium stage, it had this sort of projection for different kinds of activities I suppose, you know, that would fall within the terms of what they thought new theatre might be. And I didn't think that I had anything to do with theatre by the way, I mean I had never... I think there was, I did have some, there was some confusion in my mind about it, but I was sort of getting clearer about how, what I was doing had nothing to do with theatre. So to accept this invitation had this kind of difficulty in it, to go into a theatre and not make theatre as it were. So to pick on this sort of, like, convention was a kind of like a hook that I could hold on to and concentrate on that. So, and at the time I was using a particular sort of strategy about performance which was, I would approach different people and also according to what I was thinking at the time, they would be secretaries, lorry drivers, artists, poets, they could be people doing anything, any job. And I would have an overall sort of plan, like a blueprint, and I would contract them each to do something, and within the idea of a contract was that if they would fulfil this contract they could also do what they liked. So, and I...at the Royal Court I think there were ten of us, and the performance went sort of as follows. We walked out in front of all the audience and `God Save The Queen' was played and everybody stood up. And then it was over and they sat down, then we played `God Save The Queen' and they stood up, and then they sat down. And then we played `God Save The Queen', and some of them got up, and there was a certain amount of murmuring, and then they sat down. And we played `God Save The Queen' and a few got up and people started to shout. And then we played `God Save The Queen' backwards, and stood on our heads, most of us couldn't do that so it was complete chaos. And people were beginning to scream and shout and sort of, it was all getting very lively. And then the...so that was to sort of, you know, warm it up a bit, you know, to get it sort of going. And there was a lot of heckling and shouting and so on. And then I took each, all these other people that I'd contracted would

begin to do their thing; I remember one person was typewriting and somebody else was playing the role of a film star in a fur coat, and somebody else was sweeping all the time. You know, so there was an element of sort of surrealism about it I suppose, or certainly an anarchic sense about it. And they were all mostly dressed in white. And there were also two or three who were constructing a kind of cage which was 17 feet high, made of thin scaffolding, which on the top was bolted eventually an office, a swivelling office chair. And so, I was...and some of these people were going into the audience as well, so, you know, there were kind of numbers of things taking place simultaneously, but the central theme I was holding on to, which was to take each sentence of the National Anthem and its 18th century version and ask the audience, `Well do you believe this? What is this?' you know, `God Save The Queen'. `Do you believe that God will save the Queen?' All kinds of responses would come back. You know, in the 18th century version it talks about putting down the Scots for example, you know, so it was pretty racist actually. So all of that, and lots of interchange, fairly chaotic. And at the same time... So anyway, eventually after all, this went on I guess for half an hour or something like that, and eventually, they'd built this 17-foot structure and they'd got the office chair on top, whereupon I climbed up and sat on it, right? Sat on the chair, and to `God Save The Queen' vomited, vomited to `God Save The Queen', right?

How did you manage that, just out of interest?

Oh, by drinking water and eating bread during the whole process, so that it wasn't sort of like, because you know, it wasn't from the stomach, it was, you fill up to a point where you've got to actually get rid of it, and it's relatively innocuous because it's just bread and water. But it's got to be timed, you know, you've got to be...you can't... [LAUGHS] You have to do it at the right, you know, one had to do it at the right time, otherwise...

It sounds like a nightmare.

It would be useless, you know, it would be...it would be bad timing to do it at the wrong time. So, and then, that would be in a sense the culmination of the performance, which, you know, would have been accompanied by all kinds of, you know, sort of things going on, people leaving and people shouting and people applauding and, you know, people having arguments, and... And this went on for three nights. After the first night I went backstage to, you know, to clean up the mess, you know, having been a stage hand there I knew what they were going to have to do

so I wanted to clean up the vomit and everything. When I got round there the stage hands were completely incensed. One or two of them knew who I was, you know, and they said, `You have defiled the theatre, you have defiled the theatre. You are a disgusting,' this and that. And I said, `Yes, well maybe, but I've come to clean up the mess.' And they said, `But you can't, because you are not in the union.' So I said, `Well fine,' and that was that. So that, there was a lot of antagonism, you know, within the theatre itself, and... But I did that for three nights, and it sustained an audience for three nights, I mean it packed them out for a while. And the interesting thing was, subsequently, there were a lot of newspaper, you know, lots of reviews, and there was only one review which mentioned `God Save The Queen'.

Oh how extraordinary.

Yes. Only one. All the others said how disgusting it was, you know, how completely meaningless it was, you know. It was just diverted, the whole thing sort of like...

Such is the media.

Yes, fascinating I thought. Well it is...I thought, I was rather disappointed at the time, but, I was looking at it just recently, that's why...and it is actually extraordinary, it's quite fascinating to see. And there was extensive coverage of it.

Who were the audience, were they just sort of normal ticket payers or...?

I don't know, I can't tell you who they were. Loads of people, because, you know. I mean that was my piece and there were other things that went on at different times during the day and the night, you know. I mean it was a festival so, I guess it went on for about two weeks, something like that. Well that was.....

End of F5281 Side A

F5281 Side B

[Continuing the interview with Stuart Brisley on October the 10th. Tape Nine Side B.]

Well, I continued to make what I thought of as collaborative works, and I actually did make collaborative works until, oh, until about 1990 occasionally. But at that point in time, in the very early Seventies, I was making a lot of collaborative work. It actually stemmed from thinking about how the artist could be working in society and so forth, and therefore this idea of collaboration, and therefore, and also different relationships with audience, or people participation and so forth, all of that was part of a way of thinking about what the role of the artist could be. So I suppose it must also have had within it a kind of antagonism to the sort of, to individualism, the idea of individual talent, it was a denial of that, and yet at the same time I was the person who was generating these things, so you know, as much as I had that sort of idea, at the same time I was retaining a certain power, you know, to facilitate it. And so it had within it its contradictions in retrospect I think.

I mean when you say collaborative, do you mean collaborating with other artists?

Well, whoever they were. I was collaborating with people, and they could be in the work, like lorry drivers or whoever, whatever they were doing, or there could be, and it comes up later with my work, a kind of breakdown of the frame of art as it were where, at certain times, where there is a sort of discursive element that takes place between whoever is there and me, you know, so it's like, it's almost as though... I mean it's quite Brechtian in a way, I'm not sure whether it's sort of specifically so, but, where the mystique of the act within the frame of art is broken as it were through the, you know, like an engagement with whoever is there in terms of discussion or whatever. And it wasn't formally structured but it was intuitively kind of sensed when, you know, or I'd get tired and, you know, and we would have conversations or discussions.

I mean what kind of response did you get from people just off the street as it were to being involved in these works?

Well I've always...I mean, good and bad, you know, as you do with everything. It seemed to me, and I remember at the time thinking that, you know, there's obviously an aspect of art where knowledge is rather critical and important, you know, it's like

an acquired...there is an element where the acquisition of knowledge is important to understanding art. But there's also something else which is...that may well work only rationally or in a predominant way rationally, but there's also, you know, how one feels, one's intuition and one's imagination. And what I found was that quite often with people who had not acquired that sort of knowledge, but nonetheless used their imagination in relation to it, as long as you didn't call it art everything was fine, you know, and they would be, a proportion of those people would have their imaginations engaged and they would really engage with it. So, my impression from those sorts of experiences was that there are social divisions, you know, which operate in certain ways whereby knowledge is acquired at certain sort of social levels, it seems to me, and there is...if it doesn't occur at another level then there still can be an engagement with art but not in the same way, and maybe much more intuitively or maybe the imagination is unfettered in some way. So, I've always felt that, you know, in relation to a class structure for example that people from all social levels kind of may or may not be engaged, but in a way for different reasons, or with a different kind of, because of, you know, the context that they come out of, it would be a different sort of engagement. And things used to...I mean I found that very fascinating, and also, you know, like, the thing about, you know, performance and, you know, sometimes it was rather dramatic or, maybe dramatic is not the right word, maybe disturbing I think, a lot of my work was often regarded as being disturbing at that time, but it was very fascinating because, like five years later people would come up to me and say, `Do you remember such-and-such?' and I wouldn't necessarily, you know, but, yes. He said, `Well, I didn't really...' He said, `I was so shocked by that, but I just realised six months ago what it was.' And, you know, in other words it...often, with some people, and I don't know how many because obviously, maybe just a few, and people I had bumped into later would tell me about the way they had actually kind of like rationalised what it was that they had been affected by, and I found that rather interesting. Or people would say, `Ah yes, you know, I know exactly what you were doing because I was in the supermarket, you know, last week, and...' blah blah blah blah. So there would be all kinds of associative connections, and this is outside the frame of a knowledge of art but within the terms of, you know, of life, and I found that rather interesting I must say.

I mean just a general question, would you like to see that knowledge of art taken right into the education system to an early age so that people were equipped to engage with art?

Yes, I do, yes, yes. Yes because I think otherwise one is in danger of, one is in danger of sort of like supporting a sort of an elitist view about it, and I think art is human, it's not, it doesn't have to be elitist at all. So the more it can be made available as an entity that people can use their imaginations with and relate to their own lives the better, and the more knowledge the better in a way. So I think it's actually rather important.

But you would still define that work as art?

Yes, yes, mm.

I'm just thinking of your sort of earlier much more traditional experience. I mean did you ever feel a loss for that?

No, not at that time at all.

That vision.

Not at that time at all. Because, you know, whenever it was, there's this sort of dramatised moment of 1966, I'd sort of, you know, that was a new start in a way, you know, from a... So, later on it became rather more, because we're talking about 1970, '71, '72; later it becomes much more complicated and difficult, and finally I, you know, change altogether, change it altogether. But at that point, you know, there was a...everything was opening out as it were and there were...and also there were sort of like internally decisions to be made, you know, on a rational level, you know, what is the relationship between performance and theatre and art for example, which, you know, I had a, you know, took a quite strong position on. And that was probably because, when I first started with performance it wasn't called it and I had no idea what it was and didn't care, if you remember I was saying that before, and so therefore it was open to, moving in, you know, one of several directions, and there were times when it was probably theatrical. And then I came to sort of like abhor the idea of performance as art as theatre.

Why?

Because I wanted to connect performance as art to life, and to connect performance with art to theatre was actually to push it into a kind of, what I would regard as a synthetic, i.e. if you look at the nature of theatre it's a sort of, I guess it's a sort of

synthesis of the arts; I mean you can have, you know, there's text, there's vision, there's a literary element, there can be a poetic element, there can be a dance element and so on. So it's a kind of, it's a composite of the arts as it were. And it's also very much within a frame, you know, in terms of, you know, it being theatre separated from life. And I wanted to go in the other direction, you know, to make that connection with life in a way. And also I found that the theatrical, the theatrical outside the theatre could be a cheap and easy way of making the thing sensational, making it into a spectacle. And I was opposed to that; I was much more concerned with the idea of making an action, making a process which had this kind of, was perhaps not rational but nonetheless had a connection to everyday activities, you know, like drinking a cup of tea or taking the dog for a walk or working in a butcher's shop, you know. So it was, you know, it was that sort...and that also connected to working with people, you know, I could conceive, or at least I conceive a sort of connection, I hope this is not too obscure, you know, with, say, inviting people to work who are, you know, who maybe in the daytime would be doing different jobs, you know, like, whatever it might be. So there was a sort of connection there between the idea of art, the idea of communication, the idea that anybody could do it, anybody could actually be involved if they chose to do it, and, you know, and in relation to the participants, and that was connected back to standing on the chair in Hyde Park Corner and saying that you can all say something. So it had this sort of lateral sense about it, you know, in terms of opportunity if you wanted to, you know, take part and be involved and be engaged, and therefore the relationship between life and it should be interactive rather than separated.

But you still feel yourself as the artist?

Yes, I mean having said all that, you know, I was the animateur or the, you know...

Director.

And that was something that became increasingly difficult, because as I...I also I suppose, you know, I've never really wanted to do the same thing twice, so, you know, I always thought of this as a sort of speculation, a whole speculation about the role of the artist is one way of putting it, perhaps a bit of a cliché but it's a way of saying it. So I didn't ever want to do, you know, the same thing twice. I began to think about subjects very carefully, and of course at that period of time we were still in the period of, I suppose you call it late Modernism, and so, my work was a curiously sort of, I suppose, and maybe others too at the time, were sort of more post-

Modern in the sense that, you know, one was engaged with content and a kind of content that, you couldn't sort of fit it into a Modernist sort of frame. For example I did a piece at the Ikon Gallery which was based on - it's very embarrassing to say this now - was based on the allegations of torture made by the British Army against IRA suspects, and this was reported in the `Irish Times' and subsequently was found to be true. And so I based a work on that statement, you know. So I was very much wanting to have a connection with social and, you know, with life in that sense, and as it were to take difficult subjects, you know, that were in themselves somewhere connected to the underbelly, you know, the difficult areas in society. I mean, you know, like, the idea of British soldiers engaged in acts of torture is not an easy notion, you know, given, you know, the sort of, in a way the illusions we have about, or we had and maybe we still have, about what, British society and so on. It's difficult, very difficult. So I was always looking for those difficult questions to work with, and they were topical as well, so there was a topical element to it. And of course there's a political element to it.

I'm just trying to think about the audience. I mean, somewhere like the Ikon Gallery, how...

Oh it was very small the audience as far as I remember. I mean it was the Ikon Gallery before the Ikon Gallery that we know now, so it was small, yes.

And did that worry you?

No, no.

Did you want to make it kind of...?

No, no no, no it didn't, because, and it never has, because, it was about who's there; it can't be about everyone, it's about who's there, and it's about trying to make the thing sort of live there at that time with those people, you know, even if it's one person or if it's, you know, fifty or a hundred or a thousand.

With this sort of work, I mean, do financial considerations ever come into it, is any of it ever saleable?

Yes they do come into it, yes. I mean I'd made that move right in the middle Sixties to be independent, and I had a sort of, I suppose a naive view of being an independent

artist, you know, and even used the term once or twice in writing. It's a fairly naive notion because it doesn't exist, so it's an illusion. Nonetheless, you know, I was not supported or patronised, you know, by a commercial gallery, and what I...and also I had some sort of suspicion about institutional support but nonetheless, you know, like, in reality it was one of the few ways in which one could work. And also there were difficulties with institutional support because one got, you know, like, maybe got on very well with, you know, the people involved and so forth, but they had no commitment to one, you know, only to one thing, and then that was it. So, one was always being sort of like left high and dry, you know, to wait or look for the next event, you know, the next... And that's actually quite difficult and draining in a way, you know. And also, all the other things that go into making up an artist's life, you know, like people wanting, you know, slides or wanting...this happens to this day, you know, like, you know, it's like being a one-man band and one's in the middle of, you know, the requests from here, there, you know, not all the time but they all tend to come at the same time, and you're desperately trying to look for the slide that this one wants and it hasn't come back from there, and you know, it's very complicated. Whereas if one was, you know, had a gallery or something, that would all be, you know, smoothed over, it would be facilitated professionally, and it isn't here, you know, it's kind of deeply unprofessional, because I am, you know, in that way, you know, because I'm not properly organised.

How much contact did you have with people like the Arts Council at the time, were they supportive of your work?

I had quite a lot of contact with the Arts Council and I was invited to be on committees, and I was on the Performance Art Committee and then I wasn't, because this whole issue of theatre came up. And also there was another, very nasty little debate in there which was actually between, seemed to sort of be posited between people from the North who were on that committee and the people from the London or generally the South. And the Northerners tended to be theatrical, you know, performance people, and from the South it was a different argument. And also the people from the North had bursaries from the committee that they were on, which I found corrupt, still, and so they would then make another argument and say that if you were not, if you were teaching you were a part-time artist. So you would be a full-time artist patronised by the committee of which you were a member, not all of course, you know, there would be others who weren't on the committee. And also around this was built into this or part of this was, you know, issues to do with the nature of the activity. So they were, in a way they thought more in terms of

performances or gigs or, you know, more theatrically, and the activity was more theatrical, and I suppose on that committee was representing another argument altogether, which was much more connected to the visual arts. So I saw a connection, a strong connection, between painting, sculpture, performance. So that the Performance Art Committee appeared for me to be a rag-bag of events. [DOG BARKING] Do you want to close that?

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

We've just had to restart after a dog barking event, but, just to go back to the bursaries on the sort of northern part of the committee, I think that's very interesting. Could you explain sort of more how that might have worked?

Well, there were...I mean I don't think...I mean I don't want to make it sound as though it was North versus South, but there did seem to be this regional sort of involvement with performance that was more theatrical. And if you look at Adrian Henry's book on performance I think you can...in that book one will see numbers of illustrations of performers from, you know, outside London who would be regarded as perhaps being much more theatrical in the way that they operated, and so, there was a regional position which tended to be from the North. And then there was the kind of, I suppose a southern, an urban position, which was probably represented by people coming from London, and it also seemed to break down in my mind at least to, you know, like my position would have been that performance is an extension of the visual arts, it's...and therefore, you know, is strongly connected to visual art traditions, but also traditions outside of the fine arts. And there was another argument which said, we can't define what performance art is because it could be anything, and my view was, no it can't be anything, it actually is...it may be...there may be a number of elements to it, but it can be defined. So this non-definition was connected to the theatrical actually, anything goes, and also there were people on the committee who were clients of that committee, so they were in a sense paid members of the committee who were making, contributing to decision-making of which they would have been the beneficiaries of, if you see what I mean.

Yes, that sounds very mysteriously suspect.

Well I was very much opposed to this, and I seem to remember saying this at some point. And then, very shortly after that I was no longer on it; I don't quite know how it happened, but I wasn't...you know, that was it, I was not on it any more. And I was

actually living in Germany at the time as well, so there was another aspect to it. It was a messy sort of situation because at that time also I was a member of a small...so we're talking about 1972, '71/72, a member of a small group of people, eight of us, who were talking about forming an artists' union, and we did that for about eighteen months sporadically and we had conversations with ASTMS, A-S-T-M-S, Clive, I can't remember his name now, was the...Clive...he was a Welsh union leader, I can't remember his second name. We had conversations with a representative from the TGWU, what's that? The General...I can't remember what it is now. Anyway, TGWU. And with the National Union of Journalists. And the idea being that we could be formed as a union to, and be affiliated to an already established union, and, I have to admit that at this time I had sort of, I suppose an idealistic view as to the role of unions. My idea of the union was as a transforming, revolutionary body, one that was...you know, one that was going to transform the notion of art and its relationships to art in society and all the rest of it, so a union was going to, you know, sort of be a very, would be in a way the organising organ of that idea of, you know, of a relationship between art and life and so on, and this was going to, this is what we were going to do. I mean I'm perhaps parodying it a bit at the moment, but it was something like that. I mean I'm not sure that all the other people on this, these other eight people had shared the same view; we had a lot of discussions as to what it should be.

Can you remember who the other eight people were?

Well Gustav Metzger was one, Colin Sheffield who I think, I think the last time I heard of Colin Sheffield it was listening to his voice on Radio 4 talking about do-it-yourself, painting and decorating. I think he had, he had a programme of, you know, do-it-yourself. So there was him. The other names, there was a man whose name eludes me at the moment who at one point was the director of the gallery of the University of Southampton, the Hansard Gallery, now what was his name? He's not the one who is there at the moment, but a previous one, and he also has worked, he may at the moment be an associate director of the Lisson Gallery. I can't remember his name, he was one. And there were about two or three others. And as we moved towards the idea of forming this union, so there was another body which was regarding itself as a democratic body wanting to form a union and that was more or less led by Conrad Atkinson, and there was a sort of rivalry. But we actually did form the union, and at that point they amalgamated with us, and very quickly the union became what unions in, you know, in the West are, it became a vehicle to proselytise, you know, the well-being of artists, you know, rather... And I found this deeply

boring quite frankly, and sort of like so unimaginative. And it was also taken over by, I think at a certain stage by SWP, Social Workers Party members infiltrated it, and it just became a misery in a sense. So I left it after about a year, I just found the whole thing to be disastrously kind of like banal and uninteresting. And it went on for a long time, and at the point, I mean, when I was in it we did reach a membership of over 500, so it was, you know, it did have a sort of potential. Now what those 500 members wanted out of it I've got no idea, probably jobs or, you know, they certainly probably didn't want the sort of things that I was idealistically thinking about. So I withdrew from that after a while.

Did you ever try and sort of formalise what you had in your mind on paper and distribute it or anything, or...?

Yes we did the things, yes, yes. But I haven't got any of that, I don't know where it is.

Oh, what a pity.

Yes, it's a shame isn't it, it was sort of... And also I didn't particularly know about things like the AIA; I mean I knew about them but you know... If you look back historically of course there are all kinds of connections, you know, it's not...I mean, it's like all kinds, I suspect it's so typical. We thought this was new, more or less; of course it wasn't.

Oh, that's what keeps the world going round. Every generation thinks it's new.

Yes, that's right, you know, we did think it was pretty, you know, sort of pretty original.

And did you link to any major unions?

We did have associations with...we didn't in the end. I think we could have done with the NUJ but by that time, you know, we'd formed... You know, the discussions sort of like hung around this idea, well, we'll become an affiliate and then we'll form, and then, you know, those discussions would sort of dribble on, you know, probably because of union machinery and so on, and discussions up in the hierarchy, do we want this bunch of idiots, you know, kind of attached to us, or not, or these anarchists or whoever they, or however they might have thought of us. And this would dribble on. So in the end we decided to form the union anyway.

I mean it raises quite interesting questions about the moment at which one becomes an artist and how you retain that status.

Yes, yes, it does, yes.

I mean, did you think about that at the time, or did you just assume you were artists with a mission?

We assumed we were artists with a mission, you know, and we wanted then to in a sense establish a power base, like a voice. And this was also in contrast to Space and Air that I talked about earlier, which we thought were kind of, you know, they fulfilled very limited functions, you know, perfectly satisfactory but they were rather limited. So we wanted something more radical. The first chairperson of the union elected was Mary Kelly.

Oh that's interesting. I like to know a woman got in there somewhere. [LAUGHS]

Well yes, mm. Oh there was a strong feminist aspect to it, yes, yes.

Oh really? Oh very interesting.

Certainly after it was formed, yes. And she was working on the `Night Cleaners' film at the time I seem to remember, yes.

End of F5281 Side B

F5282 Side A

[Continuing the interview with Stuart Brisley on the 10th of October 1996. Tape Ten Side B (sic - ACTUALLY SIDE A).]

So I guess at that time I had this view that all these activities were...it was all interactive, there was no...I didn't sort of give them any, one any greater status than another, you know, so that included teaching and working as an artist, either individually or collectively, and involving in these other things. Not so much the Performance Art Committee of the Arts Council but certainly the union. I regarded all those things as having a kind of common base to them. And I felt that for a long time, and then suddenly it stopped and I began to feel a very strong separation of my own work from teaching.

That's interesting. What age were you then?

What, when that happened?

Mm.

Well, much later on. I don't know that I could give it a particular year, I mean it would be too specific, but I would have thought probably around about sort of the beginning of the Eighties, that sort of time, I would have thought so.

And the other people that were involved in these, this sort of level of consciousness about art, did they sort of move beyond it as well or have they continued with it?

Well, also at that time of course there was another dimension which was what was called the emerging community art, you remember all that. And that was a sort of, another institutionally sort of patronised area of activity if you like. And so, you know, there were, you know, there were these interesting strains, you know, and I mean I suppose you could build a sort of, a kind of elevation as it were of all, the positions of all of these things relative to a kind of hierarchy where art, you know, and maybe the tradition would sort of find a centre, you know, and the institutions would be high, you know, like painting and sculpture and so on, as occur in most in most art schools of course, you know. A sort of breaking of categories was both sort of like, it was tolerated but also resisted. It was a sort of contradictory thing you know, it was on the one hand but not on the other. And that of course still goes on. So, I suppose

it was a strange, slippery area where you could find yourself either outside the frame of art altogether, or into the community arts, or you know, you would fall...you know, there wasn't...it was like being on a very slippery slope in a way.

How did you se your role as artist in relation to the ideas of coming out of community art?

I felt quite separated from them, yes, I didn't like them.

Why not?

In principle - well principle is too strong a word. In theory or whatever, I didn't like them, because, I thought it was a...it was a sort of, I thought it was patronising, and sort of trivialising and patronising, and I thought... Because of my experience of people, you know, in terms of working, I felt that one, you know, one didn't actually have to, you know, that one could have a view of something and do it to the extent of one's ability, you know, intensity etcetera, and that one didn't actually have to strategise its communicative potential, if you see what I mean. Whereas I think in a lot of community arts it was precisely about tactics and strategies of how you communicate, and so there were lots of sort of preconceptions and assumptions about what the role was and how it was going to work, who it was for and what the purpose was, and it was quite often tied up with political views that were sort of quite emblematic, you know, quite sort of rigidified.

So do you mean it was used as a sort of social means?

Yes, that's right, yes.

Rather than something truly enlightening?

Yes, I think so, yes, yes. Although I was really very much engaged in the social but not...I couldn't bear it, I hated it. Well I still do, I dislike it, I really do.

Did other artists at the time think it was a good thing, do you remember?

Yes, some people did, yes, lots of people did. I mean, Maurice Agis for example is an example of a very effective animateur in that respect I think, you know, with his inflatable [INAUDIBLE] which he continues to show all over the place, and, yes,

there are people who are still doing it, or, you know, I mean... It's transformed, they've had to transform the means by which they've done it, you know, because funding bodies, you know, and the policies have changed of course as time goes by, you know, like you get not just different governments but you get different climates of thinking about, you know, what culture is about and how it should be, you know, facilitated according to the economics of the time and so on. And I think there have been those changes since the Seventies, a lot of changes. But some people have persisted, like, I mean I think immediately of Maurice Agis, largely because he had a studio next to me so I can remember his name, I can remember him quite easily. And he was an effective, he is an effective artist in that respect. But it's the context that I'm interested in really. So it's sort of, I think ultimately it sort of trivialises the whole process.

What, for the people or for the notion of art?

I was absolutely appalled the other, a few weeks ago, when I heard Carl Andre talking about, `If you want to know about my art ask a five-year-old child'. Well of course that's precisely a sort of, you know, the level at which a lot of his stuff actually is taking place on, you know, that if a child can really engage in it and so forth, it must have value, it must be good. And I was really shocked to hear, shocked, surprised, to hear Carl Andre make that assertion at the end of an interview after his show at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, a few months ago. I thought that was, you know, rather stupid really.

You said you were living in Germany at this time.

Well, through AIR, the Arts Information Registry, there was a kind of manifestation of British art that was produced in Berlin, and I was one of the people who was invited to go, and I think it was about '70 or '71, something like that. And I did a work in the Messehalle in Berlin, and there was a lot of other things going on there as well, and, I suppose it was a show that would be not unlike the one that's in Paris at the moment, you know, the British art show which is something similar to that except it didn't have that status, that high institutional status. On the other hand it had support from, you know, the city of Berlin and you know, and there was a different sort of social structure there anyway in terms of what, you know, institutions and art and so on. So it had a lot of attention but it was sort of like outside the high, you know, cultural institutions. And I made this work, and somebody...it was a performance with installation, although they weren't called that at the time. And, in

the course of this performance, you know, in the days that I did it, it was a rather interesting performance really, because I mean, one person broke their arm, another person had severe stomach trouble, another person had a sort of mental breakdown, and I had a horse syringe injection in my neck at some point because, and I thought I was dying because of its effect on my body, you know, because I had some problem with my back. So we were all...and it was called `Surgical Minutes', this show, and it produced, everyone, you know, had either a physical or mental problem, there were five of us. Anyway it's a side issue. During the course of this somebody came up to me and said, `Would you like to, do you think you'd like to live here for a while?' And I said, `Yes.' And he happened to be a member of a committee of the Deutsche...the Germany Education, the German Academic Education Service, DAAD, Artists Programme, Berlin, the DAAD Berlin programme, where roughly 25 artists, writers, poets, playwrights etcetera were invited to live in Berlin for a year, each year, and that still goes on. Originally I think it was started by the Ford Foundation in 1959, part of the re-emergence of Germany from being a pariah to becoming, you know, a collaborating part of western society and so on. And then it was, I think then it became a German-funded organisation. And he invited me, but nothing happened because the work that I'd done actually caused a sort of a scandal that I didn't know about, and so the committee were very much opposed to it, and, it was rather interesting really because I didn't know what the, you know, what it was really, what the cause of this was, although the work was fairly active and lively and so on. Anyway he came to see me, this guy, a year afterwards, his name was Johannes Gecelli, G-E-C-E-L-L-I, and he had been born in a place near, in Eastern Prussia, I forget what it's called now, it's now probably part of Russia or even Poland. And he had been a soldier in the war and he had been an English prisoner of war, and married an English woman and then studied in Düsseldorf with Günther Grass as a fellow student and various other people. He then worked in Müllheim and then moved to Berlin as a professor. And so he was the person that contacted me. He came to see me in London the year after and said, `Can you tell me...' right, you know, and asked me these questions, about the scandal. And I explained, answered satisfactorily, and then I was invited to go and live in Berlin. So I went, and I got that for a year.

On that same scheme?

Yes, that's right. I think it was 1972/73, or '73 to '74, I can't quite remember. And it was a strange business, it was so peculiar, because, I suppose one, you know, one ought to think it was a great opportunity, which it was, but it turned out to sort of feel

like an opportunity with holes in, or, it was like, it was like a void in the middle and that one, you know, all the opportunities were sort of on the edge, all kinds of... So the first thing I did when I got to Berlin, when I got a flat and was able to...I remember it was 3,000 Marks a month, which was very adequate, it was really good for the time, I went straight to Warsaw, because I had, I don't know if I mentioned that when I went to school I used to occasionally sit with this Polish general and he told me about Poland, and so this was my first opportunity to go to Poland. So I was in Berlin about three weeks and I went straight to Warsaw. I had the address of the artists union in Warsaw, went to, I went straight to the address when I arrived, I think it was 4 o'clock in the afternoon, half-past 4 in the afternoon, and I was met by a man sweeping the sort of, like the steps or something. And I said hello to him, and he said to me, in English, because I had said hello, he said to me in English, `I am the physical worker here. Which language would you like to speak?' And I said, `Well I prefer to speak in English.' He said, `OK.' And I then said what I wanted, I wanted to meet the man called Joseph Sjazna who had worked in the Edinburgh Festival in 1970, and I had read about his work in the, I think it was in the `Observer' and some other papers. And it was a kind of theatrical performative thing but it was connected to his experiences of having been a prisoner in a concentration camp for about four or five years. He was, Joseph Sjazna, now his name I think is S-J-A-Z-N-A, and he was a, he was a very powerful - this is what I found out later - he was a very powerful figure in the cultural life of Poland and was very close to Gierek, the President of Poland. I didn't know anything of this, I just went straight to Poland, went to the artists union and said, `I want to meet Joseph Sjazna.' They said, `Well his address is over there.' So I made an appointment with him, met him, and we had a conversation and he invited me to come to Poland for two months and work in the Teatr Studio studio, which was in this enormous, huge complex of buildings with a massive pinnacle in the centre, right in the centre of Warsaw. It was a gift from Stalin to the Polish people which the Poles called Stalin's Prick, because they hated the Russians so much. Anyway there it was. And I was invited to work there a year later, 1974. So I then went back to, I went to a few other places in Poland, went back to Berlin and I lived there for a year, and worked in Berlin.

And what kind of things...were you required to do things, or were you allowed to develop your own work?

Yes I was, in fact that's what was so boring about it, because you know, as...I mean working with performance, and also having the...I mean I'd been a soldier in Germany as well, I'd been a student in Germany; here I was back being an artist in this sort of

very privileged kind of way, in this extraordinary place, you know, because it was...it was like a home for the displaced, you know. There were lots of people there who were there because they'd come from maybe, you know, Czechoslovakia or wherever, and it was the closest point they could get to being where they had come from without having to be under the communist regime. So there were lots of really interesting people there that I got involved with. German artists it was more difficult, there was almost like a, at that point a kind of undercurrent of German artists; they weren't terribly visible, they were kind of, a bit suppressed I suspect. And also I think that the system of inviting all these international artists, so-called international artists in, in a way kind of did that to them, you know, so one didn't...and there was a certain amount of resentment I suspect. I picked this up from Gecelli, who was a painter, the man who had invited me, you know, or who had first suggested to the committee that they invite me, and he lived in Berlin and I became very friendly with him, he was a very nice man and very interesting, and his wife was English and so on and she very, unfortunately fairly soon died of cancer, so, you know, it was tragic just that period for him. So it was an extraordinary time to be there. I met...who did I meet? I can't think of his name, this guy from California who makes those big installations like Barney's Café and... Ed Kienholz, Ed Kienholz was there at the time. There was another American who has just died who did those...Duane Hanson was there, he was there. And there were, there was a guy called Krauss, a composer from Warsaw, he was there, and I got to know him pretty well. There was a Japanese film maker, Imura, who was there. Numbers of people. Cornelius Cardew was there. It was fairly extraordinary, you know, and strange. Hamilton was there a bit, but he came later, but he was there for part of the time. Beuys was there quite often. You know, so one was engaged in some sort of like milieu. And the thing that was most interesting to me was that the Direct Art people from Vienna who had, you know, who had been drummed out of Austria in the late Sixties because of making criminal art works and so forth, they were there and I met Gunther Brus and various other people; Gunther Brus was particularly, was very...I was really pleased to have met him. And so I had, you know, sort of round the edge of this thing there were lots of opportunities to sort of, in a way to sort of measure oneself and, through contact with other people. I was friendly with Marcel Broodthaers, he was there. And so on. And then of course they would all come[??] to the art collections, and then there was the opportunity to move in Central Europe, you know, to experience things one only heard about really, to get behind the Iron Curtain, all of that. So it was pretty good, it was very interesting.

Sounds fabulous.

What?

It sounds wonderful.

Yes it was, it was very good. Except that I kept wanting to do things, and they were saying, `Well you'll get an exhibition at the end,' and I couldn't bear it, you know. So I arranged to do a performance, which is called `Ten Days', which took place in somewhere called Editions Paramedia I think it was, I think that's what it was called, and it was in a gallery right next to another gallery called Rene Block who is another one of those people, international entrepreneurs. He ran the Block[??] gallery then, and in that gallery one met all people from Fluxus and so on, certainly the Americans. Anyway I arranged to do this work which was called `Ten Days', and it was based on the idea that I would not, that I would...that I would at 8 o'clock on the 21st of December 1972 or 3, I still can't remember, I would enter this room and there would be a long table, and I would just have had dinner. And I would sit there until midnight and I would go home. And the next day I would start again at 8 o'clock and breakfast would be there, then lunch would be there, dinner would be there, but I wouldn't eat it. And whoever wanted to eat my lunch, my breakfast lunch or dinner could eat it. And this went on for ten days and I didn't eat anything. So I sort of fasted or starved or whatever you want to call it for ten days, and the... So on the table, each time a meal was set, it was set at a different point on the table, so the table was long enough to have, I think it's 30 or 31 meals on it in different positions, you know, and the days were measured off. And then...but that was only half the table, and then there was another half of the table, every time a place was set for breakfast another place would be set on this table which was, had nothing on it except... So slowly you would get a kind of accretion of rotting food on one table, and on the other you would have places being set for, you know, a banquet or whatever you want to call it, on another table. So, when it got to the 21st - the 31st of December, New Year's Eve, I would have...the work would stop at 8'clock and I would then have something to eat. But before having done that, I took my clothes off and crawled through all this rotten food, right? And right to the point, and then, you know, got up and went and had a shower and things. And so this was the sort of, this was kind of like a way of re-entering the old food as it were and sort of like coming out the other end and then I was able to eat, so it was a sort of performative thing. And then there was this big banquet at the other end for everybody who wanted to come to it, and it was all free. So, I mean the original idea for that was, you know, like Berlin, the area that I lived sort of had extraordinary conspicuous consumption, and as you went to

the edges of it it sort of collapsed towards the Wall and it was all kind of broken down and you know, it became sort of very kind of drab and you know, sort of war-torn and like that, and then the Wall itself was sort of, very brutal in terms of its, one it's construction,, two its height, because it's just sort of above what you can sort of easily get over, you know. It was such a brutal notion the whole thing. And so, but in the process of this work proceeding I got the idea that this was, it was like the dying of the year, you know, and so that, you know, then there was the celebration of the new. So it was dying of the old, celebration of the new. It was connected to, you know, the Christian ceremony but it wasn't Christian particularly. And it was related to, you know, the sort of social context, sort of, this conspicuous consumption that could be seen in the Western part of Berlin as opposed to what you would see in the East. So it had all these references to it. And so that's what I did. And, the interesting thing was that three days after, it would be about the 3rd of January of that next year, '63 or, probably '74 I think, I got this terrible pain, absolute agony in my leg and the back here, and I...it was absolutely appalling and I couldn't walk. So, Gecelli came and drove me to his doctor, and this doctor was an old man and I sort of was more or less half carried in, and know, and examined and everything, and he said to me, `What have you been doing?' And I told him what I had been doing, and he said, `That is so interesting,' he said, `because, do you know in the Twenties and the Thirties I had many...in the Thirties I had many patients who were hunger artists.' And the then started to tell me about, you know, during that sort of period of huge inflation and so forth between the wars in Germany that people would sell their, they were being employed in circus to starve, and they would be exhibited in boxes and cages. And you know, so, he gave me this reference, which I thought was absolutely fantastic, you know. I mean it was just one of those sort of like surprising...I hadn't actually realised all that, you know, so that gave me another insight. And I walked with a limp for three months and then I was all right, and all it was was a cold in the sciatic nerve, because this place where I had done this work, it was a commercial building and the heating went off at 5 o'clock at night, so for three hours every night I was sitting in the cold, that's what did it apparently.

Gosh.

But you know, just as a result of that I got this other, you know, bits of information about the connection between the past and the present as it were and what I'd done, although nobody had said anything about it to me, you know, during, you know, it was... It was rather, maybe they didn't know about it, I don't know.

Or had they felt that it was a rather sensitive kind of...

Yes, possibly, yes. Possibly, yes. So having done that the DAAD thought I had done my exhibition, so I felt that I was in enforced retirement, you know. But then some people came from other places and invited me to do things, but at later dates, so you know, it worked in other ways.

When you said the second 8, and you had sort of breakfast lined up, you mean 8 in the morning?

Yes.

So you were actually there all day?

I was there twelve hours a day, yes. I did repeat that work, I did...it's the only work I've ever repeated, which is, I had a five-year anniversary at the Acme Gallery, London, five years later, that would be 1978, the first one in 1974 - it was '73 to '74. And I repeated that work with sort of like, I elaborated it and made it...and actually, it in a way had a stronger structure to it, and we can talk about that later.

I mean did people come and, did they actually eat the food or were they too sort of...?

Not that many in Berlin, you know, but, no, that many in Berlin. Some people did, but not that many people. But in, when I did it later, five years later in London, all lunches and dinners were eaten, and no breakfasts were eaten, because it was too early. So it was...but it was also very difficult, because, what I hadn't realised, but what I realised, you know, during the process of this is that one, there's a funny relationship between, you know, like, if you give your food to somebody else you feel funny about it, you know, it's unsettling. One doesn't actually have a sense of a gift, or at least I didn't; there's something, there's a sort of resentment in it as well, you know, like you're eating my food, you know.

I'll bet.

Yes. You know, it's quite...it's just rather complicated. And also, as soon as somebody sits down and other people are watching, it's like, there's something else that goes on, it's more like a piece of theatre, do you know what I mean. I mean they're actually performing the act of eating something, so the social terms have

shifted. And some people found that difficult, and I found it difficult as well, in fact I used to go and look the other way, I couldn't bear the whole thing.

I mean how did you acquire the self-discipline to not eat for ten days?

Because I decided to make a work, and that's what it required and therefore I did it.

And there were no moments when you thought, I can't stand it any longer?

No, because I had decided to do it. So I put myself into the frame of mind and I went through it, and you know, and came out the other end.

And, how did people respond to it?

Well, loads of different ways. I mean it was...it's easier to talk about the one in London because, you know, it's more fresh in my mind and it was also in a way, it was probably the more successful of the two pieces. I mean I don't like to use the word successful but it was a more kind of, more complete, put it that way, perhaps. And the reason for that is that at Acme I had three floors and I also employed a chef and a waiter. And so the chef was an artist who was also a chef, trained as a chef, he was Austrian, and he was also, he had also worked as a waiter, an Austrian waiter, quite specific, you know, because there's a particular way of being an Austrian waiter, which is very slow and very grumpy and all of that. And so he performed these functions. And so, he made Austrian Christmas food, and so what...he would do exactly what I had done previously, he would...in his chef's outfit he would come down from the kitchen which was on the top floor of Acme, down to the first floor where I was sitting at this table, and he would bring whatever meal it was. And then he would go back up again and change into his waiter's... No sorry, I've got it wrong. He would come down in his waiter's outfit, he would serve the food, the thing that he had

cooked in his chef's outfit; he would then go down to the ground floor and lay a place.....

End of F5282 Side A

F5282 Side B

[Continuing the interview with Stuart Brisley on the 10th of October 1996. Tape Ten Side B.]

Now I am quite interesting in the difference between sort of the German and the English audiences.

Well I think...the work was more developed in England I think, you know, because the first one in Germany was, you know, I had to do too many things myself in order to, you know... I mean it worked, it worked perfectly well, and people came to it, but it wasn't so developed and there weren't so many people coming to it as came in London, because of the way the publicity worked, and because, you know, I had actually, having done it once I had realised, you know, what would be advantageous, you know, like it would be advantageous to go to a doctor and find out, you know, how one should approach it.

I mean are there ways of preparing for starvation?

Well I...it's rather interesting. Because I had proposed it, or you know, Acme had agreed to, you know, the Acme Gallery in Shelton Street, was then in Covent Garden, so it's right smack in the centre of London. And, so I said, you know, perhaps I ought to go and see a doctor, and they said, `Oh, well, we will find one for you'. So they did, and he turned out to be an acupuncturist, and also a kind of dietician and so on. So I had acupuncture at the time with him, and also - this is before the event - and then he wrote out a regimen for, what's it called, a kind of, a way of approaching it which involved taking liquids, like a particular sort of tea, one glass of tea at breakfast, seven times or whatever it might be, a glass of carrot juice at lunch, you know, three times in the ten days, and apple juice or whatever it was. It was all designed to, you know, to keep my body healthy. And of course what happened was that I got healthier and healthier, you know, that was the interesting thing, so people were coming to think they were going to look at this starving person, but actually they had sort of hangovers after Christmas and were feeling lousy but I was getting all sparkly eyed and more and more healthy and more and more bouncy. It was so, you know, it was all contradictory you see, it was all paradoxical, it was really interesting. So anyway, in London I had the chef, I've forgotten his name for the time being, the Austrian chef, and he did all the cooking. I slept in Acme, I stayed there the whole time, so that it was open from 8 until midnight, so I was sitting at that table, what is it,

8 till midnight, is it eighteen hours a day? I can't remember. How do you work it out? 8 to 8 is twelve and 8 to 12 is four.

Four, so it's sixteen.

Sixteen hours a day, sitting at the table. Or walking about, but mostly sitting. At different, you know, I would move... There was one chair, one set of knife fork and spoon, and so the setting would move up the table each...and at the end of each day we would put a piece of tape across and all the... Because all the food was being eaten except the breakfast there wasn't much residue, so we then, the chef and I would then get all the cooking materials that had been, you know, that weren't used, potato peelings and things, and we would put them on the table, and then we put a dusting of flour over the whole thing. So that would...so if you came in you would see that was...there were these divisions, there were the day divisions dividing, there would be three points, right, three meals, and then a piece of tape and then there would be the next one and the next one and the next one. So, I mean in...I had no idea what was going on with publicity or anything, and I mean I'm not really interested in that, I'm just doing it, and people were coming in and out, and people were eating the meals and were having conversations. And then strange things started to happen around about Christmas time. 37 people came on Christmas Day for example, which is pretty good. I mean there were a lot of, you know, it had a lot of attention, but it began to get a very particular sort of attention that, a lot of waiters began to appear and they were having holidays from places like the Savoy, and you know, they were coming in because they had read about it. So, as had happened in one or two other of my works, I had actually kind of like drawn the, drawn the interest of people from a specific work. So chefs and waiters mostly were coming, and then there were Italians came, a lot of Italians, why they came I don't know; and quite a few Yugoslavs came. And then, you know, the usual English people or people living here, but quite specifically Italians and Yugoslavs and waiters and chefs. And on Christmas Day two men walked in and they were tramps, and they said...and we said...and they said, `Well, you know, where's the food?' And we said, `Well there's only one meal, and you can have half each.' So, one man stood behind the other, the guy ate half the meal, the other one ate the other half of the meal, and they had half a glass of wine and half of everything, right, because there was only one meal. And then they said, `Where's the whisky?' And then, `Where are the beds?' And so we said, you know, `Out, sorry, terribly sorry, but that's somewhere else.' And so, you know, very interesting who started to come through the door, and their assumptions were. So here were two tramps, you know, two homeless people chancing their arms, which was absolutely

fine because they came all the time, who cared, you know. As long as the food was eaten, that was that. But they only appeared once, although another homeless person appeared on the last night and had the last meal. And then, on Boxing Day we began to get phone calls from people asking to book tables. And we had to explain that, you know, not only was there only one table, it was rather long, but more than that there was only one meal, and so whoever came first could have it. So... [LAUGHING] It's very strange how these things work. And so, two ex-Army chefs appeared, you know, a man and a woman who were married, and they had both been chefs in the Army for some reason, and they came and they went upstairs and had a long conversation with the chef, and then they came down and they had half the meal, right, each, that was, you know, the... And then this just proceeded, you know, like, I can remember talking to a woman for about an hour trying to persuade her to have some ham and salad for lunch, you know, because we needed...really we wanted people to eat it do you see, I mean we wanted... And people were coming to sort of, you know, more or less, you know, kind of like sort of, a sceptical way to see this starving person and all of that, but actually what's so interesting about those things is that as soon as, you know, the reality of the situation arises and people start engaging with the idea behind it, all that sort of rubbish falls away and they get engaged and think about it, and you know, it's an absurd activity but nonetheless it has, you know, got references to some sorts of meanings, and you know, that engages people, and, you know, that's good, I like that. And that makes the...you know, so from with inside the work one can actually directly engage with people coming to it, so it's not a, they are not an audience as such, you know, they're actually taking part in some way, you know, even unconsciously.

I mean after something like that, where you've put quite a lot of your self into it, do you record it in any way or do you just...?

I've just tried to do that, it doesn't work. It doesn't work at all, you know, it's almost impossible. It has been filmed, I've got a whole pile of film of it from the BBC, I just got it two weeks ago, that they found it somewhere and said, you know, `We have all this'. They didn't use it because it's very...it's very difficult, you can't...when you're inside a thing like that it's very difficult to then to sort of distance oneself in order to have enough kind of like critical faculty to sort of like assess it, and, you know, to record it. It just doesn't work, and I've tried it in all kinds of different ways, and it really, and I've given up on it anyway. But you know, in terms of...I mean in the more sort of like circumstantial way, you know of just maybe like remembering bits

of it, you know, it seems to have a, it does seem to have some sort of value to it, you know, it can be dealt with.

Just on the question of Christmas, why did you pick Christmas both times? Was it because of its sort of poignancy as it were, or...?

Yes, a point of conspicuous consumption. And so I was making another point about conspicuous consumption, you know, like, rather directing it inwardly, why don't we direct it outwardly?

How did your family feel about this, sitting at home without the turkey?

They didn't know about it, they don't know about these things. No they didn't know about it I don't think. I don't think they even know about it now, I'm sure they don't. No it wouldn't register with them, you know, it would be outside their...outside their frame of thinking about things, you know, they may have seen a catalogue where it's in and said, `What's that?' So, you know, nothing really.

But your sort of immediate family, were you still with your first wife or...?

Yes, well, I didn't have a first wife then, we had been divorced. No, we were divorced that year when the thing was done in Germany but we hadn't lived together for a long time. No I was living with somebody else, yes, at the time. Yes, I mean it's very difficult for somebody who's close to you, it's really difficult I think, very uncomfortable I think. I mean, yes, it really is. I mean performance is such an uncomfortable event, you know, it doesn't pay to sort of like, sort of impose it on other people really, I mean it's sort of like, in a sense it asks too much of them, you know. I don't know whether that sounds rather portentous but I think it does, you know, I mean... But you know, like they all, I mean, this particular person was very supportive, but nonetheless it was difficult, you know. Because you know, this is not a rational, you know, there's something deeply irrational about it, and sort of peculiar in a way. And it's embarrassing too. I mean I find them deeply embarrassing.

Why do you do it?

What?

You're happy to overcome your embarrassment to achieve other goals?

Yes, oh I overcome it, but I'm embarrassed. Yes I find it very embarrassing, I have found it very embarrassing, yes. Not in the...well once I get into it it's all right but you know, like, I mean I'm doing four performances in the next year and it's all excruciatingly embarrassing and I hate doing them but I do them, right. It says something about me probably, I mean I don't know what but... I don't want to know about that, I mean you know, there's no point in, you know, thinking about that too much. No, because I get an idea and I want to do it, you know. Like one of the interesting things that Gunther Brus, B-R-U-S, said to me, it's the man who worked in Vienna and so on, and he made a performance which was filmed in the Munich Aktion Room, 1970, and it was the last one he did I think, and there was a 16mm film shot of it, and I saw it at the Goethe Institute Gallery in 1972, and I met him in 1973. And he, around about that point, 1970, after this performance he started...he concentrated on drawings and so on, so he really did, he just stopped, and I said to him, `Why did you stop?' And he gave me an answer which I've never known whether it was true or not, and he said, `Because I had an idea that was so horrible that if had done it, you know, I just didn't want to do it, and so I decided to stop altogether.' And I said, `What was it?' And he said it was to cut a lump of flesh out of his leg and eat it. And actually if you look at his work, you know, from '64, '65, '68 to '70, it's quite feasible, it's quite feasible that that would have been a, you know, that he was telling, you know, that there was authentic about what he said. On the other hand, you never know.

So there's some sort of peculiar tension between the imagination and the rational decision and...

I think so, yes, yes, yes.

Daring oneself to do it.

Yes, in a way, yes, yes. Yes.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

I mean I think it would be interesting if you gave an idea of the scale of your performance work and perhaps picked some out that would, you know, were most significant in your life.

Well I've made an awful lot of performances between, I suppose about 1966 and 1980, '79 or '80, and from about 1968 or '69 till about 1980 I did nothing else but performance, that was the only thing I, the only sort of approach to making art that I used. So, out of that, I've already talked about two of them, the one at the Royal Court and the one that was in Berlin and which I then did five years later. I was going to do them every five years, that one, but after five years I thought that was enough. And then after twenty years I thought I would do it, but, and then I didn't have the will-power really to go through it so it's obviously over. So I did it twice. And maybe, another interesting one to talk about would be the one I did at the Documenta, I think it was Documenta, God! what Documenta was it? It was 1977 anyway and it was Documenta either, 9 I think it was, or, it was 7 or 9. And I had done a piece of work in Milan for a huge British exhibition called `Arte Inglese Oggi', English Art Today I think it means, although I don't know Italian I think that's what it means. And I did a sort of rather, I suppose intense sort of performance in the huge arcade in Milan at that time and I suspect that as a result of that I was invited to do something at the Documenta. I was flown over to Kassel in January of 1977, and looked around the area where the Documenta takes place, and I wanted to...I wanted to work outside, and I was also at that time very interested in making works that involved digging, and the reason for that was that I had, between 1976 and '77, for about eighteen months, I was the artist-in-residence at Peterlee New Town, which is not a miners' town exactly but it was surrounded by numbers of miners' villages and had come about because the miners themselves wanted a kind of centre to this huge conurbation of rural villages. So I got really interested in what miners had spoken to me about, about working underground and so forth, so the work that I envisaged for Documenta had to do with digging a hole as it were and living in it, for a particular period of time, two weeks. And I was sort of in a sense kind of arm-twisted, not exactly but sort of cajoled in a way, to have this event right in front of what's called the Friderizianum[??], and don't ask me to spell it. It's the central, one of the central kind of exhibiting buildings in the Documenta space, like a huge park. I suppose I could spell it if I tried. Anyway, but I'm not going to try. And so I left in January assuming that that's where it was going to be. And so the date came for me to do the work and I drove to Kassel from London and arrived in the afternoon and went to see where I was going to work, and where I was going to work was the site of an enormous drill rig, absolutely gigantic, and sort of, for about a hundred yards square all the sort of ancillary elements that sort of supported this drilling thing. I couldn't really quite understand what was going on, so I went to see my contact, who was the commissioning agent I suppose, and said, you know, like, `What is going on?' And he said, `Oh,' he said, `that's Walter de Maria, he's drilling, what is it, a hundred...a kilometre-deep hole.' And so, and I said, `But

that's where you had actually asked me to...' He said, `Yes, well just do it on the side.' And I realised that, you know, more or less spontaneously that American money had stepped in and that, you know, that what had been a quite conspicuous sort of position for me to work in didn't exist any longer and I just had either to quit, which was also in my mind, or to find somewhere else to work. So I wandered about for half an hour, thinking I might leave and then thinking I might stay, shall I stay or shall I go, and decided that I would stay, and then I found a place which I thought could be very interesting, and it was on the side of the park away from this building, the Friderizianum[??], but on the side of another long building. And down one side of it, so if you imagine that building facing a huge grassy area, I mean, as big as Regent's Park, and down one side, there were some, what looked like building works, and there were heaps of rubble as it were, about eight feet tall, going down the side, and there was a path you could walk down. And not very far down this pile of sort of earth and rubble stopped and there was a gap, and you could go into it about thirty feet, and at the back of this gap was something called a Trompetenbaum, a trumpet tree. I don't know what it's called in English but I mean it translates as a trumpet tree. And it's a rather beautiful tree with big green leaves and there it was, and clearly they wanted to save the trumpet tree. So it left this space, and I thought, that's exactly the space that I could use to make this hole, and you know, and already there are these kind of slopes of the rubble and earth, so it's got quite a, sort of dramatic sort of appearance already and so I could use that. So I went back to the office and said I want to work there, they said, `Absolutely fine,' and so... I bought a tent with me. So, I had an assistant called Christoph Gericke, who was German, as a translator, because of this communication business, and he stayed in a room in this building that was along one side of the grass and I stayed in the tent. And we started to dig the hole, and the hole would have been about, probably about six feet across or seven feet across and then it was going to go about thirty feet, and it was going to go down, I didn't know how deep but maybe ten feet or, you know, it was going to be a bit of a major effort. And so I started to dig it, and it was very sandy soil and it was quite easy. And so, the first day was OK, it was all right, we got a section of this thing dug out and the earth thrown up on the sides of the other, where this other rubble and earth was, and the thing began to take shape. And when I got to the second day we came across what appeared to be a point, a point at an angle, like that, sort of, not 45 degrees but maybe 30 degrees angle, and it was rubble, it was all rubble, and it was incredibly hard to dig. And so we started to go through the rubble, and then, I also wanted to go deeper but we began to hit water. So, it was about five...eventually the hole was about six feet deep, and as we pulled these lumps of rubble out, there were bits of a Classical column, there were bricks and all kinds of things began to...and then we began to find

other things like bits of glass and bits of bone and, you know, strange things. And I got it far enough dug towards the path at right-angles to it, I was able to start building the structure that I was going to live in, and the structures, there were going to be three parts; there were eventually three parts but there was going to be two parts to the structure. One was like a box that was going to be just below the level of the earth, right, of the ground, probably about that much, about six inches below the level of the ground, a box that I could live in. And then in front of it was going to be, in the shape of the box, an unlivable space made of wood structures like, I don't know how you'd call it but horizontal and vertical sections going through three-dimensionally, the same dimensions as the little box I was going to live in. And that was kind of like a protection, like. And then, so we did all this, and I started to live in the box, and we got...we dug the hole out as far as the path, which was going at right-angles to it, and I didn't want to keep going, because, you know, we would disrupt people walking and I didn't intend to do that. So we started to dig down. And there was one, it rained for 24 hours at some point and the water level in the hole got rather high, but I put the box on stilts and it got within about six inches of the bottom of the hut but it didn't...I was in there for, I think about thirteen hours at one point, you know, without coming out because it was so...and I had a plastic roof, I arranged it. It was very aesthetically produced, this. Christoph Gericke had some friends who lived in the area, one of whom was a doctor, and she came to visit him and was introduced to me, and we asked her, we'd got all these bits of bones, you know, what are they? And she said, `Oh, this is a little bit of the femur and this is...' They were all bits of human body, bones, because the rubble was actually the rubble from the war. Kassel had been very heavily bombed, because it was a railway junction area, and after the war they had tipped all this rubble from the point that I, almost where I started to dig, I mean, about three feet, it was just one of those, you know, chances, right to the river. What was a marshy area they had actually stabilised by using all this rubble, and in the rubble, you know, were bits of, you know, probably inevitably, bits of body. So, the idea that I had of, you know, like, living just below the level of the ground took on another kind of connotation, you know, because it incorporated this, what had actually come out of the site. And also in discussing what we were doing with people, which was a very interesting operation, because, we became a kind of front line for people who wished to make comments about the Documenta itself and about the nature of the art activity. These were local, a lot of local people from Kassel who, you know, talked to us and so forth. But also they, we talked about the work, and they said, the hole - it was so interesting, the hole reminded them of a mass grave, and you know, if you dug a hole in England they wouldn't necessarily think of a mass grave. It's purely to do with, you know, like again, you know, their history and their associations with

experience and so forth. So, this, the whole thing had this kind of sinister sort of like...and you know, reference to the war and so on. And so, the title of that work is `Survival in Alien Circumstances', now, done afterwards, because I began to see that that's what it was, and it was so interesting to dig and to uncover in the process of, you know, making something which initially was about survival; it actually kind of acquired a number of other dimensions. And the other interesting thing about it was that people would give us things, like we got, I was given a little cooking stove, and we were given food, we were given... People, you know, they wanted to make gestures somehow, you know, in relation to what was going on, purely because we were there and you know, the nature of the work was open and not closed, and the process was in operation and continuing, and they could actually be part of it, if those chose to; they didn't have to. And I found that sort of rather moving really, that sort of experience. When we got to the path we started to dig down and we came across the floor of a house, a concrete floor, about a foot thick, and it took me one and a half days with a pick-axe to go through it, and then we went further down and then on the last day we were up to our chests in water, and the last act, action of that piece is actually just these two figures lying in the water for half an hour or so and the photographs, you know, show the sort of end. The end of the work is like an impossible, it has an impossibility about it, you know, because everything suggests a process and a continuation, and although there was the idea of an image in the, you know, the image of survival and protection and then this sort of like moat in the front with the water... And then of course, you know, the communication process as well, this beautiful tree at the back, the rats that ran over the roof at night, you know, all of these things actually were somehow part of this whole, this event. And so that, then, when we had finished the performance as it were, which was also the construction of the work, I then tipped the earth into the hole around these.....

End of F5282 Side B

F5283 Side A

[Continuing the interview with Stuart Brisley on the 10th of October 1996. Tape Eleven Side A.]

So that, in the hole there were the two, there was the box, the living box and the structure in front of it which was of the same dimensions, and there was a kind of channel round that one could walk round, so the boxes were in this hole and you could walk all the way round them. And so what I did was to tip the earth into those channels so that it came in at an angle and they were... I was thinking of mining, disused mining or, yes, disused mine works, and you see them in, you know, cowboy films or whatever where, you know, the thing is half visible or half not, and you know, like, so there's been an earth fall or something and the earth has fallen. So it was done like that. Except that the water in the front was left, so what you would then have would be the, you know, this kind of well with water in it which was sort of dark green at the time, with a kind of wooden structure up the side which would be the end of the second wooden structure, the anti living place, and then going back to the living place and then back to the tree with this kind of, all this earth poured in. And that I left as the kind of installation as it were, the remnants of the activity, although I didn't see it as remnants, I saw it as a thing in itself as it were. So that in some ways although the performance had actually produced this, in my mind they were separate entities, you know, so you have basically the performance and then you have the, you know, the installation if you like, to use art terms.

And the installation was ultimately temporary was it? Did it end?

It was temporary, yes, I mean until the end of the Documenta, I presume, yes, it was actually, it was there until the end. But whether, what people would have made of it by looking at it is an interesting question, because none of those invisible things, you know, that I talked about, the bones and, you know, all of that, would have actually surfaced in any way. So, you know, that all comes from the process and the performance. It's almost now like another, it has another form to it, you know, it could have another form to it, which is a text, which deals with that, you know, that particular event, or it could do.

Did Christoph Gericke, did he share this space with you?

No, he didn't. He lived in a room in that building along the side, and... Perhaps I should spell his name. His name, Christoph is C-H-R-I-S-T-O-P-H, Gericke is G-E-R-I-C-K-E. I saw him about three months ago, he suddenly appeared, he came to the Slade and came to say hello. He's now a teacher in Berlin, an art teacher in Berlin.

Just out of interest, what was the response from the people who lived in Kassel to the Documenta exhibitions?

Quite hostile.

Yes.

Quite hostile. And of course, you know, also hostile because they didn't feel they had a voice. So, it's rather interesting because we...because we were available, we were subject to all of that, but we could also discuss with it because we were not the directors of Documenta, we were merely people who had been contracted to do some work, or you know, how would you call it, commissioned, to do something. And so, our position was tangential to the, you know, to the position to those who they would want to argue with. But nonetheless we had a lot of discussion about it, and I think there was a lot of hostility to it, basically because they felt they had no say in it. And they didn't understand it, you know, some of it.

Mm. Poor PR.

Yes, yes, yes, however you...yes, maybe. They didn't. I think we were doing very well, you know, for our own PR, you know, in respect of sort of... I had this, this is a continuation of a view of grass-roots activity, you know, I have a strong, and still do, you know, a sense of making works which actually evolve and draw interest through grass-roots, you know, communication, which perhaps brings me to the Peterlee project that I did, which takes me in a way beyond the frame of art and into...it's where my speculations as an artist took me beyond the frame of art and produced a lot of difficulties in that respect. A lot of interesting things but also a certain amount of difficulties. And also produced a situation where I sort of disappeared from the art scene, you know.

Even though you were sort of involved in the project?

Yes, mm, mm.

Yes, that's interesting.

Oh it's happened on more than one occasion, you know, I think, anything that actually sort of moves too far from, you know, the sort of institutions which actually hold the notion of art which is where the relationship between the artist, you know the institution, the entrepreneur and the public is strongly ritualised. If you move beyond that, then you tend to move beyond a perception that this is something that should be looked at, it moves outside the frame and disappears, rather than there being a, you know, a curiosity about, well, you know, what is the...rather than some sort of engagement of what the relationship is or shouldn't be. And it's got to do with the way, you know, cultural commentators actually think, how they actually behave, not necessarily how they think but how they behave, relative to, you know, like what they do, you know, newspaper critics or whatever. So I think numbers of things which, you know, have a...certainly things that I've done, I know other people have speculated around this, just don't actually, haven't had this ability, which I think is rather a shame really.

So, tell me precisely what happened with the Peterlee thing.

Well the Peterlee thing is rather a complicated business. APG had invited numbers of artists to go to Peterlee to see whether they would like to, you know, to take on this position, and of course it was all, it was up to the Development Corporation of Peterlee, because Peterlee was a New Town and had a Development Corporation, to, you know, as to whether they would find somebody who would be suitable for them. And I was not a member of APG at this point, I had left in 1971 or even earlier, '71 I think. So I think in the end they had run through probably a few artists who were, you know, kind of like intensely involved with APG at the time, and so it started to move to the outer ring as it were of people who had been associated. And I was invited to go up there, which I did, and that... Anyway, as a result of that I was appointed as the, what was called the Town Artist, and my proposal was not to go up and make art works, that I thought that this would be sort of, basically a waste of time. What I wanted to do was to, what I wanted to do... What I felt was, and looking around Peterlee, that it was...it was built between, I don't know, 1948, and it was still being built when I was there in 1976, and looking into its history and so forth it looked like a place which made no reference to its history, not just the history of, you know, it as it evolved, because it had a very short history, but also the history as to how it had come about previous to its existence. There was no sense of... Seventy

per cent of those people living in Peterlee actually came from the surrounding mining villages, so their connections as it were, you know, to... And if you went to the mining villages there was a tremendous sense of tradition and history which was, however short was intense, but in Peterlee itself you had no sense of that at all, even... So it was the very structures and the way of thinking about what this town could be, had in a sense suppressed any sense of collective experience in a way. There was plenty of it probably but it was sort of private you see, not public. So my proposal was to, was a proposal in three parts. The first part was to establish a history within living memory, i.e. to make a start with trying to develop a consciousness of the history of this environment, and the arbitrary start, although it turned out not to be, was going to be with those people who could remember the old people; it wouldn't go back beyond that, and then it would hopefully keep going. So very limited in a way, but you know, so, I was only going to be there for a year so I had to, you know, I had to make it quite specific. The second part of the project was to be a history of the Development Corporation in relation to the town and how it came about and what it did and you know, blah blah. And the third part was to be the establishment of a kind of workshop which dealt with current events, where all these things would be together anyway, there would be the evidence of history within living memory, there would be the, you know, the history of the Development Corporation, and then there would be a workshop dealing with current issues. And current issues at the time were, one, why the Japanese were being invited in, in an area of high unemployment, and refusing to employ people over the age of 35, that was a critical question. I mean, the second question was, why can't we paint our doors the colours we want? And another question was, why can't we have allotments in Peterlee, since they're all around the villages? I mean you know, very simple but basic and sort of rather important things about people's domestic and private lives, you know. So, these were the three. And I started with history within living memory, and I eventually employed six people, I got them on some sort of Government work scheme. I got a disabled ex-miner aged 54; somebody in her fifties; a teenager; you know, they were...did I get six in the end? Something like that. But they were mostly young but there were also two or three older people there. And I trained them how to use tape recorders, as much as I could because I didn't know that much about it, and then, what we were doing was, interviewing local people. And so we began to collect and learn how to ask questions, how to, you know, but on a very local basis, because I started it but I decided not to do it because I felt too alienated, I felt that I was too alienating for them as well. It needed something else, a local kind of connection for the sort of things I was doing. And at the same time I was collecting photographs and any bits of material that would add to some sort of sense as to, you know, the history within

living memory, which actually involved most of the mines and the villages around, because mining was moving to the east, they were following the seams, and there was one mine for example that was built, was sunk in 1900, another in 1915, and so on. And they...so there were people still alive who remembered coming from places like Cornwall or Ireland as children, and arriving in this area. So all of that was uncovered, and, well that's what we were in the process of doing, transcribed and put in association with photographs of them all. So, this was all put in a set of, there were two or three offices that we had, so it was like a whole developing archive of history within living memory. And at the same time I was taking photographs of Peterlee and events, you know, around and so on. And eventually we correlated photographs with texts and I put together a big exhibition at the Sunderland Art Centre of all of this stuff, and then arranged buses for people to travel from Peterlee to go and look at it. So in a sense I got them to interview themselves, and then I got them to start giving lectures, like they would take slides and tapes and they would go to an old people's home and they would actually, they would then, God knows what they did with it, I don't know. I mean it was not for me to say, you know, I didn't want to...I mean I was prepared to discuss it with them but I didn't want to oversee it, do you see what I mean, it had to find its kind of local form in a way, you know, because this is what it was really about. And so they started going to schools and old people's homes, and then of course more material started...so the whole thing was like a snowball. Now that, I don't know whether that still goes on; it was certainly going on during the miners' strike. The second part I got in contact - which was the history of the Development Corporation, I got in contact with the University of Durham Sociology Department, and they were very interested in the Development Corporation anyway, so I got a lot of material from them, and there was one man working there that I had a lot to do with, you know, I got a lot of advice as to how to go about things, where to find things, and so forth. I had a lot of connections with the miners' union and, you know, because of the nature of what was coming up, and a lot of connections with local politicians who had retired and all of that. So slowly we were developing this sort of, this heap as it were that was kind of generated, self-generated. I was hoping this was going to continue with the history of the Development Corporation, and then with the workshop, you know. And that's the way it all began to sort of go, sort of like, sort of off the rails as far as the Development Corporation was concerned, because the minute you get to political issues, you know, you're running into local politicians. And the rural district council had been the largest in the country, something like 80,000 population at the time. In 1929 - was it 1929? - 79 or...79 per cent of the male population were working in the mines. It was one-dimensional. Women in the Thirties would at the age of 14 be sent anywhere in the U.K., yes, well

I guess, in...yes, it would be Great Britain I presume, as domestic workers. Except for those who came from a slightly higher status and they would become nurses or they might be trained to be teachers. So it was very fixed in a way the whole thing. I did a lot of work on the National Strike of 1926, it was absolutely fascinating material. I mean, you know, just very briefly, the strongest sense about the 1926 strike was the weather, you know, because all these people had been down the mines, you know, and there they were on strike. It was the summer, and it was a beautiful summer so they all went swimming and they all...you know, it was like, and it made me realise that strikes are often about demanding your freedom, not about asking for more money. It's something about, you know, I am myself and this is my space, you know, and I'm going to actually claim it for as long as I, you know, can bear to do it. And I think, you know, that there is...there's an aspect of that which perhaps is not so clearly sort of like referred to with strikes; there's usually, you get a bunch of people who are trying to get more money and blah blah blah blah. But I think there's...there is this aspect, I'm sure it's quite fundamental really. So, there were surprising things that came out of all of this material. Obvious things like the radio, the first radio to appear, you know, in the village, you know, how extraordinarily significant it was. The first film they ever saw in the cinema, in the local village hall. The fact that in the First World War a line was drawn in one village down the middle of the street and there were Protestants one side and Catholics the other and you didn't cross the line. I mean, extraordinary sort of, little references that could be opened up in all kinds of... So, it was very rich as a sort of activity and what it was collecting. And my view was that all of this would develop, this would develop a sort of consciousness, and out of this might come, you know, or maybe not, the possibility that someone might quite like to commission some art, who knows? You know, there might be something. What I did do was apply what I regarded as my standards to anything that was produced, so the photographs had to be, the snapshots I wanted to use were reproduced on a much bigger scale and they had to be of a certain quality, they had to be shown in a certain way, the text had to be, you know, designed in, you know, in a certain way, so that they...they actually had a, if you like an alien sense of order and aesthetic about them, but you know, that was my contribution, amongst other things, to the event, that I thought that these things should be given a certain status which those people wouldn't necessarily know how to do or necessarily want, or maybe wouldn't think about. But in terms of its public transmission I thought should exist, right? I mean I made that assumption. And what happened was that, I got a six-month extension. There was some publicity, there was an article in the `Guardian' by Caroline Tisdall on it, which kind of like rocked the boat a little bit in terms of the Development Corporation, the Chairman of which was Denis Stevenson, currently

Chairman of the Board of Trustees at the Tate incidentally, he was the Chairman of the Development Corporation, he was quite young at the time. I talked quite a lot to him about transferring the project to the local rural district council, because at some point the Development Corporation quite soon was going to come to an end and the whole of Peterlee was going to become the responsibility of the rural district council. So, I tried to negotiate a transfer, and this eventually succeeded almost on the point of my leaving, and within days of my leaving the second part of the project had been physically destroyed, the history of the Development Corporation had been taken out and burnt; and part three was wiped out, the workshop, that was all got rid of; and the ex-miner was given the job of working on the history within living memory. And that was all then held by the local rural district council, so that's actually what happened.

So what did you feel about that?

Well I thought that was a crying shame, I thought it was... But you know, I mean it was quite understandable in a sense because the Labour Party had been in power for fifty years, it was to a certain extent corrupt, as any one-party system after a period of time is, we only have to think about what's going on at the moment. So, you know, it was quite predictable probably that that would be the case. And there were some sort of, like, hard-nosed politicians involved, one of whom was Roland Boyes who became an MP, he was then a member of the Socialist Workers Party and local council or whatever, he was very active in actually kind of manipulating all of this. And he became an MP for somewhere near that area, and I remember about five years ago the `Guardian' gave him the accolade of MP Yob of the Year. But now I think he's suffering from Alzheimer's disease, not that old, and so he's no longer visible, you know, as an MP. So there were, you know, there were people with political ambition and, you know, there was a lot of, there was an awful lot of underhand games being played around, you know, which...and I stepped into the middle of this with this naive idea, you know, this sort of rather euphoric sort of notion, I think. And you know, they...so it was ready for plucking or picking or taking, because I had no power to direct it, I could only propose its continuation, because I only had a contract for a certain length of time. And that's what happened.

I mean it's amazing in a way that you ever got the contract, because, if you had set out the terms so clearly, they must have recognised they were vulnerable.

Of course I didn't set them out so clearly, and in retrospect we can say it like that, but the work was like any other art, it has a reference to an art work in that it had a

volition that, you know, that one recognised it could go this way or that way, and so it was developed in the process of itself. So, in that way it wasn't that clear at the beginning. Certainly the idea of history within living memory and not making art works was important to me. And of course this was the, if you remember, this was the town that Victor Pasmore, the man I'd written in my thesis at Florida State University, had written about Peterlee and his position there, so there was a curious connection there for me, and I did meet him once or twice but not to any, nothing actually happened, it was just, how do you do and that was that. He was rather uninterested in me it I think, or not me personally but you know, this person doing this thing. The Social Development Department were very interested in this, and they were very good in supporting it. When the `Guardian' wrote the article, and when Caroline Tisdall reported on the whole thing, the next day the publicity, the head of the Publicity Department came to see me and said, `You're no longer working with the Social Development Department, I am now your contact with the Development Corporation.' And so something happened, you know, where they saw, you know, all this public exposure, and it was immediately shifted. And I think that was also a mistake because, you know, the Social Development had a completely different sort of sense as to what was going on and how this worked, how it connected to what they were doing, you know. There was a certain sensitivity about all of that, and the Publicity Department you could say there was an absence of sensitivity, you certainly could, yes.

Just personally, the sense in which you, I can see you're still applying your random approach to life that, you know, a chance comes up to move somewhere for a year, I can see all these years happening. How did you find the kind of whole experience of just living in this environment?

Well I actually travelled every week from London.

Oh I see.

So I taught three days at the Slade and four days in Peterlee, so, Wednesday night I would get in the car at 7 o'clock, here, and arrive in Peterlee at about midnight, and then I would either come down on Sunday or Monday morning, early. I remember going to Reading University to teach, do a day's teaching, and I left Peterlee at whatever time in the morning and I got there before anyone else in Reading arrived, which I thought was pretty ironic. So yes, so I did a lot of commuting then, I was always in between, going from one place to another. And I had a flat in Peterlee;

Brandley was close, I remember its name, and...and I got to know a lot of people, I mean I lots of contacts and friends and... Yes, it was extremely social, you know, because of the nature of the activity, I met so many people who, hidden away, you know, or not.

And the people that were involved in the kind of oral history exercise, I mean did any of them contact you and talk to you about, you know, what it had meant for them, discussing this on tape?

You mean...oh yes, definitely, all the time. Oh they would come back and... Oh it was... Because everything was available, you see it was all open and public, so you'd come into the office, they could come into the office any time. They were all coming in and going out and reading things, and you know, bringing...yes, it was very lively, you know, not always but you know, it got like that. You know, I enjoyed it very much, but it was like other things, you know, for me it was a model, it was a kind of, it was a sort of, like a...yes, it was like a sort of utopian model in a way, you know, or something. And so, the fact that it actually worked was sort of like a bonus, it was the idea that was much more important, to me. And that connection, how an artist could work, you know, in a community, if you can find one, such as they exist, and there were communities there, you know, certainly in the villages, they've gone now but they were there then. And you know, so I ran, I could actually work with all of that, and so it sort of, in a sense it enhanced my position as an artist in trying to break the hierarchies and work laterally. Although that did my career as an artist in the hierarchical sense absolutely no good whatsoever, because you know, it was more or less invisible, and it's happened again, another project I did. But you know, that's not important because, the important thing was the idea.

And did you...you know, did you get enough out of it to feel that it would be worth extending in other situations or did you see it as a discreet project?

I saw it...because of the closure by, you know, local politicians I realise that, you know, that that was...there was a reality about that, and I certainly was not going to make another model as it were, because that was a model. The next model I made was making my own institution. [LAUGHS]

Just before we get to the end of this side, how was your connection after this time with the APG?

Well no, I've never had, I didn't have good relations with APG because, I didn't agree with the central plank of their project, and you know, I had sort of associated myself with it in 1967, and sort of got closer to it enough to know that in 1971 I wanted to, you know, I didn't want to be associated with it.

But they were connected, weren't they, to the Peterlee thing?

Yes they were; they actually contacted me, and I think I said on the tape that, you know, I think they went through the artists who were sort of closely associated with it, I know that, and went up there and back, and didn't want to do it or they... And I was, you know, one of the later people who was invited up there. And I really wanted to do it because of, I think because of the Pasmore connection going back, you know, to my thesis.

End of F5283 Side A

F5283 Side B

[.....October 1996. Tape Eleven, Side B.]

Well, the last, I think it was probably the last performance I did, which was in the mode of being very physical and very demanding in terms of time and the use of the body and so on was something called `Between', which lasted for about three, I think about three or four days, and well into the evenings, at a place called the Appel, Der Appel Foundation, D-E[sic] A-P-P-E-L Foundation, Amsterdam. I'd been invited to make a work there by a woman who saw me working in the Documenta in 1977, and this work was done around about Christmas time, and the idea I had was to work with someone at the time who would be roughly half my age, so I was 45 and the person I worked with was a man, a Scot called Ian Robertson, and he was about 23. And the idea was to construct a slope within the room that I had been given to work in in the Foundation, at 45 degrees, and this slope was again sort of incidentally about 17 feet tall at its highest point and it was just about a couple of degrees less than 45, so it was about 43 degrees so it was pretty steep. And at the point at the top of it, that's 17 feet, if you then took a horizontal line back you would go through space and then hit the bottom edge of a balcony, so the room was almost like a room and a half. So people watched this work from the balcony looking down onto the ramp, but we would work on the ramp from underneath the balcony going up the ramp. Right. Some curious, often in these works there are sort of curious sort of strange things happen, like for example in this case I was asked how much wood I needed to build the ramp and I just sort of arbitrarily chose a certain amount of, number of sheets of, happened to be chipboard, and then some wood, you know, to reinforce it, because we were going to be on this ramp for three days continuously, except for sleeping at night. And the strange thing that happened was that when we came to put this ramp up, we had to cut some pieces off the side of one of the boards to make it fit across the room, but the way the boards were going up there was a gap at the bottom, and the gap at the bottom was filled absolutely exactly with the wood that we had cut from the sides, just by accident. I mean it's happened before, but it doesn't happen always, but sometimes it does. It's so peculiar. Anyway it was a wonderful coincidence, and nothing, everything was wedged, nothing was nailed, so it was potentially a rather fragile structure, but it lasted very well. And the idea was, it was an idea that came from reading people like Jung and so forth, which is, I mean I don't know how true this is, but there's a theory that there are four stages of life and that there's the first stage to puberty, the second stage to second puberty, the third stage, which is the stage of power or whatever, and the fourth stage is the fight against death. Something

like that. So I was in the third stage, I was in the stage from, between sort of second puberty and power as it were, and at that point it's where one has a sense of power because one has fading powers, so one has to be conscious of power, whereas if one is in the second stage one doesn't actually have necessarily fading power so one doesn't have a sense of the, if you like, of death, or you know... So that was going to be the difference between us, that the other person would, according to this theory would actually be, have a kind of, a sense of energy that was everlasting in a way, whereas I wouldn't have that; because of my age I would have a sense of fragility and have to conserve energy and have to use it. So what would be the...so if we were both going to be on this ramp, how was this going to express itself? And this was going to be the sort of subject of the work if you like. And we also had no clothes, and the idea was that on this ramp we would wear whatever was necessary; in other words, if you were going to be on a ramp all the time and you needed to wear something for protection, what would it be? It wouldn't necessarily be a pair of trousers and shirt, it might be something else. It turned out to be bandages, round elbows and knees and ankles. So we became sort of bandaged figures in certain parts because of these actions on the ramps, right? The problem was, it became a really intensely difficult problem because it was unpredictable, the ramp; not the ramp itself but one's movement on the ramp was unpredictable. You could take two steps up it and fall off; you could go to the top and stand and have no problem at all and suddenly your footing would...it's something to do with the way the surface was, you'd lose footing and then you fall off. And if you fall from 17 feet you come down to the floor at speed and then you shoot across the floor but you've disappeared from the view of people looking from the balcony. So it had a really violent sort of sense to it. And, you know, like, as I say I was 45 and beginning to, you know, one feels one's age at 45, there's no doubt about that. And at one point I came down, fell off the ramp and the piece of wood that I was talking about that went across the bottom, the short piece, just to fill the bottom gap right across the bottom, had gone loose, so there was a piece... And I'd cut round the buttock a huge, like a deep red mark that sort of faded off into pink, and I looked at it and I thought, this is it, this is actually what I'm not going to do any more. I'm not going to do, this is it, this is absolutely it. So anyway, I proceeded to keep going on the ramp with this, you know, and... So we were either, sometimes we were in conflict, sometimes we weren't; sometimes one was on, sometimes two, sometimes none, you know, it was all... We put water on the ramp in the end to try to stabilise the surface and that helped it a bit because it was just so unpredictable and dangerous. And that lasted for three days. The people running it wanted to stop it, they thought it was too dangerous, and it smelt like some sort of horrible gymnasium, it was full of sweat and horrible...it was absolutely horrendous kind of thing, really, I

mean, it was very powerful as a kind of, you know, as a sort of atmosphere, and I don't know what it looked like but it must have been a fairly strong thing. I've got videos of it and so forth. And that's what decided me that I had to think differently about myself, you know, I couldn't...I could no longer sort of, I could no longer rely on a sort of endless stream of energy to do something, you know, survival in difficult circumstances, this was no... And also not only that, it was probably unintelligent to do so. It needed, I needed to think differently about the ideas that I had around the idea of the body, and that's really what... I mean I've dramatised it in a sense by saying, you know, like on the ramp and so, but this must have been something that was occurring to me, you know, I was getting close to the idea I was going to have to, you know...this was coming to an end, this period of work. And also I was getting frustrated by the fact that I was getting invitations where there were too many assumptions about what I was going to do, and I didn't like that either, so, you know, I was being sort of, in a way institutionalised in a way that I didn't want to be. So, there were numbers of factors which brought that all to a head I think, and this work kind of exemplified it. When I say it was the last one, it's not the last one. I went on to do one more, which involved, this is absolutely, this was the end really, this was the end. It was called `Approaches to Education', this same guy and myself, and we did a sort of stalking thing through the Ikon Gallery with the lift shaft, and we had an armory of four blows each. So we took straws and I won the straw to deliver the first blow, so I hit him, right? And then, it was his turn to hit me. And then, I remember the third blow I hit him, I knocked him down completely. And then he hit me and I went down. And the fourth blow wasn't so strong from either of us, we just, it was just an impossibility, the whole thing was just... And it was...I mean in a fight, it had this...the idea was, you know, like, `Approaches to Education' was this awful approach to education where you are brutally kind of disciplined, you know, in a most unimaginative way to conform to something. So it was a kind of expression of, you know, the disastrous condition of enforcing conformity. So, this was the kind of argument of it. So these blows were... But the idea that you could actually hit someone and they know you're going to hit them, or you stand there and you wait for a blow, is absolutely horrendous, absolutely, it's so ghastly. And I was better at it than him, you know, I mean I...

What, anticipating or giving?

I hit him harder than he hit me I think.

Yes. I mean actually that has quite interesting extended connotations for, you know, people who live with violence.

Yes, that's right.

Sort of anticipating blows.

Yes. And that was probably the last piece that involved, you know, kind of like real physical, real physical action, you know, and...

I mean who was this other partner?

A man called Ian Robertson. He was a student of mine and then he went to Poland on a scholarship, then he went to Canada and did an M.A degree, and, now he's living in Canada I think now, yes. I did work with him for, well three or four works, you know, three. Because I often collaborated with people, you know, when I needed...

I was going to say, what was your relationship in, you know, making the decision about how the work would be...?

Well, we had discussions about it, but I was always the initiator of the work and then we would discuss, you know, whether this was feasible or not, and you know, and then it would go from there. And there would be in it, you know, kind of rivalries as well, you know, that would... I mean on the ramp it was pretty obvious that all came up, you know, and so it sort of...there was an element of primitive, there was a primitive element about it, you know, survival, competition etcetera, you know. So, it had that aspect to it. And it was very direct, you know, it's a very... I suppose what I...the other thing that I felt about those works in the end was that, they were too direct, I wanted actually not to have this directness, I wanted more, as it were, to move towards representation rather than, you know, sort of direct, a direct...

Do you mean direct experience or direct relationship to your audience?

Probably, there isn't necessarily a direct relationship to the audience in this situation, I don't think, you know, that would be something else. But more, the way that one thought of the work was, you know, that...I mean to do performance like that it means you put yourself into the middle of it and you go through it, that's what I mean. So to sort of take one's body and put oneself into the middle of something and then go

through what one conceived to be, you know, an idea, translated into practice, and that sort of directness I wanted to get away from.

Just going back to the Jungian thing quickly, the sense in which you were conscious before you started that you were both from these different phases of life, I mean did you resent the parting of the one, or were you looking forward to the empowerment of age?

No, it was all about...I thought that I was in the better position. [LAUGHS]

In what way?

Well, I mean I think it's quite true that, you know, like people with...people who are conscious of their power can use it better than those that aren't.

Do you mean your power in maturity, or literally as a person?

Power, yes, I mean...I mean I could translate it in terms of the work of being merely how one uses one's physical energy, but of course it has other meanings as well, you know, and... So the work was not just about that, it was also about, you know, he could have been much more intelligent than me and sharper and maybe would have, you know, sort of... It was all about this thing of, the survival, you know, how one actually approached it. There wasn't an answer to it of course. I mean it was not...there wasn't intended to be, you know, it was what...it was the container that allowed the work to take place, it was the frame or the idea that contained the idea that enabled it to go ahead.

So when you finally climb off the ramp and go and have a shower and bathe your wounds, then, do you then...how do you respond to that person?

Just, well, just...yes, it's all technical isn't it?

Back to ordinary life?

Yes, yes, yes.

And it doesn't stay in your mind, it doesn't seem...?

Oh well you may talk about it a little bit, but yes, yes. Talk about it afterwards. But I think that, I think the...both of those works were very rigourous and sort of, and very, in a way very brutal works, and, I mean they were...I mean the one about education was, or the one that, you know, had as its kind of, you know, I'm not saying it was about education at all, but you know, that had as its impetus the idea of, that educative idea or training idea. God! that was, you know, like...I just...you know, I really think it was just so inhuman really, as a notion. But then it was...you know, I suppose what I'm saying is that these ideas were sort of, like, being...they were very strong sort of notions about something that maybe, you know, one could have done something about it rather differently and perhaps less intensively or something.

You could have hit something else perhaps?

Yes, exactly, or whatever. Or it could be done in a different way.

Yes. So what made you think of that, are you...

What?

You must have realised that it would become very painful.

I didn't realise it was as traumatic as...I didn't think...I didn't know it was going to be as traumatic as it was, that's for sure. I met somebody not long ago who was the person who commissioned it, and he said he was absolutely, totally shocked by it.

Yes I'm just amazed you didn't anticipate it.

Well of course you know...

Have you ever been in fist-fights before?

Oh yes, when I was a kid I was always doing it, yes. Oh yes. Oh yes I was a terrible...yes, I was really...yes, I did a lot of that when I was a child. Like, well a lot of...I suppose when I was a child, where I lived a lot of other people did it too. [LAUGHS] It wasn't just me, you know.

Well I think most children do it.

I wasn't unusual in that, you know, it was just, you know, the sort of, that's how it was at the time.

So how long did you keep this up at the Ikon, physically?

Oh it didn't last long, I mean it took about half an hour, you know. I mean, oh no.

And did they explain it in any way, or did it simply happen and then, it was gone?

Yes, it happened, it was, you know, yes. There was an audience, and it...because it took, you know, it was movement through the building using the lift, then, you know, like, so it would...it's not that one person would try to get away from the other, it was just using the space as it were to simulate a kind of sense of the one stalking the other, you know, so it was all, totally artificial in that respect, and sort of engineered to be like that. You could say it was acting in that sense, but it was directed towards, you know... And then there would be a... So you do you approach someone you're going to hit?

Mm, I don't know.

Very difficult. I mean because, if you're going to smack a child, you know, it's...you know, it's sort of ritualised isn't it, it's sort of, you know, you go...you know, if you overdo it, you know. Or you do it out of anger and it's a gesture. But if you're going to do it, you know, and you have no... It's actually in the frame of the mind as an idea, it's just very difficult. And he couldn't do it really, but I could. Well I did, put it that way, I hit him much harder than he hit me.

So what was your age difference?

Well he would have been about 25 and I was then about 47.

Well I think we'll stop there for today, and...

What a terrible point to end on, ghastly works, yes.

We'll pick up again with.....

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

[Continuing the interview with Stuart Brisley on the 15th of November 1996 at this home in London.]

Now we're going to pick up at the point we left off, which you were a bit unhappy about with your rather acute confrontation in the performance in 1979.

Mm. It's a difficult time for me, because I think I was sort of coming to the end of a particular phase of working, and I had been working more or less exclusively in performance for probably about, I don't know, at that point probably about twelve years or something, maybe a bit less. And so, the idea of thinking that this might not be, you know, might not continue in the way that I had been sort of thinking about it was a difficult one to sort of come to terms with, and it took me, actually it took me a long time to try and sort it out, I don't think I...maybe I didn't ever sort it out but it took me a long time to sort of make a transference from working exclusively in performance to beginning to do other things. And so, I guess around about 1980 would have been, I would have been in the sort of like the full throes of that. I was beginning, I had started to take photographs. I was then living in Georgiana Street and I developed a project called the Georgiana Street Collection, and I originally thought of it probably around about 1979 as, that through the use of the camera I could collect objects which...objects in situ or representations of objects in situ which I regarded as sculpture. So, but maybe to precede that, when, after I left the Peterlee project and I came back to London, I mean I had been living in London all the time, but when I was back as it were, thinking about something new to do, I decided that anything that I did would have to be to do with where I lived, and where I lived happened to be, I arrived in Georgiana Street, which was a rather drab street between Camden Town and King's Cross, and it was divided by a street called Royal College Street, and I lived on the east side of Royal College Street, and there was a betting shop on the corner, then there ws a gap, then there was the little house that I lived in, and then there was the London Electricity Board. On the other side of the road was a waste site bounded by a 14-foot, roughly 14-foot, brick wall. And an abandoned building further up which was from the Fisheries Association. So it was a... And then there was York Way and after that was a kind of abandoned sort of railway shunting yard which seemed to go on forever. So it was like the end of somewhere, it was a bit like, it was a sort of... The other side of Georgiana Street were full of houses, but quite a lot of problem families living there, so it was a bit of a dead end in a way. And so when I decided that where I next was going to live, that was where I was going to work, it was going to be concerned with the idea of community, in effect

there wasn't a community. So when I stepped outside the door into the street it had a relatively sort of sparse and bare and somewhat I suppose, some people would think of it as being rather depressing. But I did meet people, and the people I met, the easiest, the ones that sort of I bumped into, were people who were homeless, because round the corner was a refuge for homeless people, and down the road of York Way was another one, and on the other side of Camden was Arlington House, an enormous one. So it was an area which was well served with refuges for homeless people, and Georgiana Street being how it was was a kind of route that they took between one refuge and another. And I met Mary Macalevy, who was...I actually see her still, I mean I don't necessarily speak to her but I see her still in Camden, she was homeless, and I met her in a park one day, she was lying on the ground and I picked her up. And it was a bit like being, it was a bit like picking up a crab, because, when I picked her up she grabbed my arm and wouldn't let go. This was about half-past 9 in the morning and she was rather drunk. And so I said, `Well where do you want to go?' And she said, `Oh I want to go to...' this particular place, I think it was St. Mungo's refuge, which happened to be right past my house, just round the corner. So we marched arm in arm, I was rather self-conscious about this at the time, to, I think it was the St. Mungo's refuge, and I sort of knocked on the door and somebody answered it and in went Mary Macalevy[ph]. Well from that point on we obviously knew each other. And she featured quite a lot in my thinking about the sort of work that I might do. And of course the others did as well, and through her I met other people. And so there was a kind of community that, it was a community that, you know, one would bump into incidentally, because it was an abandoned sort of site really, in a way. And that...so I started to take photographs of things in the street, objects in the street, things that were abandoned, and, I noticed, there was a piece of waste ground on Royal College Street, just before it crossed, just before Georgiana Street crossed it, and on this piece of waste ground there was a suitcase, and the suitcase, I watched that suitcase in a way for about eighteen months, and nothing happened, it just decayed, it just kind of sat there. But other things arrived and then they would go away again, I mean there were lots of bags of rubbish etcetera. And in the beginning of 1981 I was, or, I was invited to do a sort of, to do a retrospective at the ICA, and as part of that work I decided to concentrate on that particular site with the suitcase and the rubbish, the bags of rubbish which were deposited there, you know, sort of regularly. And other parts of the work involved other aspects of that environment, photographs I'd taken of chairs and settees and various other sort of objects that I found in the street. And I also at that point was beginning to develop sound texts or writing and then, writing texts for speaking and making sound tapes, some sound tapes of them, which I did for about eight years. And I saw this as a sort

of, in a way a way of thinking about imaginary performance, so it was a way of moving from using one's body to using a kind of radio space, a kind of imaginative space that radio, or wireless or that technology, sort of allows. There's a very interesting sort of imaginative space there that just by the use of sound you can project all kinds of imagery.

Where were they transmitted?

Well they weren't, but they were in galleries and things but, you know, that was one of the problems with it, but... So that was part of it as well, I'm just trying to lay out the, what this Georgiana project was about. And so, when I came to the actual work at the ICA there were sort of photographs of previous works; there was, I think there was a sound tape, there was a slide sound tape, what do you call it? I can't remember what they used to be called, slides and sound would be put together. I forget what it was called. Anyway, one of those. And then there was this big installation in the main space. And, I had the space for a month, and so what I decided to do was to... And in the space, to start off with I had 30 or 31 tables, wooden sort of collapsible tables, which is what I'd asked for, and then on the opening night there were, which was I'm sure terribly exciting for everyone, 31 tables and one bag of rubbish, not opened, which came from this site. So every day... No I also took the suitcase, so the suitcase was the first item to be placed in the space along with the tables and this one bag of rubbish that appeared on the opening night. So the next morning I went to the.....

<u>End of F5283 Side B</u>

F5284 Side A

[Continuing the tape with Stuart Brisley on the 15th of November 1996 at his home in London.]

So, the idea was that every day I would take one of these more or less sort of plastic shopping bags full of rubbish or whatever, stuff that people had thrown away onto this site and take it to the ICA and open it up and in a way, sort of, not exactly...sort of categorise what was in there and lay them out, lay them all out in order. But, at the same time I was hanging one table in the air up above the, from the ceiling. So by the time it got to maybe about the, I don't know, about the twelfth or the eleventh, twelfth or thirteenth or fourteenth day, there was a bit of a collision, because there could be all the material laid out on tables and then of course each table, as tables were being taken away and hung, so there came a point where there were fewer tables than were required, and then I had to use the floor. But also, out of these bags came clothing of various sorts, and bits of cloth and so on. So I began to lay the clothing, hang the clothing on lines, which were situated across the gallery. So you can imagine a kind of, a rather smelly sort of accumulation of rubbish which was then ordered, and the whole idea was that it was all potentially recyclable, it could all be used again, or should be used again. But, this was not...I mean there was an implication of that in the work but it wasn't the full intention. The idea was in a way to make a portrait or a representation of a particular sort of sense or a mode of living as found in those rubbish bags in that particular place of, which was sort of like very low income sort of more or less, tending towards looking like it was an abandoned area, and placing them in the ICA. And then I put a map on the wall which showed these two sites, and I drew a circle round both as one, the site of the ICA which included, you know, the Palace of Westminster etcetera. So you had a circle dealing with all of the sort of major institutions, Government and so forth, and then you had another circle which showed this sort of rather drab area, and here was the evidence of one placed in the middle of the other. And I suppose the argument of the work was sort of like, in a sense it was like a portrait or drawing attention to, you know, the conditions that these bags represented within a concept, within a context of well-being, and also within a context of where regulation and order and control, where, you know, Government was situated etcetera, one way or the other, institutions, you know, like, had some sort of bearing on this condition that I was showing, or trying to show. And of course the bags contained all kinds of everything, sort of like really rather horrendous. I mean so, the more, what one might regard as the more difficult or offensive materials I put in plastic bags or plastic folders as it were, so they were sealed, and all the other stuff

was just laid out, lots of paper, lots of tissue paper. Anything that was personal, like letters, I didn't use, I selected, I took them out, so that one only got sort of materials which had no sort of immediate or personal significance to anyone else, even though they'd been thrown away. Although one person did come to see, having found out what was going on, to see whether some of her letters were being shown, and of course they weren't. And it was...it was a rather interesting process, because it involved a lot of work, a lot of organisation, and at the same time a kind of performance, because people were coming in all the time, there was a lot of discussion, so that it was kind of like an integrated process of, with numbers of elements taking place simultaneously like that.

I mean, just, sort of, several questions. Was this spinning off the Peterlee idea of sort of...?

Yes it was.

Yes. But, did you ever think of literally involving this strange other community actively in this work?

No, no.

Why not?

Pardon?

Why not?

Well I wanted to make it, I wanted to...I wanted to make an art work, I didn't want to engage with a, I didn't want to have a kind of, you know, produce a model of, you know, sort of like social reform or anything like that, so, the fact that I knew some of them... Also one wouldn't know whether those people had thrown those bags anyway, whether, maybe they didn't throw the bag, maybe it was somebody, a lot of other people. One couldn't assume who the people were who threw the bags. I knew it wasn't me, because I don't...but who were they? And they weren't necessarily those people who were homeless. So there wasn't necessarily a direct connection between one body and another. And also, I didn't want to sort of like have a kind of, you know, which was quite prevalent, and maybe around about that time of, you know, sort of like, making social sort of projections as a modelling for some, I don't know,

possibly utopian reason, I wasn't interested in that at all. So I was only interested in sort of like a representation of some sort, of one set of given circumstances placed in the middle of another, and institutionalised and given the frame of art. And so it was as much a challenge to the notion of what is art, or not a challenge, it was a question really, as to, well, what constitutes an art? Could this constitute an art activity, or an activity that other people would regard as art? And the fact that it was in an institution like the ICA gave it a great sort of impetus to be seen like that, I guess, you know, because that's what one would expect to find. So, and then in the end the work was constructed in such a way that it definitely became what, you know, one would regard as an installation, right, at the very end, you know, it was on the last day, but it was kind of like finally fixed with the tables all hanging in the air, all the clothing hanging from the tables, and then underneath all the detritus as it were collected under that. And because of the way the, because it was very smelly there was an air, air conditioning, and so all the clothing was moving, was sort of like... And each table had items of male and female clothing, and so everything was just turning slowly. And so, it did become in the end sort of like what I would regard as a coherent image, whereas previous to that one could have, it was fractured and more open and not...and one, when as a member of the public one would move into it and become part of it; one wouldn't, you know, kind of look at it or see it as a, in a, I don't think see it as a totality. And I was in it as well. So it was more like a work in process but it didn't have, it was also open as a working process because there was a lot of discussion, a lot of activity and so on, and change.

Where did that activity come from, was that just people responding and...?

Yes.

To you, as well as...?

It was really interesting actually. I mean for example, I remember very, I remember Africans coming in and responding to it completely differently to Europeans. I mean you know, or Westerners, you know, people would come in and sort of gingerly move amongst it, you know. It was a bit sort of, you know, there were difficult areas. But the Africans tended to celebrate it, they really enjoyed it, they moved amongst it, they...you know, they...it was like a celebration to them, they liked it, it sort of...they liked being part...you know, related to it. It was very curious, really interesting, and probably quite revealing I suspect. Whereas, you know, like Westerns were much

more chary, you know, than...well because, you know, it had this...because there were elements in it that were difficult, very difficult.

What happened to it afterwards, what does one do with such things?

I just[??] threw it away.

Yes.

Well it's all now in reproductive form of course, you know, it's all photographed and so on, so that's the only, that's all there is of it. I mean it was never intended to be, you know, a permanent work in that sense, it was...

Did you put the rubbish in the bags? How did you select it?

Well no I didn't put the rubbish...

The bags were simply found with rubbish in?

No, I only I picked up the rubbish, I didn't know what was in them.

Oh I see.

I had no idea what was in them. It's amazing, there was a lot of money for example.

Really?

Yes.

Oh, laundered money, how interesting.

Well, you know, yes, money was in them. And lots of unlaundered items as well. Lots of bandages with blood and, and clothes that had been really burnt, badly burnt I remember. And then sort of, suits and dresses, shoes, cans, a loaf of bread, loads of tea bags, cat litter. All kinds of things.

I'm not surprised you had to seal it if it was cat litter.

These were...yes exactly, and human, and human excrement. So it was pretty amazingly difficult, and one just didn't know what... And so I cut the bag open and, you know, got...I quickly, once I had bumped into something like that, you know, forever after one was terribly careful. [LAUGHS] But each piece had to be, the whole idea was that each piece had to be given an attention and treated as though it was important, or had value. So it was, you know, like, very very difficult at times. And I, you know, from what I heard later, which is rather amusing I think, there were people in the ICA who took deep offence at this activity, and there were others who were very supportive of it, and apparently the union, whatever it was, had a meeting to decide whether they were going to allow this thing to continue or not, and by some few votes it was agreed that it should go on. I knew nothing about it.

I can't believe the ICA would appreciate anything. Interesting.

Yes, yes. And, also, I mean the thing that, I was, I suppose, sort of like, had some anxiety about was whether a health and safety officer would appear, because it wouldn't have passed any... But, you know, I mean it's really very interesting in relation to, well all this stuff is sitting, you know, out in the street, there it all is, I mean, and that was just such a tiny sample, you know, just a tiny, you know, kind of sample of what is lying around. It's just amazing. And you think of all that, all that stuff which could be recycled, you know, that is just lying fallow as it were everywhere. So I suppose it did have, you know, certain...it had certain sort of like, there were certain implications that came out of it, I think. So that... I suppose that sort...I was then, you know, I suppose there was an element of performance about it in the sense that, you know, I was in public doing things, but there was a lot of discussion, but then there had been discussion before in performances so it wasn't that different. But there was also kind of like a lot of material around which was necessary. So there were changes in the nature of the work at that point, and I suppose, you know, later on I went on to do more contained kind of objects which, I suppose you call them sculpture perhaps more than installations, and also some installations, so that was one kind of strand of development which this was I suppose showing, you know, from, you know, making performances where the attention would be on the human body and what was done to a broader, having a broader kind of like set of terms, and then moving where the body was, or a body was not present, that there were references to body, to the human body, in some of the works I made later. So there was a kind of, like, I could see, I suppose in retrospect, a kind of trajectory. But I wouldn't necessarily recognise it at the time, I could only say that in retrospect.

Who was the curator of the show?

Sandy Nairne.

Oh right.

And Yvonne Blaswick was assistant at the time. Parts of that show then travelled around. And so there were, in a way there were sort of two strands which, one was kind of thinking of performance as in an imaginary space, and the other was, you know, like moving more towards, I suppose, object-making, but I hadn't got there in any way, and I didn't know that that was where I was going either. It was, you know, I had no aim in that respect. And I suppose that after that, in terms of...in terms of objects or installations, the next one would have been, I had a show at something called the Lewis Johnstone Gallery, or Johnson Gallery, Lewis Johnson Gallery, in 1983 I think, and I made a...I had two Workmate benches, they're called Workmates, which were, I don't know if you know them.

I've got one.

Two Workmate benches. And I had a cage made which was sort of, if you can imagine sort of like a book on its spine, so it was kind of rather, very long but not so terribly wide, it was wider, it wasn't exactly in proportion to the book, it was a little bit wider than perhaps most books, but it had that sort of tendency. It was about 12 feet long as far as I remember, 11 feet or 12 feet long and about, the cage itself was about 4 feet high and it was about 20 inches, possible 2 feet wide. And in it hung 66 separate gloves filled with plaster, and painted actually with something called G4, which is a very powerful waterproofing agent used for sealing swimming pools, which I used a lot, I've used a lot since, and it has a brownish kind of, it's like a varnish, it has a slightly brownish tinge to it. And the idea behind this work was that, it was called `One Equals 66,666', so you would have to multiply 66,666 by 66, which takes you up to around about 4 million, which was the, roughly the level of unemployment in 1983, if one included, I don't know whether the Government would have given that number, it was about 3 million, some odd of that, and then there were, you know, those that didn't declare themselves, so you know, I came to the conclusion it would be roughly around about 4 million at the time. And the idea was that these 66 hands hung, and there was, they each had a label, and I can't remember what was on the label; one side of the label it said, `No Reason', and I can't remember what was

on the other. And the idea was that this kind of cage was supported by Workmates, so, and the Workmate is, you know, like, obviously has certain influence in terms of how one would conceive of the work. So there was this concept of unemployment really, concept of absence of work, held up by Workmates, which worked out to be the, you know, roughly the unemployment level at the time. And that's what I meant earlier by, you know, like there being human references rather than the body present, you know, like some sort of... And all I suppose, you know, like, because of the, you know, the change of, I mean a rather powerful change in Government from, you know, a sort of collapsing Labour administration to a very vibrant and aggressive Conservative policy which upset lots of, I suppose assumptions that we probably all had about how things were. But you know, I suppose I was thinking pretty much in relation to...much more directly about politics I suppose and its effects etcetera. And so this work in a way I think kind of like represents that sort of attitude that, you know, like what was the... I mean if one was going to say, right, you know, what is the function of an artist and so on, what is the purpose of art, for me it began to be very much more connected to making work that was connected to political, the sort of political ethos and its influences and its directing capacities. And then, very soon after that I was invited to take part in a show at the Camden Arts Centre called 1984, and...and I made another work which sort of in a way, sort of, doesn't follow the same argument but it's within the same sort of general area of thinking, and it was... When I went to the Camden Arts Centre you go in through the door and you turn right, and this corridor, I think it's now a bookshop or something, and then at the end of that there's a door, there's a doorway, and at night there are these grilles that close, you see them everywhere, in windows, you know, you can have them in houses, they're sort of, they're like that, cross...

Sort of spandex.

They're expanding and contracting. And I read `1984' again as part of the, you know, if one's going to be in 1984 one perhaps should read the book again. And I came up, and I was getting pretty close to the exhibition and I was sort of like not entirely sure what I was going to do. And so I went there again to the gallery and had a look around and I saw these gates, and then I realised what I wanted to do, which was to, excuse me while I move, right? I took the...in front...at that particular time in front of those gates was a wall, as part of, it was part of a previous exhibition, and it was about 4 feet in front of the doorway along this wide corridor from the entrance, and when you looked at it from the doorway side you couldn't see the door, so you had to go around the sides like that. So, what I decided to do was to put a mirror on the

other side of that wall and then have the gates closed, and then have a long kind of cheese type, slice of cheese type space that went back about 20 feet to a point, and with an enclosed top, the same, about 8 feet tall, maybe 10 feet tall, I can't remember. And then, in the bottom of this cheese shape, slice of cheese shape, there was a lot of clothing was laid, and a lamp was hung right in the back of this shape, inside, with a 500 watt light which came directly back towards you as you looked in. So that what happened was that you, well what should have happened, I think it did happen, was you went round these sides into this tight space with the mirror and you were confronted with this light and underneath were all, was this layer of clothes, and it was...and then when you...you looked round, you could only see, you could see yourself in relation to everything, so you were put into the middle of it. And this was something that I began, I was then developing, making works where there was no performer, but the viewer was placed in the centre of the work as it were, or fixed in some way in the work. So that the implication was that they were in a way part of it, they completed the work. And the idea was that this light was kind of like, had in my mind connections to the idea of ideology, you know, kind of ideological, it's like Big Brother and all of that, so this horrible lamp looking straight at you, sort of in a way it was a bit like a rabbit before headlights, you know, it was a bit like that, but at the same time there was the image of you behind. So you were caught in this kind of beam of ideological power, and underneath was, you know, a sort of human level which was clothing, layers of sort of human level running underneath it. Subsequently that work I adapted, and I used, I dropped the mirror and, because the shadow of the lamp, the shadow of any person standing in front of the light could be reflected against the wall. And I also dropped the idea of an extra wall so that the cheese, the slice of cheese thing became freestanding. It had its own grid which was different to the actual grid of the thing, but it was a sort of double grid so it had a moiré pattern to it. And the lamp stayed in the same place; the roof went down at an angle slightly, so that, you know, you felt this thing getting... And the thing was placed in a particular position relative to the wall. And that was... But that piece was, it travelled around in another show I had in 1986 and then it was bought by the Tate, which meant we had to then build it again so that it would be really permanent. And they showed it last year and it was, it was rather interesting because I hadn't seen it for a hell of a long time, and I remember, you know, how, well, you know, they were very particular about, you know, positioning and so on, of this thing and to get it right, and when I saw it it was exactly as I had sort of intended it, so I was rather pleased, it worked.

Oh, marvellous. Who were your sort of colleagues at that time? Were you still teaching?

Yes, yes I was. Colleagues, wow! I don't know when Reg Butler left the Slade, but he was in charge of sculpture. He probably would have been there. Keith Vaughan probably was still being around, and he would have been working there. Lawrence Gowing would have been Professor in charge of the Slade at the time. Michael Moon would have been in charge of Painting. John Hoyland would have been there.

How did that older generation respond to your work?

Well Reg Butler was always very...really, I've got...you know how you have regrets about things? I always regret I didn't talk more to Reg Butler because, I think I was probably too shy or something, I don't know what it was. But yes, he was always really interested in what I was doing. Lawrence Gowing was always, was very supportive and interested in what I was doing. People of my own generation weren't so much, you know, and we were all very friendly but, you know, there were lots of rivalries, and there was a lot of, people, I think a lot of artists didn't, were not...found it difficult probably, in some way.

Well it was a funny time, the Eighties, wasn't it, with sort of painting coming back and all kinds of confusion.

The early Eighties, yes. Well during the late Seventies as well.

Yes.

Yes, late Seventies, early Eighties. But that's always, that's pretty continuous I think, you know. Although, you know, now of course it's different because we've all got old, and you know, it's different, we don't...you know, but it used to be rather raw, you know.

Well I want to pick you up on that but I can see this tape running out.

Yes.

I mean I would be interested to ask you literally how your work was placed amongst other work at the time. I mean were lots of other people exploring the same ideas, or were you very much on your own?

No, I don't think I was on my own particularly, no. And it's difficult because one always has the illusion.....

End of F5284 Side A

F5284 Side B

[Continuing the interview with Stuart Brisley on the 15th of November 1996. Tape Twelve Side B.]

Sorry, we rather lost ourselves at the end of Side A. I just wanted to get the sense of, I suppose a kind of aura in the art world at that time, and you know, how your work, I suppose how energetic your work was within visual dialogues in that period.

Well I think, I mean towards the end of the Seventies, and then I suppose into the early Eighties... I don't think I'd ever been, was ever sort of really regarded...I think I was always regarded on the periphery really, as a sort of peripheral figure, but given certain sorts of situations I was sort of brought into, you know, into a more central role every so often, you know, institutionally, I suppose, you know. But not so much in Britain, rather more, for example I was in the Documenta in 1977 I think it was, and I think out of that came, you know, I became, I was known in Germany and other, and I was invited to Australia and... So there was a sort of international connection at the time that doesn't exist any more but it did then. And not so much a kind of, you know, a kind of...I didn't have so much a central position in London, and I think that has got something to do with the nature of the work, what the, you know, how the work...not my personal work but how that kind of work was seen and related to. And I think it... And it's also partly to do with me as well, you know, like how I saw myself in relation to all of this. So, I felt, and I still feel, you know, that I've had a stronger kind of involvement abroad with interested parties than I have had here.

I mean does that worry you, or please you?

No it doesn't at all, you know. I mean, you know, because I think the circumstances here are sort of like so deeply reactionary to start off with, and that, you know, like the condition of art as it is actually sort of institutionally directed is by and large very centralised and sort of, that the peripheral hardly, the peripheral which is left by that, because it's not necessarily the peripheral elsewhere, it just happens to be the peripheral here, you know, like, is left to sort of get on with itself in a way, and I think there's a strong connection between, you know, like the commercial interests and institutional interests, museums, and that if you are not part of that, then you know, you really are, you know, outside it. And that's been my position, not exclusively but for long periods of time. And so, but amongst artists and others, you know, that kind of position has, you know, like, it's been neither here nor there, you

know, I've had people that have related to what I've done, people who have been very interested, or not, you know, as is the case. You know, so I don't feel...I have never felt...I have never felt part of it but I've never felt...I've never felt, you know, excluded, because I've never really felt that my position was anything other than that which I have also produced.

So you don't sort of see any need to re-position yourself?

Well yes, every so often, yes. Oh yes, absolutely. I don't think things remain static, and also, you know, the nature of my work has changed a lot, you know, in the... I mean subjects probably remain the same but the way of approaching has changed quite a lot. Certainly from, maybe all the time but certainly from the late Seventies through, and it still is. And also, you know, there are layers and layers of artists, you know, like you...it's like an enormous sort of dung heap isn't it, in a way, you know, and...

A very nice analogy. [LAUGHS]

[LAUGHS] It is, you know, and you know, and, you know, like what gets put on top is more recent, you know, and it's, you know, there's a hell of a lot of steaming that is coming up from underneath and, you know, like, so, the visual part of it is quite rightly probably that which is newer, younger, you know, regardless of whether it's better, worse, more or less radical or whatever, it's just the nature of events. So I think as you get older so there is a loss of edge as it were, you know, in terms of how one is looked at, because the edge is going to be somewhere else and you know, one has to learn to live with that, you know. And different people take it differently, right? Swallow that pill. [LAUGHS] I mean I think it is a difficult thing to do, and you know, like I think also that, you know, like being...I doubt if there is any artist alive who is not influenced by, you know, kind of public support, you know, public perceptions, celebration or notoriety, and I think all of this actually sort of influences the way artists actually behave and how they make their work.

I mean which ones are you vulnerable to?

Probably all of them I think, you know. Certainly vulnerable to criticism, you know, I mean I think criticism... I think, it's always very difficult, I mean I think you have to...I mean this for me, I always find myself affected by criticism, and then I have to sort of...because I have to absorb it, and then digest it and then come to some terms

with it, you know, whatever it is. And I suppose the only things that have made me sort of perpetually angry are when people tell lies.

Do you mean inaccuracies, or lies?

I mean lies.

Right.

Yes.

You should be able to give me an example.

[LAUGHS] Well I'll give you an example of someone who, when I did some work, I'm not going to tell you who it was, somebody who is now a very eminent critic and writer went to the Documenta 6 I think it was, no 9, whatever number I was in in 1977, and I had actually, there was a map which described where all the artists were going to be, and when I arrived there in June, I think I might have mentioned it earlier on the tape, where I was going to be couldn't be because Walter de Maria had built... So I had to go somewhere else, which was out of site and in a different place. This English critic reviewed my work and described it, had nothing to do with what I did, he merely sort of made it up as though it were one of the things he might have seen in the past, and it was a quite different piece, and he reviewed it as though it were in the position that it was originally in. So he made a real faux pas.

He wasn't there.

He wasn't there, that's right.

Blimey.

And it was a real...

It's very worrying.

And it was a real put-down. So it was obvious, you know. Now I think, I regard that as being sort of pretty nasty really.

That's sloppy.

Yes, exactly. And you know, so what does it mean, you know? So things like that I don't, I'm not too appreciative of. Janet Daley used to sort of use me as a kind of whipping boy in the Seventies in the `Guardian', but I see she's even gone further to write. [LAUGHS] And it's because her husband, Anthony Daley, had some, I think he had some sort of an organisation that was concerned with figurative art and was, he was very active in... So you know, there are people who always have interests at stake, you know, when they do these sorts of things. Peter Fuller was another one. And then there were people who were, you know, like very supportive, you know. Waldemar Januszczak was very supportive of my work over a period of time, as a critic, you know. So, I mean to come back to your question, I think criticism always has its effects. I think it's naive to think it doesn't.

Yes, but I would have said as an art historian that, you know, you're in a vastly more secure place than a lot of other artists in the sense that there are, you know, a number of critical readings that people can make of your work that would keep them busy for years in ways that other work, you know, simply won't be addressed.

Yes.

I mean, that's one question I would be quite interested in actually. I mean, to what extent are you aware of art historical sort of processes? Do you ever, you know, think about that when you're doing your work?

No, not at all. No I don't, no.

This is probably a good idea.

Well, you know... [LAUGHS]

Would one want to know what they're up to? [LAUGHS]

No no I'm not. I can't. I mean, I'm not. Maybe I should be, I don't know. I mean, it depends what you mean by that in a way, I mean I certainly... No I'm not really, I mean I just have certain ideas that I have to try and...I have to try and resolve, and that's bad enough, that's difficult enough, you know, trying to do it. And...

I'm just conscious, there are artists working in the sort of, you know, conceptual, slightly political territory that you're in that are extremely conscious of those discourses that, you know...

No I'm not at all, no, because I'm sort of, I...I mean I don't want to sort of make some sort of assumptions about how I am, because there could well be some sort of conceit, you know. But I think I have...but having said that I'll go and do it, because I think I have no...I don't seem to have much confidence in social societal structures, and I don't think that necessarily comes from having, you know, sort of, some sort of alternative beliefs in something else. I think, I've come to the conclusion that it's a sort of, it's just a general sort of scepticism. So I'm sort of, I suppose in a way I'm much...I am happiest in the margins in a way; I'm unhappiest when I am kind of, sort of in a way focused upon, you know, from a centre of some sort. So that means that, you know, like, you know, one's role or position or, you know, one's position as an artist is, you know, is this going to be as it's going to be? Either there or not there.

I mean, do you see art as truly, you know, active, or productive?

Well I'm beginning to see it much, I see it much more as being sort of like, much more... I see it much less now as being active; I have seen it as being, you know, like very, necessarily active, and now I don't see it like that, in the same...I've changed. Maybe my views have broadened in some way, you know, because I'm now making works which are...and I know from the very last thing that I did, you know, like how...I mean if one can use, if one can use shall we say certain physical gestures in terms of making art, as a sort of an analogy for this, you know, that, at one stage a gesture would have left a mark which looked energetic and full of energy, and now I always want to cover it over to show that it is only a representation, that it is not actually actively energising in itself, there and then, but it is actually a sort of reproduction and therefore it's a concept and one has to think about it. So it moves away from the idea of being active and energetic and is much more now concerned with a kind of meditative consideration of the implications of it, you know. Is that a...you follow what I'm saying?

Mm.

Yes.

I mean that does presuppose always an educated audience.

Yes it does.

Which could be quite different to, say, those, you know, performance moments earlier when...

Yes it does.

Thinking of your chairs, those people standing up and being empowered for one minute.

Yes, yes quite, I mean it's completely different, that's right.

Do you ever see yourself going back to that more direct form, or...?

Well I will next Monday.

Oh yes?

[LAUGHS] Yes.

What's happening next Monday?

I'm doing a performance next Monday.

Are you?

Yes, yes.

Oh, whereabouts?

In Darlington. It's part of that, you know, it's the end of the Northern Arts Visual whatever it is, you know, they've had a six-month, what do you call it, programme of the arts, visual arts, and this is part of that. So yes, I mean, it'll be interesting I think.

And this is a unique historic opportunity for me I have to say. [LAUGHS] Tell us what you're going to do, how you feel about it.

Well... Well I don't know how I feel about it, I feel worried about it if that's... It's a big room and there are carpet squares on the floor. I mean I selected this room, I mean I'm not saying...

This is the Arts Centre in Darlington?

Yes, it's a big, huge space, huge building, I don't know if you've been there but it's big, and it's one of these rooms that they use. It's just big. It's got these squares of carpets in it I seem to remember. And, so what I've got is, I've got two things. One is, I'm continuing... The last performance I did, the last two performances I did involved a text related to the cabbala and how, and we've talked about this, how nothing becomes something. Well, I reversed that and so it is now something becomes nothing; it's not how nothing becomes something. And so it's sort of the, it's the sort of deconstruction of reality as it were to a point where there's, you know, what are you faced with? You're faced with a sort of void in a way. So there's that, which I will use almost as a counterpoint to other activities, so it'll be almost like a series of interludes where this would be read, very seriously, you know, very kind of, maybe pompously, you know, very...with a certain profundity. The implication being that this is really very serious, right? And then there would be a whole series of other actions which also connect to local events. Now I don't quite know what they're going to be yet but I've got loads of `Northern Echoes', all of which actually...and so there's going to be news of Darlington, so, I'm going to be... Into this sort of philosophical argument about the reality will come sort of like day-to-day information, and there will be a series of actions made by me as well which won't have any rationality to them, which will be a third element in the work. And I've got three buckets, a broom, some black and white paint and a lot of plastic to put on the floor. So I'll get very dirty, painted, I shall become a black and white... As this image, as reality sort of, as the philosophical reversed statements move towards nothing, so I'm going to become more one-dimensional or two-dimensional, three, but you know, black and white basically. [LAUGHS]

Two-tone.

Two-tone, possibly grey at the end, right. And so, this is...I can't...I couldn't be any clearer about it than that. There will be quite a lot of talking in it I expect, because I normally do. Or it could be in silent. But the one after that, I'm going to do another one, is going to be completely silent, but, and I know what that's going to...that's...

So, and so I am still making those kinds of activities, I'm still involved in performance, but it's, you know, it's just one thing amongst others.

How did that come about?

What, doing it?

Mm.

People invite me to, so I say yes. I mean I never...

What do they say, `Come and do a performance'?

Yes, they say, `Would you like to do a performance?' And somebody said to me, `Would you like to do a performance in my house?' And I said yes. And somebody else said, `Would you like to do a performance at the Museum of Modern Art in Helsinki?' And I said yes. You know, I've never actually, you know, said, `I want to do a performance. I am not going to find out...' I must have done at some point, but you know, I don't...I've never sort of done that, for some... Maybe I should have but I never have. So if something comes up... And I'll usually say yes, if it's, you know, if I think it's interesting, because it usually is interesting. So the idea of doing something, you know, in a private house is really very interesting to me.

I mean, when was that, was that...?

No it is, it's going to be.

Is it?

It's going to be in December, yes.

Can I be invited?

Yes you can actually. I'm going to sort of make up a guest list next week, so, would you like to be invited?

Yes please.

OK.

I feel of all people who should see you doing performance I must be the one. [LAUGHS]

Yes. So that will be, that will probably be silent, I think. It'll be really different from the one in Darlington, which is different from the one I did before. I mean I...maybe I've been doing them maybe once a year, once every two years, but recently I've had a lot of invitations, you know, so I'm doing one in New York in April, and another one, as I say, in Helsinki, but that's going to be more...that's going to be more...that's going to be a combination of performance, installation and painting, which, so that has a different, that also has a different sort of like set of components to it.

Have you ever painted in public?

Yes, but not...not in the way that the public would perceive that this is somebody making painting, you know. I've actually used paint, I've used paint quite a lot, but you know, I mean I think to paint in public suggests that, you know, there's some sort of idea about making a painting, which has not been the case.

I'm very conscious across your career that your art has not been the kind that one can retain in the form in which it initially appeared. Has that been a deliberate strategy?

Yes it has been for a long time, but I've changed that now because I'm making painting, you know, I'm doing lots of things which can be retained in their original... Well, except that they are in themselves, or, they are in a sense original but it's almost like the argument has shifted because what they are made up of are a series of illusions anyway. I mean like photographs or photographs of photographs or xeroxes of, you know... And I've also, you know, kind of in a way, like I've made one or two works which refer back to the Euston Road school for example, and...

In what way?

Well, I took a photograph of Prince...out of a newspaper I found a photograph of Prince Charles, I wanted to do...I've done some work on the royalty quite recently, and found this photograph of Prince Charles and then I xeroxed it several times, and the Xerox machine produces, produced, because it wasn't a terribly good one, certain marks, this was black and white. And then I made a painting of Prince Charles, and

some of these marks looked like the kinds of marks that Coldstream might have made, you know, the idea of measurement and... So this painting is sort of like a complete...it's like anti-painting in a way, you know, in a traditional sense, you know, the subject wasn't there, it's a result of reproductions of reproductions. The process is completely bogus, it's actually, it's actually a kind of, a sort of representing of what a machine does to an image, or what that particular machine did to an image, and at the same time it has a sort of reference back to, you know, a mode of painting which is very particular, and has a sort of philosophical base to it etcetera. So it's a kind of parody of the whole thing, it seems to me. Although, I mean it wasn't intended as, yes, it is a sort of parody. And the other interesting thing about that was the way in which the paint, which was something I found very odd, how by taking these reproductions of reproductions of reproductions and then painting them, the paint, not, just the paint itself seemed to suggest that one had been in front of someone, you know, that I'd actually had Prince Charles as a... It's very curious.

But were you painting onto the Xerox paper or were you reproducing the image on the Xerox?

No no, no no, no, I just, I actually just paint it, there is the Xerox, here is the painting.

I think that is what painting always does though; why did that surprise you?

What?

That suddenly being there.

Well perhaps because, maybe when I was painting before I didn't have that experience or didn't...and I quickly got... I mean I studied as a painter for a long time but you know, like, part of the time was getting out of it, you know, moving beyond the frame of painting and therefore, I suppose I'm learning things about painting now that maybe lots of people knew much earlier on in their lives than me. So, that was a kind of, if you like a kind of, an insight of some sort, or, you know, a sense of something that I hadn't had before, because I'd never, I'd never painted...I'd never painted before... When I'd painted before and I was painting realistically, it was always, there was something in front, and I could not have conceived of there not being, it would not have been possible. Now, I mean we're talking about forty years' difference or whatever it is, it's, you know, that actually has no significance any more, being in front of or not being in front of, and therefore, you know, therefore how the paint

works, you know, perhaps... Because that's where the reality is as it were, or, rather than in the...or when I mean reality, that's where the material aspect of it is, rather than in, you know, looking at somebody across, you know, a room, or whatever.

Yes.

So, you know, so the paint, and the paint, if it's connected to something as particular as a reproduction, you know, then the quality of the paint as it were becomes all the more apparent in contrast to this very thin, you know, reproduction, I think.

Do you feel any regret when you're kind of exploring your parody, at what has been lost historically if you know what I mean, at this point, in a lot of art?

How do you mean?

I mean just that whole different idea of the business of representation, that you know, your representation of Prince Charles is containing all kinds of subversive contexts that would never have been in a royal portrait of the 1950s for example.

No quite.

You know, you were starting...

Yes.

Are you glad or sad?

Well I haven't though to fit. I mean I just think it...you know, one couldn't possibly do it another way, you know. The thing is that... And I have thought about that, that, if I want to deal with issues of the monarchy, or any important person, the process by which one gets into their presence in order to do this is a filtered process, and so therefore I'm never going to make it, right? There is no way I'm ever going to get in there because my ideas etcetera etcetera, the way my work has been, would preclude it straight away, and therefore the only way that I can actually have an engagement is the same way that other people do, that is through, you know, sort of popular and public imagery, and the newspaper is the most obvious. So I am like everyman, you know, kind of like reading the newspaper, and then I may find an image that I want to deal with in one way or another. And then it moves into a different space as it were,

you know, when I paint it, it moves out of that sort of popular or public arena and it becomes private, or much more private, until it gets back into public again. But it gets back into public in a different way altogether where there is a very limited and specific audience. So it's a route like that. And so, the fact that I want to paint the monarchy, or, I don't know that I want to paint the monarchy now but I have painted the monarchy, some members of the monarchy, is actually connected not to, you know, any sort of mystical celebration of them, but it's to do with the way the institution is imploding, and therefore...and because of that and maybe as part, and also partly because it's the media that's actually contributing to this implosion, that one gets images coming through, that one can collect images. You buy them in a newspaper or magazines or whatever. So, it's quite appropriate that.....

End of F5284 Side B

F5285 Side A

[Continuing the tape with Stuart Brisley on the 15th of November 1996.]

Well I think we're going to whip you back from 1996.

Whenever it was, yes.

Back to 1983, and move on from there.

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Right, so, 1984, I think I described that work, and I was continuing to make sound works which involved voice and... One of the things I was trying to do was to sort of, try and find, or try and make sounds that were associated with the text, which had the same, had a similar emotional weight or tension as what I thought the text had.

And what were the texts?

Well they were all kinds of things. I mean one in particular I remember was, I read a biography of Goebbels by his wife, and, I think it was by his wife, and also at the same time, at that period, some...that's probably middle Eighties somewhere, I can't tell you the year, but early to middle Eighties. And somebody gave me, somebody talked to me about a paper they had received which was an interpretation of the British nationalities in the Immigration Act interpreted in computer language. So, I put these two things together, you know, like this; there was a certain, there were certain statements by Goebbels about race and nationality and so on, and I associated this with the British Immigration and natural...and whatever it is, Act. And so the text was sort of a construction of these two pieces of material and maybe some other bits as well, and then they would be interspersed with sounds that I thought had, or I felt had a sort of weight that would be equivalent to parts of the text. So you would get almost like a counterpointing of sound and text, and also, I used quite a lot of tracks. So, I became actually quite proficient as a sound recorder, but probably doing all the wrong things, because I sort of learnt how to do it myself, got my own equipment, built it up. And so there would be maybe four or five voices saying the same text at certain times, maybe just one voice, then maybe there would be, you know, an underlying sort of heavy sound which would then, you know, the voice would stop, a voice would stop and then the sound would take over and then it would... So there was sort of interplaying of sort of sounds which sort of suggested emotions in some

way. You can't be specific about that obviously but, you know, you can...I mean it's a bit like Howard Hodgkin, you know, remembering emotions and, you know, one can't be specific, but you know, one...there is something that you can identify at some point and saying, well there is, you know, this connects with this in some way. So my work was a lot about that, I did a lot of those - well, probably about ten. And then, the last one I made, I didn't ever finish, was because, it was called `Paradise Street' and it was because Mary Macalevy, my friend who I mentioned before, said to me one day in the autumn, `I'm getting very cold, and if only I could get to Paradise Street in Oxford I'd be all right.' And so, rather stupidly I said to her, `Well, it so happens that I'm going to Oxford tomorrow. If you want to go to Paradise Street you can. But do you really want to go?' `Oh, I really want to go to Paradise Street because I can stay the winter in the place there and it'll be all right.' Anyway, she didn't go to Paradise Street. And I then made a tape, I started to make a tape on Paradise Street, and then somebody stole the equipment, and I was so kind of, completely fed up with the whole thing, because in order to replace all of that, it was not about insurance, you had to, you know, because there were bits and pieces and, you know, it would have taken me ages to have got it all back together, that I stopped doing it, I just stopped it. So it had an abrupt and unfortunate ending, otherwise I'd probably still be, you know, using that. And I was writing a lot at that time, in the Eighties, doing a lot of writing, sort of fiction but a sort of fiction related on that...a sort of...they're like narratives but they're not stories, and they are based on things seen but they are not sort of objective in any way. And they were written for speaking and not reading, and so they were actually written as imaginary performance pieces which could be played, and that's how I thought of them. And I also thought, I got very much involved with this idea of radio space, what I call radio space, you know, when you close your eyes and you hear a voice or you hear...and, you know, you can imagine...you know, sort of like, you construct the visual art work inside your head, you know. I mean it's a kind of, it's a really very fascinating sort of area to operate in. So that sort of came to an end. And about 1980...so in 1985/1984, 3, 2, back to 1, maybe even to 1987 I was doing all that. 1987 I had another big show which started at the Third Eye in Scotland in Glasgow and then went to the Serpentine and then travelled to various other places including Belfast and Gateshead and Derry in Ireland, and I was having quite strong connections with Derry at the time through Declan McGonagle, who was running the Orchard Gallery.

You're going to have to spell that.

Pardon? What?

Declan McGonagle.

Oh Declan McGonagle. D-E-C-L-A-N, McGonagle, well it would be M-C, or M-A-C, G-O-N-A-G-L-E, Declan McGonagle. So, and the show was called the Georgiana Collection, because it was almost like a compilation of all of those things that I had started to do when I moved into Georgiana Street about 1978 when I began to think, this is where, if you remember, where I step outside the doors, this is going to be the subject of my work, and it did, and the outcome was this show to a certain extent, although there were other pieces in it, but didn't directly connect to it. And this show involved various sort of, I mean the combination, I don't...it's difficult to describe what they were because they...they all involved at that time thinking of the viewer as the centre, taking the central position in relation to the environment, and thereby devising the objects in space so that this would happen, and the piece that I described in the Camden Arts Centre for 1984 was typical of that period. And I did another large piece which was based on a photograph of Mairead Farrell, Mairead, M-A-I-R-E-A-D, Farrell, F-A-R-R-E-L-L, who was a member of the IRA and had been in the dirty protest in the Seventies and was subsequently killed in Gibraltar in 1988. So I did a piece of work which was, and it was also very much consciously counterpointing Richard Hamilton's painting called `The Citizen', if you remember, of, well this was a xeroxed image of Mairead Farrell, allegedly taken, the photograph taken illegally in Armagh jail, when she was on the dirty protest, and it shows this figure standing behind a bed. It's quite wide photograph but I just brought it right down to a very small section. And she stands sort of quite far back and with the bed in front - or, off to the side as it were. And, it's like the female equivalent. And I reproduced this photograph five times and put a big sort of cage in front of it, a big metal cage, 24 feet long I seem to remember, and then there was another object at the back and one took one's position in relation to it and you look through the cage to the other side to see this sort of, this dark reproduced imagery of this person. And the interesting thing about that image was the way in which this person was quite androgynous, you know, and it was... So one had the sort of sense of, you know, what happens in jail I suppose; I don't know whether it happens more to men or women, but certainly she... Initially it's difficult to tell what sex she is, it's quite androgynous. So, and I saw it very much in...in a sense in association with `The Citizen', although, you know, I've got certain reservations about aspects of `The Citizen' I must say, as a work, and, you know, also the notion of heroisation, you know, that comes with it, which of course the IRA seemed to have strategised, you know, by, you know, these Jesus type figures in blankets, I mean is guaranteed to, you

know...then the response and then the sort of heroisation of that in an individual image. And I wanted to sort of reproduce this image so that it...so that it would...and also it's not a painting, it's not unique, it's very reproducible, and this figure is pushed back, you know, so that you get a...have an entirely different sort of sense of it as an image. And it's a woman, which was very, which was really critical. Whether the fact that it's about Mairead Farrell is not critical, could have been any other, could have been any person, you know... I mean it didn't have to be somebody from the IRA, it could have been somebody else, but it would have to have been somebody who regarded themselves as a political prisoner and not a criminal; it could have been from the Protestant side if there were any who were in jail, you know; the fact that it was an IRA person is not in itself significant. But the fact that it was about the Irish situation was. So, that was rather, that was an interesting work, that was an important work for me I suppose. And then there were also photographs, photographs of the street and so forth around Georgiana Street with photographs of the furniture that were found in the street, you know, settees and kind of armchairs and, you know, various other things, which... And I got this extraordinary impression at one point when I was...and I used to walk on the canal a lot which is just by, just goes underneath Georgiana Street at a certain point, that, there was no sense of inside and outside, you know, not for me but there seemed to be for the... You know, you'd find people sitting in armchairs in the street and you'd find people sitting in settees; it's almost as though, with those homeless people, you know, they weren't the ones who threw out the furniture but they were the ones who used it. So there was a very odd sense of, well of this sort of interrelationship between what is outside and what is inside. And I can remember even in, along the canal sort of like beds and things, you know, homeless people sleeping in the summer, you know, like, really so...I mean it's...I mean there's a sort of strange sense of breakdown, you know, a very odd... So all of that was in this show. And it travelled around, and that was that I suppose.

I remember you referring to the sort of Georgiana Collection as your own type of institution.

Yes. Because I...because of the difficulties I'd had in Peterlee I...I don't know why I thought of doing another project. When I came back to London I decided that it would be what I'd said it would be, and then I decided that I would invent an institution, or I would construct a mythical institution, and that's how this Georgiana Collection idea came about, that it was... So I had worked for the Collection as it were. And, I didn't make too big a thing of it but that's, you know, I mean that's how this show actually came about; it was the institution's exhibition as it were.

So how did you introduce your home-made institution as it were to the institution that was to show it, did you say? Did you explain this sort of...?

Well it took a long time for this show to...I mean it took three years for this thing to sort of come about, you know, how these things are, it took a hell of a long time. And it was going to be one thing and then another, you know, there was all...and then finally it was fixed. And so, you know, I suppose the idea evolved along with the negotiations, which... [LAUGHS] And there was also somebody else, Lewis Johnstone...Paul Johnstone, who, the gallery, Lewis Johnstone came to an end, but Paul Johnstone wanted to continue working, and so he had a small number of artists he worked and he worked with me, and so together we kind of constructed this proposal, and then sort of followed it through. So, it's difficult to say, you know, how was it received, because... It obviously in the end was accepted; I think there were lots of, there were lots of other kind of like things going on, not directly related to it, to do with the Serpentine which made it a long-winded affair, you know, which was not a bad thing, I've always found in the end, you know. I mean like, the show I've just had at South London took something like three years to come about, and was postponed something like four times, and in the end it was greatly to my advantage, I think, that it was, because if it had been earlier I don't think I would have had the work, you know.

Well the whole idea of institution has a formal aspect, but also a kind of longlasting aspect.

Yes, well this actually only lasted a short time; it only existed insofar as there was a collection, and there isn't, because most of it is now in France, you know, a lot of the photographic work was sold to France later on, and so, if I was asked, you know, `Can you put together the Georgiana Collection?' I couldn't. Some things have been destroyed, and some things are in public collections, and that's it, you know. One or two photographs are in private collections.

I mean just in terms of, this is the art historian speaking, have you got, you've got a complete record of it, have you?

No, I don't think so. Sort of.

Right. And what about...

I mean you know, when I say, you know, I didn't take it...I didn't sort of harden it up, you know, as a concept and say... I used it as a way of, I used the idea as a way of being able to work, because...

To formalise that work?

What's happened is that, then I had a strong sense of working in public and making, you know... And since then, or, you know, I've slowly moved to being able to work in private without having a...and that's actually quite important, that distinction, that one's behaviour undoubtedly changes, and at that point I was, you know, thinking very much of work as a public artist, having no commercial connections, you know, operating publicly, was connected probably to the Welfare State, to, you know, public art centres and all...you know, the way in which the State actually supported the arts. And so I think it was a concept that was connected to all of that, you know, that's all...although we still have the residue of that, that's largely dried up as a kind of engaging idea, and you know, like, so, it's not that I've sort of been a slave to that, but there's no doubt about it that there's a connection between the demise of all of that and me working privately.

I mean, do you mean the demise of State funding for the arts?

Yes, and also I, because... It's deeper than that because it's also related to sort of ideas of socialism, and you know, like what is the purpose of art? And you know, that has gone completely as a notion. Maybe it was an illusion before, but you know, there was an aspect of that, and one could actually be conscious of that without it being absurd. Now, I mean I'm talking rather superficially about this, or on the surface, because that's where it was, it wasn't any deeper, and now, you know, that is completely gone and therefore the components which would make up the context where one would want to be working publicly in this way don't exist. There may be others which, about working publicly, but I have no interest in them. So you know, that leaves me either, you know, that leaves me in a position to work privately. So I continue to have some sort of connections to the idea of public by choosing subjects which I think are of public interest, but the mechanisms, the means of operating have become rearguard rather than avant-garde, put it that way, if that isn't too crude a way of describing it. And so, because I've also come to a conclusion that the sort of avant-garde is very reactionary anyway, so the only sort of credible position for me, you know, in terms of how I think is actually to operate in terms of some sort of resistance

to all of that. And hence I have to start thinking about what sort of language to use which doesn't fall into, you know, sort of avant positions. Painting becomes, you know, figuration becomes a way of trying to deal with this, this is what I'm trying to do, amongst other things.

I must admit, just sort of looking at it as an outsider at, you know, where you've shown in Britain and who you've been supported by, in some ways I think you have been quite well supported by...

Yes, I wouldn't deny it. I wouldn't deny it.

Yes. But you just feel a change?

Oh, I think, you know, it's not about not being supported or being supported; it's actually about a much broader issue of, you know, the way in which, you know, certain ideas have just gone out of the picture altogether. So I am responding beyond the, you know, support - not support for institutional things, to something else, right, which is, like, I guess you could say that if you're a socialist, you know, like what the hell does it mean, you know? Well, it doesn't mean anything particularly by the feel of it. But one couldn't have said that, you know, fifteen years ago; one would have said, well it means this this and this, and this is what I'm trying to do, blah blah and blah. Now you can't possibly say that. So therefore, behaviour has to change it seems to me. That's what I, you know, institutional support of all that, yes, I wouldn't, you know...I'm not somebody who's going to, who wants to complain about it, or say, you know, it's all dropped off or it's all, you know... I mean I think that's irrelevant.

So this move from the public world to the private world, I mean have you found benefits in that shift?

Oh yes, yes. Yes I have. Because, I suppose... It's...I mean all it is actually saying that one postpones the public aspect rather than, you know, so, because, if you make a work, you know, that, in private as it were, and with the intention of it later being seen publicly, that's all you're doing, so, and one is also using the language that is susceptible to that. And, I mean I may never do another painting, I don't know, well I am going to, but, you know, I may never do...I might not do many more; it depends what, you know, the way I'm thinking, and you know, what I think is relevant for me to do. Because I don't actually, and this is maybe a real limitation in terms of, you know, the way careers are made, careers seem to be made to a large extent on being

consistent with languages, and I am consistent on one level but I'm not on another. And therefore the idea of, you know, suddenly doing painting or suddenly stopping it and doing something else, you know, is rather, is like... But it's only, it only seems inconsistent because what I'm trying to do is to relate the language to what I think is appropriate to the idea and its presentation.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

[Starting an interview with Stuart Brisley on the 21st of November 1996.]

We got to the mid Eighties last time we talked, and, this is probably going to be the last interview, so we need to kind of round up your sort of public career but also the teaching side of your work. Now I don't know which one you'd like to start with.

Oh I don't mind, I will leave that entirely to you.

Well you did mention that you were working with the Imperial War Museum at one time, would that be a good place to start?

Yes I think it probably would. I had a six-month residency at the Imperial War Museum, I think it started in the beginning of 1987. And it actually, while I was there I...I then began a project which went on for another, which went on for three years that came out of that residency called The Cenotaph Project, and I worked on that project with my partner, my present partner and partner at that time, Maya Balcioglu, spelt M-A-Y-A, B-A-L-C-I-O-G-L-U. Maya is of Kurdish descent and has lived in this country for twenty years, so at that point she had been here about ten years, and is also an artist. When I first went into the Imperial War Museum I literally had no strong idea of what I was going to do. There is a quite extensive art collection, and there is a phenomenal amount of information. I mean I began to think of the Imperial War Museum as an enormous rubbish dump that no one individual could possibly sift through in a lifetime, and more was coming in all the time, and there was a kind of, it was almost as though they were inundated and living amongst all this extraordinary material which, you know, hadn't quite reached the stage of being sort of organised and notated since it was, a lot of it was coming in at the time. And I found that all very interesting, because, rummaging around in the sort of, the art collection, I bumped into a small model in a perspex case, or glass case, of the Cenotaph, it was about 18 inches high as far as I remember, and that gave me the idea to make a project, and it was another public project, and it was the last public project that I made

which had behind it the idea of how one, or some intention of trying to relate art processes to a broader public and to use art as a vehicle to engage with both historical and contemporary issues and so on, something like that. And, to cut a long story short we decided that we would make models of the Cenotaph and transport them round the country to various sites and then have public meetings to discuss what this icon represented; whether it still represented what it had been originally kind of set up for, or whether it had died. Were we dealing with a kind of, sort of like a shell, or was there real substance behind it still? Because I assume that there was real substance behind it, at least until after the Second World War, some time after the Second World War. And the first place we showed it was in Gateshead, in a housing estate, and we were offered a flat, an empty flat in a rather run-down housing area, it was called something village, I can't remember its name. And we had one model built which had to be fitted in to a Council flat, so the size of the models of the Cenotaph were determined by that. It was 7 feet 3½ inches tall, because it appears that there is a standard height for Council flat ceilings, spaces, of 7 feet 6.

End of F5285 Side A

F5285 Side B

[Continuing the interview with Stuart Brisley on the 21st of November 1996.]

Anyway, so we had a kind of, we'd set up a kind of plan as to how we would use the models, and they were to be the sort of, in a way the site of, a kind of series of discussions about the nature of the monument and its place, and also referring to local conditions, local monuments and so on. For example there's a quite elaborate Cenotaph in Gateshead which it so happened had just been vandalised, and there had been a book inside it, and some people had broken in and, as far as I remember I think they desecrated the book and it was then taken out and held in the local library. So, even at that point, we're talking about 1987, you know, these monuments were sort of no longer kind of sacrosanct in the way they had been before. And then we took it to Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, and then the project began to...began to open up in a way, because in Cambridge, when we had the open discussions and public meetings, and because we hadn't done any research as to, well, what was going on in Cambridge in the First World War for example, I mean what would...we didn't do any of that, so we were rather surprised to find that there were a large number of Quakers present at the public meeting and that they told us about the history of attitudes towards war in the First World War in Cambridge. There was a very strong international socialist movement against the war in the First World War, and there was also a very strong Quaker movement against the war. And they were rather passionate about the, what they regarded as ill treatment doled out to conscientious objectors during the First World War. And this set a kind of pattern in a way that, we went for example to Halifax, to Portsmouth, to Cardiff, to Glasgow, and to Derry, Derry was the last one. And in each, the idea was to take the Cenotaph around the United Kingdom, and the sort of question was, well does this icon mean the same in all these places, or is our notion of UK-nia or Great Britain such that it contains within it oppositional and dissident voices, you know, about, you know, the power of the, as it were the State? Because basically this is an icon that is in a way activated by the State each year on the 11th of the 11th of the 11th when the monarchy and the Government and the head of the Opposition and whatever's left of the Commonwealth parade themselves in front of it, and so there's a kind of reaffirmation of, as it were, of this relationship between the icon and all these national institutions, or institutions of the union.

It also works at a much more human level doesn't it?

Oh well it did; I'm not so sure that it does now, it did. Well it still does with certain generations. I mean, I think, the thing that sort of revealed itself quite quickly was the extent to which... Well maybe we should talk a little bit about the history of it, because, just very briefly, there was... Lloyd George apparently went to France just after the war to meet, I forget who it was, the head of the French State at the time, and discovered that the French were building a catafalque to, as it were, celebrate the end of the war. He came back to London, and it was almost like an afterthought, thought there should be some sort of event, you know, that we should recognise the end of the war. So, on the 19th of July 1919 there was a victory march that was set up in London, and one of its central points was in the Mall, is it the Mall? No, well the road that, where the Cenotaph is now, what is that street?

Whitehall.

Whitehall. A wooden plaster Cenotaph was set up there as a sort of fulcrum of the victory march as it were, as a kind of centre point. And it was only intended to be there for a very short time. But the curious thing was that - well not curious, I imagine it's quite predictable - there was such an overwhelming sense of loss amongst the people that the streets were covered in flowers for weeks afterwards, sort of piling around this object, and the Government realised they perhaps ought to make this into a permanent monument. But they wanted to move it, because it was in the middle of the road, but there was a huge public outcry against this, and that's why the monument actually, unlike perhaps all other monuments that one can think of, sits as it were without a sense of approach to it, sits in the middle of the road with traffic going back and forward, and has no, you know, particular approach. I mean one could think of the Victoria and Albert Memorial for example with its approaches, and various others, or, you know, the monument that Lutyens, I mean he was the one that designed the Cenotaph, the monuments in the Dardanelles for example, these enormous great things with a sense of placement, dramatic placement in the landscape. None of this occurs with the Cenotaph which is really rather interesting, and it's because of that, because of the public demand that it be there. So, it had an intense, it was a site of intense feeling as it were for a long period of time. And I think, you know, like, the point at which we set this project up, which was roughly about 70 years after that, you know, there's a whole life, people had lived a lifetime, and so the kind of, the kind of intensity of feeling and emotion had all faded away in general, although of course there would be people still living who, you know, who remembered that period of time. And the nature of the feeling towards it would change anyway, and now it's sort of drifting towards being sort of, almost like an abstract symbol as it were rather than,

you know, rather than having, containing this or sort of like activating this strong sense of loss. And I can remember actually when I was a kid, after the Second World War, because I was in the choir, being marched up the hill on the 11th of the 11th to the War Memorial, and it was a very solemn occasion, and the War Memorial was never desecrated. So, well after the Second World War these monuments have strong meaning in the community. And it's really interesting, I've just been to Darlington and one of the issues that is currently exercising Darlington is the fact that the local hospital, the National Health Service managers want to sell off the, I think it is a chapel which contains tablets of all the names of the people who died in the First World War in Darlington, and they're proposing to sell this off because they can make something like a quarter of a million profit, and there's a tremendous outcry, or there is a certain outcry. But the very fact that they can think like that shows, you know, that times have definitely changed and that these monuments are no longer kind of stable in the society, they can... It was also true in Halifax that they were wanting to move... In Halifax they were wanting to move the War Memorial from one place to another and the British Legion were resisting this very strongly. So when we brought our Cenotaphs to Halifax this provided a sort of centre for this protest actually on the part of people, some people, against having the monument moved. And I should say that every time we took...every time we went to another site we built one more Cenotaph, so we ended up with six, so they accreted as it were and became...in the end it was a big logistical problem to move them around.

What did you make them off, just out of interest?

They were made of MDF. I've still got one, I mean, we've got rid of the others because there was no point in having six, we have one left. So, in Glasgow for example, there were a lot of communists present at the meeting, and this was in Govan and so it was very much connected to the history of shipbuilding etcetera etcetera, and also to do with Scottish independence and, you know... So, in Portsmouth it was very much about the rigid approach of the Council as it were to various events in Portsmouth, a resistance against, or some sort of, in a way a consciousness of the, of a sort of, imposition of views as it were, connected to the military in Portsmouth. It was quite a, there was quite a strong antagonism to all of this, amongst the people that came to, you know, because of the Cenotaph. So every time we went to a local place we got a sort of reflection of local feeling and thought, not necessarily directly connected to the Cenotaph but always connected to it in some way, which proved to be rather interesting, and actually in a way confirmed what we were thinking, that the Cenotaph had some sort of meaning, you know, in the

population but albeit sort of different in different places. In Derry there was one deep silence for example, nobody would speak.

Did they ever explain why they wouldn't speak?

No, it was very difficult. It was...basically I think the reason was that, I mean it was...well obviously because there's, you know, the place was in the middle of conflict, over a very long conflict, and the Cenotaph represents, you know, a kind of, as it were one side of that conflict, one side of the participants of that conflict. And the...I took it to the Orchard Gallery and the gallery was run by, at that point by Declan McGonagle and so there was...he was Catholic, and inasmuch as he tried desperately to, you know, not to have a partisan policy, nonetheless because of the divisions in the society it was extremely difficult. So, it was in a sense a kind of, it was patronised by Catholics to a large extent as far as I could tell, against his wishes. I mean he wanted to break all that but it was just proving to be very difficult. And therefore when we took the Cenotaph there it would have been within an ethos of republicanism to a certain extent, which was interesting in itself but also I suspect sort of, in a way points to the fact, points, gives some sort of reason as to why there was very little discussion about it. I think, I mean I...I had...we discussed this a lot, Maya and I, as to where we should take it, and we...we thought that perhaps it should go back to London in some way, but we found it very difficult to find a site, believe it or not, and we couldn't agree with the Imperial War Museum about how to deal with the end of the project and so it couldn't go there, and so in the end we decided to do the reverse, to take it to the point of greatest conflict as it were, rather than to bring it back to the centre. And that's why it ended up in Derry.

I mean just the relationship, even within London, it would have been interesting to see it discussed out of its rather important location.

Yes.

Did you find the sites, I mean other than Ireland which would seem much more difficult, did people kind of see it as a symbol of central authority as opposed to their own personal war memorial? Did they distinguish between...?

Yes, yes they did, they did, and they also... Yes, I mean they saw it... In Wales, there was no real national consciousness in Cardiff, there appeared not to be. I guess if we'd taken it to the north it might have been different, but in the south, you know, it

sort of seems to be somewhat Anglicised in that sense, and so that elements of nationalism weren't there, didn't seem to be. I was slightly surprised at that, because I had sort of expected, having had Scottish experience which was rather strong in that respect. So, there was, you know, in different areas, a kind of, a sort of, a sense that this thing had not any particular meaning to them, it came from, you know, like, Westminster, and they had their own monuments of course which were something else, because, you know, there are monuments all over the country, or the various countries, in little villages and everywhere, and they were all paid for by local people, they were... So perhaps they're the ones where, you know, any kind of investment was made and not this big national one, I think. But it was the national monument that actually released the idea for all these other ones to be put in place.

Did you find any way of evaluating the sort of feedback you were getting or recording?

Not particularly. In the end we did produce a book, and the book actually sort of runs through, you know, the ideas and the arguments behind the work, but it wasn't a coherent assessment of what we, of attitudes etcetera, and one of the reasons for that was that we didn't actually have the time or the, to do it, you know, that we were...because we were doing this largely on our own and there were logistical, serious logistical problems, because at the point that we did it the Arts Council had a policy that, I forget how it worked, but you could apply for money for one region but you couldn't... So we had to apply to these regional areas each time we took it somewhere; it wasn't a project... The policy has since changed and it would now be possible to do it, but it wasn't then. So, I bought a Volkswagon truck thing to transport it all in, and so that's how we did it, you know, we kind of, we did it one stage at a time, had to find the money for it each time, had to...you know, and all of that. So all of that became sort of really very time-consuming, and so the actual, by the time we got to the events we were fairly exhausted in a way. And also, I'm not sure that we, you know, that it was so terribly important, because it was again one of these projects that was like a model, it was set up as a sort of model to say, well, you know, this is a way in which one can deal with issues that might have meaning in the society, you know, you can set these things up and work in this way and you get certain engagement with people. And you know, so it was about this relationship between art and the society, art and people, which is what I was really interested in trying to sort of, like, investigate really. And so, I mean over what, 30 years or so I've made three or four of those. They are so time-consuming, and exhausting really, and also they step outside the art world and so the art world never really bothers with

them, you know, it's not...it's not an issue in the art world as to what is art or not particularly. You know, that's not a serious issue. For me that was a really serious question, but by doing it, so, you know, one moves to the periphery and all, outside it to a certain extent. And so, you know, like, they become...you, in a way you wipe your own career out, you know, for a short time by doing it, so you can't afford to do them very often.

But you don't have any regrets?

No, none whatsoever, I mean, because it was very much a part of my thinking as to how it would be to be an artist, and also...also...it was also connected to the idea of, well, extending performance, you know, going beyond performance, which was also part of what I was thinking about.

What was the Imperial War Museum, how did their attitude change in the beginning of the project to the end, did they stay supportive?

I don't know, I don't think they did, no. I mean, I think they...I have no idea what they...I don't think that they... I think the problem was that they probably wanted me to work in the museum and everything to be contained, and I immediately thought of something which was national, and sort of...and I saw the Imperial War Museum as a site as it were, a centre, that one could go out from and come back to. And I did quite a lot of research in the museum relative to, for example people who went from the north-east into the war and what happened to them, soldiers and so on, especially in relation to this thing of going to Gateshead when I first set it up, and that was really very interesting. And I was only there for six months, so, I think...and this project took three years, and they, we lost contact with each other, you know, there was a... There was a certain point where we had a meeting and it was, they were clearly kind of, sort of suspicious of this project somehow, you know, and so, we basically decided to go it alone, you know, because that, I mean I, we had set the thing up, we had every ambition to complete it, so I guess after, you know, the six-month period, you know, they probably forgot all about it.

I mean how does one become an artist-in-residence?

You have an interview and, I guess there's a competition, or there should be a competition; I guess there was a...there was a competition, and there was a set of interviews, and on the basis of, you know, kind of that, one was accepted or not.

But you are invited to kind of attend, or do you apply?

I don't know. I was invited to do so, and I, I was invited to do so because one of the previous artists had thought that, you know, thought I would probably, you know, be suitable. And I think I was suitable, actually, although it did...it didn't sort of fit the Imperial...it didn't fit somehow, I've never really quite understood it. I mean I'm sure they've got different views.

Who was your main contact there?

Angela Weight who... And, yes, and then there were one or two others, but Angela Weight was in charge of the Art Department, and she's still there as far as I know, I mean we see each other and say hello and so on. The important, for us the important part of this was the book, you know, because the book actually contains the idea, and so I hope that they've got...we sent them copies so I hope they've got that. Also the Cenotaph had very little written about it, and so we commissioned Penelope Curtis, I don't know if you know Penelope Curtis, she's now working in the Henry Moore, is it the Henry Moore? What is it called? The Henry Moore Trust or whatever, in Leeds. And she had just completed her Ph.D. on French monuments when I met her, and she then worked at the Tate of the North and... So in this book is her interpretation of the history of the Cenotaph, which is probably the most comprehensive one that there has been, which I think is quite important because you know, it is really very, it's very curious how the whole thing came about, and what happened.

So who funded the publication of the book?

Funded by the Orchard Gallery in Derry, they published it. Because at the time the Orchard were doing, I mean for that period when Declan McGonagle was there they had become very well-known for publishing catalogues and books and things. So this was published after the final showing in Derry.

You're going to have to spell Declan McGonagle.

Declan McGonagle. I think I did before but I'll do it again. D-E-C-L-A-N, either M-A or M-C, G-O-N-A-G-L-E, McGonagle.

How did Maya find working on this very British nationalistic event from her perspective?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Well, now she has an interesting background in that she was a very highly politicised figure in her youth. Her father was a member of the Communist Party as was her mother in Turkey, and both her parents had suffered a great deal because of that in Turkey; her father was imprisoned and tortured, I'm not sure on how many occasions. He was originally an opera singer and when it was found out that he was of Kurdish extraction he was thrown out of the opera house. And he was put jail and tortured, and then he was, he found himself at one point living on an island outside of Istanbul, I think he was in exile or contained to a certain extent, and on the same island that Trotsky was living on at the time, so he had conversations with Trotsky; was in the Spanish Civil War, fighting there; was in Paris. He was a very interesting man, and so, Maya's background is really very politicised in that respect. And she, it was necessary for her to leave Turkey in 1977 because of the political situation there, and her role in some of the resistance that she just had to get out basically. So, I mean, and as she said to me, you know, being exiled it's very difficult to have a voice and takes an awful long time to, you know, to be able to speak in any way, and so by the time this project was started it was as though she was, had reached the point where, you know, she felt she was able to contribute to something, she could take part in something probably for the first time. And so, she found it very interesting, because although she had been exiled for that amount of time and had lived in Britain all that time, she had only ever been in the south-east, because of having no money and you know, like, she was a student for a while and...you know, I mean not having the money to travel or... So travelling round the United Kingdom was also very interesting, and also bumping into different, you know, different sort of cultural attitudes as it were, was also very interesting for her I think. She had been brought up by Irish and Scottish Jesuits in Istanbul at school, so she had a very strong connection to the sort of, to both Scotland and Ireland and probably knew more about the west coast of Scotland than I did for example. So there were some sort of surprising aspects to her. And I think she really, I mean she was very active and very...very positive in relation to all of this, and certainly in terms of discussion and so on, and organisation as well. So yes, I mean I think she saw it, it was like that really.

That's interesting. During this time you were still teaching at the Slade?

Yes, mm.

How did you kind of relate projects like this to your teaching experience? Did you introduce it to the students?

No. No I never do that.

You keep your professional life separate?

I mean there was a point when I...I wouldn't have done it anyway but there was a point when I regarded the teaching and all, everything I did as being sort of an organic whole, and there came a point where I decided that there was, actually it wasn't like that, you know, I'd moved out of thinking in that way at all, and now I see what I do as being completely separate from it. And also I am really very much opposed to the idea of leading, you know, by one's own sort of like limited example, `this is how you do it' kind of argument. Very common in Germany, and on the Continent, where, you know, professors have their own studios and you go into X's studio and it's usually very masculine in the way that it's, you know, very macho, and, you know, little clones can be produced. And, I've always resisted that. And also I've always found it rather embarrassing when students actually want to try to sort of work like me, you know, which in the past one or two of them have done, and that's always been really uncomfortable and I've always resisted it.

And it might be quite interesting to hear about your time at the Slade, because you sort of worked under some well-known heads.

Yes.

To get that other perspective.

Yes, well, I don't know, I think we did talk about Coldstream a bit, I mean, I suppose, Coldstream was the figure I, the figure I had the strongest sort of feelings for and the least kind of understanding of in a way. Because, you know, I was...it was the way I came into the school and my position in it, and therefore my relationship to him, and also his, you know, his own personality which sort of... I always felt, I don't know how to describe it really, as though, I didn't...I had no sense of protection, put it that way. I didn't have defences with Coldstream, he seemed to know too much. He was a very amusing and sharp, witty man, you know, and underneath that was a very

sympathetic person, so, you know, one was always being taken for a ride, you know, one way or another, or there was a tendency for that to happen.

End of F5285 Side B

F5286 Side A

[Continuing the interview with Stuart Brisley on the 21st of November 1996, at his home in London.]

You were talking about William Coldstream.

Mm. Also, of course it was the last sort of phase of Coldstream's time; he'd been head of the school for 25 years, so, it was just the last sort of six years or so that I, when I knew him, so he was... In a way I guess, you know, he was beginning to get tired, you know, you could sense the, you know, the thing was sort of over in a way, just slightly before he retired as it were.

I mean could you sum up what he stood for in terms of the Slade?

It would be very difficult for me to do so because, one, I... Or maybe it's a good thing for me to do so because I was a student at the Royal College, I, you know, there is a Slade ethos and a lot of the staff are ex-students, which I personally disagree with. You know, there's a kind of sense of the Slade which is sort of, it's not elitist but it's kind of conscious of itself, very conscious of itself and its own values and so on. And I was never part, I am not part of that, I was never part of that and I don't want to be part of that. And Coldstream was probably, not the last figure but almost the last figure to really contribute to a powerful sense of what the Slade was, I mean insofar as, you know, he was the leading figure of the Euston Road School and that mode of approach to figuration was an important part of the school, albeit sort of hidden away. So it had its kind of, it had its powerful centre under Coldstream and at the same time it had a sort of, a kind of openness to, you know, contemporary issues and so on. The teachers were by and large very well selected in terms of a sort of catholic view of the world, you know. So, it was both sort of, in a curious way sort of elitist and open at the same time. Maybe that's part of being, of how the elite works, you know, it has to be open to enable it to be sort of like, what's the word, fertilised.

Fresh blood.

Yes, that sort of thing. But the Euston Road was really very, was a very powerful sort of platform in it, and you know, William Coldstream was there, William Townsend was there, Euan Uglow was there, there were numbers of others, you know, who, you know, who would have strongly, would have been a strong representation of that

approach, or even if at that point in time, we're talking about the early Seventies, it would have been a fading kind of like movement as it were, or, in the school it wasn't. And of course, also it had its, you know, there were a lot of people who wanted to study there, you know, in that mode. That's almost gone, it's almost gone. The last person to really support it was Patrick George, who was of course, was again one of those Euston Road figures, although he refused to even hear the word. One, he refused to hear the word education mentioned; two, he did not like the term Euston Road. Nonetheless he was very much involved in it. And since Bernard Cohen has come there's been no coherent policy applied to that area, and it has...it's been, you know, it's become sort of a victim of fortune in a way, I mean it's sort of collapsed in a sense. Even though Euan Uglow is still there, although I think he's about to, probably to retire next year at some point. So until, probably about the middle to late Eighties that sort of core of the school was present.

And how did you as, you know, part of the fresh blood team, how did you feel working in relation to that?

I was a complete outside as far as I was...one, I was employed, when I first was employed was not in the studios, I was the Student Adviser, and at the end of the first year I was offered another day's teaching to do that job, and at the end of two years I was transferred to the studio. And I can't remember how it worked, there weren't studios, you know, it was like a, there were a large body of students and staff appeared to float around amongst them all, and then there were various sort of ways in which work was criticised and with groups of staff, and you know, students. So it was organised but it was, the actual kind of body of students, it was sort of relatively open, you know, all year... Apart from the first year, the years were all mixed up, and there was a separate graduate area and there was a separate graduate sculpture department but no undergraduate sculpture, at the time. The graduate sculpture was run by Reg Butler, who was also a rather powerful figure, you know, another powerful voice in the school. When Coldstream retired, Lawrence Gowing was appointed, and he...he instituted, when he had been in Chelsea some years previously he had instituted something called the `studio system', where there would be a small group of staff and then there would be a body of students around them as it were and they would have, you know, a definite rooms or room to work in. And so, at that point the school began to change its structure, and some features which were missing were, you know, being sort of introduced, like, it was under Lawrence Gowing that undergraduate sculpture was established, and that's how, as far as I remember, my first job as a full-time teacher at the Slade in 1976 or, when was it, '78, was to

introduce sculpture, undergraduate sculpture. And Gowing was an extraordinary person to work for, what an amazing person. I mean his intellect was so gigantic, he was an extraordinary, really amazing sort of figure, because, he was both kind of... Well there's one way of describing him from my position, which is that I remember... He was... I had an extraordinary education under Gowing, that's for sure, and, one of the things I remember him saying to me one day after I'd said, I forget what had happened but we had some sort of disagreement, and we were in a staff meeting or other, and he had told me one thing in one place and then he had done something completely different. And so he turned round to me and he said, `Now you realise that I am bigger than my word.' [LAUGHS] And he was, I mean that's how he was, he was fairly extraordinary. And he was incredibly difficult, but fundamentally he was a very human, he was a very human guy and very...and really wanted to, I mean he had such a wide sort of range of ideas but also he...he was not frightened of risks, he would really take risks. I mean I can remember going with him to Maidstone jail to interview this guy who was in jail for, had got 13 years for armed robbery at the age of 20, which is some doing if you're...and he had been in there for 10 years and we went down to interview him to see whether we would accept him into the Slade, and next, I think it took about two weeks and there he was, in my studio in the Slade, this guy. And he is now a practising artist, I mean he is now... This was Gowing, Gowing actually was very...Gowing was always looking for people who he thought had imagination, and he was always looking beyond the conventional into, with people, you know, looking for people who he thought would be full of ideas, full of kind of imagination and ideas. And of course he made mistakes, like, you know, out of that, some people, you know, were brought into the Slade who were really amazing in what they did and so forth, and others, you know, collapsed because... And I really supported him on this, I thought this was great, I really liked his...his kind of brave approach to people, you know, he wasn't frightened in any way; wasn't careful...

I mean can you think of an example?

What?

Can you think of students that he would have seen as a success in those terms?

Well I think the person I've just described, he would definitely regard as being a success. It's a man called Alan Stocker, who, I mean Stocker's entry into the school was, I mean extremely difficult. I remember, because he was in my studio I remember saying to him after he was there about six months, you know, like, `How

are you, I mean how are you getting on?' And he was saying, he said, `There are times when I feel like laying down in the street and letting them take me away.' Because he actually found it difficult, he found money difficult, he found it difficult just to, you know, because he had been so institutionalised. It was just a tremendous struggle for him. And also he had made friends in jail, you know, like he...there was always this pull, you know, to...this kind of influence, you know, wanting to... And I remember him going off to Amsterdam, I think it was against his, probably against his, what do you call it, his parole or whatever it was, you know, and, difficulties emerged out of that, in relation to drugs and... And I remember, he said to me also something which I thought was really interesting. He said, `I don't know why people can't just pay me to paint.' And I thought, ah yes, the next step is for you to go and get some money,' you know. But actually he overcame all of that and he, you know, now he's a practising artist, you know, and, you know, whether you like his work or not, it's, you know, there he is, he's doing it. He had a show at the Flowers East just recently. And, you know...

I thought I recognised his name.

Yes. So, I mean that's the most obvious example to me, but there have been others. And we had a policy, very much supported by Gowing at that time, of really always pushing the university, because, you know the Slade is a department of the University College, and we would take up to eleven students under the Gowing period who had no academic qualifications, so there was a very, a generous sort of view about talent and it didn't matter where it came from, you know, like what social background or anything like that. And Gowing was very cavalier with the university regulations, you know, he would, unlike our current, you know, what do you call him, Head of the School, who seems to me to be sort of like entirely subservient to them; Gowing was so cavalier about it. And you know, we had a sense of independence and life and openness in the school because of it, you know, that, he was the...he was very much a leader, and wanting to sort of open the thing, you know. At the same time he was rather a moderate person as well, his own work was, you know, sort of really, I mean his vision was kind of moderate and sort of quiet, and you know, some of his paintings, certainly the early Euston Road paintings I think, you know, paintings of his wife about 1946 and so on. He had connections to people like Bacon and, you know, Freud. When Gowing was there Freud was teaching in the school for example for some period of time. You know, there was a...and there was a strong sense that there was a man of great intellect who was, or with a very big intellect, who was leading the school. He would walk into the, you know, into one of our meetings and

he would start talking about something that, you know, we would all have to stretch our minds to try to understand, you know; he had that sort of capacity. So, he was very difficult but he was just very worthwhile in that respect. And, you know, there was...he wasn't entirely consistent, but nonetheless he was, I think, ultimately really a worthwhile head of the school.

And was he still holding onto the idea of art as a formal matter at that time? Or, you know, I mean in the Seventies we were well into Conceptual art and things that bear little relation to the Euston Road School.

He did have...I mean he... I think he had certain, I don't know whether you'd call them prejudices, he certainly was... I mean like all of these heads of the school of the Slade have actually had, and with the exception of Coldstream, I couldn't say it, but all the others have had a view that painting was a very important first order subject, and that everything else kind of like, you know, sort of takes its place only in relation to that. And so, and Gowing was not unlike the others in that respect. And that's been one of the, in my view one of the limitations of the Slade in this, the last, since Coldstream, that the kind of, there's been a sort of defensive stance in relation to the subject of painting, and at the same time an antagonism to varying degrees to other modes of activity. And this continues to the present day. I mean in my view it's sort of, almost close to mindless.

Because things have changed so much.

Absolutely. And also it's so demeaning to the notion of painting itself, to try to elevate it and to sort of like forcibly fix it above other mediums, you know, because, it's such a kind of false notion relative to what goes on outside the school. You know, it has no connection to reality in that respect, or very little connection to reality, and it's, you know, I would like, what is it based on, I mean what...it seems to me to be based mostly on fear since all of the heads of the Slade have been painters. And you know, they've all had that. Perhaps the easiest person to work with in this respect was Patrick George because Patrick George had a sense of objectivity and fairness in terms of, you know, the way people could...about discussion that the others, that neither, I mean Cohen doesn't get anywhere near Gowing's intellectual capacity, I mean you know, he's a Pygmy in relation to Gowing. And also it doesn't have any sense of objectivity when it comes to discussion of ideas, whereas Patrick George did, and as much as he would, you know, like his position in relation to the visual arts

would have probably, from a personal view would probably have been very particular and specific, nonetheless he was open, he was liberal about it.

Going back to Reg Butler, how did you, you know, did you have any... What's the right way of putting this. As he was sort of well-established in the post-graduate field, how did you relate your undergraduate department to what he had already established? Did you have any conflict?

Yes, well, the conflict about undergraduate and graduate work actually expressed itself quite differently, not so much in relation to sculpture, but much more in relation to Malcolm Hughes's period of time as being head of graduate study, graduate studies in the school, and it came down to the fact that there was a so-called experimental area, which I happen to run at the moment, there was an experimental area that dealt with sort of aspects of computerisation, film and video and so forth, and within the undergraduate area that I taught in, or that I was running, there was a certain...there were people with aspirations in that direction but it was very difficult to be able to sort of facilitate that because the resources were held by the graduates, and it was kind of difficult to get access. So, on a technical level it was like that; on a political level within the school there was one point when, at the first staff meeting, I forget when it was, probably about 1978 or something like that, when Patrick George and myself had been fighting to have an integration of teaching within graduate and undergraduate, so the staff would teach it on both levels, and Patrick had been very supportive of this and I had been supportive of him in pushing it. And Gowing at the first graduate meeting of the school in October, at the beginning of the year, had agreed that this could happen, and he then made the statement that, you know, this was what was going to happen, that everybody would be working, you know, both undergraduate and graduate, and he then looked round the thing and he came to me and he pointed his finger at me and he said, `Except you'. So I was not to.

Why was that?

That was because I think Malcolm Hughes had some difficulties with the way I, what I thought, you know, how one related to people, what teaching was about, you know, and all the rest of it. So there was a strange sort of antagonism there which was very peculiar, I never really understood it, but I was excluded, even though I was running something in the undergraduate schools directly related to what he was responsible for in the graduate school. And he resigned at a certain point, I mean it wasn't that he had his way either, because he resigned in protest at Gowing, whatever, something

that Gowing had done, and then the whole thing took another turn, if you see what I mean. So there were some complications within the structure of graduate and undergraduate. My undergraduate sculpture thing I suppose had a broad approach to the idea of sculpture, of sculptures and expanded field or whatever, however you'd call it, would have been very different from the, you know, the sort of sculpture that Reg Butler was interested in. And also when, after he retired Dick Claughton, who was his assistant, I think, was a full-time member of staff, took over for two or three years, and then there was a kind of, almost sculptural Euston Road, Mike Kenny and one or two others were teaching in sculpture. So there was quite a separation between what I was doing and what they were doing. And then what happened? I can't remember what happened after that. I resigned at some point during this period for three weeks, and... I was running, that's right, I was running this studio - sorry this is a bit garbled because my memory is not so good about this. I was running this studio and it was sort of like, it's called Studio 5 and it dealt with sort of experimental issues and so forth. Because one of my students had at the degree, a woman, had made a very mild statement about feminism, Gowing and the members of the team became rather anti-feminist, and I was so angry that, you know, that they appeared to me to be treating this student with less than, they were not being fair, because she wanted to make, she wanted to say something, she wanted to say what her position was relative to this, to what... She was a film maker by the way, she was a very good film maker, and, she was murdered in Zimbabwe several years later on a film project. And she was intelligent and articulate, and she made this statement, and they were really very angry about it, for whatever reason, and I was really angry that they were angry, and that they had, you know, kind of given her, I thought, a mark that was well below what she deserved, and so I resigned actually I was so angry, and I wouldn't come back. And I got a job, a part-time job at Goldsmiths'. And then about three weeks later, or, I don't know, a month or something, the secretary of the school phoned me up and said, `Oh, you know, would you consider running the undergraduate sculpture, you know, actually starting an undergraduate sculpture department?' And by that point what had happened was, because I had resigned, I was full-time, because I had resigned after a certain date in the year it meant that I could be kept in the school for another year, right? So Gowing wouldn't release me, and therefore I couldn't accept, I couldn't say yes to the job at Goldsmiths', right?

Mm, compulsory reinstatement.

Well, I mean it was, you know, he wasn't going to let me...he didn't let me know whether I was released or not, put it that way. So after about three weeks to a month

they then said, `Well will you do this job?' And I said, `Yes, fine, I'll do it,' and so I went back.

So you never did teach at Goldsmiths'?

Well I did, but it was much earlier on, I had taught at Goldsmiths', yes, yes, under Michael Craig-Martin.

Oh when was that?

Would have been in the early Seventies I think, '70, something like that, yes. And I've also taught at Reading and Nottingham, regularly, these are regular jobs. This was when I was part-time, you know, as opposed to full-time. So life under Gowing was sort of rocky, you know, rocky but sort of very exciting, and there were many turns, you know, many movements and turns in the world of the Slade at that time. And there are reasons for that.

So Gowing came to the end of his tenure in 1986, and Patrick George took over.

Yes.

Did that make a terrific difference?

Well in a way it didn't, because Patrick...Patrick didn't want to do it anyway, he was...he was a very reluctant head of department. He was a kind of...he did it because the search committee of which I was a member at the time couldn't find an appropriate candidate, and at that time there were two outstanding contending candidates; one was Michael Craig-Martin and the other was Mary Kelly. I supported Mary Kelly at this time, and she, when it came to the interview, there was a professor of English, I think he was a professor of English, on the interviewing body, and he seriously contented some of her theoretical positions as an artist, and to the extent that she was really in a sense wiped out, fairly comprehensively.

Now just, in what way? You know, literally in the way she set her models or in the way that...?

Yes, it was...that, he challenged the sort of validity of certain positions she held relative to, I guess it would have been in relation to psychology etcetera. And, one

could have seen it perhaps as being a kind of Anglo-French kind of argument, I mean, that she was very much a supporter, or very much involved with Lacan and so on, and here was, you know, probably a relatively conservative English professor, you know, who was nonetheless very sharp, you know, kind of like, in a sense assaulting her views. And I think she had a hard time to, well she didn't...I think she was done in as it were, which was a great shame. That left Michael Craig-Martin, who decided not to take the job, because at that point he...I think he had just resigned from Goldsmiths' and I think he...it was a period of time when his work was really starting to sell, and I think he saw himself much more connected to, you know, like the market and all of that. And so, you know, educational arguments were no longer quite as powerful as they had been for him. And he would have been obviously a very effective, a very effective head of the school. So, that's how Patrick ended up doing it. And he was, I think, he saw his job as sort of stabilising the place for the next person to come, so he didn't institute much that was new, but what he did do was, he had such a sense of fairness about him that it was probably the very best period we've had in terms of relations between the staff and, you know, the understanding of other departments' problems and, you know, it was a very positive period of, I would say higher quality in relation to, you know, meetings and, you know the nature of what the purpose of the school was and all, that comes up every now and again, all those sorts of things. And at the same time he stabilised the finances and, you know, he put it onto a, he sort of regulated it if you see what I mean. And then he retired. And then there was a search committee set up for the next professorship, and I was on that search committee as well; it only met once, and it met in March of, I forget which year, and then it didn't meet, and this was, March was eighteen months before Patrick left the school, and I was then a reader, I was then the sort of second person at the Slade in terms of status.

End of F5286 Side A

F5286 Side A

[Continuing the interview with Stuart Brisley on the 21st November 1996.]

So, I said to Patrick, it got round to about November and there'd been no meeting of the Search Committee since the first one in March, `What is going on?' And he said, `I don't know, you'd better go and see the Provost.' So I went off, toddled off to see the Provost, and he told me that everything was in hand and then he asked me, you know, did I know Bernard, and I said, `Yes, sure I do'. And what did I think about him? And I said, `Well, he's a perfectly reasonable guy and,' you know, blah blah. Anyway, the outcome was, there were no interviews as far as I can...oh there were, there were interviews. I was put into a really difficult position because I didn't want this job in any way, but the Provost said that it was my duty to be a candidate, so I became a candidate, you know, sort of, I was inveigled into being a candidate so they had a coherent set of candidates, and the other one was Bruce McLean, and then, you know, that was obviously set up in such a way that Bernard got the job. Bruce I think really wanted the job, I think Bruce McLean was, you know, would have...but I have to say that I didn't want the job. And so, Bernard appeared. And lots of good things have happened under Bernard, and other things have happened as well, and it really is one of those, I guess it's typical of all these sorts of situations, there's kind of, it's like the curate's egg, you know, in part it's good and in part it's bloody awful, and you know, one could say that, you know, Bernard is a very complex figure, he has lots of...he's a very humane kind of person. A rather emotional person and in no way is he an intellectual.

I sense that you feel that it's important, this intellectual aspect, for people leading an art school.

Absolutely I do, yes, because the alternative is this sense in which, you know, there can be emotional kind of commitments to unemotional elements like mediums, you know, like you can get very emotionally committed. It's like, is it Bert Irwin who said, `I love painting,' you know, and I think to myself, what the hell does that mean, you know, I can't understand what that really means, `I love...' What painting? The act of painting? Paint itself? You know, what? So I can't... I think an art school needs, you know, a person of real intellect, you know, to deal with all of the complexities that make it up, and probably always did. And there's also been in the past strong, an anti-intellectual stance held by artists, you know, certainly against notions of history, art history and art schools, complementary studies and all of that,

and that's usually based on blind ignorance and a kind of deep sort of sense of being defensive about inadequacies in my view. And so, I think the head of an art school has got to have a very broad set of values and attributes and one of those has got to be a certain intellectual capacity. And you could say that Coldstream and Gowing and Patrick George to a lesser extent had those attributes; they may have applied them, you know, in different ways etcetera. But it's really very, it quite critical it seems to me.

I meant to ask you, in relation to the Mary Kelly interview, the fact that she may have been rejected on, you know, a kind of philosophical point in effect, really suggests that either the interviewers were from other parts of the university or that there is quite intellectualised complementary studies at the Slade. I mean which is the case?

That there are intellectualised complementary studies?

Yes.

Yes there are, yes.

Yes, so what kind of form do they take?

Well, we have...for the last two years we've had a head of theoretical studies. I mean, the history of the Slade in that respect, the art history department was part of the Slade for a long time and then it was detached I think in the Seventies at some point, became a department in its own right, and then the Slade as it were sent students to the Art History Department. And because of the shifting economic situation it was necessary to introduce things like M.A. etcetera into the school, and then maybe just before that happened there were difficulties beginning to arise in relation to our students doing art history in the art history department because of the need to increase the numbers of students in the university - it's all economic - to increase the numbers of students, the art history department were being stretched and couldn't really cope with, you know, servicing a whole school. So, in a way we were sort of forced into a situation where we had to, you know, develop our own theoretical, cultural studies, and we did that on the grounds that we renovate the fabric of the, the physical fabric of the school in order to increase the number of students and at the same time to change the proportion of foreign students to home students, thereby getting more money, earning more money and thereby being able to pay off the loan for the money to do the fabric and to, right, to facilitate this. So this is what's really happened. And

theoretical studies is now run by Michael Newman and has since the beginning. Before that I was doing a certain amount of theoretical work with students, bringing in people, running short programmes and so on for about five years, which was sort of in a sense the preface for all of this to be put in place. And since the last two years we've then established M.Phil. and Ph.D. programmes as well, so there is now I would have thought a high level theoretical complementary studies programme both for undergraduates, graduates, up to M.A. level and now M.Phil. and Ph.D. students, that's how it works. I have certain criticism of the, which is what, stepping back into the prejudiced artist role, having sort of made these claims about, you know, what a head of an art school should, attributes they should have, there is a problem that keeps appearing now in the relations between theoretical and complementary - sorry, cultural studies or critical studies, with studio practice, that the students who are doing the M.A. feel that these two areas of activity are not sufficiently connected, that they are too separated, and that, you know, the whole thing needs re-examining. Now this may be a chronic position that artists take in relation to, you know, critical studies in other schools, I don't know, but they're certainly taking it here at the Slade, and I think there's a certain truth in it, a certain difficulty there.

What are they looking for? Sort of, to bring the two ideas closer?

They're looking for a closer connection between what they do and the way in which cultural studies is actually, or, I forget what it's called, critical studies is applied to them; whereas obviously critical studies is about actually establishing its own set of criteria in terms of, you know, academic practice as it were, writing and so on, within the broader context of the university. So you can see the pretensions that are there. But I can also see the gap between, you know, because of their...

Would you prefer to keep the gap, in effect?

Well no not in all cases at all. I think the gap, I think where the gap is appropriate is where the students actually find it useful; where it's not it should be re-examined. Because it's a very personal...it's all very personal the way things are done, it's not done collectively, right, there isn't a collective education, there's a quite personal, and therefore... You know, so my argument is, well, you know, I run seminars for example for M.A. and M.F.A., which is another qualification, students, my students, and we are always reaching the point in these seminars which are based around ideas that students bring to these seminars, they are the ones who, individual students run the seminar; we then, you know, contribute to it. And at a certain point, you know,

one needs other expertise always, you know, and it's actually quite frustrating when, you know, you realise that this really should be going further, and it's not because there isn't anybody there who is actually knowledgeable, you know, to take it, to contextualise it in ways that it should be done, in my view. And that's where there is a problem, it seems to me, and I've expressed this in meetings and I've always... You see I have also a very different view to Cohen as to, I'm opposed to departmentalisation in the first place anyway, so the Slade is, Bernard believes in strong departments, is what he calls strong departments and then communications after that. Well what you get with strong departments are fortresses and you don't get communication after that, you get fortresses, and then you don't know what the rest of the school is doing, you're in your own little box and you've got no idea what's going on elsewhere. So, that's all very well to control it from the top, but it doesn't communicate across in any adequate fashion. And so I'm really against that, I'm for a much more open structure, and this is the bone of contention between Bernard and myself, because at my inaugural lecture as a Professor I actually made this argument very explicit, and since then, you know, life has been very difficult, because Bernard is the kind of leader who needs support.

I mean have you had support from other members of staff for that idea?

No.

Oh that's interesting.

No. No, because the whole thing is so departmentalised, you know, it doesn't communicate.

No I agree it does seem a great pity.

Well it is, it's a great, it is a great pity in my view.

So going back to your seminars, I mean who would you imagine would be the knowledgeable person, would it be an art historian for example?

Yes, I mean for example, having said all that we have had art historians in as it were who have not...we haven't invited, they've come. There's one, Alison, I've forgotten her other name now. Alison, she's a younger person and she's more, you know, kind of open. She's got a fellowship from the Henry Moore Foundation at the moment,

Alison Smayle or something, I can't remember her other name. She's rather good. And we also have a seminar called Image and Text which is basically, deals with, you know, like, any issues that deal with the relationship between words and images, could be in film, video, performance, painting, anything. And this goes on week after week, you know, different people come in, there are different things that are shown, artists' books of film or whatever, and the whole thing is, you know, very dynamic, or can be, it was yesterday. And lots of people, lots of students come from different areas. And she comes to that, basically because her research with the Henry Moore Foundation is to do with the relationship between words and sculpture, and so that is a subject that, you know, that's an area where this, you know, this could quite easily be aired in one way or another. So there is a connection but it's not a structural one in the sense that I think it should be, if you see what I mean. It's a personal one. So, and also, I mean I've...yes, I mean I do feel that we have a really poorly conceived sort of structure in art schools based on the division of mediums, and I find that so uninteresting, and I think that what there should be, it almost goes back to the Hornsey model of 1968, there should be a kind of, you should arrive at the point of a medium almost at the last, it's the last thing, you know, it's almost like the periphery of the activity is where the mediums are, they are not in the centre in my view. In the Slade they are centred, every one. So, if you're a sculptor, you know, like, and you know, like, and there may be some activities going on in our area, you know, well that I teach in, that sculptors maybe would find interesting, they'll never know, they'll never know. Unless they are individually so curious, or else antagonised by their own department they will come to us, because we are open, we say anybody can come, you know, and so we do get students from other areas but usually they're disaffected by what's going on elsewhere, and that's a negative thing. So there could be another structure which would be very much more positive it seems to me, where you know, where the use of mediums has a particular place but is not privileged in the way that it is at the moment. That's just a view I've had for a long time, I've been really always opposed to, why is it called the Sculpture Department, you know, or the Painting Department, or the Print-making Department, you know. And you know, you always find when you go up there that there are a whole group of people who are playing to the convention, and then there's always some that are, you know, like having serious difficulties with the convention and want to break it, and the convention is usually held artificially, I mean it's an artificial structure anyway but it's held artificially in relation to what's going on outside in contemporary practice. So it's like a, it's like some sort of isolated little world all of its own, it has no particular relations to, you know, activities outside, and students are in a schizophrenic position, contradictory position, inside and outside, and I find that really rather stupid to tell you the truth.

Yes, I agree. On the numbers front, in the great Thatcher era and the boost in higher education, how much have the numbers increased?

Quite considerably, and also productivity has increased with actually a drop in salary, is what's gone on, I mean in real terms. We've dropped something like 38 per cent in salary over, well I don't know, what, ten years. The numbers have increased and productivity has been increased to a very large extent at the expense of the quality of the education, quality of education is going down, I think. That's not entirely true. You know, if there is a change there is always going to be some things that are kind of introduced or that get done better, you know, because something is being released, so, some things are, like for example the seminar programmes that we run now are much better than they used to be, but the resources are very much more limited than they used to be because there are more students and the resources haven't really developed any more. The relations between staff and students is, you know, there are fewer tutorials etcetera because there are more students. The space problem is chronic, you know, like, a lot of my students work outside; what I mean by that is they work professionally. I mean our last seminar was in the ICA for example, and we, you know, I regard the course as being almost nomadic now, you know. In order to give it some sense of dynamism, if we had it always restricted within one situation where we are in the Slade where the space is so limited, that it would just become incredibly frustrating for everyone concerned. So I've tried to turn that difficulty into something positive by establishing a programme that makes a connection between inside and outside, and proposes that whatever a student does outside is part of the course, as long as we can actually see it, and that you know, this is an essential part of the course, how one becomes a professional artist, and in that way one has, provided that the students are relatively positive you then actually have a lot of things going on, and the whole thing becomes more dynamic. But it can only really be done probably with activities that are not traditionally fixed, you know. It would be very difficult to do that with painting I think, probably difficult to do it with some aspects of sculpture, but with performance, video, film etcetera, it's actually much more positive, more...not positive, it's more possible to do in relation to spaces that are available, you know, the way things can be set up and so on.

So something like that seminar, could members of the public come to it?

No that one they couldn't because it was in some strange room in the ICA given to us because of, you know, it was just the, it was the most appropriate way of doing it. So, it wasn't public, it was our department seminar.

But there are other things where, you know, people go out in the world and..

Oh yes.

And the college comes to them.

Yes. I mean, well, on another level critical studies does actually have a fortnightly public lecture which is available to the public, but our own seminars aren't, you know, they're available to the school but not to the public. Although if somebody came and said, you know, like, `I'd like to come to this school,' you know, what the hell, anybody could really come, but it can't be publicised that's all. Because there is this question of payment you see; immediately they would say, if it's for the public, you've got to...they've got to pay, right? Because that's the thinking, that's the culture in the universities, you know, they have to do that, because you know, there is such a shortfall of money. So that's the first thing that goes, you know, like you go to another department and they say, well, you know, it'll cost you X to do this, because...

Yes.

It used to be free, you know, it used to be...

Petty accounting.

Yes, yes.

I mean do you see any end to that?

Well I think there has to be a change. No, I see at the moment it all being sort of consolidated. And of course also what's happening is, the sort of managerial part of this has been introduced, the language was introduced a long time ago, the Slade resisted it for a long period of time but now we're in the full flood of, you know, managerial sort of cultures and practice and language and, you know, and all the rest of it, and individuals who, you know, might have been invited to teach at one point in one kind, have adapted this and are the new managers of the future. It's...there's a sort

of, in my view there's a kind of reduction going on, you know, reduction of, a reduction of the culture in a way, it's really rather, I don't know, this word culture gets used much...

The creative culture?

Within the school I'm talking about, there's a kind of shrinking of the culture in the school somehow, to me, because of this. Because, maybe it's enforced, you know, the head of the school has to be a manager, because the university, you know, is required X Y and, you know, the whole thing. But it's more than that, it's actually that, you know, like Thatcherism has actually sort of, has wormed its way all the way through; we are now fully inhabited as it were, you know, and people are now, maybe there are people who are coming into the place who never did know what it was like before other than as students, so you know, it becomes the norm, you know, it's like history, there isn't a strong sense of history in this respect. So you know, it just actually kind of changes like that. And I think, I can see that going on. I'm sure it's true everywhere else.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

So your feelings at this point in time at the Slade.

Well I think, because of the, you know, the economic constraints which have come from Government and the way we've moved to try to maintain a reasonable educational standard and keep the options open for people, for students, the way we've done that is to sort of open up opportunities for people from abroad, from beyond, from within and beyond the EC, and after two or three sort of like typical years it's now, we've now reached a point where the actual relations between these groups of people has become really quite dynamic and active, and it's becoming a very positive aspect of the whole educational process. There are sort of pluses and minuses in all of this. There aren't enough British home-based students, and there's a severe, and some of those home-based students are under severe strain because of their own financial situations, and the contrast between that and some governmentally-suppported foreign students can be quite extreme, and the contrast between that and rich, privately rich students can be also extreme. So, you know, one can see within it almost a reversal of Third-Worldism, you know, where, you know, people are coming from sort of like unstable regimes but with large amounts of money to study and therefore able to do so in relative ease in connection with home-

based students whose grants are so low they have to work all hours of the evening and at weekends in order to survive, and that is very problematic as part of the social... Nonetheless, you know, the actual educational process itself has been really enhanced by this international dimension being brought into it in such a positive way. How long it will last of course is another matter I think, you know. One of the reasons why lots of people want to come here is because they perceive London to be a very active place for young artists, and once - and of course all of these kinds of conditions are temporary as we know, so once that fades, you know, like, and...will these students still be wishing to come here? Especially since the future of the universities seems to be dependent upon them becoming economically viable, almost like private institutions. And the kind of quality that, the standards that did exist seem to me to be under, not just under threat, they already have eroded and you know, they stand to erode much further. That's not very positive, because the long-term issue is not, the short-term is, in terms of what actually happens with these students.

I mean on that note, how...how do you equate an art education with other kinds of university education? Do you see it as having a different role and still being vocational?

I think it's vocational, yes, I think it's largely vocational. I think it does require, I mean I don't know in what other fields of study, you know, the element of creativity is placed in the centre, and since in art education it is to a large extent, then the way in which the education is structured and facilitated has to take that into account, and that's why it doesn't fit terribly well with authoritarian structures. Whereas some other disciplines there may be more of a requirement for imposed discipline in order to release the imagination within certain frameworks. But in the art thing it seems to me that this is not the case. Unless you go to very traditional activities, like, I don't know, bronze casting, you know, you have to do it a particular way in order to get a certain result. So when you come down to very specific mediums, disciplines are required, but in terms of, you know, like, education and the development of attitudes towards creativity, it requires it seems to me one, a sort of lateral sense of relationships between people and things as it were; and then two, the challenge to the individual to develop self-discipline. So that it's almost like, it's almost like, as though within a relatively free field, you know, one finds one's own sort of necessities as it were, you know, all connected to being creative.

Well thinking about, going back to your own career, tell me about the period after the Cenotaph project.

Well, it was such a...the Cenotaph was such a struggle, you know, just to get it done, and I mean I had a lot of discussions with Maya about this, and I was feeling that.....

End of F5286 Side B

F5287 Side A

[Continuing the interview with Stuart Brisley on the 21st of November 1996 at his home in London.]

I think I was trying to describe the problems I was having probably from the late Seventies through, well probably to the present moment, which have been to do with having consciously a very public stance in relation to the making of art, like in performance where, you know, the body as it were is in public, the person is there, has to be there; maybe there's a restriction about that, the fact that the body has to be there, so, in that way. To moving through the Eighties, trying to find ways of, trying to, in a way extend ways of working, moving as it were more towards private activity, or to activities which required studio space, a space to make things, and then whether it would be projected afterwards. So, ways of actually behaving perhaps more like traditional artists behave. And that's actually, I'm still sort of struggling with that, and since the Cenotaph project I've worked much more privately, but the subjects have become, are, remain as my perception of what would be public subjects, subjects that people would have some immediate connection with, and that's why I've worked quite a lot through using newspapers, trying to find common subjects for people, common subjects that people would be connected to. So as much as the, maybe some of the processes have become private, like painting and so forth, the subjects remain in the same kind of context as when I was working publicly. So actually that's really what's been going on. Now that should be really very simple and easy to do, and it's been sort of very difficult and sort of uncomfortable and, because I think I've had to confront or try to change some ideas that I held strongly and I've had to sort of in a way find ways of being able to leave them behind as it were. So I've had to sort of struggle with...that's a struggle in me, you know, as to what the nature of art is, what the position of the artist is and what I should be doing, you know, it's not a very interesting, necessarily, subject for anyone else but for me it's proved to be sort of somewhat complicated and difficult. I don't know why really but it has.

I mean can you explain in what way? I mean it might be evident from the interview, but...

Well just the idea of picking up a brush again and painting is a very, would seem to be, you know, like, OK just do it, it's no problem, but it's not that easy, and... So when I do that I'm confronted with all kinds of questions about, well what is the...what am I trying to do, how does it relate to what I've done in the past, how does

it relate to what I did when I was a student, because I painted for about eight years, ten years, as a student. You know, what...it's almost like I'm starting again, you know, and...you know, I'm confronted with sort of contemporary notions of, you know, like, what painting could be or is, which doesn't necessarily connect particularly with what I'm trying to do. So you know, I'm having a lot of difficulty with that, you know, whereas with performance in the past that wasn't an issue, there wasn't a problem. I had stepped as it were outside of the traditional languages; although, you know, there's all kinds of referring it back historically, nonetheless it felt like that, you know, one moved into an area where one didn't know what was going on so much. So to move back as it were into mediums where, you know, there's such a powerful weight of history and all the rest of it. And after such a long time of operating by breaking the boundaries, to come back in again is difficult, you know, quite... I mean even to the point of its validity, for me. And so now I'm in a position where, you know, I can contrast that with saying, well you know, now I'm making performances again as well, what the hell is going on with them, you know, what value do they have, how do they work in relation to the fact that I'm making these very precise sort of images, you know, with paint, or I'm making very laboured, hard bits of sculpture. Now this, you know, like how...how do these actually connect, and what... I don't know where the...it's not simple any more. It's not, you know, I took the... In performance for 15 years, I've worked as performance, you know, worked with performance only, and I understood that very clearly; when I was a painter as a student I realised I was a figurative painter and I'll never be anything else, except that at a certain point it all completely turned on its head, and then I was everything else as it were. So, you know, like I've always had, I've always had a kind of, quite a...quite a direct and extreme position relative to doing things, and now, I suppose I've recognised some limitations in that and so it's now more complex, what, you know, what the relations between these things are. And I can no longer kind of, you know, easily say, well to hell with all that, I can't, whereas I could before, I'd just say, well, take it or leave it.

I mean do you find the social experience that you had in performance contrasts with the whole sort of private studio experience, do you find that a problem?

Well, you know, one of the problems with performance is that, one, well, you can never...you can never...with performance you can never meditate upon it as it were; you do it, you may think about it before and afterwards and you may actually have secondary information through, you know, like reproductive processes but actually the thing itself is the thing itself and just lives in that time, in a way. And is limited to

that, you know. So there's a great frustration in performance it seems to me, and the other thing is, it's also deeply embarrassing as well, because performance... Well for me it is, because it often breaks certain sorts of taboos, and so it's very uncomfortable to be in it and do it. And so it's limiting and it's uncomfortable, and it's very elusive as to what its value is as well, it seems to me, at any given point in time. Now that may be, the value of something may be equally elusive with painting or sculpture, but at least there's something you can meditate upon, you know, there it is, you can see it, and you can see it actually taking place time and again before your eyes as you look at it, if you see what I mean, but you can't with performance at all, you know, it's not... And any reproduction is something else, it's not it. It is taken from it but it is not it at all. And I just don't believe that with, you know, that the idea of documentation, documentation has any real value, because if it's just documentation it always drops to a low level. In order to raise it you have to make it into another fiction, and therefore it's not what it was before in any way. So there's all these ironic difficulties with performance, and this essential limitation of having to be in it and never being able to see it from the outside. At least with these other activities you can actually be inside and outside, you know, you can be inside in it its internal sense in the process and as part of that process you can step out and have a look at it, which is really important, you know, to see what's going on, and then you can say, well you know, I want to do this or I will do that, or, you know, you do something in relation to it. Do you understand what I'm...?

But you'll never see it through the viewer's eyes.

No no, never through the viewer's, no I entirely agree, not through the viewer's eyes, this is purely in relation to me unfortunately, just me, what I'm, how I, the problems I have about, the problems I had with performance and doing fifteen years and then feeling that this was really, this had to change, I couldn't go on like that, you know. Because that limitation, and also, that was not satisfying, it was not satisfying in the end, because it was always, it was always sort of deconstructive, it was always fracturing and breaking, but it was never... Which is interesting in itself, but is, you know, like, the idea of an art work which actually offers you another view, another kind of perspective or, I don't know how to describe it exactly, and there it is still happening, you go back and maybe when you see it again it looks different because you've changed or something, but it still is an event that takes place, your eye travels across it, goes in and out and up and up and down, there it is. And, I find that...in other words, painting is like a performance that keeps performing.

So is that good or bad?

Yes I think it's good. Well I like that quality of it, yes, yes. But if it stops performing then the painting has died, you know, or for you the painting is dead, if you see what I mean. Because, you know, like with painting or, with sculpture I guess the same, but with painting it's, you know, once the thing, once you've consumed it, it's over isn't it, you don't need to look at it any more. It's when you can't consume it exactly and you keep needing to re-examine it and re-look at it, it's like you keep having a relationship with it, and maybe you never, maybe you never find out what it really is.

I would have thought one of the great freedoms of performance would be precisely that, doing it and walking away.

It is, yes, it's true, but it also becomes...but it can become its antithesis, if you persist in it, if you see what I mean, which is what happened to me, I persisted with it and you know, it was...and for that period of time, and then it became, you know, then it turned into its...you know, it turned into its other, something else; not its other, it turned into its opposite. That freedom becomes a prison. And you realise how limited that is then, any work of art is going to have limited terms of course.

So it sounds as if you've actually enjoyed this recent period, and yet I thought you were saying the opposite, so I'm slightly confused.

What?

I thought you were saying the opposite at the beginning, that, you know, this sort of...

No, I'm really...no, no. There's something really nice about, there's something nice about anonymity if you see... You know, the fact that I can, the fact that I can walk out and buy a newspaper and come back and I can get on with that work, and, if I'm making a work as a performance I've got to...performance only works in front of somebody else to start off with; if there's nobody there it doesn't work at all, it can't. So, you know, like, you've got...so it's got to be public in that respect, and that's... So it's that freedom just to sort of be able to move back and forth and that's very, that I think is very positive.

Tell me about this last exhibition of yours at the South London Gallery, because that was very political. I mean in a way it didn't, although there were paintings and things

in there, and sculptures, they were not...the content of them was one that stood in contrast to a lot of the kind of historical baggage of those formal means, I would have thought.

You mean the formal means employed in the painting, or the...how do you mean?

Well when you were saying that, you know, part of the problem of going back to painting was the historical baggage that painting carried...

Oh yes, mm.

I mean in away you've stuck to your same kind of basically political content.

But what I tried to do with that was to, I saw all those as sort of like parodies in a way of painting, because, but I may be wrong, I mean I may be wrong about that. I thought of them as parodies because, you know when we were talking about the Charles painting and Coldstream and all of that, that all of these images actually come from reproductions and they come from reproductions of reproductions, and so, and then they're given a sort of painterly treatment which makes them have the appearance of maybe having, that one might have been in the presence of an actual subject, that actually it's not true at all and it never, it wasn't. So they are kind of, in that sense they are kind of fantasies or illusions, so they play a game of realism in a way, it seems to me, in the way that I could never have done when I was a student because I was having big struggles with trying to be a Realist. And so in a way I think of them as being anti-paintings in that sense. So they have all the, they have some of the attributes of looking like painting but I'm not sure what they are. And they exist in that way because of the political content, i.e. the content goes back to the idea of public subjects again, subjects which everybody would have some relationship to, or, let's say... I wanted it also to be specific in Britain, people...I wanted to be even local, that people would have, you know, a connection to the subject. It's like painting the ordinary, would be another way of putting it, that this is the ordinary which is actually also extraordinary. It's the ordinary because you can, you know, with newspapers, I don't know, depending which one, 5 million are sold every day so you know that 5 million people have probably looked at that image that you've picked out of the newspaper to make a painting of. So it's ordinary in that sense. It's extraordinary in that some of the photographs selected were from images of the monarchy and the monarchy sit within this consciously structured mystique, right, which is connected then to the media again, you know, and is both supported and also

destroyed by the medium, it's both through...it's all sort of full of contradictions. So the extraordinary is referred to, i.e. the symbol of the union, the monarch, but it's referred to through the ordinary images of the newspaper, reproductive processes of the newspaper, and is then subjected to, you know, being sort of like painted as though it was a copy. So it's...so in a way the political content is sort of in a way contained in all of this as well, and is part of all of this, it seems to me.

Yes. I think that's what I meant. So, yes. This is an incredibly banal question but I really want to know the answer. That chair that had God knows what stuck to it, what was it?

What was the stuff?

Yes.

[LAUGHS] It was papier mâché.

Right. What a relief! [LAUGHS]

[LAUGHS] Yes. Well, somebody did say somewhere, I read it and I forget where I read it, it might have been in one of the reviews, it might have been, is it Graham Dixon or...

Andrew Graham-Dixon.

Or it was... Somebody referred to having seen a painting painted with the artist's shit. [LAUGHS] I don't know. But this...yes, it was made to look like shit of course, but it was that acrylic paint and newspaper, and it's quite realistic.

It's very successful.

Yes, that's right, it's very... I think sort of, a lot of things I touch tend to sort of like have an illusion about, you know, it's funny, you know, if you have a...I've noticed, you know, that, my work tends to actually always have some sort of illusionistic aspect to it. Just by throwing that stuff, you know, it came out like that, you know, it's very...I don't know what it is, it's just, you know, like, I guess some people have a propensity to produce certain things, you know.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Now I know, because you told me, that you're relatively close to retiring in the next couple of years. I mean have you thought what life will be like without the structure and stimulus of working at the Slade?

Well, I've often thought that the subjects of my work have been influenced a hell of a lot by, you know, my connection with institution, and I think that's probably true. Initially I've sort of approached the idea of not being in the Slade any more with a great deal of pleasure I must say. I mean on two counts. One, it's great to feel free, and on the other hand it's also great not to be subjected to all of that, you know, whatever it was. But then I think there are other aspects that... I mean the most important thing, the most critical thing about, for me, is that relationship with other people, and one of the things that's kept me relatively, well I don't know whether I'm right in saying this, but relatively sort of young in a way, is contacts with young people, and, or younger people, and that has been, that has become, I've become more and more aware that that has been a kind of privilege in a way. And so, suddenly that's going to disappear. And so I've been, I've actually had, over the period of years I've had to confront lots of sorts of issues I suppose that were important to young people, not necessarily to me, so I've had a sort of education in a way. And it's all going to come to an end in that respect, I mean at least formally like that. So that social engagement is going to be a loss. I can't say that's true of...in general I couldn't possibly say that that was true of the staff. Absolutely not, you know. You know, if I never saw almost all of them again it wouldn't matter, and I'm sure that it would be the same, them with me, you know, like, absolutely. That, there is nothing critical in there at all, but with the students there is. And so it's at that level that I feel there's going to be a loss. Now, I don't think... And I'm also pretty sure that that can't be regained in any way, right, that's just, that's just the nature of how it is, one's got to come to terms with that. On the other hand one could look at, you know, I could look back and say, well, you know, I have engaged in certain sorts of public...I've had public involvements through the nature of my work at various points in time, and they've been very consciously done relatively to, you know, trying to have...in a way to speculate on how it is to be an artist, and I don't see any reason why that can't continue. And it may well be that with this space that's going to exist, not the time space but the social gap, the gap that's going to me left by the absence of involvement with these young people, there's a possibility that something will enter in that has some connection to other parts of my work earlier on. So that's maybe how I could look upon it. Retirement is one of the worst words you can imagine. After retirement

comes death, it seems to me, and I mean I don't feel like, I don't even want to think about the idea of retirement. I don't think it... I could think about a sudden drop in income, that's for sure, I could certainly think about that. But you know, I'm sure, you know, like, there's going to be plenty, there's going to be a lot to do.

Right, well I think on that optimistic note, well thank you very much Stuart Brisley.

End of F5287 Side A

End of Interview