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Interview with Scott Burton for the Archives of American Art, conducted by Lewis Kachur at Mr. Burton's studio at 115 West 28th Street, New York, New York, on Friday, May 22, 1987

KACHUR: Let me ask you your full name and birth date.

BURTON: My full name is Walter Scott Burton. I was born June 23, 1939.

LK: That was in Alabama?

SB: Yes. I was born in the hospital in Greensboro, Alabama, in Hale County, but really my home town is Eutaw, Alabama - a very tiny town in Greene County. The nearest city is Tuscaloosa, the university town.

LK: So they didn't have a hospital, the town was so small.

SB: Right. Exactly. And so rural. The ambiance at that time -- It had been one year previously that Walker Evans took all the famous photographs of Hale Country and maybe even Greene County (I can't remember). But that's exactly my area of childhood that was documented - more the black people than the white. The Coca-Cola signs with bullet holes and black people's shacks.

I'm from a small town. I'm not from a farm like cousins of mine. So neither city nor country -- a town. A small, American, Southern town.

LK: What was the population in those days? Do you have any idea?

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SB: Yes, I do. Three thousand - about two-thirds, of course, black. So a very small white population. In some way, of course, I'm a Southerner, but I don't identify with it. I hate it there. I hate the racist, classist society that it is.

LK: What kind of a home did you have? I mean, you lived in a house or an apartment?

SB: We lived in a middle-class Victorian house.

LK: Big yard?

SB: Yes. Good question. Very important to me. Taking the dining room chairs out in the backyard and playing with them. It was very influential on me - very, very. I guess I had a lot of solitary years as a young child. I have no brothers and sisters.

LK: You were an only child?

SB: An only child.

LK: What did your parents do?

SB: My father was a "roughneck" - an oil well driller. He worked in offshore oil rigs around Texas and Louisiana - around the Gulf of Mexico.

LK: The Gulf Coast?

SB: Yes. My mother was a legal and a social secretary, later in Washington. So I spent my first twelve or thirteen years -- I don't remember exactly which year we moved to

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Washington. My mother's family had always lived back and forth between Washington, D.C. and Alabama. A lot of Southern people do that. My mother had worked in the government for congressmen. My uncle, who is the hero of our family -- my father was absent, so the man of the family was my mother's brother, who was a journalist and a writer and a college poet. He and his family lived in Washington. So my mother's family were very close - my grandmother, her two children, and me and my cousins.

I spent summers in Maine and visited Washington frequently. So it wasn't exactly Mark Twain --

LK: Southern childhood.

SB: Right.

LK: There's some New England connection there.

SB: Yes. Very important, like in the wider world. The wider world existed for me, unlike a lot of kids. The insularity of the South and, indeed, the Midwest and probably California, too.

LK: That's interesting. So what would you see in Washington when you would visit? Was it pretty much the national sites?

SB: Yes. I vaguely remember going to the memorials and stuff. That became more important to me when

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we actually moved there. My mother and I moved to Washington in 1952 or 1953. It was very powerful on me because it was the same time when you become pubescent. So at the very same moment that I was exposed to -- Washington, to us now, is even a tiny town. But at that time, it was a frightening big city to a kid. I was still a shy, small-town kid, of course. But that thing of going into adulthood and into a big city at literally the same month -- that was a very dramatic experience.

LK: I just want to cover the period before you actually moved to Washington. You mentioned your mother's brother being important. Did he have children that you played with and things like that when you visited Washington?

SB: Yes. And they would come in the summer to see us. They were cousins.

LK: So you felt there was a sort of connection with Washington before you even moved there?

SB: The more important thing is my uncle, who is the literary person. Because, in later years, I took a detour from art into literature. It was very much the family influence.

LK: Was he a journalist with a particular Washington newspaper?

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SB: A chain of newspapers. I can't remember what it was called. It was called Knight, I think. He was like a political columnist.

LK: [unclear]

SB: He knew politicians. It was my first exposure to the star system. [laughter]

LK: In politics.

SB: It was very, very glamorous and exciting. He had been a college poet. There were volumes of University of Alabama college poetry, 1925 or whatever. They were like Vachel Lindsay. I think that was a big influence.

LK: On his work?

SB: Yes. My literary exposure as a child was classical - the Bible, Dickens, Shakespeare. And that funny....Vachel Lindsay and that kind of thing, dated 1920s.

LK: Do you like to read?

SB: Yes. Reading was very important to me, supremely important as a child.

LK: And you say the Bible. Did your family, when you were in Alabama, attend church?

SB: Oh, yes, unfortunately. Presbyterian church.

LK: Did you go also to Sunday school?

SB: Yes. I was forced to. [laughter]

LK: That was pretty bad?

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SB: I hate religion. I'm very anti any kind of religion. I'll be anti-Semitic if I have to, but I'm also anti-Catholic, anti-Protestant, and anti-Buddhist. [laughter]

The really important thing here, for me, in terms of childhood, is the influence of the architecture, which I didn't realize until many, many, many, many years later. I love what we call "Greek revival" architecture. It was a courthouse town - the classical pattern. There's a kind of very simple, neoclassical courthouse in the middle of the square in the middle of the town.

LK: In Eutaw?

SB: In Eutaw, Alabama. My grandmother's childhood home was with columns and a pediment --

LK: Porch and things like that?

SB: Yes. Not a plantation. It's at the edge of the town. It's not this kind of "Gone With the Wind" stuff. But, nevertheless, that was a pervasive architecture with classical language. A very simple version.

LK: More than Victorian, like your own house was.

SB: I remember vaguely being aware of Victorian architecture and also bungalow. Some of my friends lived in -- it fascinated me -- I mean, those kind of California bungalows. I remember in

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much more detail the buildings than the people.

LK: Really? I was going to ask you about your friends, what kinds of things that you would do.

SB: Not much. I remember movies being very important. In those days, there would be one theatre in the town, but it would have maybe four different movies a week. Everybody went to all the movies. So I must have seen hundreds of movies as a child.

LK: Typical Hollywood kind of stuff?

SB: Yes, of course. I remember Fred Astaire, loving Fred Astaire. I remember the Dickens movie with Pip - "Great Expectations." I remember being so terrified by the convict in that movie. This is trivia, Lewis. [laughter]

LK: No, no. There's a lot of Dickens involved in childhood.

SB: Dickens is, I guess, an important force in my life. I don't think my work is Dickensian. I hope it isn't. Or Southern. Because Washington and, of course, New England also have a great deal of provincial neoclassical architecture - even in the 20th-century. So I'm very deeply an Easterner, understand now, having gone to the Midwest and to the West. The whole thing of eighteenth-century architecture and neoclassical style, even into the twentieth-century, I feel are

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very much part of my sensibility.

LK: In terms of proportions?

SB: Yes.

LK: Or forms?

SB: It's very hard to say. But the idea that there is an ideal proportion for something -- Of course, using granite all the time. I mean, I have a love of classicism. I love Flaxman.

But the Presbyterian church in Eutaw, Alabama, the county courthouse, and my grandmother's childhood home.

LK: Classic revival.

SB: Her aunt's house. All around it is columns, pediments, cornices and keystone. Well, not so much keystone. It's not an architecture of stone as much as of wood.

Later in Washington, there's a lot of important influence on me in the architecture that I've only realized lately. I'm skipping ahead.

LK: Was there any interest in art among your family?

SB: No. It was all literary. The only art that was vivid to me as a child was the illustrations in my children's books. They're all like English - Tenniel in Alice In Wonderland. I mean, Winnie the Pooh, Ernest Shepherd, Mary Poppins. I can't remember if P. L. Travers did that. Anyway, I'm

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an Anglophile. The first time I went to England, I felt that I'd been there before. I think it's from the influence of the children's books. The Wind in the Willows - all of those standard English children's books. There are others I can't remember. I had some that I know now must have been maybe George Macdonald or somebody, because I recognize the drawing style in Walter Crane and those Arts-and-Crafts illustrators. I don't remember Kate Greenaway, but some of those are hauntingly familiar to me -- those kind of Pre-Raphaelite and Arts-and-Crafts drawing styles. I know I had some books, I must have had some books, with those pictures.

So I think I'm an artist because of the children's book illustrations and comic books. An American kid, I had the best collection of comic books in town - really a serious comic book collection.

LK: That's something different from Dickens. Spider Man?

SB: Well, no. Batman, Superman. Little Lulu was a great favorite of mine. Comic books are very important to me. Of course, they are a blend of visual and verbal, of pictorial and narrative. There's a strain in me which is in

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abeyance, but it comes out in the performances and in a few other works. Maybe in the future, I'll do comic books. [laughter] I don't know.

So the Greek revival architecture. But, specifically, art. I had the World Book Encyclopedias. They had reproductions of art. It didn't mean a great deal to me. I don't remember being fascinated by them at all.

Oh, another interesting thing -- In the post office, of course, there was a WPA mural. God knows, it probably was a Pollock or a Guston.

LK: No, I don't think so.

SB: I have no idea. But it was a tobacco farmer. That was the only art, as such, that I knew about.

LK: So you didn't draw or study any art in school?

SB: Not particularly. I went to a very old-fashioned, red brick, really Victorian schoolhouse - grades one to six. Of course, we did things.

Do you know what was important to me in my own production? Crayons and coloring books. When I started out as an art student, it wasn't painting, which I've got no interest in at all any more. But color -- I'm by no means unique -- has a profound reverberation. When I see a color, it gives me a strange feeling. It's an early childhood feeling. It's very hard to explain.

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The technicolor of the movies of that time. When I see it today, tears come to my eyes. It's a certain palette as well as film process in the technicolor of the 1940s that's very different from any other kind of color. But the color of crayons especially are --

LK: Crayola crayons?

SB: Yes. Green and yellow, and the big boxes. I mean, when I look at this red, I have some intense associations that are totally non-specific, non-verbalizable. A lot of people have them - not just an artist. I'm non-Matisse papier collé, so I don't know how -- that extremely powerful feeling. Because I've also discovered the love of shape and physical object, which is different. But the sensation of colors was very important to me as a child.

I have to say one more thing about becoming an artist. I think this is true of many American kids. Christmas tree decorating. My mother taught me how to make sure that not too many red bulbs were together and that they were distributed around the tree. You'd go outside and you'd squint and recompose. I learned composition from my mother decorating the Christmas tree. [laughter] Hans Hofmann, with all the push and

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pull many years later, was just the same.

LK: Talking about the same thing? This was an outside Christmas tree?

SB: No, no. Inside. But we would go out and look in the window to see how it composed for the neighbors!

LK: Oh, really? Great.

SB: Also, Halloween costumes - very important. I remember one important one my mother made for me. I don't remember all of them. Sometimes, I guess, as older children, we'd make our own.

Then Valentine's Day cards and Easter baskets, all of that nonsense of American childhood holidays. Very influential on me. And I'll bet you that on Elizabeth Murray, Jackson Pollock, and all the rest of them. But for me especially, Christmas tree decorations. That was spatial. That was three-dimensional.

LK: Yes. Although, I guess, the Halloween costumes were --

SB: That's performance, all right! [laughs]

LK: We're not trying to do any one-to-one thing like that.

SB: It's a little pat. But that's very important, I think. This is old-fashioned. We were very much

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into making Valentine cards with collage...

LK: With sprinkles and glue?

SB: Yes.

LK: Cut paper?

SB: Paper antimacassars, doilies. Some form of collage.

LK: Sure. And probably different from other national types of childhood emphasis, I would imagine.

SB: But I'll bet you a lot of American artists -- you know, coloring books and crayons, paper dolls. I don't even know if they make those paper dolls with many dresses any more.

LK: You mean cutting out rows of paper dolls?

SB: No. Like figures - flat figures. They all had different clothes. Mostly movie stars.

LK: Like Ken and Barbie.

SB: Yes. And they all had many different costumes. Although it was very sissy, I liked them very much. That's another association of color for me. These flat printed clothes that the paper dolls had that you would cut out.

LK: That all sounds very bookish. Anything more active, in terms of sports or playing?

SB: Not much. I'm sort of classic sissy in that way.

LK: Did you collect anything besides comic books?

SB: No. And not much at sports - hardly at all.

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LK: You said you played with furniture in the yard?

SB: Yes. [laughs] That's my sport.

LK: That sounds interesting. Playing house? Well, I guess all children play house in some form. Did you have a tree house?

SB: No. I had a tree swing that was very important to me. Climbing trees was very important. But that's kind of escapism - being way up and away where no one can get at you. Being in the tops of trees was very important.

LK: What would you say was your best memory of childhood? Or maybe you've already kind of touched on that. Is there any way you could say what you remember best in a positive sense?

SB: That's hard to say. The last day of school and the first day of school.

LK: You've already touched on the Christmas tree and the whole idea of holidays and family that are good memories. Good kinds of things.

SB: No. They're not really. They're two different issues. I mean, I would not like to go into the unpleasant side of my childhood. It was intensely difficult.

LK: That's the next question. What's the worst memory?

SB: I wouldn't like to talk about that stuff. I had a

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very unhappy childhood, but I'd rather leave it at that. That's one reason I had solitary activities - reading, drawing, swinging and climbing trees, and so forth.

LK: I guess, then, the next phase is when you moved to Washington. That was with your mother.

SB: The other thing in childhood that I remember is World War II. I love World War II. [laughter] It brings back my earliest years. I love to see Winston Churchill on TV or Pathé News or March of Time or Life magazines of 1940-1945. It gives me just a rush of feelings, World War II.

LK: I guess you remember mostly the latter part of World War II.

SB: No, the whole thing. I have early memories of sirens and blackouts and rationing Coke.

LK: Really? They did that all over the place?

SB: Yes, all over the country.

LK: What would you do in a blackout? Everybody down to the cellar?

SB: No. I think we put our bathrobes over the windows, blankets over the windows.

LK: So there was no light?

SB: Yes. I'm sure it was a psychological technique on the part of the government, because we were no where near any kind of military. But I remember

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convoys of trucks and convoys of troop trains. World War II, when you're under five years old, it's very strong, interesting.

LK: Did you play soldiers the way kids do now?

SB: Oh, sure. Because my friends' fathers brought back bayonets and Japanese helmets and all that kind of thing.

LK: Oh, really? That sounds like dangerous soldiers.

SB: We had guns and medals and so forth. My father wasn't in the service because he was doing highway construction at the time, which was a privileged --

LK: An essential industry or whatever you want to call it?

SB: Yes.

LK: So he was deferred. How about your uncle? Was he a war correspondent at all? Did he write?

SB: No. He lived in Washington all the time. And he would travel, but not to -- I don't recall. No, he had nothing to do with the war reporting - always political. His name was Radford Mobley. My mother's family was Moberly before they shortened it. It's an English name. They came as perfectly poor common people. You know that kind of American family where you're not aristocratic, but you've been here for hundreds of generations. They came as servants and worked their way down

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the East Coast and ended up at South Carolina at some point and then down to Alabama. It's not snobbish to say it was eighteenth- or seventeenth-century, because they're ordinary people - not at all wealthy aristocrats.

LK: That was your mother's family?

SB: Yes. My father's side, I don't know anything about. They're obviously similar. My uncle's name was Calvin, one of my father's brothers. That always signals to me that kind of Puritan stock.

LK: His family name?

SB: No, given name. John Calvin would be a hero of the Southern Fundamentalists, probably. Poor farmers.

On the other hand, a family like my mother's grandfather -- We have these books of the history of the county from the 19th-century. They called themselves "planters." They were just farmers. But that's that whole self-glorification of the South that I hate as much as the racism. Its classism. It's the other thing about it: We used to have all these farms and probably slaves. They would tell me how my great grandfather would have bought his way out of the Civil War and how they buried stuff in their back yard. I mean, the

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whole crap! The whole junk!

LK: So you rejected the sort of intensity of the South experience.

SB: This is an interesting thing. My name is Walter Scott Burton. I was named for my father and he was named for his father, and I think he was named for his father, which takes us back to when Walter Scott was -- I didn't understand this until college.

LK: Sir Walter Scott.

SB: Yes. Sir Walter Scott was the culture hero especially of the American South, I learned in my Victorian literature course.

LK: Was it Ivanhoe?

SB: I have never read a word of it. But now I realize that it's like being named for Norman Mailer - no worse. Stephen King or something. Or Louis L'Amour or something. But that's interesting. I'm living, surviving proof of the pervasive popularity of Sir Walter Scott in the American South in the 19th century.

Steven Marcus was my teacher in this course -- the great authority on Dickens and Victorian literature. He explained that to us. The Southerners thought they were living in this age of chivalry and this fake medieval age that Walter

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Scott wrote about. Pretty embarrassing.

LK: Your parents are both from similar kinds of families. Is that how they met? Did they ever tell you?

SB: In a more closed society like a small-town society before the 1950s or before television or before increased mobility. Actually, I think my father had been the boyfriend of a cousin of my mother's and she took him away. I always thought that she got pregnant, because I was born very prematurely. In fact, I only weighed three pounds. But It was a very different society.

LK: You were born pretty soon after they got married?

SB: Well, about seven months. I've always suspected. This is trivia. This is not important.

LK: Well, it's all part of your formation, I guess.

SB: Anyway, my mother took me to Washington, where she had lived on and off in the 1930s, working for congressmen.

LK: When she was single?

SB: Yes, or previously married. She supported us. We didn't have a lot of money. But it was to go to a better public school system in Washington. So I went to public schools in Washington - not private schools. But they were still much better than school in Alabama would have been.

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LK: Were there any teachers who were important to you?

SB: Not really at that time. Washington was very important to me. My mother worked in the government. She was a military kind of secretary - an administrative assistant, I guess. A woman, in those days, was called a "secretary." I can see a lot of correctness in feminist political struggles through my mother's own life. It was the age of McCarthy.

LK: You said it was 1952 or 1953 when she got to Washington.

SB: Yes. McCarthy was on TV all day. It was so frightening to a child.

LK: Did that sort of go together with the experience of going from a smaller town to a city?

SB: Sure. I remember the anxiety of growing up, the anxiety of having to master a metropolis.

LK: In what part of Washington did you live?

SB: We lived for a couple years with my uncle and his family in Georgetown. Then we moved to a place up the street, to Glover Park, which is a little bit like Brooklyn. There are parts of Brooklyn or Queens that remind me of that neighborhood. I don't know what the names of these places --

LK: Did you live in a brownstone-type house?

SB: No. In an apartment house.

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LK: You had some contact then with art in the public schools?

SB: Yes. I remember vividly the first time I ever went to the National Gallery. My mother took me on a Sunday afternoon. To confess, I remember being bored. I remember looking at the sculpture to check out the genitals like a twelve-year-old. Nothing prodigy-like about me in that way. But I got into the habit of going to the National Gallery. Now I'm talking about the age of thirteen to eighteen - the adolescent years. I went to the National Gallery a lot.

Then, fairly soon -- I guess a couple years or three years later -- I discovered the Phillips Collection, which was also just completely influential on me. The Phillips Collection, before they built the new wing, they didn't even lock the storage. They had a wonderful little de Kooning, and they wouldn't show it. I would just open the storage door and go in and look at it in the racks in the closet. This is jumping ahead a few years.

LK: So you were already interested in art. I didn't know their security was that --

SB: It was incredible. You sat around in their French furniture, looking at the room full of Paul Klees.

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The Phillips Collection was one of the greatest events of my adolescence.

LK: It's interesting. As a space, of course, the National Gallery is among the classics. And the Phillips is so domestic and homey. Was it the art that appealed to you, or the setting, or the whole thing?

SB: I guess the art, the Klees. I think it was the only great Renoir.

LK: "The Boating Party"?

SB: Yes, which is really very good. This de Kooning. Traditional art meant very little to me. I really very much worked my way backwards. I mean, I love all kinds of art now and also art history. I have a smattering of self-taught information in art history - very little. I've retained even less than I've taken in.

I must say the stuff that I loved in the National Gallery were the pink period Picassos especially. They had some of the Mellon things of figures, boys and horses, girls, the big Saltimbanques, then some smaller boys with crewcuts, in this arid, beautiful landscapes. I think the Blue and the Pink Periods --

LK: They had more of that than they do of the sort of Cubist period. Those are very recent acquisitions.

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SB: Yes. And that spoke to me. I don't remember that. I would probably have been interested in it. But from the beginning, it was modern art for me.

LK: When you were bored at National Gallery, was it the Renaissance and the older things that you were looking at that bored you?

SB: Yes. I don't remember spending much time in that. I remember going always straight to the modern wing. There were also things like Dunoyer de Segonzac, Lothon Friese - I loved them. [laughs]

LK: So this was your first interest in art? Were you already then doing some art in high school?

SB: Yes. We're talking about junior high school now. One thing I must mention, Lewis -- I feel like such an American. Something that was a real turning point in my life was the movie, "Moulin Rouge," about Toulouse-Lautrec, which must have been about 1952. Directed by John Huston. It was so visually beautiful with Huston's filters and stuff, but also the life of Toulouse-Lautrec. That was one of my great discoveries of art. I remember getting Toulouse-Lautrec reproductions and finding old frames and painting the frames a good color for them. It was extremely important to me.

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LK: That was the first artist you really --

SB: Fell in love with.

LK: You followed his biography and were interested in his life.

SB: Yes - through this Hollywood movie.

LK: He had a couple at the National Gallery, suppose.

SB: I don't remember them. I guess the next was my Picasso period. And then, later, because of the great Klees at the Phillips -- doing a lot of Klee, I started looking up art schools. I went a couple of times to life classes in Georgetown. There were a couple of terrible academic artists that had studios and students would come in. You know what I mean?

LK: Yes.

SB: Never liking that very much. We're talking now about the age of fourteen, fifteen, sixteen. A couple of Saturday classes at the Corcoran.

LK: Is that the Washington Workshop?

SB: No. That's different. I was going to mention that. And feeling too sophisticated for these children's Saturday classes and stuff like that. Then I heard about this thing called the Washington Workshop of the Arts. I don't know how. It's a place that really should be documented. It's probably the first alternative

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space in America. I later found out that it was run by Leon Berkowitz, who became a very close friend and mentor and teacher to me.

When I was fourteen or fifteen, I went to one class on one evening to see what it was like. (I've told this story before.) It was way too sophisticated for me. The teacher was having people use big bedsheets because it was cheaper than canvas, and teaching them how to stain and pour paint on it. The man's name was Morris Louis.

LK: Bernstein then?

SB: He was already Morris Louis when I went there.

LK: Were you aware of him at that time?

SB: No, not at all. I was terrified. I didn't go back to the class.

LK: It didn't seem like making real art?

SB: No. It did. But it was too advanced for me. I was frightened by it.

LK: Had you signed up for a course like that or you were just sort of auditing and seeing what --

SB: No. I just went to check it out. I never went back. But then, indeed, I would get sheets of my mother's and stain. I could make very bad Morris Louises, Helen Frankenthalers at the age of fourteen or fifteen.

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LK: The Washington Workshop School is sort of an interesting --

SB: This guy, Berkowitz, is very seminal in that. A couple years later, he was my high school art teacher. For a while he taught in the Washington high schools before and after he taught at the Corcoran. I think he even still does. We don't have any contact. He and his wife (a poet named Ida Fox) became like parents to me - real family. He was a major influence on me, one I had to reject very radically. He is the first lyrical abstractionist, if you want to use that word. It's kind of mystical. His great loves are Turner, for example, and probably Rothko.

LK: Is that what he would teach?

SB: Yes. And that's why he was a bad teacher. Only his vision. It may be good and bad. It was not exactly my temperament. But, in any case, he sent me in the summers to the Hans Hofmann Summer School.

LK: Can we talk first about what his class was like?

SB: In the public high school, it was just not anything. We were the bohemians. There weren't any hippies yet. We had a little group - the art weirdos. I wore desert boots. Very bohemian. The school was in Georgetown. I was either living near it or in this other apartment quite close.

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LK: Would you walk to school?

SB: Sure. The middle-class white section of Northwest Washington. Now it's very, very changed. But in the 1950s, the public schools were white. Some of my friends were important to me - children of the liberal Jews, like the Americans for Democratic Action people, the people who worked for Hubert Humphrey, and so forth.

LK: Those who countered the McCarthy - -.

SB: They were always being attacked by McCarthy. I'm not very political in my intellect, but I was always aware. Being in Washington, you have to be aware of all these kinds of issues.

So there were these traditional liberal Jewish people -- some of them worked for the government; some of them worked for think tanks and so forth. A lot of them were my friends. Through them, I would see Ulysses on the bookshelf or a Charles Eames chair.

LK: That their parents --

SB: Yes. Those were very important to me, because my own family was not in any way modernistic. They were perfectly traditional. My uncle was a friend of Nixon in the early days, which is pretty shameful.

LK: When he was in Congress.

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SB: Right.

LK: It's not your uncle's fault.

SB: Well, it's not exactly a liberal heritage.

LK: You found that you felt at home in this kind of current of these friends? Were some of them wanting to be artists, too - studying art, also?

SB: I guess, yes. Or writers. One boy was a friend of Ezra Pound's, who was, at that time, in St. Elizabeth's Hospital. He would go in Sundays and take his poems to Ezra Pound.

And the first paperback bookstores were opening up. Very important for me in early adolescence. You don't know what it was like, Lewis. It's a new thing. I mean, you take it for granted. We don't even use public libraries very much any more for normal purposes, because you buy a paperback and everything is in print. But in the early 1950s, the advent of paperbacks was just incredible. I read a lot of D.H. Lawrence and a lot of Evelyn Waugh. He's my favorite. And Aldous Huxley. Because they were all the first things published in highbrow paperbacks. Very important.

The social history of the culture is how it impinges on your life, like Christmas trees. But the advent of paperback publishing -- I'll never

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forget the first -- I guess it was in a very famous book shop called "The Savile." It's long since defunct. It was one of the great American book shops - very, very famous in bibliophilic tradition. The Savile on Wisconsin Avenue and, I guess, P Street perhaps.

Georgetown, in those days, also had an art co-op with some potters and some painters.

LK: This was your Greenwich Village of the period.

SB: Yes, exactly. So I, very early on, became a bohemian.

LK: Playing that role was something that --

SB: And my friends were playing it. Then we got a mentor in Leon Berkowitz in high school.

LK: Was this just by chance that he was a teacher there and you hit it off?

SB: Yes. It was by great chance. He's a very, very strong person and an attractive personality. He liked having groupies. We're not really friends any more. His wife is dead. We went very separate ways many, many years ago. But he still has an admiring circle in Washington. He's an artist about whom more should be done - quite an important and original artist. He got lost in the shuffle when he got [Clement] Greenberg down to see [Morris] Louis. But then Greenberg cut him

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out or something. It was a very bitter story.

LK: Was he doing abstract work at that time?

SB: Yes.

LK: Would you go to his house?

SB: Yes

LK: Would he see students after school?

SB: Yes.

LK: Would you see his paintings?

SB: Yes, absolutely.

LK: He showed his own work?

SB: Absolutely.

LK: Did you admire them?

SB: Oh -- I still do. It's a kind of lyric and somewhat mystic thing.

LK: It's a sort of clarified image now, the Washington Color School. But I know, in some research that I've done, that there was a period in the mid-1950s where there was a very strong influence of Abstract Expressionism.

SB: That was because of Leon.

LK: A de Kooning connection.

SB: Yes. Leon gave one of de Kooning's early shows at this Washington Workshop. I did not see it. Greenberg did it before he turned against de Kooning. I have the pamphlet somewhere. It's very interesting. I don't remember that show. I

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do remember a de Kooning show --

LK: That was important for people like Louis, I guess, and Berkowitz.

SB: I remember Leon having discarded that into much more open landscape-based rather than figure-based - non-cubistic.

LK: Staining canvases, too?

SB: He actually never did stain. He always brushed. I think staining is Louis's. But they were very close friends - and Ida Fox, the poet, who worshipped Gerard Manley Hopkins. So there's this whole religious visionary element in this work. They were very close. They titled a lot of Louis's early paintings. This is probably in all the literature.

LK: Usually, they talk about Louis and Noland.

SB: This is before that.

LK: Did Berkowitz work at all in acrylic?

SB: No - in oil. I remember the smell.

LK: Is that what he taught? Or did you study drawing or painting?

SB: I never did life drawing. The only life drawing I really had was in Hofmann's morning classes. That was only two years, because the third year he didn't have a school and I would just take over work informally to show him during summer.

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But Leon never was interested in figure. One thing I wish I had had is more academic life drawing. I was too good for that. These private studios in Georgetown were still existing and the Corcoran classes. I was doing Matisse imitations - simple Matissian line drawings. I was precocious, but it retarded me ultimately. I was too precocious, because then I totally abandoned art and spent ten years in a literary direction. So I think that I was too sophisticated too young, really. Because at fifteen I was exposed to stain painting.

LK: Before the news from New York.

SB: Before. This is really, in a way, before New York, or around the same time.

LK: But, I mean, from Washington, they would get the --

SB: Yes. So this is around the same time. I somehow touched on this kind of a thing. Although it was too much for me. I was prematurely sophisticated, I think, because of the Klees, because of the Picassos, and, in fact, the whole other thing.

One good friend of mine, one of the liberal Jewish kind of American Democratic for Action people -- they lived in a modern house, and I loved it. I just loved their house. Window

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walls. So I became a modernist. At that time, I would have scorned an architecture like that of the National Gallery, which now I just love.

LK: So you were into the International Style more or less?

SB: Yes. I discovered modernism -- not only art but modernism -- at the age of fourteen.

LK: Was there any architecture that you learned formally? Or did you just look at it or read about it?

SB: No. Also, Georgetown was great because there's some wonderful federal townhouses there. You absorb these things without even knowing it. One building which I recently realized is extremely influential on me -- and you're going to laugh -- is the Washington Monument. [laughter] My uncle's father-in-law was head of some department at the Library of Congress. On their walls were all kinds of prints -- I don't know if they were drawings or lithographs -- of proposals in the competition for the Washington Monument. They were very, very ornate. So the real Washington Monument, which I went in and climbed up the stairs as a kid, I was aware of its reductive nature without being really aware of it, because of my step-great uncle. So I was aware of the

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minimality at an early age. I was very lucky, I think. This is all reconstruction. This is all hindsight, Lewis. You understand that.

LK: Right. History is always tinged with that. I guess most people, even myself, would sort of view the Washington Monument as just sort of being there, and you kind of almost don't see it as a building.

SB: True. It was only recently that I saw it. It's off the subject, but it's kind of an important thing for the history of public art. I realized recently what the Washington Monument was intended to be when it was built, which is totally lost from us. This is very interesting. And it has nothing to do with stripped classicism or reduction and rejection of ornament. It has to do with the form of the obelisk. Here's how I can get it across to you: Imagine to yourself that the Washington Monument is solid stone. Then you see it becomes a giganticized obelisk. We know it's an obelisk form, but we know now that it's hollow and it has four little windows at the top, and many of us have been up in it. So what we think of it is a kind of eccentric minor skyscraper. Don't. Think of it as Cleopatra's needle ten times bigger. Pretend to yourself that

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it's solid stone throughout. Then I think you get a freshness on it, that it's a giganticized obelisk. It's an enormously enlarged obelisk. It's an Oldenburgian object in a way. The whole idea of enlarging and enlarging and enlarging the scale. Since I've thought of this, I want to take a postcard and touch out the little windows to try to communicate my understanding of this. And I think this is a correct understanding of the Washington Monument -- that it's really meant to be seen as the world's largest obelisk, not the world's smallest skyscraper.

LK: Or shell.

SB: Yes, shell. If you can eliminate the shell, the interior is not there, the interior space doesn't exist, then I think you get more of a sense of the original intent of the object.

LK: If you want to propose to fill the Washington Monument -- [laughter]

SB: Certainly not wrap it. But the Washington Monument is very important in my life.

[end of side one]

The last word I wanted to say about the Washington Monument was, as well as it being iconic -- I'm not that pop. I guess I'm perverse, but I'm not that interested, personally, in the kind of

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camp which is not a bad word, but Oldenburg, ironic. It's just not me. I'm more "serious," unfortunately.

LK: In quotes?

SB: Yes. So the Washington Monument wasn't a pop thing to me, but a serious, iconic sculpture.

LK: But this is pretty much reading back — —

SB: Yes. At the time, I wouldn't have dreamed. I mean, I was interested in Philip Johnson's glass house, which has been very influential on me, I feel, as a cultural object, rather than John Pope (what's his name?).

LK: John Russell Pope?

SB: Now I love that National Gallery - the old wing. And I love the Lincoln Memorial and the Jefferson Memorial and the terraces and the reflecting pool and Pennsylvania Avenue and the White House.

LK: Great urban spaces.

SB: Yes. The urbanism of Washington is very important to me. My greatest ambition, doing the plazas and the parks, is to do something in Washington for personal reasons. This is my city. I'm Eutaw, Alabama, but I'm also Washington D.C. I'm also very much of New York City. Those are my three --

LK: Poles?

SB: Yes. This is the direction of my life -- north.

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LK: Any general impressions about Washington, or anything you want to add in coming there from the South? Or have we pretty much touched on all the main points?

SB: I guess. There will probably be something extremely important that I'll think of tonight. You know how that kind of thing is. The National Gallery, the Phillips Collection, the kind of liberal intellectual group,
Berkowitz, and my friends from school - the poet who studied with Pound and so forth.

LK: But I mean the impression of Washington as a city.

SB: I very shortly had my culture exploded in the space of a couple of years. Although I wasn't exactly a naive kid. As a child, we didn't travel to Europe, but we traveled to Washington and Maine. I remember Boston sort of vaguely. So it wasn't like a completely isolated childhood. I wasn't brought up in a tobacco barn. I'm not trying to mythologize myself in that way. I had a sort of socially normal, not so benighted childhood. I mean, a lot of my friends in childhood were just never aware of anything but their own little society. So that was good. I don't feel like a Southerner. I resist that, maybe denying it.

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LK: Isn't Washington a Southern city?

SB: Yes. But, of course, it was a big city.

LK: You started to talk about the Hofmann School, which was something that Berkowitz sent you to.

SB: I wanted to come.

LK: You thought this was a great thing to do?

SB: Sure - very scared. I went off to Provincetown. I was the age of sixteen.

LK: Had you ever been there?

SB: No. All alone. That was my first time going away from home. It was very, very terrifying. But Mr. Hofmann and his wife were very sweet to me. She was particularly nice and kind. I was afraid of the other students. They were older. They were in their twenties and they were much more sophisticated.

The only one I remember was the monitor, James Gahagan. I know he's still around. His work was totally derivative of Hofmann. He was just totally swallowed up in Hofmann.

Hofmann was very different from Leon. One was an interior visionary. Leon is visionary and Hofman is scientific. Push-pull. He would take your paintings -- this has been told many times -- on the Friday afternoon critiques, carrying around a stack of construction paper of many different

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colors and a lot of pushpins, and he would search through the pile for the right color and tear you the right strip and stick it on your painting with the pushpin and say, "You see, it's solved." So the whole idea that there's formal solutions --

LK: To the art.

SB: It's complete unvisionary. And it confused me. I never worked through all these conflicts. I destroyed most of the painting. It was totally student work. I remember particularly loving the Philip Guston of that time, being influenced by that. I used to like to use a palette knife and put them on in plus-minus configurations.

LK: A lyrical --

SB: I guess so, but not visionary.

LK: Pinks and blues?

SB: Yes. But my palette was de Kooningesque - a lot of cadmiums and some of those greens and whites of de Kooning. The palette was de Kooningesque.

LK: Did Hofmann set up any kind of palette?

SB: No, not at all.

LK: No sort of regime?

SB: He had a still life set up in the garage. Actually, they were very Judy Pfaff -- very flashy, Day-Glo and shiny and everything.

LK: He wanted the color, I guess.

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SB: Yes. I never painted from them. In the morning, we drew from the models. That wasn't about anatomy; it was about big chunks of space. He would also draw on your drawings.

LK: He would?

SB: Yes. That's all been recorded to death.

LK: The Hofmann School.

SB: Yes. 1957 and 1958 were the last two years. In 1959, I went there and painted on my own and would occasionally take around some drawings or sketches - a lot of pastel sketches. I don't remember taking any paintings that year. I never finished any. The last painting I ever started I dug up a couple years ago. It was of four chairs out on a lawn! Which is just wonderful to me. It's real poetic justice.

I remember liking Fairfield Porter.

LK: In the Hofmann School?

SB: Yes, in the 1950s. Mostly through reproductions in Art News, which was my Bible. But I remember going to one of the Stable Annuals when it was really on Central Park South -- this must have been in 1956 or 1957 -- on my way probably to Hofmann through --

LK: You went through New York?

SB: Yes. I remember going to Whitney Biennials. The

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Corcoran Biennials were very important - the Corcoran Annuals or Biennials in the 1950s. I remember Larry Rivers influenced me a lot.

So, I think if I had stayed a painter, I would have become a kind of new image artist - a Moskowitz or, God forbid, a Jennifer Bartlett. Really. Because this unfinished painting I pulled out, it's four Adirondack chairs or something like that (or folding chairs) out on a lawn. I know it was influenced by Porter.

LK: And done in Provincetown.

SB: Yes. Probably not in Washington. I can't remember. Probably in Provincetown. But I don't think I ever finished any work that summer. I stopped painting abruptly and never touched a brush again. I lost all desire. I used to draw compulsively, and I have no interest in drawing, in releasing that energy in that form now at all. I haven't since 1959 or 1960.

LK: You said the mornings you did drawings.

SB: Yes.

LK: What was afternoon? Painting?

SB: Yes. You just worked in your own house or in the garage.

LK: You had separate little studios?

SB: No.

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LK: People got summer rentals?

SB: Yes. The last summer, I had the loft of a barn.

LK: To do bigger work?

SB: I never did large work. My work was always pretty small. Or outdoors. Everybody did Hofmannesque cityscapes of Provincetown. I would love to own one of those little drawings of his.

LK: Do you remember anything he said about your work or what he was trying to get you to do?

SB: I was so young and so shy, all he would ever say would be, "It's wonderful." It was encouraging. All I remember is encouragement that you give to a very young person.

LK: So it was a fairly positive experience.

SB: Yes. I really wasn't ready for the serious thing of putting a strip of orange triangle on the upper left-hand corner. You know what I mean?

LK: Yes.

SB: I don't remember much of that. I was too shy to show the paintings in a lot of the critiques anyway. I was sixteen, seventeen, eighteen years old.

LK: So you skipped to the back row where you didn't have so much interaction.

SB: Yes. Right.

LK: Do you remember any other students in the class?

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Did you ever hang out together?

SB: They were all older that I was.

LK: I was reading an interview of Red Grooms, and he was up there. He was about your age - a year or two older.

SB: I remember his shows. I don't remember Red. I remember the artist colony. Hofmann was in the West end, and they were all in the East end. But I certainly remember the galleries and I remember some of the shows Red and Yvonne somebody -- Not Yvonne Jacquette, but Yvonne somebody else. She had a gallery - The Red Ball or something like that.

Do you know who I remember meeting then? Mimi Gross - Red's ex-wife. Her father was Chaim Gross, the sculptor. They lived there in the summer. So she and I became friends. I've known her probably longer than anyone else in the art world. But I remember some of these people - Jan Müller, Wolf Kahn. I didn't know them, but I remember --

LK: Their work?

SB: Yes. And I remember the shows. Probably Motherwell.

LK: Was it pretty active in the summer, in terms of the galleries there and all? Would you go to

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openings?

SB: I wouldn't go to too much. I was a bit shy of openings. I remember the shows. I think it was called The Red Ball Gallery or something like that. But I remember that kind of work, and Lester Johnson and Jan Muller and Max somebody.

LK: Did you like any of that work?

SB: Sure.

LK: As much as Fairfield Porter?

SB: Yes. I think I would have turned to representational painting of some kind. There's a whole generation of what they call the Tenth Street - the second generation of New York School. My favorite is Gandy Brodie. So much of the American New Image art of the 1970s and 1980s seems to be, in a way, a recapitulation of all of that. Miles Forst was very interesting. My favorite is Gandy Brodie. I think he's an important painter - just a fantastically interesting painter. I've pushed all my curator friends to do a show of this. Curators are so backwards, so slow, across the board... [laughter]

LK: Red Grooms came down to New York and opened a little museum that started to show that kind of work. Were you aware of that?

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SB: No. That's later, when we move to New York.

LK: Up to this point, what do you think was your most important art experience? Or did it kind of balance out?

SB: In my own art?

LK: Yes. I mean, say, where you were spending quite a time listening to Hofmann in that one pole, and then Berkowitz.

SB: It was really weird.

LK: You were kind of balancing back, then, in the fall, to another aspect.

SB: I never resolved these things. I just moved on to another part of myself, which is the literary, the right brain or the left brain or whatever. Then I moved to New York.

LK: To go to college.

SB: Well, there were a couple of transitional years. Let's see, the first year of college, I went to a small college in Vermont called Goddard.

LK: Goddard? Like in Robert Goddard?

SB: Yes. It still exists. It's changed a lot. Then it was like the real Bard. It was a John Dewey work-study philosophy. You did the dishes, and then, two months in the winter you went and got a job. It was a Bard/Sarah Lawrence kind of thing, but more nitty-gritty. It was interesting because

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it was the beginning of the beatniks; although the word didn't exist. But all of these kids -- there were folk singers and I know they did drugs. Fortunately, I didn't. They were starting to grow long hair. I remember a couple of beards and mustaches. Very much Bob Dylan types. I don't remember him, but they would go back and forth --

LK: This is 1959, 1960?

SB: 1958.

LK: 1959 was your last year at Provincetown.

SB: Yes. I must have gone to Goddard September, 1958.

LK: Then you were at Columbia 1959 to 1962, it says. B.A. You were at Columbia for three years after you transferred.

SB: I moved to New York the fall of 1959. I lost a year because I went to this school which is just horrible. But, in retrospect, interesting because it was the whole Bob Dylan Fourth Street culture. These people loved Odetta. They would go to New York to play in the coffee houses. It's not me, but it's an impingement.

LK: The milieu.

SB: Yes. And it wasn't for me. I left after one year.

LK: This was at Goddard.

SB: Yes. Then I spent a year living at home, painting, I guess with Leon. A few courses at

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George Washington University, credit but not a matriculated kind of thing, and applying to other schools. I decided I wanted to get a liberal education rather than go to art school. I was one or two days away from going to the Art Institute of Chicago around that time, and I decided not to go. I'm very glad. Why are you writing this down?

LK: I like to take some notes to keep my thoughts going here. Did you apply to large colleges?

SB: Yes. I applied to Harvard, Columbia, and the University of Chicago.

LK: So you really did want to get a liberal .

SB: I also wanted to go far away from a tiny town in Vermont. I wanted to go to a very big city.

LK: But you didn't apply to schools in Washington. You did want to go out from Washington?

SB: Right. The main reason for Columbia was it was a way of moving me to New York. I was terrified of New York, which is very understandable. It was a way of making the transition.

LK: Something about it must have attracted you, I guess - the idea of going to New York.

SB: Yes. Where else would I end up? God forbid I should end up in Boston or Chicago. Thank God.

LK: That was a close call.

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SB: I can't say if I hadn't gotten into Columbia whether I would have gone to Harvard. I was accepted at all of these places and chose this one. But let's say I had not been accepted at Columbia. Would I have preferred to go to Chicago or Harvard or here, to go to N.Y.U.? That I can't answer. Was the school or the city more important? I'm not so sure. In any case, Columbia was both. It was wonderful. It was just the right thing for me to do.

Anyway, there was a year in Washington, living at home, painting on the back porch and spending a lot of time with Leon and his wife, Ida, the poet, and taking some classes at George Washington in philosophy or French - not in art. And the determination to get a literary education. This is why I'm talking, earlier, so much about my uncle. He was the patriarch of the family.

LK: Especially in Washington, I guess.

SB: I mean always. He was the writer. It's like your family wanted you to be a doctor. I realized that I was groomed to be a writer, because my school scores were more praised and the art was not important enough. So I spent about ten years working through that - that family's introjected decisions for me. This is like anybody. Your

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family wants you to be a banker, but you want to be an artist. This is a writer versus an artist - not a banker or a doctor versus an artist.

LK: At least they got you towards the arts anyway, I guess.

SB: Yes. But, nevertheless, it was all literary. I have a great affinity with literature. I tried, for a number of years, to be a creative writer - plays, poems, novels. They were terrible. They have all been destroyed - at least I hope so. Because it was dead. The only writing that was at all alive were some art reviews I started drifting toward about 1965 for Tom Hess in Art News. They were a little more viable than the terrible poems and so forth.

LK: So at Columbia, you went to study literature.

SB: Yes. Lionel Trilling was, for example, my favorite teacher. And Eric Bentley and Robert Brustein, who taught me modern drama, and Steven Marcus, who taught me 19th-century literature - romantic and Victorian. He was great. Frederick Dupee, who taught me 20th-century poetry. I never studied with Kenneth Koch.

LK: Was he there?

SB: Yes. I didn't like Kenneth. And I never studied with Meyer Schapiro, like an idiot.

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LK: That was my question.

SB: Like an idiot!

LK: You didn't take any art history at all?

SB: Well, I had a required art history with a wonderful teacher, Howard Davis. Wonderful. It was a required one-semester course.

LK: Art humanities.

SB: Yes. Did you go to Columbia?

LK: Yes.

SB: To college?

LK: No, to graduate school.

SB: I was at what was then the Men's College. Howard Davis was wonderful. He spent the entire semester on Greek art.

LK: Did he make it to the renaissance? Quatrocento?

SB: He was able to spend one day maybe on Gothic. But that was great, to be so immersed in Greek art with him. That's the only formal art history education I've ever had.

LK: They're supposed to cover the masterpieces.

SB: But he was a great teacher.

LK: It was his way of looking?

SB: He's just so thorough. I suppose he loves the others equally, but he never had time to get to them. It would have been a four-year course. So he was very good.

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SB: Yes. A good friend of mine, a close friend, is a playright named Terence McNally. His close friend was Edward Albee. They were friends of mine in the early days, when Edward was doing those first early plays and stuff. So I got to know the New York downtown theatre world through Edward a bit.

The big deal, I guess, moving to New York -- I was friends with some dance people: Jerome Robbins and Lincoln Kirstein. So I loved the ballet. Once, I wrote a ballet libretto, which was performed once or twice. It was a disaster. This is also in the mid-1960s.

Bill Berkson, the poet and art critic, was there at Columbia at the time. Who else? A lot of people. Brian DePalma, the movie director.

LK: Really?

SB: Yes. I knew him slightly. Richard Hennessey is a painter now.

LK: Was he painting then?

SB: No. He was studying music. Joe Masheck. You know Joseph Masheck. He was a friend. We were in boxing class together, in gym together. We were boxing partners.

So the minute I got to New York, I was almost catapulted into this great scene.

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LK: It sounds like you've covered all the arts.

SB: The great person was Frank O'Hara, whom I got to know. John Button, in fact, and O'Hara were very close friends. I wasn't so friendly with Kenneth Koch. Bill Berkson was more his protege. Bill and I were rivals. We didn't like each other at all. Edwin Denby and Fairfield Porter and Tom Hess.

LK: You got to meet Porter.

SB: And I knew de Kooning. I didn't know de Kooning. I had met de Kooning. Oh, a wonderful memory. I came on a visit to New York. I guess this must have been in the late 1950s. I went with some friends to see -- not "Waiting for Godot," not "Krapp's Last Tape." Which is the Beckett play? "Endgame." And de Kooning was in the audience. So the combination of the Beckett and seeing Bill de Kooning was a great -- I was a hero worshiper of de Kooning. I still am. I love him. I don't think he's an American artist; I think he's a European artist. He's totally misunderstood. Tom Hess is completely wrong on everything. But that's another subject - my theory of de Kooning.

Beckett is one of my greatest modern heroes. I think Samuel Beckett is one of the great, great modern artists.

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LK: Did you write some sort of existential plays?

SB: Yes. Kind of conceptual --

LK: Of course, it's very visual, too.

SB: You're talking about the 1965 to 1970 period. Conceptual issues were coming up in art. Through verbal mediums, I got back into visual mediums.

LK: With John Button having a studio, but you weren't painting?

SB: No, no. I wasn't painting at all.

LK: Just writing.

SB: John was great friends with Fairfield, with Alex Katz, with Philip Pearlstein, and a bunch of other figurative painters. They were all great friends of mine and I was a great champion of their work until now they've fizzled out, except Pearlstein, who I think is not a figurative painter, but a Dadaist.

LK: That was then writing in Art News.

SB: I was just a little reviewer, like Bill Berkson and Peter Schjeldahl and Carter Ratcliff. S.B., P.R., and P.S. Betsy Baker was the managing editor and taught us a great deal about writing. Also struggling with my own works and trying to do ballet. I did some ballet librettos. I did this one at the New York City Ballet. It was just a horrible disaster. It was an Aaron Copeland

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score. Trying to write avant-garde plays, and they just weren't very good, Lewis. They were not alive. I'm not a poet; I'm not a dramatist. I had no ear. I don't mind. I have a great eye.

LK: Did you go to see art still at that time? You were going to museums?

SB: Sure. I remember one thing that's very instructive to me. I remember the Dorothy Miller show at MOMA, where she had the first black Stellas. I remember hating them and rejecting them, and saying, "This is not art." I was already a perfectly sophisticated person. I wasn't an anti-modernist. I was a modernist. It's a great lesson to me. I remember hating Warhol at first and saying, "This is not art." Even though I was not at all a conservative, still I remember the struggle that it took me to understand, and the defensiveness of both minimal art and pop art. I think it's very important that now everything is so easily acceptable. Something really new and important, even sophisticated people, the antibodies form against it if it's really new. Since the conceptual period, since about 1970, I feel that all art has become easy. Quality is there, but newness, importance, turn of the screw, is not

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there - each new thing we can accept. I remember hating the Frank Stellas; I remember hating the Warhols, and being disturbed.

LK: You were very tied into the realist artists, I guess.

SB: But not in a conservative way. Because I was interested in abstract art. In fact, I would defend it. John Button, and I would have fights about Pollock. I loved Pollock. So abstract painting or sculpture, I had no trouble with. But the first minimalism of Stella, I found very disturbing and hated it. It took me a while - a couple of years - to deal with it. I think that's very important - that if there is no struggle or no resistance, what the hell is there new about it?

LK: The value is less.

SB: Since about 1970, art has become combinations of earlier things. Everybody's just recombining earlier things, even when they're good artists, for the most part. I mean, there's some minor exceptions. Moskowitz, I like very much, and Shapiro. Because they're kind of close to abstract imagery. I have a taste for that. I hope it doesn't get into my own work.

LK: David Shapiro?

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SB: No. Joel.

LK: Oh, sorry. The sculptor.

SB: I was thinking of imagistic arts. Part of me has a certain affinity with that. My work is not like that. It's the real thing. It's not a sculpture of a table; it is a table. In fact, I turned down opportunities to be in shows with some of these people who are more like Shapiro or Judith Shea or Moskowitz, even though it's a new image, because my work is not Artschwager-generated. It's not a depiction of a table. It's an actual table.

LK: Were you aware of Artschwager then, or any of that kind of stuff?

SB: I remember Artschwager from Whitney Biennials and stuff. I went to the Greene Gallery and the Bykert. Of course, you were probably here by the time the Bykert Gallery opened.

LK: Yes. You were at N.Y.U. also then, after Columbia.

SB: After Columbia. The only reason I was at N.Y.U. was I got a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship for a year of graduate school. I had no intention of leaving New York, so I took a very boring M.A. with very little work at what was then a lousy department in graduate school at N.Y.U. in English.

LK: So you did continue a bit with the literature.

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SB: Yes.

LK: You were living on 2nd Street by then?

SB: Yes. I lived there for most of the 1960s.

LK: Was this then the later sort of part of the 10th Street School, which then went into the Lower East Side?

SB: Of course, they were still in the 1950s, really. Yes. I remember vaguely going to Tanager and stuff on 10th Street - a couple of those co-ops.

LK: Had they died out, though, by then?

SB: It was dying out by then, yes.

LK: What were you looking at then that you remember? We've touched on some of it - Green[e] Gallery, Bykert.

SB: I don't know. Bykert is later. The Stable had moved by then, uptown. It was really a stable on Central Park South. I remember going to one of their annuals sometime between 1955 and 1960.

I remember going to Whitney Annuals - very important. I've told you about the Corcoran earlier.

LK: How did you get to write for Art News?

SB: I was just in that group. I was one of the junior members of that particular art world. They went every night to the New York City Ballet. Edwin Denby was very big figure in that whole world. I

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didn't know Harold Rosenberg at all. But Tom Hess.

LK: How did you meet Hess? Do you remember?

SB: Yes. I remember waiting about three hours outside his office as a prospective young reviewer.

LK: He interviewed you?

SB: I don't think he ever got to me that day. He was not a nice man. He was a very disdainful guy and a troublemaker.

LK: Did you have an assigned beat?

SB: We got the shit. No. The young ones got the bad ones. They were the magazine of record. At that time, you covered everything. So we would write about amateur shows, too, the young people. Gradually, Tom gave me more important things. He gave me a very important thing once which I was really not able to handle adequately, which is the first piece of writing on Tony Smith, who I totally fell in love with and who was a big influence in some way on me ever sense. I think Tony Smith is one of the great American artists. I wrote a very inadaquate but very early piece on Tony Smith. I didn't really understand it. It was beyond me.

I never became an art critic. I was a reviewer. But I never developed at all into a mature writer. There's nothing of mine from that

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period that I would wish to reprint - nothing at all. So I'm a failed critic.

LK: You didn't have a point of view?

SB: I didn't develop a point of view. I wrote a lot of enthusiastic things about various artists like Al Held, I remember. I think some of Al's geometric art certainly influenced mine; although I don't have much respect for his work any more. I have a disrespect for Alex Katz, who used to be a good friend. He gets all his friends to write about him. I think it's just really trivial.

The only thing I wrote about an artist in recent years was a little introduction to a Philip Pearlstein show. And I think that's a good piece. It's nothing to do with me. But I admire Philip in a way because he's an underdog. He's misunderstood. He is not like a Porter or a Jane Freilicher and that kind of middle-class, gentility bullshit. He is a radical artist. He's not a figurative artist. He's abstract -- He's a Duchampian, Picabian artist.

LK: He's Dada.

SB: He is. It's not here to go into. I don't identify with Philip's concerns, but I do identify with the underdog.

LK: Position vis-a-vis an abstract artist.

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SB: Yes. Or even pop art or minimal art. That's another issue. But I'm passionately interested in other art, unlike a lot of artists.

LK: I get the feeling that you were sort of involved in all the arts in a way.

SB: Sure. Dance. Theatre.

LK: Art wasn't necessarily primary.

SB: Right. I'm not any one thing.

LK: The writing.

SB: I'm not a studio painter.

LK: You go to poetry readings.

SB: Sure. I love John Ashbery's poetry lots. John was a friend.

LK: So this was really the downtown scene in a very generic or cross-arts way. What about "happenings"?

SB: I never saw them. Alas I never went to a "happening," nor Red nor Kaprow nor anybody. I never went to those things. It's a real lack.

LK: How did you start to do street performance? How did you get into that? How would you trace your evolution away from the writing?

SB: I was trying to write. It was clear to me that my attempts at writing plays were failures. I was not at all a natural. I had no ear. I could not write dialogue. It wasn't naturalistic. So I was

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trying to write abstract plays, whatever that means. I can't remember. Plays without psychology and without naturalistic characters. That kind of coincided with the conceptual art and literature as art. Then, in the late 1960s, I was quite close with John Perreault, who was a poet, and Vito Acconci, whom I now loathe. Vito was a poet moving into literature. So, around 1968, 1970, 1971, we did a lot of works together - street works and other theatre situations.

LK: In a group?

SB: Not collaboratively, but as a group. Eduardo Costa, who is still a good friend, was one of those.

LK: ~~Eurcus~~ Circus-Witten mentioned those two, and also Marjorie Strider.

SB: Yes. She was in that group. She's a sculptor who's been around for years and years. A concrete poet named Hannah Weiner. So the whole thing of concrete poetry and conceptual art would overlap. Then I found an entree into a neo-visual art through a sort of writing in which the words became less and less important or the words became objects instead of signified whatever. It's not thing I put into a retrospective - this whole period of late 1960s to early 1970s.

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LK: Is any of this preserved in terms of films or scripts?

SB: No. Vito preserves all his things, I'm sure. He always recycled them in posters or something. I hope it's not preserved.

LK: Do you want to describe any of that? What area you were working in or what you were trying to do with performance?

SB: It's all so embarrassing, that whole period.

LK: Why? A lot of artists did that.

SB: I know, but I wasn't very good. And I'm not Sol LeWitt or even Dan Graham. That was a period of experimentation to me. It did enable me to express this love of theatre and being so stage struck in my own peculiar way. I made a few attempts to get professionally involved with the theatre throughout the 1960s, and they all came to nothing.

LK: You tried out for things?

SB: I would write and submit plays. They were not very good. It never happened. I started out a couple times to go and study acting and work with theatre companies. Maybe I would have become a director. I think I have that kind of temperament. But somehow the world of the theatre was just intellectually not very good. Even the

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best of the writers, like Tennessee Williams -- There's only one Samuel Beckett, only one Brecht. Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee - they're not very good. Eugene O'Neill is not often very good. Arthur Miller is never.

The thing I did love was the theatre of the absurd. I loved Ionescu. I saw the first American performance in Washington in the 1950s of "The Bald Soprano." That was kind of an amateur but avant-garde theatre group. I can't remember what they're called right now.

LK: It sounds like we're getting in the direction of Dada. You started to be interested in Duchamp at this time, or was that later?

SB: No. I don't remember being interested in Duchamp for many, many, many years. I don't remember him meaning a lot to me until much later - until this period of the late 1960s, early 1970s. I never read or paid much attention to John Cage. A lot of that seemed very dry to me.

LK: In these performances, also with Perreault and Acconci, was that more politicized or more social?

SB: Well, art politics. I mean we were against art. Right? And I still am. But I've learned how to be pro-art and anti-art at the same time. That's later. But this was all very much anti-object.

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Lucy Lippard was a good friend and a big influence at that time.

LK: Dematerialization of the art object?

SB: Yes. Eva Hesse was a friend. Though she's a perfectly traditional artist in a way. These were later, when I was out of the ambiance of Button and the figurative painters which I really rejected. They came to very little. I liked them in one way, I think, because they were the underdogs, the unfashionable. But they're too genteel. It's all about middle-class living rooms, and I hate it. Portraits, Inc. Katz is different. He's really an artist of little skill. But he tries, but it's not a convincing world. Fairfield's was a very convincing world, but it's all about having great elms on your lawn. It's very class-bound. Hilton Kramer demonstrates that in a very ugly and graphic way - this classism.

LK: Then I guess things were heating up in American society, too, in the late 1960s. Did that make you sort of reject that part of it?

SB: Yes, of course. I was a very naively political type. I took part in some of the artist things sporadically. But we all did it sporadically. And I realized, from the collapse of the 1960's culture that an artist can only do art. Or to

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become a political person, you really have to change your life. These things are all so demanding. But I feel that we have a heritage from the 1960s. I kind of feel that moving into public art is a vindication of that - of those liberal ideals. I'm not a radical, and I don't say, "Burn the museums." I say, "Preserve the museums." I even have a taste for ongoing traditions of painting and sculpture. Bill Jensen or something.

I'm jumping ahead now. But I would like to change the nature of art much more towards design at this point. I think it's got to make a deep change - not a stylistic change from cubism to surrealism, which for that day was very profound. Changes categorical or modal changes, deeper than stylistic changes are always happening underneath the surface.

Anyway, that's the heritage of the 1960s.

LK: The social concerns?

SB: Yes. I think Hans Hofmann is very important because he articulated the latent political critique of conceptual art. Of course, the original conceptual artists are just as much art for art sake as Whistler. You can always define philosophy, which is not social issues at all.

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LK: Is it fair to characterize your performances, though, as growing out of this interest in art, writing and theatre combined?

SB: Yes, for me.

LK: Also growing in, say, the political direction of the late 1960s.

SB: Not really political. The political implication of drugging yourself to sleep at an opening is only an implication.

LK: Didn't you do performances in the street?

SB: Sure. I would be embarrassed to call them really political. They were just gropings. It's a rejection of the gallery and museum context.

LK: The rejection of the objects.

SB: And the objects. Yes. Although I find that very naive.

LK: What I'm trying to talk about is this is a distinct historic period which, to somebody like me, seems like the old days.

SB: It's history. Yes, I'm afraid so.

Okay, so the poetry events, the street works -- The word "performance" wasn't even in use then. Some of them were called theatre works.

LK: Or concrete poetry.

SB: Concrete poetry was still somewhat different. It was a tributary. Those were the days of art

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politics. It took place in demonstrations against the Museum of Modern Art.

LK: Were you a member of the Art Workers Coalition?

SB: No, I wasn't a member. It was very sporadic. And like a lot of other artists, it wasn't a full-time commitment. That's when I realized that it's through your work that you have to be political or social.

I admire Leon Golub, who found a way to be political, but through his art. Somebody like Lucy Lippard is a failure because she never could reconcile political activities with art activities, in my opinion. When she writes about women and says they're a special case, it's demeaning in a way. I think she's an example of the failure of liberalism.

LK: To shift a little bit, were you conscious of European things or Gilbert and George or anything like that?

SB: No. This is before Gilbert and George - maybe before the singing sculpture and certainly before it was done in America. I remember seeing it and just loving it. But that's already after I'm really formed. That was maybe 1972 at Sonnabend Gallery. I was already formed by then.

LK: How did you get formed?

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SB: The summer of 1970 was one of the major turning points in my life. I was guest-teaching in the summer at the University of Iowa. So was Marjorie Strider. There was an artist there named Hans Brader, who was on the faculty there. Marjorie, Hans, and I decided to give a couple of evenings of performance. We used the theatre for one evening. I did my first tableau. I first used the word and I first used figures other than myself in poses. It wasn't very good, but it was a turning point - two different things.

LK: Were there stage props?

SB: No - just figures in poses. The second evening, we decided to do it out-of-doors. Mine was not actually a performance, but an installation. That was what I called "Furniture Landscape." That was my first use of a piece of furniture. That was, for me, a very dramatic summer.

LK: Those both happened at the same time?

SB: At the very same time. After a couple years of fishing around with this kind of conceptual, crypto-literary, what later became body art. I mean, Vito later went on to drug himself to sleep at lots of openings. Vito is an eclectic. He's always taken from everyone around him. I hate him.

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In any case, I no longer use myself in performance. I project it onto other people.

LK: Were you using students?

SB: Yes. They were all students at the University of Iowa - boys and girls.

LK: Who executed the poses.

SB: Yes.

LK: Very slow tableaux?

SB: Actually, they were all still poses and we had a revolving stage. That's a little bit like the Christmas tree in the round. I tried to compose in the round on the revolving stage.

LK: A revolving stage? There must have been some money out there.

SB: No. It was just part of the physical plant of the University. They had a rural campus. So in the forest in the rural campus, I decided to take a household of furniture and transfer it. See, that's the whole conceptual rubric. You know, the transference piece? That's an archaic --

LK: That's what it was called - transference piece. Are these the things that were published in the Triquarterly?

SB: Yes. You saw little details.

LK: So that was so much later that it was published.

SB: But I had them photographed. The photographs were

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just documentation. They weren't the work of art. The work was this temporary installation, which wasn't exactly a performance. You moved through rooms. There were clearings in the forest. The one nearest the road was the living room. Off that, the dining room. Off that, the bedroom. Very, very corny.

LK: Did you have a map or was it just a path that was followed?

SB: It was just clear. I mean, you'd drive your car down the road and stop. There was an indication of where the entrance was. There was like a foyer, because there was a hallway, plant stand, an object which I borrowed, which was extremely important to me in retrospect - the kind of Arts and Crafts, geometric, simple, Stickley stand. That's the symbol of the entrance hall with a plant in it, which was amusing to me at the time. The piece was slight and picturesque and fey and corny and all the rest of it. But it was still a turning point. It wasn't good, but it was a turning point.

LK: It's interesting that there was a path or an unfolding of the spatial --

SB: It was a spatial configuration. Many years later, now, I can play house permanently in a park or a

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plaza. But it was seminal work for me.

LK: You got furniture from --

SB: Basically, I borrowed it from one pair of friends - their household. But, secretly, I didn't borrow all of it, and I borrowed other pieces from other people. Because if the pieces were upholstered, they had to be floral or leaves. If they were wood, they had to be painted green or natural color wood. There was no contrast - no acrylic, no steel. It was all wicker or -- So there was thought to it. The rubric was transferral.

LK: You like that. I guess it derives from surrealist ideas.

SB: Probably derives from it. I remember all these conceptual artists. They would take a piece of paper and put it on the roof, and let the rain fall on it for two weeks. And then, they would transfer it to another roof. You know what I mean? Really terrible. A whole goldmine of bad art in the late sixties.

LK: Did it get easier to make bad art?

SB: Well, it got easier to make art.

LK: Period.

SB: I think that's very important. I emerged in the seventies. My work is peculiar. I guess it's terrible. More women emerged and other kinds of

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oddball styles. There was no hegemony of styles. Leo Castelli couldn't tell when people stopped collecting.

I read that Chuck Close said a wonderful thing. He said, "Nobody liked the seventies except the artists." It's a very good statement.

End of Interview

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Second interview with Scott Burton for the Archives of American Art, conducted by Lewis Kachur on September 25, 1987

KACHUR: We were talking last time about your experience in Iowa in the summer of 1970. Since then, I came across this issue of Art-Rite with photos of the pieces. That's for those pieces that you did in Iowa, right?

BURTON: Yes.

LK: Did you actually do those photos yourself?

SB: No. I had them shot to my specifications.

LK: Do they reflect rooms?

SB: These are just details. There are no photographs of each of the rooms - that is to say, these small clearings in the forest - we treated them as rooms and adjacent clearings, with the logic of, really, a house. That really changed my whole life. The idea of using furniture came into my mind one day seventeen or eighteen years ago. The use of it has varied. From around 1970 to about 1975, with the first gallery show, which was at Artists' Space, I dealt with furniture with found objects and in a pictorial way and what I call tableau - various way.

However, that was overlapped with this thing starting in 1973, where I actually designed the pieces of furniture myself. That's the first time

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the installation's using found pieces, even objects like that bronze replica of a chair.

LK: The Queen Anne chair?

SB: Right. All that is very fruitful, but very transitional - what came out of that. And it overlaps. I mean, the first starts in 1970 to 1975, and the second starts in 1973. So it's not consistent at all there for a couple of years.

LK: I've got a feeling that in the early 1970s, you were pursuing a couple different lines of work.

SB: Quite a few.

LK: You were doing a couple different lines of work and sort of -- You did the Eighteen Tableau at Finch.

SB: The performances.

LK: The performance aspect.

SB: But in terms of them, it was 1972, and I really discovered what I consider an important subject matter for artists and for tableaus, which is very precisely defined "body language" - not emotional gesture and not representational gesture, and not emotional or expressive gesture, but that whole vocabulary of where our hands are, where our faces are turned, where our shoulders are, where we position the parts of our body in order to tell each other things about our relationship, either

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at the moment or in general, hierarchical. Not just love-hate, but hierarchical relations, depth relations, deference. In any encounter there are beginning signals that people do. This is subconscious. It's not unconscious, but it's subconscious. This is not Freudian. It's as important.

LK: This is the connection between the two --

SB: No, there's not a connection.

LK: Or between the furniture pieces and the tableau?

SB: No, it's not a connection at all. Not at all.

LK: You're talking about the tableau?

SB: Yes. I'm talking about body language. You can use any piece of furniture as part of your body language communication. If I stand here and put my foot on the chair, it's not a utilitarian functional gesture; it's a symbolic gesture in some way. Body language has nothing to do with the particulars of furniture. There are some connections. But I've been talking so far about body language, which is what is properly called "kinesics" - the individual movements. Another aspect of body language is proximics, or a relation of body to body. That aspect is really more informative on me in the plazas and the parks, and the design of furniture.

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LK: Outdoors?

SB: Outdoors or in. But the relation of people to furniture is proximic rather than just their symbolic gestures.

Anyway, in 1972 I did a group behavior tableau. In 1976, a pair. In 1980, the final version of individual -- Did we talk about this, Lewis, last time at all?

LK: No.

SB: So those were group behavior, pair behavior --

LK: These connected in your mind?

SB: Yes. A definite series. Those earlier performances were using pictorial tableaus, kind of comic, ironic, mock heroic, or begging you. In the early 1970s, there's also a piece called "Photo Novella," which I never really developed. I took a narrative and had a friend pose and another friend take the shots. I composed them and so forth.

LK: In a narrative way?

SB: Yes. They're all slides. So then I picked X slides and I arranged them in a certain sequence. There were a lot of people beginning to do that kind of photo narrative thing at that time. I never pursued that, really. I'd like to someday.

LK: That grew out of your interest, I guess, in writing

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in the first place.

SB: Well, it's a way of writing without using words. The only thing I don't like about writing is the use of words. [laughter]

LK: That's kind of hard to get around.

SB: The way the performances are written -- in two ways -- one is they're plotted. They're written in the sense of having librettos. In dance, of course, that means the story, right? Libretto in opera is something else. But a libretto in the sense of the plot of action without any dialogue.

LK: The visual plot of action.

SB: In a photo novella, which is a corny form, it's usually comics, right? I adopted that form. That's never been shown. I mean, it was shown once in slides. But then I had transparencies made and I had them retouched. I had planned to show it in long sequences - forty eight-by-tens or ten-by-twelves in a long light box. I never got it shown. It's buried away somewhere. This is just a footnote for you.

LK: In that article, you mention working on light boxes. They mentioned that this was one of the things you were doing - light boxes.

SB: This was very loose, but it's very rich. I like this article. It's very rich. There's one

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terrible mistake in it. You don't seem to have the last page.

LK: Here it is.

SB: Oh, then I looked at it before. This is the history.

LK: This photo is --

SB: There is a terrible thing. It's written here: "Conclusion: Scott chairs elegantly." And it's terrible, because it's a misprint. It's supposed to be: "Conclusion: Scott chairs eloquently." It's all the difference in the world. I wanted people to know in history that it's "Scott chairs eloquently." It's very different.

LK: Really. See, here it says, "light box narrative Photo Novella." So that's what you're talking about now.

SB: Yes. I never developed -- This is very interesting. I haven't looked at this for years.

Anyway, the early 1970s, I'm everywhere. And it's been an explosion. It's been a frustrating search for a long number of years. These photo pieces, stage pieces, furniture pieces, out of door, all temporary. But then what ~~energies~~ emerges are three performances - the Whitney, Guggenheim, Berkeley University. Something very important, Lewis. I want so much to some day go back to this

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in some way. Because teaching people what body language is -- these were hermetic and seemed abstract to people. They were avant-garde. They were slow and long and in museums. Very austere in a simple way - tedious to a lot of people. But the whole subject of body language is an extremely important one for humanist study. It's simply fascinating. For example, how people signal to each other that they're going to end the encounter. These are called "terminals." There are things called "reciprocals," nodding in rhythm, or mirroring each other's posture sitting on the bench, you know?

LK: That's what all interviewers are supposed to do. I wonder if you had a specific interest in -- I know there's a lot of popular literature now. There are books called Body Language.

SB: There always have been. There's one very bad, with the wrong impression, that doesn't even touch it. I can't remember the guy's name. It still has never emerged as an important field of study yet. I mean, it hasn't gone all over the place. Brain studies have. I remember when they were the minority.

LK: You mean studying parts of the brain?

SB: Yes - left and right and stuff.

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LK: Brain centers, I guess.

SB: The new understanding of the brain. But this very recent understanding, Ray Burtwhistle is one of the main people, actually. There's another one. And these are obscure. You need a good, intelligent, generalist in human sciences to write a book about it.

LK: I guess the things I've seen are sort of pop psychology.

SB: You've only seen one, I think.

LK: How to tell if a girl likes you by the way she's sitting.

SB: There's actually been a second one, but that's the kitsch part. I don't deal with that at all.

LK: How did you get started along this line? Do you remember?

SB: I don't know. Reading a book called Personal Space, by Robert Summer. A fabulous book. Again, these things just pop into your mind just like that. Like the whole furniture. They just pop into the mind. I had this vision. These are not narratives. They're meant to be thematic. Like first you show intimacy, and then you show disengagement. You know what I mean?

LK: Yes.

SB: They're not stories like boy meets girl stories.

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LK: When you did the pieces where the curtain closed and so on --

SB: These are just simply blackouts. In a tableau, technically you don't move. But these were really very frontal, very slow. Some of them are sufficient in non-movement. But mostly it's about not movement itself, but changing from one movement only actually to get from one body statement to the next. I'm not talking about gesture. They're more like relations between the axis of the shoulder and the axis of the hip. It's very simple.

LK: I've seen photographs. One thing that interests me about that is that the museums -- first the Whitney, then the Guggenheim -- sponsored these as -- at least the Guggenheim almost treated it as an exhibition.

SB: That was my request and Linda Shearer's agreement.

LK: Who was supporting your work at the Whitney in the earlier shows?

SB: That was actually done in the context of special evening events. I'm not sure if they have a different condition. At Guggenheim and at Berkeley, they were during the day. Actually, at the Guggenheim, it was in the theatre. In Berkeley, it was in the Matrix Gallery, where they

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show painting or sculpture or something. That was even preferable. It went on in the daytime every day, and lasted the length of an exhibition (six weeks or whatever). Those are better conditions for this. They don't set up a theatrical expectation.

LK: Like in the evening, you mean.

SB: Yes. Also, if it's three times only or two weeks only.

LK: I know the Guggenheim piece was done by two actors. I've seen photographs. And they did it two or three times a day or something like that.

SB: I can't remember if they did it once a day. I can't remember.

LK: Every hour on the hour. There was some kind of schedule to it.

SB: Maybe twice a day. I can't remember.

LK: One could see it. People only sat in that back of the auditorium, from what I understand. You were interested in distance.

SB: Yes. So you don't get involved in particular features or personalities. The actors wore make-up over their eyebrows and on their lips.

LK: They had a white face?

SB: No. Not perceptible. Imperceptible make-up. It just sort of washed the features. I wanted people

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really to concentrate on not issues of individuals. They dressed, not exactly identically, but very close - all white shirts (not the same white shirts). Or all khaki. Not to suggest uniform, but just to -- It's very, very hard to make things neutral, like personalities, differences of age or comportment. And without making it like robots.

LK: You worked with them as a sort of director?

SB: Yes. I would move the limbs around. I would just tell them, "Lift the left elbow for ten seconds." It's very much about timing, too. We use counts. It's slowed down, not for magic and surrealism, but for information. A statement of body language can just be a matter of small movements. You have to make them perceptible. So I slowed them down, almost like, I guess, in a slow-motion film. So not for surrealism or hypnosis, but just for informational...

LK: To signal that as --

SB: To give the audience enough time to see that the hand is traveling from the elbow to the shoulder. It's not very far. So if you don't do it slowly, people are going to miss it. I've evolved a fantastic tool with these performances. I do want to go back to them some day. I have a fantasy of

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doing one where they're -- Also, I've always used all men. I could use all women, but they're not sexual issues. They're social issues. They're not robots and they're not mannequins and they're not moving mechanically. But it is non-naturalistic.

LK: It's a generic man?

SB: Yes, kind of generic. Of course, it's never possible. But I'd like very much to maybe do studies of black men and white men and how racial conflict -- You sit down on the subway as a white man and notice that the black people never give any acceptance gestures, much less move over. That's different from white to white or black to black. I'm fascinated by this way that racial hatred can express itself in just little gestures. That would be not just studying body language, but the content of a particular historical use of body language.

LK: Yes. That's very social.

SB: It would be quite an important subject to use.

LK: It's interesting that you don't see this as sort of just early work or something that you don't think about any more.

SB: No. The early work that I don't think about any more are the performances that are cheesecake and

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have bathing beauties and the heroic tableau with muscular giants and those kinds of amusing, ironic --

LK: The street things.

SB: That's even earlier. That's very, very ephemeral work. But the early tableau, which are corny and meant to be -- Some of them use twenty-four chairs. I had a stage thing where there are a lot of dining room chairs and there were like Shakespearean...there were love scenes and fight scenes and death scenes. Those are amusing.

I did a lot of lightweight experimenting. But the behavior tableaus are very serious. And the design of furniture is very serious.

LK: Both things were coming out at the same time.

SB: About the same time.

LK: How about the New York City Ballet story that you did?

SB: That was in the other life. That was, actually, a libretto.

LK: Around that time or earlier?

SB: That was five years before - 1965. That's strictly in the period when I was trying to be a writer. That was a dismal period. That was long before.

LK: You say you were also making up part of the action

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-- Or were you just writing?

SB: I don't think we should talk about that. That's boring stuff. We have limited time. This issue of body language has been touched on. Really, the only things to cover are the furniture, the individual pieces, and then their relation to public art. So let's wrap it up. That 1960s stuff, I mean --

LK: I'm sorry.

SB: No. It's not important. I mean, that's the whole period when I was attempting to write in the theatre. This is through Lincoln Kirstein, who was a friend at the time. He commissioned this and some other stuff. It was all pretty dreary.

LK: Were you collecting furniture at the time?

SB: No. When I moved to my Thompson Street slum --

LK: When did you move from the Lower East Side to SoHo?

SB: About 1967 or 1968. It wasn't SoHo then.

LK: There were galleries then in 1968.

SB: No, there weren't. Paula Cooper came the next year.

Anyway, there were these empty rooms. I didn't have anything. There were thrift shops in those days. That was deeply influential on me. [laughs] The Queen Anne chairs. Actually, that

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was in my apartment. But some of the pieces in tableau were worthless things that I bought for two dollars at thrift shops - where now Rizzoli is and so forth.

This was the first time I'd ever had my own space that I didn't share with anybody. So I started populating it with a few very cheap, but to me intensely important, pieces of thrift shop furniture. That's how the obsession started.

LK: Was it a bigger space than you'd had?

SB: I don't know. But It was the only one that I never shared with anyone. So it just sort of popped out. I mean an Army cot. The chair that became the bronze chair. Some other pieces.

LK: Did you suddenly stop two-dimensional work?

SB: Oh, I had stopped two-dimensional work by 1960 with the end of my painting.

LK: When you got to SoHo and also started --

SB: It wasn't SoHo. Anyway, where I lived was not in what became SoHo. Thompson Street is Village.

LK: You were above Houston?

SB: No. I'm at Spring Street. But that is still the Village. It's technically in the city. That's the South Village. It's Italian people and it's tenement stock, you see. It's not the next block over, which is --

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LK: San Gennaro?

SB: No. That's on the East Side. Saint Anthony's is on Sullivan Street. This is not important - just to you. It's New Yorkology. So it's not SoHo.

LK: Okay. When you started to move into the tableau in this period of the 70s, did you have different friends? Were there different artists?

SB: Can't we just talk about this other stuff - the design of furniture and then the public art? I'm tired of talking about this. It isn't very important. I guess you're more interested in the social history.

LK: No. I think both are important.

SB: I don't really any more.

LK: Another thing I was curious about -- Linda Shearer picked up your work again in 1978. The first Exxon Show. In that catalogue, you talking about Judd's category of specific objects. I thought it was interesting that you said that you thought that applied more to your work than to his, which you saw as much more sculptural.

SB: I cannot deny Judd, Sol LeWitt, and Carl Andre as making sculpture totally literal - not only Judd. That's a pretty garbled interview, like a lot of them. It was ineptly edited - not by Linda, but by somebody else. An intern, right?

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All of those people made it real in your space, and so forth. Not only removing the pedestal, but the way I sit, and so forth. But it's still illusionistic emotionally in a way. You still see something of an ideal landscape, a halo around a Judd, an Andre.

LK: Kind of an aura that you wanted to get away from.

SB: Yes. A table or a chair cuts through that. The problem with that, as I realize now, ten years later, is that there's still an aura to a piece of furniture if it's wonderful. [laughter]

LK: And if it's presented, I guess, in a certain context, too.

SB: Not only that. But even in a non-context. It cannot have an aura if it's -- See, I used to be very anxious to tear down the art part. Now I realize that it's very deeply part of it. But I'm still skeptical of the art for art's sake part. In the individual pieces, in those days, I was very concerned to establish it <u>against</u> art, as functional furniture stuff. Actually, now that I've really been successful with that in public places, the individual pieces, people still treat as precious objects, of course, in the plazas and in the parks. And some day industrially produced individual objects will

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really break down that distinction. In a way, I admit that some kind of aura is necessary so it isn't just some commonplace landscape designer's thing for people.

LK: You're coming full circle.

SB: Not full circle. It's not even a linear progress. I still believe in furniture and designing things as a rebuke to dying or dead traditions of contemporary art. I really think that there have been so many mini-generations and so many bad schools and failed artists teaching the wrong things and ruining generations of students dumb enough to believe it. Art is just in a horrible way. Painting and sculpture. I mean, painting is just hopeless, as far as I'm concerned. This is theoretic.

LK: You started to write around 1980 about Rietveld?

SB: No. I just did one thing. I didn't really start. That's a unique set of notes. No, it was a good occasion. Sol LeWitt's Rietveld's were at Hartford, so I went up to see them. They're just so wonderful.

I may have mentioned that I've been doing a second -- It's not starting anything. I gave a talk once about the furniture of Brancusi. Did I tell you about that?

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LK: No.

SB: I call it "My Brancusi." [laughs] His studio furniture is very important. As you know, the park in Romania is very important, and the bases and pedestals are a fascinating study of themselves. People have written about this. I haven't really read much of it. Someday I'll publish these scattered notes on this aspect of Brancusi.

The act of designing it myself is very important, but also the idea that art would justify itself with the functional element was very important. And misguided but very important. Partly as a reaction against the academicness of art at that time -- It started around that time, around 1970 or late 1960s. I don't know. After the minimal and conceptual and pop generation, it all kind of seemed to end.

LK: Run out of steam.

SB: Yes. I think not only myself, but other artists of the 70s are picking up the pieces. Unfortunately, the 80s ~~is~~ are all back in gear again. There's this media star system back. The 1970s were very different. I see this art as furniture or as design has a lot to do with the frustration of the loss of the 60s. It's not

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overtly political, but it's somehow social. It's a social response to some degree. Obviously, my individual pieces are nine-tenths art conditions. But then, there's that other possibility. I would say by the late 70s, I was beginning to formulate some idea of public art.

LK: I think you mentioned it in the Exxon catalogue that you hoped to do a more public scale.

SB: Oh, really?

LK: It's interesting that the minimal artists and so on were talking about Malevitch, Tatlin, in terms of their painting, and you were talking about the sort of productiveness through utilitarian designs of Tatlin and the things that they had done for practical use.

SB: Yes. The productivists and the utilitarians. The Europeans, from around 1920, including the Bauhaus ideal or the De Stijl ideal -- We don't have that. I mean, that was very important to me, but there's no direct connection. To work for industry today, it needs to be very commercial - not an ideal at all. Right?

LK: You have talked, at some time, about a social ideal.

SB: What is possible in our kind of society with

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our kind of artists. I'm older. I realize the contradictions and the limitations. But still, I feel somewhat identified with the idea of being progressive. Some of the individual pieces are absolutely one-of-a-kind, deluxe objects that only a collector or a museum specialized support system can tolerate. I can do two or three different things. It's not an ideological consistency. Should I stop making gallery work if I want to do a production chair? No. I can do them both and public works.

One thing I draw the line at is doing a sculpture. There are non-functional elements sometimes in my work. Siah Armajani was the encouragement for me in that. As you know, I consider him the most important of our whole generation and direction.

LK: You were shown with him at the Exxon show.

SB: Yes. I actually was committed to functionality before he was. But I would like to say that he was the leader in the ethical dimension. Absolutely. I wasn't aware of the moral and the democratic, for example, issues in this work until I met him. I was aware, because I'd done a vernacular Adirondack chair and stuff. But art as a new way to fit into society, he kind of

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crystallized that. He's my ideal. He's much more involved in that than any of these other artists. Of any other artist who's involved in public art or site specific art, he's really the only one, I think, who's deeply motivated by the public good.

LK: The reading rooms that he's done.

SB: And the bridges and the outdoor gallery rooms, classrooms, and so forth.

LK: You've worked on a couple of public commissions that he's also been involved in.

SB: We've been involved in one or two of the same projects.

LK: Were you both in the M.I.T.?

SB: No. Out in NOAA in Seattle.

Just to finish up my little petty development, my story. First I did the chair, and then I found where to put it. It kind of almost developed that way - by putting the movable pieces (I mean, even if they're heavy, they're portable) into different situations and figuring out how to make them look good as sculptures, but how to make them make sense as chairs and as tables. That was good training. So the design of chairs and tables and benches led to the designable spaces.

LK: That seems pretty clear.

SB: It will.

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LK: Some people have stressed the Art Deco chairs that you used in the one behavior tableau, that were slightly altered - the three chairs in the --

SB: It wasn't a behavior tableau.

LK: I'm sorry.

SB: That was just one of those early furniture kind of things - pastoral chair tableau. Those are comic pieces. They're meant to be light and amusing, unlike something like the behavior tableaus, which are dead serious.

LK: And a different kind of investigation, as you said.

SB: No, I love vernacular. I deeply love all dining nook chairs.

LK: I wanted to ask you about the child's table and chair that you did. Was that a commission piece?

SB: No.

LK: I noticed in seeing again the spatter table at the Guggenheim and, I guess, this piece also, I was struck that some of the first pieces looked kind of small to me. Or they looked smaller than they reproduce, I guess.

SB: They're small-scale. There's a timidity and a beginner's fear.

LK: In the mother-of-pearl piece that you did with the tin --

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SB: Steel.

LK: Oh, steel rather. Sorry. I got the feeling that some of the smallness was also to counteract that minimal big gesture - the idea that if it had been larger, it would be more like a --

SB: I don't see that, because I've gotten more and more ambitious in the big minimal gesture. [laughs]

LK: But your pieces have gotten larger in scale. I guess that's what I'm getting at.

SB: From a purely working artist's point of view, public art has the added advantage of giving you a wonderfully broad canvas to work on - five hundred feet sweep rather than thirty two inches. And with designing light standards, a vertical dimension, a chair would be stupid twenty-six feet tall, as far as I'm concerned. But a lamppost is something. So working in big scale, it has been a great thing for me. I mean, my God, you know --

LK: Which commission involves a lamppost?

SB: The park in Baltimore.

LK: How did you first get started with public sculpture?

SB: Actually, in pre-conscious way. That bronze chair was first shown out on the street. It was

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an abandoned thing. So that's a kind of an unresolved, immature manifestation of some notions.

LK: Did you expect people to sit on it in the street?

SB: I expected them mostly to pass by without noticing it. And many did. I think it was placed next to the door - like a little shack that would take the parking fees in a parking lot. It did happen to be in SoHo, across the street from Artists' Space. On Saturdays we put it out instead of all the time. It would have been good to bolt it in so you could leave it. But we had to watch it. People would come and try to steal it, because they would notice other people, and tug it and tell their friends. So that was not good. That was like a "happening" thing. It would have been a great work if it were -- I think bronze is soft. Maybe I could do it someday, cast it in a very hard steel and bolt it permanently to the ground in some non-art thing, like the edge of a -- It's very romantic in a silly way - urban waste. And the furniture that people use, parking attendants, it's not even valuable enough to take. Nobody wanted to take it. I love that notion. But in a plaza, I wouldn't introduce a notion of ruin or waste -- the opposite. But that's the preconscious, isn't it?

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A turning point for me was being invited, in 1976, by the New York State Council on the Arts' Visual Arts Special Panel to submit a competition entry for a city on Long Island - three artists submitting competition entries for a public project in Smithtown, Long Island. The town voted on it.

LK: What was your proposal?

SB: Well, it didn't win. George Trakas and I lost by a long shot. Athena Tacha won it. That was one of her first pieces.

What it was was an extrapolation of the old bronze chair. I proposed a bronze living room out-of-doors on a grass carpet with bronze furniture of all different periods of American history and in different sets from plain to fancy - plain, fancy, and middle. It's a ridiculous idea, but it was -- In fact, I outgrew it, because a few years later, five years later, when I actually got the chance to do it, I had already started doing the real things. It would have been wrong.

LK: The plaza --

SB: No, no. That's not the public art. I mean, the ambition to design the plaza in a different way. I had outgrown the idea of replicas. I've long

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since outgrown the idea of furniture as replicas. This has another dimension, which is kind of nice. This was 1976. I was thinking, how can I take this Bicentennial seriously? Furniture meant most to me.

LK: That's where we get the historical chairs - the Bicentennial.

SB: Well, in a way, yes. What a stupid and meaningless thing. And how depressing, especially in 1976. It was half serious. Funny juxtapositions of the common. Absolutely proposed one of those 30s, 40s sort of Art Deco kitchen-dinette chairs like you mentioned and singled out. You know what I mean? Common thing.

LK: Yes.

SB: In other words, it mixed up thrift shop things with fine things, the way that American life seems to do. And middle things, like an Arts and Crafts settee. All in bronze. It still would be a nice thing to do, but maybe only on the Mall in Washington.

LK: So that got you thinking about larger-scale public things.

SB: Yes. That was the first application of a studio piece, so-called, to permanently-sited public situation. Of course, old furniture, landscape,

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it's all there, only not emerged clearly.

LK: What about the Rockdale Temple?

SB: Actually, I was offered to design the whole space, and I just wasn't ready for it. This was like 1979 and maybe 1980. What I had done, in the meantime, is the public table - the cone table that was shown in full-size mock-up at the Neuberger Museum in 1979 - a big, inverted cone on a low-disk platform. That has just been completed. The first one has been cast in concrete at General Mills in Minneapolis. And it's just been finished after almost ten years. Anyway, that was my first piece. I called it "A Public Table." It was the first piece on a public scale. It was twelve, thirteen feet across. Part of that is so that your knees can get under. You need that slant. But it enlarged and made a wonderful thing for ten or twenty people after we had built it.

In fact, late one night at the museum, Judy Pfaff, Laurie Anderson, myself, a couple other artists, the crew, the workers, and Suzanne Delehanty, maybe Larry Slotnick (Shopmaker?), we all sat around and had sandwiches. I had conceived it originally just as a cone. But it had to be on a disk to have a foot, because it was a temporary thing there.

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Actually, the disk turned out to be as important as the cone. It became architecture. It became a room within a room. You all sat up on it - not only in a circle and not only on this fabulous shape, but up on the disk. It made such a wonderful sense of community for me.

We haven't used it yet. It's just been cast. But it's my first emotional public feeling. It's an emotional -- I can't explain it -- . Not emotional in the sense of expressive. It's psychological - not expressive and emotional.

And for the same show, I made a small model of something very important to me, that I call the "Serpentine Double Banquette." Isn't that a marvelous name? Not truly a banquette, because that's actually a bench against a wall. This is a two-sided -- In public furniture, this thing has recurred - this two-sidedness or more-than-one-sidedness.

LK: Like a love seat?

SB: No. Back and forth. Like a train in a train station. Two-sided going - Janus-like.

Anyway, this proposed a two-sided -- The model proposed it for inside a room. It could work also outside. But a settee that was stretched and extended. It was maybe a hundred or

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two hundred or three hundred feet long, and would coil around.

LK: Sort of winding?

SB: And be winding, but not just for itself, but so that different size groups of people could find different configurations. On the outside of a curve, one person could sit on the inside. A tight curve, two, and a generous curve, several. And that's a fabulously public idea, too. I've mined that; I've never built that actual one yet.

But 1979 -- This is somewhat different from a design of an entire public space. It's still a kind of object. In the case of the banquette - very much tailored to a specific site. A view, a door, a pedestrian thoroughfare.

LK: Did you plan for a particular place for it?

SB: I've planned it for a hypothetical but particular room in this model - a room where there were some windows here and there were some windows here, and there was a door here and a door here. But the concept --

LK: Did you observe people there, too?

SB: No. I never built this. This is just a model.

LK: Oh, it was model in that show.

SB: It was just a small model in a show. The public table was built as a full-size model, but it

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didn't have chairs. People in the show didn't sit around it. It was probably perceived as a second-generation minimal artwork. And it is in a way. And it's a damn good one. [laughter] Richard Serra liked that piece.

LK: Oh, did he?

SB: That amazed me. In any case, there is this corny American town parlor with the replicas, then there are these couple of pieces of very inherently public furniture. And then starts proposals for the real thing. The first two that were started about simultaneously were at MIT and at NOAA. And then I get into the relation of architecture and the discovery of architecture.

LK: It jumps.

SB: Not a big jump. It's not a big jump at all, to me.

LK: It's a progression.

SB: Yes. It's a significant progression, but it's not a leap to me. I mean, it's very real, very rational. From a chair to a room, whatever the kind of room - outdoor or indoor. You know what I mean?

LK: Yes.

SB: It's not a big jump.

LK: I like the idea of the Equitable Plaza there as an

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outdoor room.

SB: Sure. I still do plenty of objects in the site independent. Some of the objects are site specific - not just in some spatial, formal way, but in relation to the style of the architectural context, either with it or against or somehow adjusted to it. It's very important.

LK: I noticed in the Seattle piece that it was mentioned that you had actually used a rock that came out of this lake.

SB: Yes. How could I resist? These were boulders that had been deposited by glaciers so many years before. They were brought up. They have all of pre-human time in them.

LK: Is that what you mean by "site specific"? Using or adapting something <u>there</u>?

SB: No. Many different things. At MIT, "site-specific" means a lot of things - one of them adapting to the context of the Pei modern style. In midtown Baltimore, adapting to the brick and limestone and terra-cotta style of midtown, urban mid-Atlantic and so forth.

LK: Somewhat aging?

SB: The stylistic; then there are, of course, the site specific and things that an architect deals with - where people are coming from, where the light is

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coming from, and so forth.

LK: By now you've worked on quite a number of things. It's hard to single out any one. Can you venture what has been, for you, the most interesting project or collaboration?

SB: I've only been involved in one collaboration: Battery Park City Plaza with Armajani and Cesar Pelli. Other relations to architects have been cooperative and close, but not collaborations. The design is a hundred percent mine except Battery Park City.

LK: What's the status of that?

SB: Well, that's in the building. It's supposed to open sometime next year - maybe late next year. Parts of it are looking great.

Well, what are we talking about? You're skipping around here.

LK: You just mentioned Battery Park as being the only collaboration.

SB: Well, you brought up Battery Park.

LK: I recently read about Ned Smyth, I guess, who did something down there.

SB: That's a different project. There are several artists' projects down there. The World Financial Century Plaza is one very specific one. That's ours. It's very different from the others. The

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others have nothing to do with the office buildings. This is tied in with Olympian York Developers, who put up the office buildings and the Winter Gardens. This is part of the commercial complex - not the south arm, which is the residential where the other artists' works are going. This is rough stuff.

LK: So maybe I should say: What's been the most interesting project where you've been involved with - not as a collaborator, but as a --

SB: Well, let's see. There's NOAA in Seattle and MIT, the Atrium and the Baltimore Midtown Park and the Equitable Atrium and now the Equitable Plazas. What else? Is that all? I guess those are the only finished ones. Now I'm working on the Sheep's Head Bay Piers, the GSA Portland Fountain. There are others, but those are the ones where I'm really working with the whole space, that I am involved somehow in the design of the entire shebang.

LK: Is that was you prefer?

SB: That's the hardest and the most rewarding. There are others. For example, the Tate Gallery at Liverpool that James Sterling is doing, where I've got a commission for seating. But it's more limited. I'm dealing with the whole space and

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determining where the things go, as well as what they look like. It's integral. But I'm not involved in design of the whole space, just in fitting in. Some of them, you know, I consider it part of my success to fit in well. Stand out a little bit, but fit in well and logically. Where do people want to sit? Where do people want to move?

[end of side one, tape one]

LK: You started to say you don't have to -- I'm overstating it to say that you're giving up your ego.

SB: In some ways, you have to give up some ego things. Community demands and sometimes an architect's own style. In Battery Park City, there are a number of things that I don't like. Not that I don't like them, but I hope people won't think I designed. That's tough. But if you get everybody's demand and can still make a coherent work of art, that's great for the ego.

I think probably my best thing to-date is the Equitable atrium.

LK: That's what I was going to ask you.

SB: Not only the most fancy and expensive, but it works so well. People enjoy sitting there.

LK: Inside.

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SB: Yes, the inside. The atrium one. People really enjoy that as a space. Non-art people enjoy that as a public space. They don't know conceptual element and maybe aren't aware of the diagrammatic element of the floor, but still it's -- so I think it works both ways. To me, there's a great deal of sculptural content, but also a programmatically successful thing.

The park in Baltimore is pretty good. It's a little stiff and awkward. It's not quite as accomplished. The NOAA piece is absolutely wonderful. It's really the culmination of the rock chair idea, among other things. The MIT, I like a lot, because it's, to me, rather intellectual. It's stylectic.

[telephone ringing]

I'm sorry. I'm expecting one phone call just to make a date with her for her to call me back.

[off/on tape]

[inaudible]

LK: It's hard to know where to start with the public works. I mean, I get the impression that it's sort of, as you said, a natural evolution. But it is a kind of different life as an artist to move from the studio and the design element out to where you're going to -- you know, you're going to

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Portland, to Liverpool...

SB: Well, it is and it isn't. The studio pieces are only conceived in the studio. They're made by fabricators. So I had to get used to -- and it is a skill -- a long time ago, to try to work with various fabricators. Once you don't make it yourself, it's already a different thing. So it's not such a leap.

LK: But then, now, you're dealing with bureaucrats or architects and other kinds, who aren't trade people but other kinds of professional people.

SB: Yes. And that's got a lot of difficulties, including the difficulty of satisfying their demands for what an artist is. It's still an issue of personality. It exhausts me. I am basically a little bit, in middle-age, less outgoing. Sometimes the time you have to put in is a little tiring.

LK: Could you describe one? Just choose one and sort of describe how you go through one of these processes - how it works.

SB: Often, there's a model stage. Tom ~~Adamarka~~ Abate-Marco and I make a model and we work it out in study models, crude things. You can use a piece of chewing gum or sugar cubes or anything.

LK: Your assistant?

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SB: Yes. It's very hard for me to do otherwise, because I have to do it kind of three-dimensionally. I can make sketches. I have images in my mind. But then, we just put little chunks of balsa wood or cardboard out - 3D. That's the way I can really work.

LK: Do most people come to you through Max Protetch?

SB: No. Almost none, alas.

LK: Interest for these kind of things? I mean, how does it sort of start?

SB: I don't know....

LK: You don't submit -- Have you done much in the way of competitions, in terms of submitting your work?

SB: Yes. I've lost plenty, won a couple. But sometimes panels do it. There's a network of informed people. Once you've done one or two, then there's --

LK: It snowballs, I guess.

SB: Well, not that it snowballs, but it makes it more possible. Also, they know you can handle it. I've noticed there's not a lot of young people coming along in this, this is sort of difficult. I mean, maybe it's just very slow. Things like Creative Time, Art on the Beach, Art Park. We really are in the age of bureaucratic art. For me, both the show at Artists Space and

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work at Art Park, that was very -- And for other artists, too. For a lot of artists, these public --

LK: When you were younger, you mean.

SB: Yes. But I'm just thinking of Art Park. The Art Park piece is not so pivotal to my development. But Art Park is one of those great places where it is getting artists more into public modes - whether it's an earth work type or an architectural art, not necessarily a functional layout, a garden or a landscape. But there's certain things. Wave Hill. I was in all of them. That's great, too. Wave Hill.

LK: Any time that you've exhibited at one of these places, has a public commission come from anything like that - somebody seeing your work?

SB: I'm sure not direct. Probably never directly. I'm talking about cutting your teeth. How do you cut your teeth?

LK: Do you think they're still viable? Those things?

SB: Sure.

LK: For a young artist?

SB: I don't know. I guess so. Things change. Situations always change. There doesn't seem to be a very visible new generation. But it's okay, because we're the new generation. This was really

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something that has taken off in the 1980s and is by no means becoming any kind of mature phenomenon. There are a few artists, not very related to each other -- It's not like a movement -- In different parts of the country. Also, the works are in different parts of the country. It's very much, truly, a national kind of phenomenon. Probably more of the artists are from the New York area, but not all.

LK: What strikes me is these commissions are so scattered -- Seattle or something.

SB: Yes.

LK: Also in places outside of New York, where you have more possibilities.

SB: Fortunately I'm lucky having Equitable and Battery Park and Sheep's Head Bay.

LK: What are you doing in Sheep's Head Bay?

SB: The City is rehabilitating the commercial fishing piers. An architect got the job to do it. There's a percent of art requirement, so I've been working with the architect - actually very, very collaboratively with Michael Koenen and his staff. Quite collaboratively. I take the lead in certain parts of the piers, and they in others.

LK: Is this a kind of waterfront renovation?

SB: Yes. But this is not like an Esplanade or

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something. This is where commercial fishermen have boats, where people -- very, very working-class people come and pay twenty-five or twelve dollars and go out for the day, fishing. These are small businessmen. We are servicing small businessmen. It's very humble. It's very non-elegant - far from the Museum of Modern Art, far from the world of granite and onyx and bronze. It's been great for me, because where the hell do I fit in? What use can I be in such a real situation? I've contributed some very, I think, attractive and probably valuable ideas to it.

LK: In terms of layout, but also in terms of particular --- ?

SB: In terms of the use of the space and also the look of the space. The thing I'm especially proud of -- There are piers one through nine. It's kind of like "found" decoration - the numerals. I can use it --

LK: Oh, on the piers.

SB: They're not there on the piers, but we're going to have like thirty-foot flagpoles, and I've designed numerals to go at the top of each flagpole - partly so they're visible from the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway so it identifies the neighborhood to zillions more people. These are bright-colored.

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These are neo-geo. They're geometric numerals - somewhat abstract, brightly colored. They're like maritime flags a bit - international code and primary and secondary colors. They will revolve in the wind. They'll be stiff. They're not flags. They're stiff metal and bright colors. But they're wind fans, so they will rotate.

LK: At first, I saw them as abstract ---

SB: Yes. But you can see now that there are numbers, right? They're very abstract. They're neo-geo numbers.

LK: What are they made in?

SB: I'm not sure. We're not sure yet. Probably baked enamel and steel. Hopefully. And it's so exciting. I've designed litter receptacles, drinking fountains, lamp standards, paving patterns, graphic. This is now graphics.

LK: So you're really getting into a Bauhaus mode, doing the whole thing.

SB: No textile weaving yet. In another life, I'll do clothing, but not in this one.

LK: This sounds like a kind of situation that's more where you haven't been approached for a specific thing, but you --

SB: My services.

LK: Right. In general. Which is more exciting for

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you, I guess.

SB: Yes. Because then I can end up anywhere. I never dreamed, until this, that I would want to design numerals. I mean, this is very much like -- It takes me back to being an art student. It's geometric abstraction. It's very teen-age to me.

LK: You say "neo-geo" kind of ironically.

SB: Because it's all neo-geo. Ever since Barnet Newman, it's been neo-geo.

LK: In a more formalized situation, how does it operate? Are you flown into a site to look at it and decide what to do with the place?

SB: Yes.

LK: And then you submit drawings?

SB: Yes. One of the things I like -- I've developed a skill of what has been called a "space doctor." It's funny. This is as far from what an artist is supposed to do, which is formal and visual. Thinking my way into the successful habitation of the space and correcting mistakes. There's probably some deep thing about you hate yourself and you want to change it, so you do it symbolically. With the plaza. [laughs] The need for self-correction. But I love that to take on.

There are two different issues. One is

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taking an ideal space, maybe - whether that be way out in the middle of a field where there were no trees. But then, another thing would be taking a field where there are trees and you go and dig them up. You know what I mean? Or a room that pre-exists. I have never designed an entire room from the outside in.

LK: The architectural way.

SB: Right. I mean, it's always been either old or new. But I've made alterations in these - substantial alterations in some pre-existing architectural spaces. At MIT, for example, and at Baltimore, the park. There are certain pathways that are given in the topography.

LK: That you try to follow.

SB: That you have to follow. But then, there are inflections. In Baltimore, the main pathway through the park was a kind of weak serpentine. So I made it absolutely straight. It's wonderful. It's like being on an airport runway. There's a slight grade, so you shoot up or you shoot down in a straight line. And it's very pleasurable.

LK: You consider the Baltimore thing as kind of space doctoring?

SB: No. Well, only in the sense that there was pre-existing park and I transformed it. Yes, in that

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way. Or the corners at Equitable - the wide sidewalks which was my job to make into urban plazas. That's space doctoring.

Another thing would be a competition in Philadelphia that I haven't heard from yet. There's a kind of triangular corner. So three artists could -- the building will exist and the street corner exists, but in between them there is nothing yet.

LK: Is that downtown Philadelphia?

SB: Yes. It's not around the City Hall. This is further downtown. It's a new building. They're having trouble with the developer, so they haven't told us who won it yet. That's a new site. It's still space doctoring in a certain sense that you say, "Gee, there's no natural light in this space. How do you deal with it?" You know what I mean? A lot of the impulse, too, is correcting the wrongs.

LK: You're also working within parameters, like you say.

SB: But there's a nice emotional reformist pleasure here. I wish I could take the whole city and make alterations.

LK: I wish you could, too.

SB: [laughter] If only I could put the police station

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where the Burger King is, over in my new neighborhood.

LK: I guess one of the famous people you worked with is I.M. Pei. You mentioned the MIT just briefly. Was that somewhat daunting, to be involved --

SB: In 1979, 80, it was. But he was very nice. His son, Lee Chung Pei, who was the main architect, Sandy Pei, was very nice. We became friends. They were patient with my self-education. Mr. Pei is very supportive, not chummy. He's not chummy.

LK: Is there any development within your public work, do you think? Or does it all depend on what it is?

SB: Conceptually, not recently. It's just that it's getting maybe a little bit more successful. I'm enjoying enlarging the types of things. I'm working on a new fountain that's just a fountain - no scenic --

LK: Do you think you'll expand in that direction?

SB: I hope so.

LK: Away from tables and seating and other --

SB: No, no. Never away. Actually, the fountain in Portland is designed for a particular space. Actually, there are no tables and chairs involved. It's just a big fountain. But no. I mean, I want to do it all. I mean, the lights --

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LK: you can do several things at once.

SB: And the pathways. Not just the pattern, but the direction of the pathways. The threshold. I love the thresholds - how you mark them or don't mark them or distinguish them from each other, a major, a minor, entrance, whether it's into a room or into a park. This is just a usual -- I've discovered architecture. Boy architect. But I hope it's different from what architects do. I hate good design. I loathe good taste. Like Ed Barnes' good taste? Good, middle-class taste. Like IBM. You know what I mean? But it's still the notion of good taste.

LK: With a capital G and a capital T.

SB: Yes. And pretty much an intellectual's idea of good taste, too. I'm not talking about a Brooks Brothers architecture.

LK: Can we talk a little bit about your summer? What I did for summer vacation, if I may? Just to take the opportunity that you recently had a piece at Dokumenta and also this Münster project. I was wondering about the benches that you did there. They do seem to be, in this photograph anyway --

SB: No. That lies. The relation to that building, that is adventitious and fortuitous. And I don't like this photograph for that reason. There is no

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relation. They were designed independently of that building.

LK: For this particular park.

SB: In fact, you don't even notice -- that's a false relation, an irritating photograph.

LK: You mentioned something about a George Rickey.

SB: It's over in the same park.

LK: What were you working in relation to, then, if not the building?

SB: The city itself. I mean, I designed this pair of park benches and they had to go into a city park. Someone at the museum suggested that park, and it was fine with me. I spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to site them in the park, both for the way they look and for the way they will be used.

LK: The distances between them?

SB: For a long time, I had them facing each other, and there was something wrong with that. And then, the young assistant, Frederick Meshiva, suggested putting them in this relation, actually. I thought it was terrific. He was good and he was right. I hadn't thought of that. This very bright, young, assistant curator at Munster suggested this. I give him full credit. It was just right. Because you don't stare at the people

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on the other side, and it's not so much like a hockey field.

LK: Interesting, the little things that make a big difference.

SB: Yes. Absolutely. I proposed for some project a steel bench and somebody said, "Oh, no one will sit on it."

I said, "No. You're wrong. It's not what it's made out of; it's where it's placed." You could put an old rotting wood, and if it was in the right place, people would sit on it. You could put an upholstered lounger in the wrong place, and no one will sit on it. So it's not what it's made out of; it's the location that's supremely important.

LK: You started to talk about the sandstone pieces. That was in the museum.

SB: That location was chosen. It's an upstairs foyer, the head of a staircase and normally a non-exhibition space, between two major galleries. So I tried to make that a place where people could sit around at the chairs or at the table. I wonder if they do, now that it's been placed properly. The original placement was display rather than encouraging the use. So I don't really know. And now it's all over.

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LK: Now the two chairs have been grouped the way you wanted them - together.

SB: Yes. A pair of chairs together, and then, another place, a table with legs that you can sit on. This is "The Card Players" of Cézanne. [laughter]

LK: Oh, really? They are very monumental.

SB: Ultimately, anyway. I'm not kidding, Lewis. I think I like those paintings and the tableau aspect of them as well, which no one really thinks of in Cézanne. I'm bored by the nature stuff of Cézanne. It's a dead end. It's not for me.

LK: You like the ones where he does the rocks...

SB: Not particularly. Not really. No, I don't like them at all. They bore me. They're boring. I think they and analytic cubism are such a dead end. Boring.

LK: What do you like these days in painting?

SB: Pick your historical period.

LK: The way you're talking suggest that there are certain aspects of, say, Cézanne that would interest you now.

SB: Oh, that's a joke. That's quite peripheral.

LK: Are there artists now who interest you more?

SB: From his time?

LK: Or from --

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SB: You know, I love art.

LK: In modern art.

SB: I don't really know how to answer that. I like a lot of different kinds of artists and art. I can't think of anything too fascinating. I recently designed a piece. I haven't even gotten any further than the basic design yet. It reminds me an awful lot of certain Matisse paintings of all things. I don't need to go into that.

LK: That's not something you're really exploring.

SB: No. I cannot deny that I love Matisse a lot. Yes. And I like a lot of Picasso. I just don't like analytical cubism that much. I guess I can't deny that in one way, from one point of view, I'm in the tradition of geometric abstraction. I can't deny it. I just got fed up with formalist art, although I'm deeply formalist. I can also indulge all the formalist feelings I want about color and shape and so forth, or a conception like that piece which is about removing mass. It's big rectangular solid with a couple of chunks out. So it's not about taking shapes and putting them together; it's about taking a mass and removing things. That's formalist, too - not just optical space. I'm much less interested in Frank Stella, speaking of that. Not the early, but the later

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Frank Stella is not looking good to me. But the Sol LeWitt wall drawings, I think, are incredible and inspiring, because they deal with architectural context in a very particular way - a systemic way, but still brilliantly. I love that. LeWitt is now our older generation. LeWitt is most important to me. I think Andre is great and important, but he hasn't really developed. He's made brilliant variations, but on the same theme again and again. And Judd's furniture and his architecture seem to me really deeply a failure and kind of a compromise of his sculpture, because his sculpture took principles of architecture and furniture the way it sat on the floor -- equidistance rather than what we used to call relationalism -- and transposed them into art. That was great. But now that he's transposed them back into design, it doesn't seem like anything much to me. I think he's been influenced by artists younger than himself.

LK: A lot of people are talking now about Artschwager suddenly, too.

SB: Yes. But Artschwager's big revival has been in this, in a way, kind of neo-pop-conceptual art.

LK: Which doesn't interest you so much.

SB: No. It doesn't interest me very much. You know

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who I really like? Haim Steinbach. I like the shelves. But I also think that's a very brilliant twist on an old tradition of assemblage. It's very obvious after-the-fact, but only this very smart artist actually did think of it. I mean, Cornell would have hated it; Schwitters would have hated it. But Schwitters would have understood it more. I think he's quite brilliant. I don't think it's -- I hope not -- the direction of new art. I hope the direction of new art has to do with taking over design. I'm not sure if I mean commercial design. I don't want to be in Conran's. I'm ambivalent. I mean, I'm still of the elite culture or the snob culture or the critical culture - no better than Hilton Kramer or Donald Kuspit. I actually consider both pretty sleazy. I still expect art to be significantly different from life, but I also want it to make exactly the same as life. There's an ambivalence and a contradiction. For many years, I talked only about wanting to reduce it to life. Now, I understand that art is art and I'm an artist and I would like to be a great artist and a profound artist and put emotionally rich works and things, and not just do deck chairs that are only deck chairs, but to somehow do deck chairs that are

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poetic or that reverberate, but are also accessible in their language because it's functional, because it's a chair - or a fountain.

LK: What are your ambitions or hopes for public sculpture in general these days?

SB: That it should disappear. Public sculpture.

LK: Right. Public art, then.

SB: The problem with public sculpture is that there is no curatorial taste - not that that's infallible. But there's so much junk in public and the non-art audience doesn't know the difference. It's very upsetting. The educated non-art audience - not just the great unwashed, but the middle-class which might be musically sophisticated or literarily sophisticated or maybe politically sophisticated, but not art sophisticated. They don't know the difference between a Tony Smith and Tony Rosenthal. One is great and one is terrible. I am against public sculpture when I see a Tony Rosenthal.

LK: You mentioned the percent for art a couple times. It entered into your own work. And that seems to be just engendering a lot more of this.

SB: Right. But there is a strong and intelligent voice in public art leadership that's trying to tip the balance toward attitudes more like mine -

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whether it's Robert Irwin who actually is not sincere about this. But that doesn't matter. Better Robert Irwin than Tony Rosenthal, I guess. [laughs] I'm not too sure.

LK: What about the whole situation of Richard Serra and the idea of government --

SB: Well, he certainly has done a lot for the cause of public art, right? In a negative way, in some cases. But that's about our society. The controversy is what's interesting to people about that - not the issue of art. Nobody that covers it really says, "Well, what about new possibilities?" You know? Some of us have been proposing alternatives to Richard Serra. Where's all the excitement and the media and the controversy about that? It's stupid in a way. It's terribly vulgar in a way. The conflict itself is. And the conflict itself is distasteful. No, not the conflict. The attention is distasteful, because it's only focused on the controversy. It's the same old thing of the controversial artist, as when Jacob Epstein did "Genitals" in 1908.

LK: And Oscar Wilde.

SB: Right. By the way, the Jacob Epstein stone carvings in London -- I hated the bronze

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modeled pieces. But the stone carvings were so interesting. Epstein and Eric Gill are getting very interesting. That's what you asked me before. I mean, I love a lot of art, but these monumental stone figures -- I just can't stop thinking about Epstein's and Gill's. Early Epstein. Actually, the later -- even throughout his life, I think the carvings are fantastic. "Lazarus," which is late, is great. I fell in love with the Eric Gill "Stations of the Cross" in Westminster Cathedral, and then other stuff mostly from photographs. I mean, it's all been Brancusi to me, and these are definitely not Brancusi, but it's fresh. It's not stale like so much is. I didn't go to the Miró show; I didn't go to the Klee show. I mean, I love them. It's not that they're stale, but I absorbed them probably deeply through the Phillips Gallery or the Modern Museum. And I love them. But Epstein and Gill and some others are just great discoveries.

LK: Especially Eric Gill. That's pretty recherché, but I guess he's coming back.

SB: Well, I'm waiting.

LK: I saw something about him recently.

SB: Really? Where?

LK: Somewhere in an article or something. You

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mentioned Brancusi again. We sort of skirted a little bit the idea about the base in his work that is so interesting, or the confusion of the base and the --

SB: The enrichment of the base, the significance. Not just its form, but its significance.

LK: How about for your own work? Does the issue of the base ever come up?

SB: As a matter of fact, I have done a couple of pieces which are bases. A base is a specialized form of table.

LK: A side table.

SB: Not a side table.

LK: Developed from the side table? No.

SB: No. Well, maybe from the side table. Maybe from the center table. More likely from the center table, Lewis, because it's more of a display issue.

But I did some pieces that are very important to me. They're a pair of cone cylinder sphere tables that developed out of the circle-square-triangle table, which is plane art. This is a volumetric equivalent. For the cone to look right in scale with the other two parts I had to make a small base, rather small. So then they became not tables like cafe tables, but pedestals,

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because they're rather high, - rather high and very limited surface area. So they're pedestals.

LK: With the cone on the top.

SB: Yes. Forty inches high, ten inches diameter, twelve inches - something like that.

LK: To be a pedestal is their primary function.

SB: Yes. And I came to this, not through a typological impulse, but through a formal impulse. Because when I put the cone, the sphere, and the cylinder, lying on the floor side-by-side, they had to also look good together. That helped me to discover more the typology of furniture. It's a fascinating issue. The typology of table and a form of table - side table, coffee table, dining table, work table, buffet, like a serving table, pedestal.

And then, I started thinking more about Brancusi.

LK: Do you expect people to put something on top of that?

SB: Yes, absolutely.

LK: Have they?

SB: I don't know. One was bought, and I don't know how the guy used it. Then, the one I have done as a pair, has never been bought. I think they would look good with a pair of vases with flowers

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or -- I don't care. I once showed one in a gallery in the foyer with a vase of flowers on it. No one --

LK: No one got it?

SB: Could deal with it. They may have gotten it, but they rejected it. [laughs]

LK: I guess for a lot of sculptors, at some point, the whole idea of getting sculpture off the base, away from that kind of precious separateness, became very important.

SB: Right.

LK: We've sort of flanked that issue.

SB: Well, I certainly went that way. I mean, the so-called specific object which rests on the floor the way that a chair does. In art history, it leads the way to a chair in some way. Maybe this is coming full circle. The specific object then becomes -- reintroduces the base.
There have been artists who have introduced the frame - from Ralph Humphrey -- The great paintings of Ralph Humphrey. Now, Allen McCullom, who's so hot.

LK: Those big frames .

SB: Yes. I've seen that in pictorial terms -- the frame becomes more important than the painting. There's a whole -- from geometric

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abstraction to the conceptual issue of a real frame with nothing in it. I'm sure there have been artists who've done empty frames.

LK: Although it comes back at certain points. It seems to be more resonant at certain points.

SB: So the issue of the frame is in a way the issue of the pedestal. I tried to get a commission. A collector has a small Brancusi and a small Picasso sculpture. I wanted a commission to design bases for them. I would love to be submissive to Brancusi and to Picasso. He didn't go for it. He was afraid I would overshadow them, which is the wrongest thing in the world. I would have been tactful and respectful. He was very wrong.

LK: That's too bad.

SB: Yes. It would be a great thing - like adjusting to architecture.

LK: Right. In a different -- adjusting to art.

SB: A public designer to architecture. A minor episode, to be sure, but still interesting and fun. Maybe I'll do a sculpture that I can then design a pedestal for -

[laughs] I'm kidding.

I don't think of the chair as a pedestal for a person. That's a clumsy analogy that some

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people have made. I think it's stupid. It's not a performance work. It's not about looking at somebody using it. It's about looking at it empty or you're using it and not looking in a mirror or letting some people look at you. The work is not performance props at all. Those are docents' fictions.

LK: Yes.

SB: Yes. There are relationships, but they are not a simple thing - like a chair that I do is really a prop. And then, all the people are saying, "Oh, we saw your bench in Münster, with three old ladies in identical hats sitting on them. What a performance." I hate that. This doesn't want to detach itself like spectacle. This wants to integrate itself. See, I hate Christo. I really am against Christo. It wants to integrate itself into the normal fabric of life and stand out subliminally or peripherally or subconsciously or after-the-fact, retrospectively.

LK: You hate Christo's political turmoil or the fact that he --

SB: It's bullshit. Political turmoil is bullshit. I hate proposing a temporary spectacle as substance of art. What he does is go in and say, "I'm making your lives better for a day," and then

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disappears - hungry again after three hours. It's false nourishment. It's junk food. It's junk art.

LK: Visual junk.

SB: It's also very fascistic. He also proposes the idea of the heroic remote artist who flies in. Like in Leni Riefenstahl, they come in from the clouds and they go down. You know what I mean? And then they go back up and off. The people say, "What have they done?" Even the work of art proposed as something deliberately not normal and eccentric and extravagant -- yes, but it isn't there for them to continue to consult. My work is there for them to pass by every day or every week.

LK: Your benches are going to stay in Münster?

SB: Oh, not that one. Actually, I hope they do buy them and put them in aluminum and keep them permanently. But, you know, that's something that then is necessarily part of people's lives and not this theatrical event. Christo is no more substantial than a Hollywood movie, as far as I'm concerned.

LK: I guess he comes out of "happenings" and some of that stuff.

SB: Who knows? But I'm very against that. It's kind of fascistic. It's totalitarian in a way. It's

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just a hermetic, remote, genius artist. And it's like "art for a day." The ephemeral nature of it offends me. You'd think that in some simple, liberal program that it's conceptual, it's not for sale - which is, of course, bullshit, because he sells all these terrible, arty drawings that look like Robert Morris junk.

LK: With a little piece of fabric cut out of the real fabric or something - collaged in and stuff like that.

SB: Right. Or these bad sort of Bernard Buffet versions of Beaux Arts sketches.

LK: I wanted to ask one other thing that I wanted to ask was related to the base issue. I thought it was kind of an interesting point that you raised -- I guess it was in an article -- that, in a way, the history or development of furniture has already circumvented the issue of the base in the development of the side table from the eighteenth-century on, which is just --

SB: The occasional table.

LK: I'm sorry. The occasional table, which is something made just to put something on.

SB: Or just to be a decorative thing in the room itself sometimes. Look at some of those Robert Adams things. Some of them are actually for

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candlesticks. Wonderful. They're really lamp bases. They relate very much to Noguchi's first electric sculpture, light sculpture. Although those are illuminating the base. That was a wall piece. The whole history of furniture is -- You know, there's no Meyer Schapiro of furniture, really. I mean, we have --what's his name? the wonderful Mario Praz. And Elizabeth Aslin from England is a wonderful writer. There may be a couple of attempts like that -- Janson -- but nothing really -- I'm only talking about in English. I'm sure there are scholarly studies. But the whole weaving together of the traditions of form, the sociological issues, difference in production issues - you know, how things are produced economically and technically. There is absolutely no great history of furniture that I know of. There are a couple of this and thats, but, boy, I wish there was a Robert Rosenblum. Take even European furniture, even post-Renaissance and just do it. Anne Hollander did it on clothes. There are a couple of other people who've done it for clothing. Boy, it's such an under-studied field.

And then, the relation of furniture and art in the deeper historical things. Like, what's the

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difference in an occasional table that Adam designed and a Noguchi lamp? You know?

LK: Have you been interested in Noguchi?

SB: Actually, recently, a great deal. I don't like his sculpture at all. I don't think it's successful. But the more I know about his whole career, I think he's a major, major figure for all of us.

LK: I guess his playgrounds and the very early...

SB: They're very early. Yes. And you look at those models of playgrounds. All of architectural art of the 1970s is really in them. The whole idea of art as a place -- We've moved from art as object to art as place - very much through earth works. Smithson in particular; Heizer also; maybe more than DeMaria. "The Lightning Field" is still a big thing. It's not exactly the landscape itself. I don't like DeMaria, but Smithson I love, and grudgingly, a little bit of Heizer. I hate the later Heizer. I think it's just terrible. It's just self-aggrandizing objects that are very bad ideas. But the early things, the double negatives and stuff, you can't deny it. Oppenheim was never an original. Smithson and Heizer are the only authentic ones for art as place. But then, Noguchi did come along way before. It took

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Noguchi a long time, I think, to integrate all the parts of himself. Only recently has he been showing his furniture as something on the same level as his sculpture. As recently as the Sam Hunter book, there is a strong distinction. And Hunter wrote what he told him. Nevertheless, he's very important, conceptually. Even in the 1930s, the light sculpture was on two levels - sculptural and the utilitarian. The furniture hadn't caught up with it. Through the heritage of Japan ---

LK: Those lamps --

SB: Yes, I know. I'm going to get some more. I had one as a teenager. It was very important to me - an Akari lamp. It was a very, very big icon. It was an icon of modernism in the 50s. So, in that way, Noguchi's always --

LK: You got it in Washington?

SB: There was a liberal outpost of good design. The Museum of Modern Art type of good design. ~~Earth sells.~~ Ursell's. At Wisconsin and Que Street, Ursell's. And it was a mecca to me. It had Herman Miller and Knoll furniture. My temple. I worshipped that.

LK: We're not supposed to go back that far.

SB: Anyway, I gradually discovered the extent of what Noguchi has done. He's very great. I've

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been to Costa Mesa to see probably, maybe, his major life work - an entire plaza in a very, very difficult situation of some speculative office buildings with the cheapest kind of glass curtain wall in a former agricultural area - a barren thing off the super highway. Across the shopping plaza on one side and an office complex on the other. In the office complex, he did just a great work of art. It's called the "California Scenario." It's so ridiculous in some ways - the narrative idea. It's so cornball in some ways. There's a desert part and the water part and so forth. But it's just genius - a work of great art. It's amazing that it hasn't been more acknowledged yet.

LK: So I guess your hope for public sculpture is more of such?

SB: Yes, and my own. [laughter]

LK: I guess the only thing I haven't touched on, that I wanted to, is how your work got into the gallery system and to its point of recognition. You had a lot of different shows. You had, for instance, Droll/Kolbert and then Brooks Jackson.

SB: Iolas.

LK: Iolas. How did those come about? Or do those seem to be one-time shows?

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SB: That's the whole transitional turmoil of the seventies. There were these very, very few objects. Those two shows, plus the Exxon show, where there were a couple of other ones, they're all pretty small, modest pieces - a lot of them are of wood, some of them painted wood. I haven't really done a lot of the color. It's interesting. I want to go back to doing some more color more directly - mixing them myself. I've been using the colors of granite a great deal recently. But looking at the spatter table again, I miss mixing the colors a little bit.

What about those? I mean, Donald Droll was one of my friends, a close friend, and one of my first big supporters - very helpful and instrumental. Brooks Jackson was a man who had seen my performance at the Guggenheim and wanted me to do performance at his gallery. He had taken it over from Alexander Iolas pretty much at that time. I talked him into financing and letting me show a few of the earlier tables. And there were a couple pieces at the Guggenheim like that. It was very important to me to meet -- Well, Dan Wineberg in San Francisco was early. Nicholas Logsdale from Lisson Gallery in London was early. We still haven't done a show yet, but he came to

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me very early. And Max Protetch, just a tiny bit later. I met Max in 1979, I guess, and have been working with him since 1980. As you know, I've just opened a big new show in his new space.

LK: I noticed you showed at Protetch/MacIntosh in Washington.

SB: Yes, I had a show there.

LK: Was that the first time you worked with him?

SB: Yes.

LK: He was still in Washington.

SB: No. He was in New York. He had been in New York for a year, and then gone back to Washington. And then, in 1979 or maybe 1980, he reopened on 57th Street. I showed with him the following year - partly because Siah Armajani was there. He had also Richard Fleischner and Mary Miss and Jackie Ferrar, who actually wasn't doing anything but Andre-type stuff at the time, and Will Insley, who's fascinating. So Max has a good sensibility for this. Unfortunately, he's now emphasizing certain painters and not working with -- Well, still me and Armajani and Ferrar, who's pretty minor, and Insley, who's major but different. He's a predecessor. He's really of another generation. He's really interesting. Max isn't really keeping up with this. I don't know

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who he could show. But he's not as much a center of art as architecture or public art or whatever.

LK: As he was a few years ago, I guess.

SB: Yes. It's still a good gallery, because he shows the architects.

LK: How do you feel about that?

SB: Well, I wish he would show -- I can understand not wanting to deal with Fleischner or Mary Miss, who are really tough, horrible people - angry, nasty people, both of them. But I wish he had a couple of other artists. Some of these public art artists don't do well in galleries and shouldn't even try. I like my individual pieces. I like Armajani's very much. But Elyn Zimmerman, who is one of my favorites, doesn't look good indoors in a temporary situation, nor George Trakas or Nancy Holt. It's two different things. The dealer probably has to think about that, too -- good shows and salable things.

LK: Items. Yes. It's just sort of interesting that your career evolved towards working more with architects and these kind of people after you already started showing.

SB: Well, no. There's a general kind of consensus of sensibility there. I mean, his architecture people are very often people interested in art,

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unlike most architecture people.

LK: But have you ever worked with any of the group of people that he shows?

SB: Mier van der Rohe?

LK: No. I mean, Aldo Rossi or any of those architects.

SB: No. They don't need me. They don't really need me. It's Pei and Barnes and those people who need me. [laughter] Long live debased modernism! They need me, because their work is, in some way, incomplete. I'd much rather take an old SOM building than -- I'm not needed in a Venturi building. He has a conceptual element and artistic. He's an artist or Jim Wines/Site. They don't need me. Michael Joyce doesn't.

LK: Do you like the idea of the gallery being like that? I mean, his showing architects.

SB: Oh, yes. I love it. I mean, it's much more interesting to me. I've had other offers and someday I might take them. But for now, I love it. It's a unique gallery. Don't you agree?

LK: Yes. It's a different kind of gallery that emerged at a point where all these things seem to be coming together.

SB: His art part is now retrenched. He has some artists that I just think are hopelessly

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retardataire.

LK: I guess it's the re-emergence of painting that you're talking about.

SB: They also want to have artists whose work sells. Paintings sell better than sculpture. Bad paintings sell better than good ones.

[end of side two, tape one]

LK: How did you first came to Max Protetch's attention? Do you remember how you met him?

SB: I think that Robert Pincus-Witten initially recommended me to him. In fact, I'm sure of it. He didn't respond. That was when he was in SoHo for one year sometime in 1977, maybe 1978. I can't remember. Robert Pincus-Witten was one of the very helpful people to me early on. He was the first well-known critic who wrote anything on me and talked about me and recommended me. Donald Droll, in the early days, the dealer; Robert Pincus-Witten; Linda Sherer, very supportive. A number of people at one shot, that I'm talking about sustained up to a point.

LK: Over a time.

SB: Up to a point sometimes. Then they lose interest or they change their lives or whatever. Some of them stay.

LK: And then Protetch -- Did he visit your studio?

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SB: There was no studio. There was not. There was no studio for years. [chuckles] I remember going to the opening when Max opened up on 57th Street. He, in his deliberately naive, deliberately awkward way, said, "Hey, you should be showing with me." I still was with Droll/Kolbert. Donald was dropping out. Frank Kolbert was an impossible, really pathological, dishonest and unpleasant person.

LK: At some point, they split up.

SB: Yes. And I was still involved, financially, with Kolbert and was very, very unhappy, looking for a way out. It was indiscreet of Max, but it was fine with me. We made an agreement. Later, when I gradually pulled out of Frank Kolbert, who was a real shit and very bad person --

LK: Was Armajani already in the gallery?

SB: Yes, I think so. That was a big inducement to me - the whole architectural and design context, plus Armajani and Max's planning to work with other architectural artists - Trakas, Aycock -- although it never happened. His gallery did not become a major center for the public artist that it should have. It's unfortunate. I mean, still, it had its place. But it's now different. Things are now different.

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LK: There are a couple things sort of sitting around here. Is there anything you want to describe or explain in terms of your models here?

SB: September, 1987. Here's a chair, Lewis, that I intend for production as a cafe chair. Some of the granite tables are cafe tables. That's nice typologically, a very nice form.

LK: With a linear triangle back.

SB: It would be very lightweight. But it will be such a nice cafe chair. And with a lightweight steel frame, and when you lean back, you would have certain flexibility.

This is a typical Tom Adamarco model - foam core and balsa wood strips. Eventually, I'll have to test it with plywood that I can sit on or something. I hope that the triangle, the steel, is resilient enough you can lean back a little bit. I don't believe in right-angle seats very much. Occasionally.

LK: You've done a lot of reclining --

SB: A little angle in the seat makes it a real chair, like an Artschwager or Robert Wilson sculpture of a chair. But in the early child's chair, I guess we think it's good to make a child sit up straight and get good posture. Or in some of the granite chairs which are for a foyer or hallways,

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like a right-angle chair. That's true of an 18th-century English thing. If you see a chair at a right angle, also if it has a wooden seat rather than an upholstered seat, you know it's a hall chair. So it's a very interesting question. There's a health chair of the 19th-century for children, which is a right-angle chair. This steel chair seems like a right angle. I mean, it is a right angle, but it should let you lean back a little bit - the resilience of the upper part should be. But it's lightweight and it should be cheaply manufactured in a mass edition. I would love it so much.

One of my great ideals is the Bentoia chair, that is disseminated universally throughout the liberal culture. It's an historical symbol. It's time capsule art. I would love to achieve that. Jasper Johns' flag. I must have mentioned it to you before. That's the time capsule stuff.

LK: You mentioned before that you aspire to do mass --

SB: Yes. Not exclusively. I mean, there may be contradictions in doing unique, individual things for collectors or museums. I don't care. I want to do them all.

LK: Is there a plan to do this particular model?

SB: No. I have a tentative relationship with a Swiss

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furniture producer. We've been working on some other stuff together. I'm going to show this to him. This does not stack or fold. But other than than, it's a very nice cafe chair, I think. Don't you?

LK: Yes. So that's something you definitely want to do in the near future.

SB: Yes. I've been working toward that for a number of years with many failures, like the acrylic chair, the steel tubing sling chair.

LK: You were hoping for the acrylic?

SB: Yes. The one that folded. A couple of things. I've been dabbling in it, even to the degree of trying to patent one, which is real furniture, not art. Art is copyright, not patent. Patent is mechanical.

This chair was inspired when I was looking at a wonderful book of Biedermeier furniture. Sometimes I just look at books of old furniture and I just leaf through them. It's not pastiche or it's not reference, but they just stimulate my imagination and these things pop into my mind.

LK: I thought a little bit about the Vienna show and the whole re-interest in the cafe chairs of that era.

SB: I've done some cafe tables at Equitable at one

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of the outdoor plazas. It's specifically modeled after a cafe. I joke that it's like the Impressionists. It's a kind of Manet trickle-down. The leisure hours in a mass society. I'm serious. The cafe table is maybe not a geometric granite cafe table, but -- Here's where social history comes in. So now, this cafe chair is really my homage to Manet and Renoir, Berthe Morisot.

[unclear]

LK: You have sort of an architectural model here.

SB: That's a study model for Liverpool seating.

LK: An active project?

SB: Yes. That's the Tate's commission for the special seating in the James Sterling remodeling at Liverpool - one of the buildings at the Albert Docks, which are undergoing this Harbor Place, South Street Seaport, Faneuil Hall treatment.

LK: There was a recent article on that.

SB: Oh, where?

LK: In the Times, in the travel section.

SB: You read detail. Wow! You really read detail. You really read the whole article! That was a tourist brochure in the New York Times. [laughter] You really read it! I'm a compulsive reader of trivia, too. The cereal box content.

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LK: It's an obsession.

SB: Oh, that's funny.

LK: And then you have like a reclining chair ---

SB: That model? Yes. That's in the chairs catalog that Stuckey explained there. It's just a model.

LK: I'm interested, too, that you work in cardboard quite a bit.

SB: Yes. It's all in cardboard, foam core, balsa wood, plywood. Then Tom makes drawings. And then I go to fabricators. Then there's zillions of alterations and there are samples produced for the finish or for the detail. You may choose particular wells, particular screws. It's not conceptual art that you can phone it in and then come and get it.

LK: Are there things you reject when you see how them come out?

SB: There are always decisions to be made and we'll change. We'll change things. I, just yesterday, had finished a table designed in 1977. We'll put it in the show, but like in a side room, but it's definitely not mature work. But it's ivory tiles. How the tiles on the side meet the tiles on the top, it could have two different looks. Things like that. There's a concept; there's an impulse. It's an impulse rather than an attempt

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to solve a problem, which a designer starts out with - a real designer. And dealing with certain constraints. I have freedom of imagination. Being one of a kind, of course, helps. Or sometimes, the prestige of art. Like at Equitable, it's not a thing of one of a kind, it's a thing of costing a lot of money. But they're willing to pay for it, because it's art - more than if it was design. They're not my client. They can't tell me what to do in the way they tell Ed Barnes or I.M. Pei what to do. I have more power -- of course, in a much smaller budget, smaller scale -- than I.M. Pei, because I'm an artist. It's what I scorn - the false prestige of the artist. I hate it. I hate that. I hate that --

LK: That notion of the artist as genius?

SB: Yes. I hate that. But I'm happy to take advantage of it. [laughs]

LK: Well, I've asked you a lot of questions. I'll just ask you if there's anything that you wanted to add.

SB: No. Heavens.

LK: Anything that's important or that you felt we haven't touched on?

SB: No. I did want to thank you for coming again. Because I did want to talk about the design of the

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furniture and the motives for it - the reformist impulse as well as, from a personal point of view, a total orgy of personal self-indulgence, because I love furniture. As I said, it's to me what women are to de Kooning [laughter] or bananas to Morandi.

LK: Or little bottles.

SB: Right, actually. So I feel very lucky that my personal impulses and certain historical proprieties seem to coincide.

LK: There is an integration.

SB: My personal idiosyncrasy for this furniture seems to be useful in cultural history at a certain time - namely the need for a new kind of public art. I feel like one of the lucky ones that the personal and historical jibe. I'm not the only one. It wouldn't be so significant if I were the only one.

End of Interview