Eva Meyer-Hermann *One of the reasons I wanted to interview you was to talk about feminism in relation to your work. I would like to know more about the cultural climate at the California Institute of the Arts [CalArts] when you were there, between 1976 and 1978—right after the period in which Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro set up the Feminist Art Program [1972–74]. Did that affect your decision to attend CalArts or interest you, specifically?*

Mike Kelley **By the time I entered CalArts the women's program was gone. I didn't know about it so it did not affect my decision to attend the school. I chose the school because of the large number of faculty members that interested me. The Woman's Building in Los Angeles was very much a separatist organization, so I was not personally familiar with what was going on there. These women artists wanted to work in what they felt was a safe environment, free from male influence. So I really did not become very aware of their work until I graduated from CalArts in 1978 and got involved with the alternative space LACE [Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions], where some of the artists associated with the Woman's Building and other feminist groups presented work or were on the committees. *High Performance* magazine, which was in the same building as LACE, focused a lot on feminist artists as well. It was largely a reader-contributed magazine, so the content was quite eclectic, though feminist discourse was very much in the air. But, as far as feminism being a big focus in my education at CalArts, no.**

I was already attracted to feminist discourse by the time I was in high school, simply because of the increasing visibility of the women's movement and because of personal experiences. As the late-60s, antiwar, leftist movement fell apart it fractured into various identity-oriented movements, and you started to have divisions within the political left. In high school I was part of a small group of leftist students and, of course, the women's movement was a topic of discussion. A very close friend of mine came out as a lesbian after we both moved to Ann Arbor, and she disappeared into the lesbian separatist world. I ran into her on the street and her friends would not allow her to speak to me. It was hard, as a male, to support some feminist activities because of this separatist attitude. I studied art at the University of Michigan [U of M] in Ann Arbor where there were very few art-related organizations. There was a lesbian-run gallery and I tried to support it as much as I could, just to be helpful. I had experience cleaning and buffing floors and did that for them for free—but they were very distrustful of me. The work shown at the gallery was primarily crafts-oriented and, in that sense, adopted a kind of "essentialist" position. Most of the women artists I knew were opposed to that position. They did not want to work with traditional "women's materials" like fabric or ceramics because they thought that to do so simply reinforced female stereotypes.

When I moved to Los Angeles I saw that many women artists still embraced this essentialist position. Pattern and Decoration painting is an example; this was a movement that grew out of the desire of many women painters to find an essentially female approach to painting (though male artists were part of the movement as well). Artists associated with the Woman's Building were struggling with this issue. I think many of the works produced in that context were by-products of consciousness-raising discussions related to prescribed material usage in traditional women's art forms: specifically, crafts like quilt-making, decorating, etc. Some of my works of this period are very related to this mindset—the Birdhouse sculptures, for example. These works were made specifically to comment on my class status and on clichés of maleness. Building a birdhouse would be a typical masculine pastime in the suburb in which I grew up, but was hardly the norm at CalArts. But these works were not made as comments on feminist practice. They developed naturally out of my own experience and the elitist frame of graduate art school. They were, though, highly ironic. I was not attempting to position traditional birdhouses in the canon of fine art.

In the work of some of my female contemporaries (not at CalArts, but of my generation, like Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, or Sherrie Levine) there was a refusal to produce works that read as specifically feminine, even if they addressed feminist issues. These artists were criticized by some first-wave feminist artists and critics for adopting "male" styles in order to attain success in a male-dominated art world. Similarly, I have been attacked for "co-opting" women's practices in certain of my works and not giving credit to feminist artists. I believe, in both instances, these attacks are misguided. The point was to reveal gender as a construct, not to reinforce traditional gender roles.

I recall seeing an image from the performance Futurist Ballet *in 1973 in which you are wearing a little girl's First Communion dress. Was this gender-bending some kind of political statement?*

Yes, but I would hardly call it feminist. That performance was a response to my readings on Dada performance, but its "look" comes directly out of the camp trash aesthetic, especially the performances of the Cockettes or the films of Jack Smith or John Waters. I was very interested at that moment in their "queer" aesthetics, where gender is confused and perversion is championed. The *Futurist Ballet* was, actually, a response to a course on Dada taught by Diane Kirkpatrick, who had written a monograph on the work of Eduardo Paolozzi.[1] Kirkpatrick was the only art historian I can remember who taught courses on modern art at U of M.

1 See Diane Kirkpatrick, *Eduardo Paolozzi* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1969).

How was the performance received?

People just thought it was shit and, in a sense, it was.

You invited the audience with false advertising?

Yes, we posted posters for fake lectures to get our audience, but when people showed up they were presented instead with a kind of anti-Happening. It was a prank.

But they stayed through it?

No, they all left.

But you continued to perform?

Yes. We continued until we tired of it, or until whatever class that was actually scheduled to use the space showed up. It was a guerilla performance. We did not have permission to use the space; we simply found out when the space was empty and used it. The performance was a provocation. But, in a sense, our whole lifestyle was a provocation. The way we looked, our art, everything we did was meant to be abnormal.

I read that when you were a kid you refused to play sports, but instead wanted to sew.

That's not quite true. There is a photo of me, when I was around fifteen or sixteen, holding a crude doll that I sewed. But I had no desire to learn to sew; I only sewed the doll in order to anger my father. He kept trying to force me to do these masculine activities that didn't interest me—like working on cars or playing baseball. I didn't want to do that; I just wanted to hang around with my hippie stoner friends and listen to records and goof off. He treated me like a sissy, so I became a sissy to get revenge. I sewed this figure and decorated my bedroom with frilly little girls' dolls—but mixed them up with anarchist and psychedelic posters. My father and I constantly fought about the length of my hair. He could not accept long hair as being masculine when it was, simply, male teen style of the period. This kind of reaction radicalized me and made me aware of how strict gender identifications were. If he would have just left me alone I probably would not have become the kind of ultraradical he so feared and hated. And it wasn't just him. In gym class, for example, because I had long hair, the teacher forced me to wear a flowery woman's rubber swimming cap and called me "lady." Guys I knew were getting beaten up just because they had long hair when they were just rocker dudes. It soon became the norm for guys to have long hair, but these experiences left an imprint on me. They pushed me further out. By the time I left home to go to college it would not be uncommon for me to be dressed in my custodial uniform and work boots, but with a 50s girl's sweater and nail polish. It didn't make any sense—it wasn't normal "cross-dressing."

When I saw documentation of the performances of the Cockettes and John Waters's films I was immediately impressed by them—there were no fixed gender roles. They were not straight, they were not gay—they were pure confusion. I saw these films in Ann Arbor while I was attending art school, but they were not shown in the art context. The *Futurist Ballet* is a reflection of where I was at that time. But that performance was not presented within the art school either. As I said, it was a guerilla performance presented in a university lecture hall, and the audience was tricked into attending it by fake flyers for nonexistent lectures on a number of subjects. There was no place for this kind of activity in the art program.

So you were not commenting explicitly on feminist art tropes until the later 1980s, when you began the Half a Man *series?*

As I've stated before, my initial rationale for working with sewn objects was not about addressing issues of gender, it was about the commodity discourse that was dominating the art world in the 80s. I chose to use those objects because my assumption was that they were gifts. Because they were handmade and not commercially produced, I felt I could safely assume they had been given away rather than sold. I was trying to expand the discourse on commodification in the art world. If it was wrong that artworks be sold, did that mean that objects that were given away were free of the effects of capitalism? I knew this was not the case, and I was sick of only hearing artworks discussed in terms of the market while ignoring all of their specific qualities. Basically, one could not make an artwork anymore; one could only make a product. That seemed to be the limit of the discourse at that time.

The first two works I made using sewn items were *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid* (1987) and *Plush Kundalini and Chakra Set* (1987). *More Love Hours* was made from found, handmade items like afghans, dolls, pot holders, etc. It was composed in an allover, noncompositional manner. *Plush Kundalini* was composed of commercially manufactured stuffed toys in a vertical orientation that related specifically to Tantric belief systems. I chose this contrast to point out the obvious difference between handmade and commercially made objects. The compositional differences were jokes on gender identification: the vertical, "phallic," and commercial Tantric sculpture would obviously be gendered male; and the expansive, acompositional, handmade "field" would be gendered female. So gender was a consideration in the works, but they were not specifically made to comment on "women's" art.

I was naïve to believe that the general art viewer could get past the fact that the bulk of the materials used in the construction of *More Love Hours* were, more than likely, made by women. But to limit the focus to that fact is to limit the links I make between gift-giving and labor, worth, guilt, and payback solely to gift-giving by women. That is,

obviously, not true. I suppose, to clarify my point, I should have made another work composed of crafts that one would assume were produced by men: hand-carved wooden items, for example. But that seemed redundant to me at the time.

The general reading, especially amongst some first-wave feminists, was that I was co-opting the work of women artists. I was shocked by this response. It seemed clear to me that what I was doing had little to do with first-wave feminist work, except in the choice of materials. I understand why women artists of that generation would be upset that my works would find favor when theirs were barely mentioned in art history. I don't blame them for being angry. But it was not my fault that there was such a disproportionate ratio of men to women in the gallery scene at that time. Somebody even coined a term, "The Mike Kelley Problem," to describe this situation.[2] I felt like my work was being purposely misrepresented and I was being used as a pawn, a negative example, to condemn a situation that I, myself, also thought was unfair. I have always been very open about my influences. I think that is the duty of artists to credit those who influence them. But I will not make up influences to serve a cause.

Such gender-specific readings seemed so tangential that I did not even address them in my second series of fabric works. The responses I received to the first works revealed the incredible amount of sympathy viewers had for stuffed figures. Many people told me they felt sorry for the dolls in these works—which seemed to be trapped in the positions they were organized in. The Arena series resulted from this response. I decided to work with the figures in a more singular manner. Plush figures were positioned on blankets laid on the floor. These objects were arranged very simply, generally in quite obvious formal relationships. But despite the formality of the arrangements, viewers tended to read them narratively; they tended to see the objects interacting with each other in the manner of a drama. So, I followed the Arena series with the Dialogue series, for which I wrote texts, which played back on boom boxes, to push this narrative reading. At the same time, I attempted to problematize empathetic affect through the kinds of texts I produced.

It wasn't until I really understood how caught up viewers were with gender readings relative to these works—because they were sewn—that I decided to address this issue more directly by using materials that would be gendered male. This resulted in a group of sculptures made out of wood.

The works presented at Documenta IX in 1992?

Yes, I decided to work with materials that were gender appropriate for me. I felt that I could no longer use cloth objects (especially figurative ones) because, no matter how I used them, the viewer could not get past empathetic connection or issues of the feminine. Each of the wooden sculptures presented at Documenta IX was a kind of "portrait" of a different male psyche—they were "characters," in a sense. I wondered if the viewer could get past the fact that all of the works referred to vernacular woodworking, to the specific connotations of how I was using the material: what kind of "male mind" "produced" each piece...

... Thinking that they must have one message? Do they allow for a more poetic reading, a more ambiguous reading, perhaps?

Well, one would think so, especially in the world of art criticism. Some readers did get what I was trying to do, but it was too complicated or ambiguous for the general viewing public. For example, when my retrospective exhibition came to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1994 there was a comment book for visitors. The works that got the most response were, of course, the works made using craft items—especially figurative objects like dolls or stuffed animals. The two dominant responses were either:

A) "These are so cute. I could do this with my kid's old toys,"

or

B) "What kind of pervert are you? Why are you using these things like this? What's wrong with you?"

Which returns us to the abuse debate. I recently saw a discussion on German television between various art historians and museum directors. They were laughing as they attributed "all these animals... used, worn-out animals" to some sort of abuse. They couldn't get beyond this.

That's the kind of thing that made me realize how much the theory of Repressed Memory Syndrome [RMS] permeated the culture. The presentation of an old, dirty stuffed animal immediately evoked the issue of child abuse to many viewers. I was very surprised by this response and researched RMS. I hadn't realized what a dominant belief system it was. We were living in the midst of an epidemic of fear regarding the abuse of children. This discovery led to an entirely new body of work. I realized that these fears were projected upon me, the artist, and one interpretation was that perhaps I had been abused myself as a child. I decided to capitalize on that notion—not so much of sexual abuse, but institutional abuse: suggesting that my art education itself had been a form of mental abuse.

The issues of misuse and misreading converge in the two photographs you made in 1990, Nostalgic Depiction of the Innocence of Childhood and Manipulating Mass Produced Idealized Objects, *one black and white, the other with a brownish tint. Of course, it is well known that there is a lack of video documentation of*

2 See Terry R. Myers, "The Mike Kelley Problem," *New Art Examiner*, Summer 1994: pp. 24–29.

your performances—and people don't know much about them, visually at least—when they see these photographs they say, "Oh, this was a performance by Mike Kelley."

This is another example of how viewers project upon me, the artist, the belief systems they think are being represented in my artworks. The idea that artworks could simply be constructs is somehow impossible for them to accept. People just assume that the male performer in those photographs is me, when it is not. And then they assume that my earlier live performances were like that—something kin to Viennese Actionist performance—when they had absolutely nothing to do with that aesthetic.

Exactly.

Those photos were jokes on pornography and played on people's fear of the dirty stuffed animal. I invented a genre of scatological stuffed animal porn that did not, in fact, exist. The double titling of the works should make it completely clear that the photos were thoroughly ironic and not pornographic at all. The two photos were slight variations of each other; the black-and-white photo was supposed to be the "documentary" version, focusing on commodity discourse, and the sepia photo was supposed to be about getting back to some natural pre-adult state. They are ridiculous. In one way, I was just playing with certain conventions of coloration in photography.

My performance work was quite formal and language-oriented and had much more to do with, say, structuralist theater than Actionism. Also, my aesthetic is often confused with Paul McCarthy's, since we have collaborated on a number of projects. But our approaches are quite different. My performance work grew out of sculpture; I "demonstrated" objects that I made. Then, I became interested in the fact that the manner in which I spoke about the objects changed their meaning. This led to longer performances in which it was no longer possible for the viewer to recall the development of ideas, so they were forced to be in a constant present. Whatever the logic was at that moment was where they were, because the flow of the logic was too complicated or ambiguous to follow. If there were meaning inversions, they were not recognizable. That's why I did not allow my performances to be documented—so nobody could go back and make "sense" or "non-sense" out of them.

I was also tired of working in band formats. I enjoyed the collaborative aspect of working with other artists, but the band format became a limitation—it was too tied to music, especially rock music. I thought of the performances as a kind of sculptural combination of language and music. The manipulation of objects and the flow of speech were temporal and rhythmic and, in that sense, were musical. But they were not tied, in an overt way, to musical genres.

Going back to the "scatological" photos, I believe the reason people focus so much on this work is to keep me typecast as a "bad boy." I don't quite know how this association came about, but I cannot seem to escape it. A few pieces chosen from my entire body of work were taken out of context and used to push this reading. Many of these works were made specifically to represent aesthetic positions or political ideologies that are not my own. Again, people confuse ideas that I reference in my work with my personal opinions.

Perhaps because they can't deal with this "meta"-level of art—that the scatological photos are faux documentary?

Yes, faux documentary. But most art viewers want art to be about "personal expression."

Maybe many viewers have never taken onboard the indirection of a "postmodern" position, which does not depart from some unmediated encounter with the work but deals with conventions or playful allusions... and generates its own pleasures?

I'd say my work is primarily about playing with conventions. Many of the subjects and materials I work with have little to do with my personal tastes. Especially in my early career, in fact, I was very much against having my work seen through autobiography—though I have eased up on that stance in recent years. Of course, it's impossible to escape autobiography in one's work. For example, class issues were present in my work from the start. The very idea of presenting a birdhouse in the art context is proof of this fact. The use of craft materials was not typical in the art world when I was a student. There are a few artists I can think of who worked in this way, but not many—Lucas Samaras, Ree Morton—it wasn't common practice. Of course, what I was doing had little to do with the practices of either of those artists.

I want to return to what it was like at CalArts when you were there, when it was dominated by Conceptual art practice. The Birdhouses, as I understand it, were seen as jokes on Minimalist art. But then, you began to ascribe symbolic or allegorical meanings to them, which was a no-no in Conceptual art.

Yes. I had a very hard time in the beginning at CalArts, particularly with Michael Asher, because he was so staunchly opposed to making reference to mass or popular culture in any way, because his belief was that to do so simply reiterated it. But that's not the way I felt. I knew that wasn't the case.

My entrance into the art world was through the counterculture, where it was common practice to lift material from mass culture and "pervert" it to reverse or alter its

meaning. That approach is the essence of camp. Mass culture is scrutinized to discover what is hidden, repressed, within it. I thought that Michael's position was completely escapist. Luckily, there were other artists teaching at CalArts when I was there who did not share this prejudice.

Why did you choose CalArts, then?

There were many people on the faculty for whom I had great respect: Pat O'Neill in the film department, John Van Hamersveld in graphic design, Buell Niedlinger and Morton Subotnik in the music department. I wasn't so familiar with the people in the art department. Allan Kaprow was listed in the catalogue as being on the art faculty and that was a big draw, but he had left by the time I got there. The only artist I was familiar with in the art department was John Baldessari. But the real reason I went to CalArts was that I wanted to work with Subotnik in the music program. CalArts very much advertised itself as a cross-genre school where one could work in various departments, but it turned out that was much harder than they made it seem.

Why?

The programs were actually quite divided. Because I'd never had any classical musical training I wasn't allowed to take music courses.

You never had any musical training as a child?

No, I came out of rock music. I listened to psychedelic rock when I was a teen and that led me to avant-garde, electronic, and improvisational music. I had been making tape music on my own for a number of years before I arrived at CalArts, and I was familiar with nontraditional music approaches like those of John Cage and Fluxus, so I didn't think the fact that I had no musical training would make a difference—but it did. I was never able to work with Subotnik. All of my musical experiments were done outside of the academic classes, in collaboration with other students. Of course, this was not the kind of serious work I wanted to do at CalArts, but at least it was a way to play with sound.

Didn't you study with Laurie Anderson?

Yes, Laurie Anderson taught at CalArts for a short time, as a visiting artist, and I took her class.

But you were more interested in Subotnik?

Well, I couldn't study with Subotnik. Just before she embarked on her pop music career—and was still primarily working in the art world—Anderson taught a sound class in the art school. I was excited that, finally, there was a course on this subject. She wasn't much of a teacher. She would just ask the students to bring in sound-related works they liked and we would talk about them, and then the students would produce something themselves. It was very open. Besides some avant-garde music recordings, I believe I brought in some early recordings by Captain Beefheart—the more poetic, language-oriented tracks—and something by the Firesign Theater.[3] I was surprised that she was unfamiliar with both, but she responded to them. I liked her personally and, later, she lived close to where I lived in Hollywood so I would see her once in a while.

But I *was* interested in her work, which I knew somewhat through recordings and the art press and liked. We shared an interest in spoken language in a sculptural context. I made some sound-producing sculptures at CalArts, as well as simple sculptures with which I either interacted physically or spoke about. Those are probably what I presented in her class. I also presented them in evening shows in one of the theaters; I would perform a series of short demonstrations of these objects.

David Askevold was the other artist on the faculty who was interested in performance, installation, language, and music. We became very close. I had a band at CalArts called The Poetics, and we used David's writings as lyrics for our song "Searing Gum."

You had already been in two bands, correct?

Yes, Destroy All Monsters [DAM] in Ann Arbor, and then The Poetics, which was formed at CalArts. The Poetics included Tony Oursler, John Miller, and a floating group of other members. I had been working with sound since 1973.

And the school would not accept this as musical training?

No, because I was untrained. The bands I was involved with, at the University of Michigan and at CalArts, functioned outside of the school context. We performed for our own pleasure and what we did was not considered art. Though, The Poetics did perform publicly, once, at CalArts, but in an event done in collaboration with students from the dance program.

As I understand it, when you were in Detroit, music was extremely important for you. You said once that an artist has no social value in America... "I came from a milieu where artists were despised, whereas rock musicians and drug dealers were, you know, hipster culture heroes."[4]

That's right.

So, you wanted to be more like them? That's why you became engaged in music in Detroit?

No, I was against the idea of rock stardom. I chose to become an artist because it *was* socially unacceptable. The band I was in, Destroy All Monsters, wasn't accepted by the rock music audience. We would never have been

3 Formed in the mid-1960s, the Firesign Theater comedy troupe (Phil Austin, Peter Bergman, David Ossman, and Philip Proctor) released a series of smart, zany albums beginning with *Waiting for the Electrician or Someone Like Him* (Columbia CS-9518, January 1968). See Vwadek P. Marciniak, *Politics, Humor and the Counterculture: Laughter in the Age of Decay* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

4 Mike Kelley, "Interview: Mike Kelley, Language and Psychology," interview with Art21 published September 23, 2005, available at http://www.art21.org/texts/mike-kelley/interview-mike-kelley-language-and-psychology.

allowed to play in a bar or a club. They'd throw us out in two seconds. Only people on the fringes of the music or art world were interested in what we were doing: the most extreme free jazz and improv musicians, and avant-garde composers who were coming out of John Cage and Dada...and the few people who were specifically interested in noise music, which was about five people in the city! I myself didn't really think of what we did as music; we were making art. I always thought the band was more like a posture than it was music. It was a concept band.

It was a kind of cultural convention that you played with?

Exactly. And we had no unified style; we drew from psychedelia, drone music, depressing folk music, electronic music, etc. We were all over the place stylistically. It was somewhat related, in this regard, to the paintings I was making at the time. I was mixing different styles together in what would now be called a "postmodern" manner. That was very unusual at the time. Painting at U of M was dominated by formalist concerns.

How did you get into that?

It was just a natural reaction to formalist painting discourses falling apart. I was interested in multimedia. When I went to the art school at U of M one was forced to pick a genre to study. There was no multimedia program, so I chose painting. That program was completely dominated by the discourses of the New York School of painting, and a number of the teachers had studied under Hans Hoffman. The art school at U of M was quite backward. I mean, compositional notions of paintings were already dead, by and large, and had been replaced by the acompositional approaches of monochrome or field painting, and the seriality of Warhol or Minimalism. So my works were purposely retrograde and perverse. They looked sort of like Sigmar Polke at his crudest but, of course, nobody had ever heard of Polke in America at that time.

I thought rock music was retrograde, too, so DAM was a similarly perverse reaction to that.

Because the art school was so unsophisticated, I took as many classes in other programs as I could: art history (though there were almost no contemporary or modern art history courses), psychology, and sociology. But it *was* an undergraduate school, so I didn't have a lot of freedom about what I could do. Most of my time was taken up with the technical courses that were required in the art program. But I was primarily interested in multimedia, especially performance and installation. Since there were no courses on this subject I arranged to do an independent study on the history of live art with Jacquelyn Rice, the ceramics teacher.[5] That's the only way I could study the subject and get credit for it. I had to have the approval of a faculty member.

What's an independent study?

It's when a teacher agrees to work with you, independently, on a particular project or subject. The only faculty member I could find willing to do this was Jacquie Rice. She wasn't particularly interested in performance, she was a ceramic sculptor, but she was supportive of my work and agreed to work with me. Students had to take a certain number of classes in each genre, if I remember correctly, so working with Jacquie allowed me to forego my obligation to take a course in the sculpture department, which was dominated by people making welded steel sculpture in the manner of Anthony Caro. I had no interest in that. I had already taken ceramics courses, which functioned as sculpture credits, but I did not wish to continue working with ceramics. Though I did produce a number of ceramic sculptures. Most of the students made functional ceramics.

In my independent study with Jacquie I read all the extant literature on the history of live art. I read on Dada and Futurist performance, Happenings and multimedia art, Bauhaus theater, avant-garde theater, Actionism, Body art, Conceptual art, etc. Later, when RoseLee Goldberg's book on the history of Performance art came out, I recognized most of her sources.[6]

And then you gave a presentation on what you had studied?

Not a public one. I simply met with her, showed her what I was reading, and talked about it. I also made some installation works that included my body and were heavily influenced by the work of Joseph Beuys and, to a lesser extant, Rudolf Schwarzkogler. I wasn't interested in the medical or masochistic overtones in Schwarzkogler's work but, as in the work of Beuys, I was interested in the ritualistic displays of objects and materials and my interaction with them. The only solo performance I can remember from this period consisted of me lying on the floor, under a circular sheet of plastic, lightly blowing a whistle that was amplified in the room. I wore a rubber mask I had made by casting the head of a large carp, though the viewer could not see this. I considered the work a poetic tableau. Besides Beuys and Schwarzkogler, I was very interested in the work of Paul Thek, Tetsumi Kudo, and Öyvind Fahlström. I even arranged to bring Fahlström to the school to talk about his work. It was difficult to find much information on the work of these artists as they were not discussed in school. I discovered their work on my own through my reading in this independent study.

So this practice of research begins very early—you approach your projects with extensive study and preparation and are very skilled at this, and this approach continues to the present day. Going back to your experiences in Detroit, you

Jacquelyn Rice received a BFA ceramics from the University of ashington in 1968 and an MFA 1970. She left the University of ichigan in the early 1980s to run e ceramics department at the node Island School of Design, here she was dean of fine arts om 1989 to 1996.

RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance t: From Futurism to the Present* lew York: Abrams, 1979).

once said that visiting the Detroit Institute of Arts [DIA] was an important early experience for you. So you went there as a child; did your parents take you?

I don't remember. It's not the kind of thing they would do. They were not interested in art, and my parents didn't like to go downtown; they thought it was dangerous. But I got there somehow or other when I was quite young. I was fixated with John Singleton Copley's painting *Watson and the Shark*.

How far did you live from downtown?

Very close, a half-hour drive or so. My parents had lived downtown, I believe, when they were younger. But with the increasing racial tension—resulting in the race riots of 1967[7]—they moved to the suburbs, like many other working-class white people. Later, when I was a teenager, I would sometimes go to the DIA with my buddies to smoke pot and hang out, just like you'd go to the mall.

You can smoke pot in a museum?

Of course not, you'd smoke it outside. At that age I recall especially liking the collection of Pop art, and of course the Surrealist works and the Diego Rivera murals. I specifically remember seeing shows by Robert Morris and Mark di Suvero that particularly impressed me.

So it wasn't only the nineteenth-century paintings that appealed to you, contemporary works interested you as well.

Yes. The DIA had a quite good contemporary collection. Samuel Wagstaff had been the curator, so they had a very good collection of Pop art and Minimalism. And that looked fresh to me when I was a teenager. I was already interested in art and spent a lot of time at the library looking at art books. When I was in high school, I was part of a small group of liberal students which formed a recycling center. There was no organized recycling at this time, but we were allowed to use an abandoned house owned by the local newspaper.

So really, you were recycling materials?

Yes. Glass, paper, metal... people would drop it there and we would separate it and put the materials in large metal containers that various companies would pick up. I particularly liked working in the glass container. I wore a protective suit and goggles and smashed up the glass with a sledgehammer—it was a lot of fun. Another pleasure was going through all of the magazines that came in. I ripped out all of the articles about art. I learned a lot about contemporary art by doing this, and when I went to college I was far more educated about it than most of the other students. So when I went to the museum, I knew who Warhol was, I knew who Oldenburg was, etc.

****As a youngster I was very involved with the subculture and had peripheral connections to the White Panther Party and anarchism. When I was sixteen or so, I really thought I was going to be some kind of "guerilla." At that time the Yippies were very similar in certain ways to Kaprow—the frame was different, of course, but the idea of doing these gamelike street performances had replaced art in a sense.**

My parents didn't like art. They were just against everything I did, as a matter of course. No matter what, everything I did was wrong and seemed to rub them the wrong way. So I had to find the place where what I did was right—which was only in the counterculture. Later, by looking at the kinds of histories of what was behind the counterculture, I realized that the aesthetics of the counterculture came directly out of the historical avant-garde, particularly Dada and Surrealism. So, when I was quite young, in high school, I read a lot about Dada and Surrealism.**

Going back to your experiences at the DIA, you refer to Watson and the Shark *much later, in* Profondeurs Vertes, *the project you presented at the Louvre in 2006. You also make reference to Thomas Wilmer Dewing's* The Recitation *(1891), as well as other nineteenth-century American paintings.*

Yes, that's another painting I recall intensely liking when I was a child. All of the paintings referenced in that installation are nineteenth-century paintings from the collection of the DIA. I've always had a soft spot for nineteenth-century American painting, especially landscape painting. When I was working on *The Sublime* project [1981–84] I did a lot of research on nineteenth-century American landscape painting.

Why do you think you have a soft spot for that?

Well, I suppose I just responded to the dreaminess of landscape painting of that era, the ethereal, soft-focus mystery worlds they depict—the exoticism of it. I like the tropical paintings of Frederic Edwin Church and Martin Johnson Heade very much: they strike me as very poetic, an American version of Romanticism.

In several pieces, like Meditation on a Can of Vernors *[1981], you discussed these effects as "sublime." The* Fresno *episode from* Day is Done *also plays with landscape.*

I'd say it's more about notions of the rustic than about landscape. The *Fresno* episode is very comedic and refers to the kind of country humor I would associate with television comedy shows such as *Hee Haw*—low, hillbilly humor.[8] Rather than Romantic landscape painting, that work would seem to me to be akin to the tradition of rustic painting, especially the genre in which country peasants are ridiculed.

7 The reference here is to the Detroit—or "12th Street"—Riot of 1967.

8 The TV variety show *Hee Haw* emerged as a rural alternative to the pop entertainment of Rowan and Martin's *Laugh In*. Beginning in 1969, the show featured cornpone skit comedy interspersed with performances by the biggest stars in country music in a surprisingly long run that lasted until 1991. That final year, *Hee Haw* was given a facelift, which removed most of the rural sets, replacing them with city streets and a shopping mall. This drastic change led to a quick decline in audience and the ultimate cancellation of the show.

But there is a link between the sublime landscape and rustic humor because rustics are the people who inhabit the natural landscape. That's an amusing dichotomy; on the one hand there is landscape rendered transcendental, and then there are the uneducated people who actually live there. I like hillbilly comedy because it is antitranscendental and desublimates the Romantic sublime. The same dichotomy helps me to appreciate the writings of H. P. Lovecraft. He is an aesthete, and his writing style is overly wordy and flamboyant. He has an intense hatred for rustic country types, and yet these idiots are conduits for metaphysical forces—of course, evil, pagan metaphysical forces. [Laughter.]

If you go too over the top with sublimity, it crashes. Then it becomes comedy. I want to ask you about your most recent show, in London at Gagosian Gallery. You included a video from the Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction (EAPR) series based on a critical analysis of the writings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.[9]

But my take on that text was really comedic. I used sections of Rossetti's writings cited in a critical study and the more flowery verbiage of the analytic sections to construct a script that was Sadean—a joke on the term "the English vice," which is S&M. The look of the video was patterned after B-horror films made by the Hammer Film Studios in Britain. These are, often, period films featuring copious amounts of blood, seminudity, and torture. But my primary interest in Rossetti has to do with the famous story of him digging up a book of unpublished poems that he buried in his wife's grave. This is a very morbid metaphor for writer's block. I thought of the story when I began work on the Timeless Paintings series (1995), which related to my work referring to Repressed Memory Syndrome. The Timeless Paintings are patterned after student works from my undergraduate years, and I see them as "dead" in a sense. They supposedly represent my inability to move forward in my work, which is the result of my "abuse" by formalist painting teachers. I see these paintings as horrible acts of excavation.

I was thinking about Rossetti as an example of a poet/painter—since I also see you as a poet/painter.

That's true. I'm a poet/painter.

The other day you put it so nicely, "Going forward is also going back." You purposely return to previous works, but this is a form of progress. I don't see this return as being negative, like having writer's block.

But you have to realize that, at my age, there's a tendency whenever I evoke some earlier period of my work for viewers to assume that I'm simply attempting to go back and capitalize on my "greatest hits"—that it's a market strategy.

Who says this?

The art press. In the collaborative installation I did with Michael Smith, *A Voyage of Growth and Discovery*, for example, I used stuffed animals. The installation contains video shot at the Burning Man festival, and the reason I chose to include stuffed animals in this work is because they are such a common element in the visual aesthetics of rave culture. Their use reveals the infantilism at the core of this particular culture. Their presence in *A Voyage of Growth and Discovery* has nothing to do with the works I made in the 1980s that utilized stuffed toys. I was criticized for using stuffed animals because those 80s works are so widely known—in fact many younger artists are only familiar with those pieces, so to them it seems like my work is a one-liner. But, for me, it's a challenge to use materials I am overly associated with, to see if I can work with them in different ways and get something else out of them.

I've already been told that I should not make any more Kandor sculptures, that I have produced too many of them and they are now redundant. But I'm a very programmatic person and I will not stop making them until I have finished the system I set up for myself. There are twenty bottle and city variants that I chose to work with, and I'm going to continue with this project until I have accomplished this goal. That's the challenge I gave myself, and it's an interesting and difficult process to continue to make them and to keep finding something new.

I think that the London show was quite different from the Berlin show. The works changed a lot.

I thought so. The Berlin show was built very much on a kind of geometric, modern, almost Bauhausian approach. While, in the London exhibition, I worked with organic forms. Formally the works were very different, in my opinion. It was such a simple, and obvious, inversion that I thought art viewers would catch it right away. But, then, for some reason critics rarely talk about formal concerns in my work. With the Kandor series, people can't seem to get past the Superman reference. Apart from a few metaphors that interest me, I'm not particularly interested in Superman comic books: the fact that Superman is an alienated being saddled with the responsibility of caretaking his traumatic past—represented by the city of his birth stored in a bottle—is somewhat like my own *Educational Complex* sculpture, a model of every school I have ever attended reconfigured into a single über-school. But that's only one aspect of the project. My primary interest was that each rendition of Kandor was completely different, and that allowed me to produce twenty quite different,

Exploded Fortress of Solitude" s at the Gagosian Gallery, London, ptember 8 to October 22, 2011. *de in England*, the script for ley's video *Vice Anglais* (2011), poken by voice-over actors and formed" by a still-life arrangent of characteristic, British orative objects. Both tapes offer morous and ironic responses to bert M. Cooper's study of the glish writer and painter Dante briel Rossetti, *Lost on Both Sides: nte Gabriel Rossetti, Critic and t* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 0).

formal variations of the city—all of which are supposed to be the same city. But, instead it's more "bad boy" crap. "Mike Kelley is a nerdish comic book fan." That's simply not true, or what that series of works is about.

I suppose people are more familiar with Superman than they are with your work, that's why they focus on that aspect of it. They just don't want to make the effort to go any further than that. The Kandor show in London had a much darker feel than the previous show in Beverly Hills. It somehow struck me as site-specific. Was that something you had in mind?

Yes, most definitely. That's why I related the works to Dante Gabriel Rossetti and shifted the aesthetic to forms evocative of rocks, ruins, or war memorials. I was very much thinking of British sculpture from the Henry Moore generation.

It was so...British!

I have always been interested in the drabness of postwar English art. Of course, no one thinks about that much at this point, in a post-YBA England.

In one of your early projects, Australiana *[1984], you directly address American attitudes toward England.*

Well, in a very comedic way. I did several projects related to travel at that time. In *Indianana*, for example, I conflated memories of a trip I had taken to rural Utah as an adult with childhood memories of a trip to southern Indiana. While for *Three Valleys* I visited two randomly chosen areas on the outskirts of Los Angeles, took photos, made notes, and constructed a fantasy relationship between the two places. Around this same time I went to Australia to be in an exhibition; if I remember correctly, this was my first trip outside of America. After the exhibition had opened I traveled around the country a bit. I was interested in the fact that the United States and Australia were both former English colonies. I made an exhibition, titled *Australiana*, of drawings related to my travel notes. The idea was that the United States and Australia shared this colonial heritage and England, of course, was cast as the villain. It was very lighthearted, with lots of jokes about the American Revolutionary War and the brotherhood between Australia and America. It was all fabrication built on the most clichéd notions of all three countries. It was all done for fun and very nonsensical.

The installation shots show that the exhibition was hung salon style. Was that how you usually hung shows at the time?

Yes.

So, each show was a site-specific installation?

That's how I thought about it. The hanging of the works always commented specifically on the given architecture. Pieces were hung in a very eccentric manner—in the corner of the room, over doors, et cetera. Because I rarely sold any artworks, I sometimes showed the same bodies of work in different spaces around the country. The *Monkey Island* group of works, for example, was exhibited a number of times—in fact that was the body of work I presented in Australia at the 1984 Sydney Biennial. Each exhibition was very individual because of my approach to hanging. I was interested in Jonathan Borofsky at this time. He was really good at utilizing the same images over and over, yet each presentation was completely different and formally very interesting and complex. This is what I liked about Paul Thek's installations as well. They both had a great understanding of space.

My placement of drawings in an architectural space forced the viewer to scan the room to search for thematic connections. I saw this as analogous to the placement of language motifs, in time, in my performances. Of course in installations of drawings or objects, these relationships are more recognizable. But still, my exhibitions were visually busy and not so easy to penetrate. They were fairly complex networks of information. When I hung *Australiana* I actually ran strings from certain drawings to related drawings to prove that I was conscious of the placement of the works in the room. It was like, "If you're too lazy to search for these relationships, there are strings to point them out to you."

You do not hold viewers in very high regard.

I'm afraid not. You know as well as I do that most viewers look at art for about two seconds and then they're out the door. I have always appreciated complexity in artworks; the fact that works are high minded or silly is less important than their complexity. That is the true content of the work—its structure.

Some of this complexity is lost in a retrospective exhibition because it's almost impossible to get all of the works from a certain series or exhibition—that may have been sold separately—back together again.

You're never going to see my shows again as they originally were. Viewers of a survey exhibition have to realize that they're only seeing a kind of series of fragments of a whole.

But a survey is also an opportunity to bring together disparate works and combine them in new ways.

Well, there's no other choice than to try and have some fun with it.

I wanted to go back to how music shapes your practice and how musical structure functions as a kind of armature for your work. How has this changed or developed since your early days in Detroit? As I never attend performances, such as Tube Music, *which addressed sound and music directly....*

What I did in Destroy All Monsters, or in the art bands, was geared specifically towards the conventions and audiences of the time. Destroy All Monsters was deliberately aimed at an audience that we knew would hate it—though not very many people actually saw us. We thrust ourselves upon people. We directly addressed the death of the avant-garde in popular music and its increasing commodification...and stupidity. And, of course, people didn't like that. You have to realize that this was pre-punk, and there was no system for distribution. With a couple of exceptions, I didn't even know that other bands in the US—or elsewhere in the world—were doing things like this; DAM was specifically pointed towards Detroit history and a Detroit audience. It was connected with the death of radical popular music in the late 1960s, with the death of left politics in general, and with the huge economic crash of the 1970s.

DAM was a provocation against popular music. You have to realize that it had absolutely nothing to do with anything in the music world except maybe the Stooges, but it was far more abstract than the early Stooges. I never saw the Stooges in their first phase when they were beating on metal, oil drums, and stuff like that. I heard about it, but I never saw it. I was familiar with avant-garde music. I would go to the Kitchen in New York and see performances there. While a lot of avant-garde music came through Ann Arbor, DAM wasn't geared towards the avant-garde world, but more towards street culture or bar culture. These were our only venues, even if we got thrown out. You could come in, set up, and play for five minutes...and get thrown out. Mostly we played loft parties or house parties and got thrown out of those too. So it was designed to be an unfun band. Music was secondary. We weren't musicians and didn't think about what we did really as music—or, if it was, it was at the furthest extreme of what could be considered music in the "pop" sense, maybe Captain Beefheart was the closest thing. This is before there was a punk scene, and way before I knew anything about the No Wave scene in New York.

So punk developed in the US in the second half of the 70s?

I'd say the big year of punk was 1976. But punk struck me as being a kind of throwback music, going back to early rock and roll and reacting against all the excesses of psychedelia. I actually liked the excesses of psychedelia. What I didn't like about the 70s was the return to roots music, like country rock, folk rock, and then punk rock, which was like going back to simple, stripped-down early rock and roll. I thought it was retrograde.

And also more commodified?

No, I wouldn't say that. Even though it was put out by big record companies, they didn't even sell those records. Unlike England, where punk was extremely popular, it was never really successful in the US. The first two punk compilations in America were the CBGB and Max's Kansas City compilations. The only bands I recall liking off those compilations were Suicide and Pere Ubu, which you could hardly describe as punk. Other than that, I didn't know of any other bands in the country doing anything similar to us—except Devo. I'd seen a film by Devo at the Ann Arbor Film Festival and could tell that they were artists. Their first concern wasn't music, it was this whole media project. In a sense this wasn't unheard of, as bands like Funkadelic were already creating their own worlds and finding success doing it. That's the "advanced" music—though its politics is very complicated. But you have to realize that DAM was never seen in a musical context and never thought of as music by audiences.

I know that sometimes it's difficult to listen all the way through it.

Of course, now, it sounds like pop music. But it didn't then.... But to go back to the politics of the new punk movement, which we saw as retrograde, DAM—like The Poetics later—did a lot of things that were completely antithetical towards this aesthetic. We played these slow, mournful, dreary instrumentals, or made silly, childish noises...the punk audience hated us. We had absolutely no place in that scene, which we confronted on purpose. Also, the music was quite experimental. Some of The Poetics' music was done as background music for Tony Oursler's videos and specifically designed to play with the conventions of movie music or mood music. And we would always do different kinds of things, different kinds of performances, given the opportunity. So when we were once invited to work in a dance context, we did a dance performance. We also had the opportunity to play in clubs a couple of times, and in public spaces. We wrote sets of more "straight" songs to play with those conventions. So it was very experimental.

When I went to CalArts, it was specifically to focus on a broader notion of performativity in music...and just to go someplace. I didn't know anything about Los Angeles. I knew that there were people teaching there whom I greatly respected, and I thought I could learn from them. Oddly enough, I found myself back in a similar position of just playing music on the side, with a group of people I met from different departments.*

**** But all this had nothing whatsoever to do with my developing interest in solo performance, which followed on from the installation work and "environments" I was making when I first arrived at CalArts—and with which I wasn't especially happy. That's when I started making the Birdhouses. The second one was built specifically out**

of a how-to manual that I had bought at a local swap meet. After doing that I understood the conventions of the materials, what it meant to work in the garage, to build something... "let me just limit myself to this kind of specific, class-oriented pastime... home carpentry." But by the time I made the third Birdhouse I was already tired of building "normal" ones, so they became more and more abstract and more and more allegorical or pseudo-allegorical.

I started building other, similar objects—that were specifically meant to be spoken about. I might write two or three lines... they did one thing, accompanied by another couple of lines. I call that period of my sculpture "demonstrational sculpture." The writing then became more and more complex while the objects became less and less complex. As it became more about a kind of theater I realized that I had substituted this activity for my interest in music. In fact, all the junk that we collected and played with Destroy All Monsters was "sculptural"—and just as important as the so-called "music." I thought all that stuff was interesting... and some of it was not even played. We'd have a guitar and an amp, but also something found on the street that just looked interesting. That was part of the ensemble.

Of course, I was interested in Fluxus and post-Cageian ideas, people like Alison Knowles, and situations where a group of things can represent a kind of music. In my work, the props became less about this kind of exchange, so that language eventually defined them. But over time the language changed the definition, so temporality became much more important. These early performances were musical in a number of ways: they were durational and had tempo, based on speech and speech patterns. But I felt that the movement of the objects in space was also a kind of music—though a much more abstract and language-oriented music. In many cases I never felt that the language and its meaning was especially important. It was about the flow of the language, a sense of development and dynamic shifts in rhythm and tempo. I was interested in other artists who were working somewhat in this vein, especially Stuart Sherman, whose work is little known or appreciated, or, to a certain degree, Guy de Cointet.

So this musical approach, as I would call it, used temporality to conquer or capture a space?

It freed me from the band format, and from the populist overtones of the band. And it was only me. I didn't need all those people. Sometimes I would work with other people, but generally not. While I continued to work with people in band formats, I never showed this work in the art context. It was always done for our own amusement, in the music context. Bob Flanagan and a couple of other poets associated with Beyond Baroque, whom I was friends with, started a band, for example. We were all writers. We never rehearsed and would book ourselves into these punk clubs and try to invent the set on the spot and—whether it was good or not—make it seem that it was really a set of preexisting songs. That was the sole reason to form this band. It was amusing and sometimes fun.

My performances became much more complicated. They almost got to the point of being operatic. And then I couldn't deal with them any more. They had moved into the world of theater which was too complicated, too difficult to deal with, too technical. So I decided to stop. Also, the performances were always ideational projects. I always thought of them as a development of belief or logical systems. At some point my interest in this also ended. There's a performance, it brings something to life, and then it's dead. And I start a new one. The performances were all quite random.

That's also why you would never restage a performance?

Yes, I've never restaged them. A few I've traveled, performing them two or three times.

But you wouldn't, say, do The Sublime *again?*

I don't see it; though somebody could restage it in the future, if they so desire. I also never allowed the performances to be videotaped, because I thought it was against their temporal nature. What I wanted was for somebody to watch them and to *feel* a logic. If you could go back and watch it on videotape, that logic would be disproven because it made no sense. So I could not allow that. You could read them as "poems," in which case you don't expect logic, but, you know, in performativity, people get involved. It's like listening to a preacher. You get involved live, but if you analyze your experience, you see that the logic doesn't hold together. It's not about that. It's about producing certain mental states in the viewer.

Did they try to interact?

People? No.

Were they really quiet, or did they stand in the corner... I remember seeing photos...

Well, sometimes. I built interaction into them, but generally I think people were so confused they didn't know how to respond or act.

You learned your performance scripts by heart—even though when one saw them performed, they seemed extemporaneous. How did you incorporate music? In The Sublime, *for example, were there drums?*

Yes, there was a drum section, but the music was very rudimentary and performed by nonmusicians. So it had to be very simple. They made one sound—when they did this action, they made that sound. Or, at this moment, there's ten beats.

So you scripted all this?

Yes. When I did *Plato's Cave*, I decided to work with the famous rock band Sonic Youth, because that brings a certain expectation to the audience about what they're going to see... how the band's going to perform. I particularly wrote it so that they did things that they wouldn't normally do. And they weren't the stars. A lot of times, they were behind a curtain or, when they played something, it wasn't something that they would normally do. So I was trying to play against the theatrics, the conventions of rock theatrics. And the piece really itself had nothing to do about that. That was just a play with structure because nothing, say in the so-called thematics of the piece, had anything to do with rock. Zero. Also, I randomly broke the script up into male and female parts to make it seem like it was drama. But the only drama was because a man and a woman spoke it to each other in a certain kind of tone, which gave it, say, the feeling of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* But the words had zero to do with that. It was just another play with the format of presentation.

So did it relate to the content of Plato's Cave*? What would you say* Plato's Cave *is about?*

About nothing! It's about a certain set of cave references and other kinds of references related to my research.

You mean the performance?

Yes. But then the staging might not have anything to do with that. There's no physical connection between the performance and the exhibition, though in the early days there was. My shows consisted of presenting leftover props or demonstrational devices without the explanatory action. You didn't know what the things did or how they functioned. That information wasn't provided. Instead, I became more interested in language, so I decided I had to have two approaches: one for the gallery, where drawings and objects could interrelate as a gestalt, producing a certain kind of effect; and another for performance, which needed a completely different set of operations done specifically for a live audience.

I recall reading somewhere that the music—or sound—helped you to memorize your scripts.

I memorized them by rote repetition, in short bits, and I kept going until I got it all memorized. I didn't even know what I was saying, because I found that easier than memorizing them by content. Some of these works were an hour and a half long, so you can see how, at a certain point, this would produce a crisis. It went beyond my capability, because I wasn't a naturally gifted memorizer anyway. I had to listen on a tape recorder and go over it and over it and over it again until I felt the rhythms; then I could shift them if I felt they needed to be shifted.

*For me, this seems to be "musical." It's a musical approach to working by rhythms. Maybe what results is a kind of "operatic"—as you put it—*recitative*, which makes one more narrative line, interspersed with things that repeat or use rhyme or alliteration—the arias, if you like.*

Exactly. But after I stopped performing live, I took a hiatus from all this.

So, for example, you let certain "dialogues" run on?

Yes. Then I wrote those, too. They were similar, but much more simple. As they were sculptures, they had to be short so that people could take them in quickly. I didn't expect people to sit there and look at them for very long. The first one, *Theory, Garbage, Stuffed Animals, Christ*, was pretty long, but after that they were fairly short. The first presentation of *Theory, Garbage, Stuffed Animals, Christ*, at Beyond Baroque was as a play—you just sat and watched these two stuffed animals sitting there with a tape recorder. Later, I moved it into a sculptural arena and showed it in a gallery alongside other works doing different things, and taking different kinds of approaches... playing games, etc. It wasn't until I began the EAPR series that I really re-engaged with music. I was really missing doing music at the time, so that's when I shifted my approach, almost a hundred percent...

I remember that in your talk at the Getty when Day is Done *was in progress you said that you were enjoying it tremendously to have the freedom to work with music—which implies that you felt you hadn't had such freedom before, or not in the same way.*

Well, first of all, I didn't have the skills, and, secondly, there would have been no reason for me to make music that sounded like something played at a Nativity event, say. Why would I do that? It wouldn't come to me in a flash. But I was confronted with the problem of responding to a found Nativity image. How do I deal with this? As it was what I had to do, I had to get a collaborator to help me work these things out and decide how much they should reinforce or not reinforce the genre.

I like very much how this process suggests a whole circle, as performative elements are so central to Day Is Done, *which, in turn, follows on from* Educational Complex, *filling its blank spaces with the actions of so many human—*

and dress-up—protagonists. To me, this important return is prompted by the temporal aspect of the music, and how it takes shape.

And also the idea that the work has always been built as pseudoritual—I've always thought that art is a kind of pseudoritual. It's about the development of some kind of belief system, for want of a better term, that's simply negated and replaced with another one. And to me, it's very much like a materialist replacement for, say, politics and religion. For forms in which you have to invest some belief, art substitutes forms that don't demand such affirmation. You can say that's just entertainment, and maybe it is. But perhaps religion and politics are just entertainment, too.

I think it's a very human striving for knowledge and for consciousness about things.

Yes.

To me it's not so negative.... I want to talk a little bit about your involvement with UFOs, another place where noises, sounds, and music join with visual and other sensations. Your writing about Ufology deals with the question of how basic forms—lumpy masses or goo—are made and perceived, and the issues of "personification" that often arise from alien encounters.

First of all, most of my UFO projects were specifically about formlessness. I was responding to the discourse about formlessness that was popular at the time. It follows, of course, that the music had to be formless as well, so I generally used drones or random machinic emanations. I was studying all this UFO literature to get information about the shapes and colors and sounds associated with extraterrestrial phenomena. I found one article with a specific analysis of a recording someone had supposedly made of a UFO. So I took this analysis to a sound engineer and had him re-create four or five variations of the particular pitch relationships to which it referred. That's the sound I used for *The Keep*[10]: a sound engineer's interpretation of the interpretation of this tape of a UFO. A lot of the music from that series was like this, though that was the most literal. Using this as a guide, I just made things that sounded the same way.

Sound with no structure. The blankness of Educational Complex *was never supplied with sound before you began* Day Is Done, *right? So the temporality of blankness and silence actually ended up in a very noisy narrative?*

That's because the "content" of the *Educational Complex* was what was missing. So it was only when I decided that I wanted to start filling in the missing areas—with screen memories, basic false narratives, that could have been anything—that this shift began. I started collecting photographs of inexplicable-looking rituals. Then came the problem of staging them. What are these people doing? What are they saying? What's the music? Everything was "projected"—but, at the same time, I had to think very hard about how to approach it. I didn't want to do anything too literal. I also figured that if I was going to play with these tropes, I might as well have some fun.

But at other times, I've done things that are much more literal, like the piece for the Louvre, because that was a "serious" show, a response to an exhibition of nineteenth-century American artists who had studied in Paris, so I picked specific paintings. I didn't think the paintings in the Louvre exhibition were that good, so I chose to use works from the Detroit Institute of Art that were really good examples of these kinds of paintings. Dewing's *The Recitation*, for example, is quite unusual, an American mix of Symbolist and Impressionist styles whose protagonists are society women. I researched women's literature of that period and found some really beautiful poems by several poets I'd never heard of. Then I worked with opera singers to develop a dialogue between the characters in the painting, based on these poems, that very much suited the action in the paintings.

A more sophisticated version of Day Is Done?

Yes. The other work [Copley's *Watson and the Shark*] is sort of a sea scene, so I researched sea shanties and took various themes from them. As we did research for the operatic section, it turned out that there were almost no American Impressionist composers. We could only find one who was taken seriously, Charles Tomlinson Griffes, whom I'd never heard of before." The music is based on his approach, so it was a real learning experience for me to do this. I had to study poetic forms I'd never researched before and music I'd never heard before. It was great fun!

It's a wonderful piece.

Of course, most people would never think twice about it. "Oh, he pulled that off a record or something."

It reminds me of your approach in Made in England, *part of the London exhibition* Exploded Fortress of Solitude *(2011), which was a kind of play with inanimate objects. You recorded the soundtrack on vinyl records; the viewer sits there and listens to this play surrounded by record shelves.*[12]

10 First shown at Kelley's exhibition *Sublevel: Dim Recollection Illuminated by Multicolored Swamp Gas*, Jablonka Galerie, Cologne, June 5 to July 31, 1998. *The Keep* is in the collection of the Museum Brandhorst, Munich.

11 Studying in Berlin between 1904 and 1907, Charles Tomlinson Griffes (1884–1920) was influenced by French Impressionist music and contemporary Russian composers, including Alexander Scriabin. His works for piano, chamber ensemble, and voice include *White Peacock* (piano, 1915; orchestrated 1919); *Piano Sonata* (1917–18; revised 1919); and the tone poem *The Pleasure Dome of Kubla Khan*, after the fragment by Coleridge (1912; revised in 1916). Griffes taught at the Hackley School for boys, Tarrytown, New York, for the last thirteen years of his life before succumbing to influenza in 1920 at the age of thirty-five. See Edward Maisel, *Charles Griffes* (New York: Knopf, 1984).

12 See note 9.

Yes, I wanted to do it as a real play.

All these inanimate objects playing mother, father, and the family.

Yes. And it's all sort of random. They're just ceramic objects I bought that were made in England—which turned out not to be as easy as I expected: there wasn't a lot of export materials. They're really kitschy objects.

There's no sound other than human voices present?

Right. Although every once in a while there's a sound of whipping or moaning, but yes, very, very little sound, and no music. There is a little bit of music in the video—but no speech. There are guttural sounds and two pieces of "period" music in line with what you would think of the period based on the dress of the foppish main character. But yes, that separation wasn't something I had initially planned. But the actors were incapable of learning such a complicated script, so I realized that no one was going to sit and listen to it anyway. Then I thought it was more funny to replace it—all the drama, this heavy bombastic speech—and just have it played out by a still life, surrounded by all these records, because no one ever listens to recordings (apart from books on tape or things like that). I remember when I was in school and took a Shakespeare course, the language was so impenetrable to me, "olde" English. I had to go and listen to these records four or five times before I could even understand what they were saying. To this day, I cannot stand to listen to a book on tape or anything like that. It repels me. I just thought it was funny to have all these records surrounding you. No one's ever going to listen to that record. A few people might take it away as a souvenir, but they're never going to listen to it.

So what's the future of the sound and musical components of your work? Will you follow up from Day is Done *and the EAPR series?*

Well, *Day Is Done* was a specific project based on a select group of found photos, so I would not continue to expand it. That piece was a collection of synced videos, with related set pieces, that functioned analogously to a feature film, based on the genre of the musical. The flow of scenes was fixed and the viewer had to follow them in the gallery to watch the "plot" unfold. *Day Is Done* was an attempt to produce a spatialized, feature-length film. I'm continuing to make EAPR videos. None of them have been presented in as complex a manner as the *Day is Done* exhibition, and I probably won't attempt to do that again. Technically, that installation was extremely difficult to set up.

I'm not sure what I'm going to do next. I want to take a break from the EAPR project and work on something with less intensive production values. Videos are extremely expensive to produce. I do want to make more EAPR-related works in the future, because the found images provide me with interesting scenarios that spur me to write, and to compose music. I'm thinking of attempting to make some sculptures that function analogously to the videos. I would write dialogue and music for dramatic interactions between a group of sculptures or found objects—as with *Made in England*, which we just discussed.

So what comes first, the script or the sculptures?

It could be either way. It doesn't matter. In fact, perhaps it doesn't even matter if there is any connection between the script and the sculptures at all. The relationships could be random. Maybe that's the best approach.**