

GREG CURNOE'S HOME MOVIES:
RECORDING AN ORAL HISTORY COMMENTARY

by

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Abstract

Greg Curnoe's Home Movies: Recording an Oral History Commentary
Master of Arts, 2016
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This paper documents an applied oral history project that focuses on the moving image works of Canadian artist Greg Curnoe (1936-1992). In order to document these works in a manner appropriate to their subject matter, a series of oral history interviews were arranged with a group of the artist's friends and family. Participants were asked a series of questions and were shown footage from a selection of Curnoe's films and videos, including two 16mm films—*No Movie* (1965) and *Souwesto* (1969)—and a three-part video series entitled *The Laithwaite Farm* (1974). While watching these works, the participants were asked to comment aloud and their resulting commentaries were recorded and transcribed for the E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Also included in this paper is a brief analysis of these oral history documents, as well as a history of Curnoe's work with moving image technologies.

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Appendix A: List of Greg Curnoe's Known Moving Image Works

Appendix B: Oral History Transcripts

Introduction

This paper documents an applied oral history project that focuses on the moving image works of Canadian artist Greg Curnoe (1936-1992).¹ Beginning in the 1960s, Curnoe was among a group of artists working in London, Ontario that began to champion their everyday lives as the raw material for their art. This informal movement later became known as London Regionalism. Indeed, as one of the leading advocates of regionalism in Canadian art, Curnoe frequently found the inspiration for his artwork in his relationships with friends and family members, and within the community in and around his hometown of London, Ontario.

More than his contemporaries, Curnoe chose to make no distinction between his life and his art. The documentation of his own life—of the time and place in which he lived and worked—was a lifelong project for Curnoe, who endlessly recorded his thoughts and day-to-day experiences in notes, journals, indexical lists, published and unpublished essays, audio diaries, and occasionally films and videos. Between 1965 and 1970, Curnoe began to produce a number of moving image works on 16mm film. These films are typical of Curnoe's interest in the day-to-day, often featuring footage of people, places, and events that Curnoe found personally significant. These films can also be seen as a specific example of Curnoe's interest in liberating the distinction between life and art as they borrow heavily from the conventions of home movies in terms of both subject matter and aesthetics. The film *Connexions* (1970) features images of London, Ontario with Curnoe providing his own oral history of these images in the form of a pre-recorded voiceover commentary. After 1970, Curnoe stopped making films but later started working with a variety of different video technologies to continue documenting his life. These videos often served as documentation of Curnoe's own life and artistic practice, although the

¹ "Moving image" refers here to both motion picture film and a variety of video recording technologies.

work of other artists from Southwestern Ontario (a geographic community that Curnoe and others affectionately termed Souwesto) are also occasionally the main focus.

Curnoe's body of audiovisual work was originally composed of four 16mm films and at least ten known video recordings. The E. P. Taylor Research Library and Archives at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) is currently in possession of all known extant copies of Curnoe's videos, which amounts to eight video objects made between 1974 and 1990. This includes one master recording on ½" open reel tape, two remasters of now lost material on ¾" U-Matic cassettes, and four master VHS cassettes. Also included is one VHS remaster of the ½" open reel tape—possibly created by Curnoe as an access copy or to preserve the recording against technological obsolescence—for a total of seven unique video works and one duplicate. The other video recordings known to have been made by Curnoe cannot be located at this time and may be lost. The AGO also has 16mm prints of three of Curnoe's films in their collection.

Today, Curnoe is predominantly remembered for his prolific work in a variety of mediums, including watercolour, printmaking, drawing, sculpture, installation, and collage, among others. His work with film and video, however, has been largely neglected and forgotten. These works are poorly documented and are significantly underrepresented in the literature: this is possibly due to the access challenges that researchers would have faced while working with these older film and video formats, or is perhaps a result of these works being overshadowed by Curnoe's better known work in other mediums. So how can the regionally- and personally-specific subject matter of these films and videos be documented in a way that facilitates and contributes to future Curnoe scholarship and an improved understanding of Curnoe's practice? This project was designed to address this question and to acknowledge and integrate the personal subject matter of these works into their description and documentation. I arranged a series of oral

history interviews with Curnoe's family, friends, and colleagues. These interviews were focused specifically on a selection of the material described above, including two films—*No Movie* (1965) and *Souwesto* (1969) and a series of three videos entitled *The Laithwaite Farm* (1974). The participants were also invited to watch this material and encouraged to comment aloud on what they were seeing, using Curnoe's own *Connexions* as a template for a descriptive oral history commentary. These interviews and the various spoken commentaries were recorded and transcribed to make information on these films and videos more accessible for researchers and the public. This process will be explained in greater detail later in this paper. Also included in this paper is a brief history of Curnoe's work with moving image technologies, which draws heavily from the aforementioned oral history interviews and commentaries. This brief history should be taken as a first step toward a fuller understanding of this aspect of Curnoe's artistic practice.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1 On Greg Curnoe

Greg Curnoe's use of moving image technologies is conspicuously absent from much of the existing literature. Many of the major texts that focus on Curnoe as an artist have been published in conjunction with exhibitions of his work but these exhibitions typically do not feature any of Curnoe's films or videos. One of the most significant of these publications is the AGO's *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*. Published in 2001, this is the first book-length study of Curnoe's life and artistic practice. Included is an exhaustive chronology of Curnoe's life and work and an extensive bibliography prepared by art historian and curator Judith Rodger. One section of the bibliography entitled "Tape-recorded Interviews, Films, etc. (chronological)" lists all of Curnoe's known film work and several of the video recordings produced by Curnoe during his lifetime; at least two video titles documented elsewhere are absent here. Although this is only a cursory acknowledgement of Curnoe's work with moving image media, the publication's larger contribution to the existing literature on Curnoe's life and work is exceptionally important. The included text by Dennis Reid—"Some Things I Learned From Greg Curnoe"—is also significant as it introduces a common authorial tendency that can be found in many of the texts referenced below: the deployment of memory and personal remembrance.

This tendency can be found throughout the "We Are Not Greg Curnoe" special issue of *Open Letter: A Canadian Journal of Writing and Theory*, a collection of texts that resulted from a two-day symposium on Curnoe. Unfortunately, no attempt was made to introduce his film or video work to the symposium discussion, although the publication as a whole provides another useful insight into Curnoe's relationships and artistic practice. An even more revealing example of this personalizing tendency in the existing literature is Lynda Curnoe's *My Brother Greg: A*

Memoir, which details the life of Greg Curnoe through a recounting of the author's intimate memories of their sibling relationship. George Bowering employs a similar format in his poetic memoir *The Moustache: Memories of Greg Curnoe*. Significantly, Bowering recalls that Curnoe was always interested in promoting the work of local folk artists.² This interest manifested itself most obviously in Curnoe's involvement with the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada (ADNACC) and the resulting videotape series *The Laithwaite Farm*, which is partly the focus of this project.

The 1981 *Greg Curnoe: Retrospective* at the National Gallery of Canada is notable both for its affirmation of the artist's national legacy and also for its inclusion of Curnoe's *Springbank Road Race* (1975), a videotape that is now seemingly lost. Unfortunately, aside from a brief mention in a chronology of the artist's work, no mention is made of this or any of Curnoe's other films or videos in Pierre Théberge's text for the exhibition catalogue. Théberge's earlier essay for Curnoe's exhibition at the 1976 *Biennale di Venezia* is similarly vague, although Curnoe's films are briefly acknowledged in the introductory text.³ However, no mention is made of Curnoe's work with video; his contribution to the ADNACC is mentioned only in passing. Théberge later wrote of the ADNACC in "London Recaptured," another personal remembrance of the curator's relationship with the artist. The text, originally written in March 1992 (several months prior to Curnoe's death in October of that year), refers briefly to their involvement with the ADNACC but again no mention is made of the resulting videotapes.

Katie Cholette's various writings are some of the only secondary sources to contextualize Curnoe's use of video technology. Cholette specifically alludes to Curnoe's work with Théberge in establishing the ADNACC and identifies the use of video documentation as one component of

² George Bowering, *The Moustache: Memories of Greg Curnoe* (Toronto, ON: Coach House Press, 1993), 60.

³ Pierre Théberge, *Canada: Greg Curnoe, XXXVII Biennale di Venezia, 1976* (Ottawa, Ontario: National Gallery of Canada, 1976): 127.

the larger project of building a visual archive of regional folk artists. Interestingly, Cholette comments in "Autobiographical Metaphors" that the ADNACC might be interpreted as a component of Curnoe's larger artistic practice, referencing the artist's longstanding contestation of 'high art' and his insistence that there is no distinction to be made between his life and his work as an artist.⁴ Unfortunately, none of these sources elaborate too extensively on the specifics of the video recordings, only ever alluding to their existence with minimal contextualization and without examination. Curnoe's films are typically addressed in a similar way, although they have the additional burden of being documented with misinformation.⁵ The only other text to situate Curnoe's involvement with the ADNACC within a larger analytical context is Janice Gurney's "Evidence of Activism in the Greg Curnoe Archive." Specifically, Gurney suggests that the ADNACC can be seen as another instance of Curnoe's outspoken cultural activism and his proclivity for founding and being involved with "counter-institutions."⁶ The ADNACC is discussed at some length but no mention is made of the resulting videotapes.

1.2 On Home Movies and Moving Image Preservation

Greg Curnoe's video work is perhaps best viewed through the artist's larger project of challenging existing preconceptions of what constitutes art. This manifests itself literally in his video documentation of institutionally neglected folk artists for the ADNACC but can also be seen in his adoption of home movies as a medium of artistic expression. Patricia Zimmerman's

⁴ Katie Cholette, "Autobiographical Metaphors: The Interaction of Text and Image in the Works of Greg Curnoe" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 2001), 82.

⁵ In her PhD dissertation, Cholette refers to *Souwesto* without sourcing any of the appropriated footage and even mislabels the film's runtime and, arguably, the film's title (the film has occasionally been labelled as "Sowesto" but Curnoe himself is known to have used the standard spelling of *Souwesto* in his 1991 CV). Katie Cholette, "Memory and Mythmaking: The Role of Autobiography in the Works of Jack Chambers and Greg Curnoe" (PhD diss., Carleton University, 2007), 382; also see Greg Curnoe, CV, 1991, Box 12, Folder 5, Correspondence 1991, Greg Curnoe fonds, SC066, E.P. Taylor Research Library & Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario.

⁶ Janice Gurney, "Evidence of Activism in the Greg Curnoe Archive," *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 20 (Fall 2008), 193.

writing has been fundamental in the development of the growing field of study around home movies. The introductory chapter to *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories* discusses the importance of home movies as a visual practice that has been largely neglected within the history of moving image technology; this neglect has likely impacted interest in Curnoe's moving image work. Zimmerman's "Reinventing Amateurism" is also helpful as it considers the unique developments that video technology has introduced to home movies, including the democratization and liberation of subject matter – an element identifiable in all of Curnoe's videos, which typically feature uninterrupted documentation of single events.

In terms of documenting Curnoe's moving image work, an important precedent has already been set by a number of authors and archivists. Snowden Becker—currently the Program Manager for the Moving Image Archive Studies program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)—has written on the advantages of introducing oral history into the cataloguing of moving images. Acknowledging the difficulty of cataloguing the personal subject matter in home movies, Becker has suggested that alternate cataloguing methods should be introduced, including the arrangement of screenings for the filmmaker's friends and family. According to Becker, the attendees of these screenings should be encouraged to vocalize their reactions, which would then be recorded as a form of oral history documentation. Caroline Forcier Holloway, an audiovisual archivist at Library and Archives Canada, has similarly written on the advantages of implementing oral history recordings in the cataloguing of moving image materials. Holloway's case study of a silent home movie collection is a highly applicable precedent for cataloguing Greg Curnoe's film and video works. Another proponent of this approach to cataloguing is Heather Norris Nicholson. Nicholson has also written on the difficulty of cataloguing the personal subject matter of some moving image materials and her argument for relinking regional

subject matter with regional subjects to assist in cataloguing provides another important precedent for dealing with Curnoe's films and videos.

Reference materials for this project include the *Videotape Identification and Assessment Guide*, written for the Texas Commission on the Arts, and the *Videotape Preservation Handbook*, written for the Association of Moving Image Archivists. Both texts provide information on the specific preservation issues that pertain to archival videotapes.

1.3 On Oral History Theory and Practice

One of the more comprehensive publications that deals with oral history is Lynn Abrams's *Oral History Theory*. This text provides a thorough introduction to the theoretical and methodological frameworks that guide the practice of recording oral history narratives. Abrams introduces the text by elaborating on the unique characteristics of oral history, with the remainder of the text divided into chapters that address each of these characteristics individually in greater depth. The *Oral History: The Challenges of Dialogue* collection is another helpful resource for understanding the theoretical implications of oral history as a practice. Brigitte Halbmayr's contribution to the volume provides a useful consideration of the relationship between the oral historian and the subject of the oral history recording. Addressing not only the interview process itself but also the subsequent process of interpretation, Halbmayr argues for a strategic balance between the subjective interests of the oral historian and the subject of the oral history recording. Karin Stögner's essay is similarly useful as it discusses the interaction between present memory and past events. Stögner refers to Walter Benjamin's writing on the philosophy of history and maintains that the role of the oral historian is to acknowledge the inevitable subjectivity of memory and to detect that subjectivity in the narrative retelling of the historical past.

A more practical consideration of oral history can be found in Jill Jarvis-Tonus's "Legal Issues Regarding Oral Histories." This essay—originally published in 1992 in the *Canadian Oral History Association Journal*—has been updated to provide an in-depth examination of the modern legal implications of recording oral history narratives in Canada. Most of the available resources on oral history have been written by American practitioners. As a result, Jarvis-Tonus's article is an instrumental resource for ensuring that the specific regulations of Canadian copyright law are adhered to and respected. Equally instrumental is Nancy Janovicek's "Oral History and Ethical Practice after TCPS2," an essay published in the same volume as the updated Jarvis-Tonus text. In this essay, Janovicek explores the relationship between current federal research policies in Canada and the practice of oral history. Although Janovicek admits that oral history practitioners in Canada are still subject to an overly combative and unaccommodating review system, she does maintain that the most recent edition of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* is a useful guide for ensuring an ethical research practice.

Other important reference materials for conducting oral history interviews include the *Oral History Association's* "Principles and Best Practices" guide and Nancy MacKay's *Curating Oral Histories: From Interview to Archive*. These two resources provide best-practice recommendations for arranging and conducting oral history interviews, with the latter text also providing information on transcribing interviews. Also included here are the *ARSC Guide to Audio Preservation*, the ARSC Technical Committee's statement on the *Preservation of Archival Sound Recordings*, and the second edition of the *Guidelines on the Production and Preservation of Digital Audio Objects*, published by the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives. These three sources provide technical recommendations that will help to ensure the archival longevity of the oral history recordings.

Chapter 2: The Greg Curnoe Fonds at the Art Gallery of Ontario

This project was prompted by the discovery of Greg Curnoe's video series *The Laithwaite Farm* in the Greg Curnoe fonds at the E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives at the Art Gallery of Ontario. The fonds was donated to the AGO by Sheila Curnoe, Greg Curnoe's widow, several years after the artist's death in 1992. The donation occurred in two parts, with the first portion of the fonds being donated in 1998 and the remainder being donated in 2000. The fonds comprises Curnoe's extensive collection of personal and professional records, the entirety of which remained in the artist's studio until its donation to the AGO. The scope of the fonds reflects Curnoe's lifelong project of documenting the time and place of his life and includes files of correspondence, published and unpublished writings, project and grant applications, notebooks, sketchbooks, photographic material, audio cassettes, and the video material that is partly the focus of this project.

A finding aid was prepared for the fonds in 2001 by Judith Rodger and Amy Marshall Furness, currently the AGO's Special Collections Archivist, with assistance from Ben Featherston. The finding aid is intellectually organized with items listed in series according to their content and their relationship with other items. Series 24 of the Greg Curnoe fonds is entitled "Video Recordings" and includes all of the known extant video objects attributed to Curnoe. Included in this series is a complete copy of Curnoe's *The Laithwaite Farm* (the three videos are represented by one original ½" open reel tape and two remasters on ¾" U-Matic cassette). Also included is a VHS duplicate of the ½" open reel, three original VHS cassettes of Curnoe's 1983 studio documentation series, and a VHS home video of the artist's 25th wedding anniversary party. These objects are listed individually in the finding aid and are described according to the handwritten labels—presumably made by Curnoe—that are affixed to their

original housings. Interestingly, the finding aid incorrectly identifies ten video cassettes in this series when in reality there are only seven video cassettes plus one video reel for a total of eight objects. Aside from the finding aid for the fonds, there is no other AGO documentation for these objects and most are completely unmentioned in the existing literature.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Oral History

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this project was prompted by my discovery of Curnoe's *The Laithwaite Farm* video series in the artist's fonds at the AGO. Although these videos had been donated to the AGO sometime between 1998 and 2000 with a finding aid available by 2005, they were minimally documented and were accessible only on their original (and increasingly obsolete) media formats. Primary research using some of the material from the fonds established the historical context for *The Laithwaite Farm*—afforded by the video's association with a larger exhibition curated by Curnoe—but additional documentation was still required for the videos themselves. Adopting the explanatory soundtrack for Curnoe's own 1970 film *Connexions* as a template, I decided it would be advantageous to meet with Curnoe's friends and family members to record a series of oral history commentaries for the videos that would further identify and describe their subject matter. These commentaries would be supplemented by a more familiar question-and-answer interview with each of the oral history narrators that would focus on the history of Curnoe's use of video technology. The project was later expanded to also include Curnoe's motion picture films from the period 1965-1970. This decision was made after determining that some of Curnoe's videos were less suitable for an oral history commentary than others, due to their lengthy duration and their focus on singular subjects: for instance, the two VHS tapes labelled "Working on large nude self-portrait" are each approximately two hours long and focus on Curnoe at work alone in his studio. Although these videos are interesting as visual documents and can certainly be viewed within Curnoe's larger artistic project of documenting his day-to-day life, they are not stimulating in a way that would encourage an insightful commentary. I also decided that it would be more beneficial overall to

include Curnoe's films in the project as the films include footage from a variety of sources and feature a wider range of subject matter than any of the videos; this material is therefore in greater need of documentation and contextualization. After reviewing all of Curnoe's available films and videos, I ultimately decided that the project would focus on commentaries for the films *No Movie* and *Souwesto* and the three-part video series *The Laithwaite Farm*.

Although this oral history project is unique—insofar as it was motivated by and largely structured around the viewing of moving image material for the purpose of eliciting a descriptive commentary—it is not without precedent. Caroline Forcier Holloway has created a list of recommendations for working with film or video material while conducting oral history interviews. Many of those techniques were incorporated into this project, including the use of playback cues for interesting sequences and also the recording of timecodes to allow for the exact matching of a comment with its corresponding moment in the film or video.⁷ Otherwise, the project was designed to incorporate as many standard principles and best practices for oral history interviews as possible. The project itself was reviewed and approved by Ryerson University's Research Ethics Board (REB), ensuring its compliance with the second edition of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2). All of the administrative documentation that was prepared for the interviews is also compliant with TCPS2 and was also informed in many cases by Jill Jarvis-Tonus's recommendations for conducting oral history interviews within a Canadian legal context.

The interviews and commentary recordings were preceded by background research, to ensure an informed approach to the material and to the individuals participating as narrators. The narrators were selected on the basis of their personal relationship with Curnoe and also their

⁷ Caroline Forcier Holloway, "Making a Case for the Donor Interview: Giving a Voice to the Doug Betts Silent Home Movie Collection," *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* 26 (2006): 49-51.

direct association with Curnoe's films or videos: all narrators are featured in at least one of the works being discussed. The interviews themselves were arranged to adhere to the recommendations of oral history best practices in as many ways as possible, despite the atypical design of this project. All of the interviews were arranged to take place in a space that was familiar and comfortable for the narrator; in all but one case, the interviews took place in the narrators' homes or residences. The interview questions that were prepared for this project were also composed in accordance with common recommendations for oral history practitioners. Lynn Abrams has suggested that "In the interview situation the oral historian is a facilitator; we ask questions, provide prompts or cues, demonstrate interest and empathy, all in order to encourage a respondent to access their memory and convert their memories into a narrative."⁸ For this reason, the questions were written to be as open-ended as possible, to encourage reflection and discussion in the narrator's own personal style and manner of speech – a basic principle of oral history best practice.⁹ Multiple-choice questions or questions that could be answered with either 'yes' or 'no' (i.e., questions with an inherent limitation on possible responses) were generally avoided. Specific questions with definitive answers were only introduced during the later interviews, after having been furnished with new or partial information by the preceding interviews. The interview questions were also intended to be probing while remaining as non-invasive and respectful of the narrator's participation as possible. Abrams again has suggested that "oral history is a collaborative endeavour, the result of a relationship between interviewer and interviewee" that should not be taken for granted.¹⁰ Again, it is important to keep in mind the human component of oral history and to maintain an ongoing respect for a narrator's agency and

⁸ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 104.

⁹ See "Principles and Best Practices," *Oral History Association*, last modified October, 2009, accessed June 28, 2016, <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/>.

¹⁰ Abrams, 10.

independence. This respect for the relationship between narrator and interviewer is a critical component of oral history practice and in this case was maintained throughout the entirety of this project, including in the later stages of transcription and interpretation (discussed below in subchapters 3.3 and 3.4).

The oral history commentary component of this project was also designed to incorporate existing best practice recommendations. The Oral History Association suggests that "in recognition of the importance of oral history to an understanding of the past and of the cost and effort involved, interviewers and interviewees should mutually strive to record candid information of lasting value."¹¹ This appreciation for the candidness of the oral history format was fundamental in the design of the commentary component of this project. For instance, the footage chosen for discussion was only shown to the narrators once, during the actual recording of the oral history commentary. This allowed for a more spontaneous commentary (the benefits of this will be discussed below in subchapter 3.4). Although it may have been advantageous to screen the footage multiple times for each narrator—to allow the narrators a chance to notice details that they may have missed during the first playback or to ensure that the narrators had more time to remember additional information—I decided that it was more important to respect the narrators' time and to appreciate their already substantial contribution to the project (the "cost and effort" alluded to in the above quote). This decision was also informed by *TCPS2* guidelines and the recommendations for research involving human participants and respect for human agency. Ultimately, I determined that footage would only be viewed more than once if it was specifically requested by one of the narrators.

To allow these interviews and commentaries to take place in the narrators' homes, the commentary screenings were conducted using available digital transfers of the original material:

¹¹ "Principles and Best Practices."

an access copy of *The Laithwaite Farm* was produced by the AGO's Media Services department using the ¾" U-Matic duplicates in the artist's fonds; a recent digital transfer of *Souwesto* was supplied by the Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre (CFMDC); and *No Movie* was shown using an online copy of a pre-existing video transfer that was made for the film, which has been made available by the Michael Gibson Gallery. Unfortunately, it was later discovered that this video transfer of *No Movie* was produced using an incorrect frame rate, resulting in a faster-than-normal playback (this error is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5). Although the commentaries will synchronize perfectly with this video transfer—which is currently the most available copy of this film—any attempt to watch the film at its intended speed will require the commentary playback to be adjusted appropriately.

3.2 Technology and Formatting

The E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives at the AGO currently has no system or standards in place for this type of oral history cataloguing effort. For that reason, the technological design of this project was largely based on accepted preservation standards and the unique requirements of this particular project. The most important aspect of this design was the quality and formatting of the oral history audio recordings. According to Nancy MacKay, the interview transcript was at one point considered the "primary archival document" for oral historians but that "Current practice favors the *recording* as the most authentic representation of the narrator and therefore the primary document."¹² Although some oral history projects are recorded on video as well as audio (to provide a richer visual document of the interview), I decided that this would be inappropriate for this project for a number of reasons. Most

¹² Nancy MacKay, *Curating Oral Histories: From Interview to Archive*, 2nd ed. (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2016), 34.

importantly, the E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives is not currently capable of accepting and managing born-digital video material, especially material produced at the high quality (with resulting large file sizes) typically recommended for an oral history project. Another reason to exclude video from this project is the additional burden that a video document would require during the recording process: a professional oral history video would require a more elaborate set-up—either in a prepared studio or in the narrator's home—and would require at least one additional individual to monitor the video recording during the interview. For this project, both of these options were inappropriate as they would significantly detract from the narrators' level of comfort. It was also important that I should be able to manage everything independently without assistance and with minimal impact on the narrators (in terms of effort or distraction). Ultimately, the oral history interviews and commentaries were documented exclusively through a series of audio recordings.¹³

Now that the original recording has replaced the transcript as the primary archival document for oral history projects, I decided it was necessary to produce the recordings for this project at the highest possible quality and in a format that would be sustainable and conducive to long-term preservation. I chose to record the oral history interviews and commentaries using the WAVE file format (.wav). WAVE is an uncompressed and non-proprietary format, which means that it is capable of recording audio at optimal quality without being hindered by restrictions on use or application. Additionally, WAVE is currently considered one of the "*de facto* standards for archival master audio file formats" by the Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC)¹⁴ and

¹³ For additional comparisons between audio and video recording oral histories, see MacKay, 93.

¹⁴ ARSC Technical Committee, *Preservation of Archival Sound Recordings*, Association for Recorded Sound Collections, 2009, http://www.arsc-audio.org/pdf/ARSCTC_preservation.pdf. For additional information on the WAVE file format specifically or digital audio file formats generally, see Sam Brylawski, Maya Lerman, Robin Pike, and Kathlin Smith, eds., *ARSC Guide to Audio Preservation* (Eugene, OR: Association for Recorded Sound Collections; Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources; Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2015), 32-34.

is recommended by the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA) as one of the best options for digital audio preservation.¹⁵ Following the recommendations of the ARSC for archival masters, all of the oral history recordings were produced in the WAVE file format at a bit depth of 24-bits and a sample rate of 96 kHz.¹⁶ It should be noted here that these format specifications typically result in rather large file sizes that in some cases may become burdensome for the collecting institution. However, I decided that these specifications would be safely manageable for two reasons: (1) this project is limited in scope so the number of files being ingested is finite; and (2) the E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives does not actively acquire born-digital material so the requirements of ongoing digital preservation will be minimal.

In terms of equipment, all of the oral history recordings were captured using a Zoom H4n Handy Recorder. This portable field recorder was chosen for its ability to produce 24-bit/96kHz WAVE files and for its user-friendly interface, which helped to ensure that I could independently manage all aspects of the oral history recording process without being distracted or inconvenienced.

3.3 Transcription

The E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives at the AGO currently has no internal formatting standards for the transcription of oral history interviews. For that reason, this component of the project was again designed primarily by referencing existing standards and best practices recommendations for transcribing.¹⁷ Most importantly, the transcribing process

¹⁵ IASA Technical Committee, "Ingest," *Guidelines on the Production and Preservation of Digital Audio Objects*, edited by Kevin Bradley, 2nd edition (IASA-TC 04) (Auckland Park, South Africa: International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives, 2009), <http://www.iasa-web.org/tc04/ingest>.

¹⁶ ARSC Technical Committee.

¹⁷ Some of the formatting for the transcripts was adapted from a template provided by Nancy MacKay. See MacKay, 108-9.

was informed by the general principle that "In the use of interviews, oral historians strive for intellectual honesty and the best application of the skills of their discipline, while avoiding stereotypes, misrepresentations, or manipulations of the narrators' words."¹⁸ The transcripts produced for this project resemble the content of the original audio recording as closely as possible with only minor adjustments made to encourage readability. Most of these adjustments are distinguished by the use of square brackets and are intended to supplement or clarify partial statements or common shorthand statements (ex. "the London Regional [Art Gallery]").

Elsewhere, square brackets have been used to indicate non-verbal communications (including laughter and physical gesturing) to help convey the tone and manner of speech in the original recording. Incomplete statements (which occur frequently in oral history interviews as narrators construct a spontaneous narrative) have also been indicated throughout the transcripts through the use of an em dash (ex. "He showed a lot of people—. He opened doors to ideas for people.").

Another common aspect of oral history interviews is the use of crutch words and crutch sounds (e.g., "so," "you know," "um," "er," etc.). These crutch words and sounds are frequently used by narrators in place of silent pauses. Unfortunately, these words and sounds can easily become burdensome in an oral history transcript so they have been largely removed from the transcripts produced for this project to encourage readability. Also removed from the transcripts are feedback words. While the narrator is speaking, it is common for those listening to provide small indications of feedback to encourage the narrator to continue (e.g., "right," "okay," "uh-huh," etc.). These feedback words have been largely removed from the transcript, unless the feedback was a definitive response to something said by the narrator. During the interviews that feature more than one participant, it was common for the narrators to speak simultaneously. If a narrator was interrupted but completed his or her statement, the statement and the interruption were both

¹⁸ "Principles and Best Practices."

formatted as full sentences rather than two sets of incomplete statements. This has allowed for improved readability while also respecting the intended speech of the individual narrators.

Of course, it is important to keep in mind the limitations of transcription and to acknowledge the significance of interpretation:

In reality, an exact reproduction of the spoken word is impossible. Judgments about punctuation and paragraphs must be made, as well as decisions about how to translate a spontaneous conversation to a readable text document. Sometimes words or phrases are difficult to hear, and the transcriber's best judgment in transferring voice to text may convey a different meaning from the narrator's intent. Finally, user tools such as tables of contents, chapter headings, or indexes are often included, adding another layer of interpretation to the source interview. In other words, there is no such thing as a standard transcript.¹⁹

To help alleviate this inevitable process of interpretation, the narrators were given a copy of their interview transcript(s) before the project was completed. I encouraged the narrators to review the transcript(s) for misrepresentations or misunderstandings and corrections were made whenever necessary.²⁰

3.4 Interpretation and Evaluation

In addition to the transcript, it is important to recognize the many other layers of interpretation that comprise oral history narratives. Oral histories do not only involve the interpretation of a narrator's speech. All oral history interviews comprise a series of subjective interpretations of the past based on the personal memories of the individual narrators. Although this formulation of history can appear problematic, it is also in many ways advantageous. Karin Stögner has argued that oral history necessitates an ongoing and conscious appreciation for the

¹⁹ MacKay, 100.

²⁰ Nancy MacKay states that this review process is an important aspect of acknowledging and respecting the "Shared Authority" of the narrators in the creation of the oral history document. For more information, see MacKay, 19.

significance of memory and the process of remembering.²¹ In other words, oral history as a discipline is fundamentally opposed to an objective formulation of history. According to Abrams, "what the oral historian is interested in is whether a respondent can remember events and experiences that are significant to him or her" and not whether they can remember every experience flawlessly and in a way that is perfectly removed from their own subjective viewpoint.²² This emphasis on what is remembered and why it was significant for the individual narrator is fundamental to the oral historian's interpretation of an oral history document.

The following chapter will discuss the oral history interviews and commentaries that were produced specifically for this project. Throughout that chapter, all efforts have been made to acknowledge and appreciate the influence of memory and remembering in the construction of a historical narrative. This is especially true for the oral history commentaries, which feature deliberately candid remarks and observations (again, each narrator was shown the footage only once), in order to develop a better understanding of what was particularly significant for each individual narrator and for the community as a whole.

²¹ See Karin Stögner, "Life Story Interviews and the 'Truth of Memory'," in *Oral History: The Challenges of Dialogue*, edited by Marta Kurkowska-Budzan and Krzysztof Zamorski, 205-15, *Studies in Narrative* 10. (Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009). For a longer discussion on the topic of memory and its significance in the construction of an oral history narrative, see Abrams, 78-105.

²² Abrams, 103.

Chapter 4: Summary and Discussion

The oral history interviews conducted for this project have provided a number of valuable insights into the subject matter and historical context of Greg Curnoe's films and videos. First and foremost has been the identification of many of the people, places, and activities seen on-screen in the individual works, especially in *No Movie* and *Souwesto*. Historically, home movies (which these two works significantly resemble) have often been shown with the accompaniment of live commentary from those in attendance – this commentary would have served to identify and supplement the onscreen activity, often through anecdotal explanations or reactions. This distinctive presentation of home movies was even adapted by Curnoe for his later film *Connexions* in which the soundtrack is "the same as you would expect to hear if the film were shown silent and Curnoe stood at your shoulder explaining the pictures on the screen."²³ In other words, these oral histories (especially the commentaries) have proven to be an appropriate means of documentation for this particular group of material for two reasons: not only have they successfully identified and contextualized much of the subject matter in the films and videos being examined—which is a demanding task for moving image materials in general—but more importantly, they have accomplished this while faithfully reproducing the presentational context of home movies that Curnoe himself employed elsewhere in his filmmaking.²⁴ Even *The Laithwaite Farm*, which does not resemble or incorporate any home movie material, has benefitted from this oral history documentation in its own particular way. These benefits will be discussed in greater detail below but it may be helpful to begin by highlighting a few of the insights gained through the identification of subject matter in *No Movie* and *Souwesto*.

²³ Robert C. McKenzie, "Greg Curnoe's *Connexions*," *20 Cents Magazine* 4, no. 3 (March 1970): 19.

²⁴ Murray Favro even commented on the historical appropriateness of this approach to Curnoe's films: "See when people did their home movies and showed them, I don't know if you know about that, but they did what I'm doing right now. You'd just talk over them because there's no sound."

One of the major insights obtained through this project has been the identification of several peripheral figures within the history of the Nihilist Party and the artistic community in London, Ontario in the mid- to late 1960s. One example can be found in the various commentaries for *No Movie* in which the narrators frequently drew attention to Gard Wigley, the resident pianist at the York Hotel in London but an otherwise unknown local musician.²⁵ Another subject that has now been identified through the various oral histories is Kenneth Hilborn, a University of Western Ontario professor who was invited to speak at the first Nihilist Picnic in 1965. Hilborn's participation in the event has been recorded elsewhere in the secondary literature but only as a brief note with minimal explanation.²⁶ According to a few of the oral history narrators, Hilborn was invited to the picnic due to his openly right-wing political opinions and his outspokenness on the American war in Vietnam. These opinions would have been contrary to the opinions held by many of the Nihilist Party members (a group made up mostly of students and young artists) and it seems that Hilborn was invited to the picnic simply to be chastised by the audience. Some narrators have suggested that Hilborn was caught unawares by the audience's reception and that he was genuinely jeered during his speech, while others have maintained that he knew what to expect and that the antagonism of the speech and its reception were both relatively good-humoured.

It is also worth noting that, although *No Movie* occasionally features title cards announcing the dates and descriptions of the various activities depicted in the film, the oral history interviews have still been able to contribute to a much fuller understanding of what exactly is being seen on screen. The historical context and motivation for many of the events depicted in the film are explained at length in the oral history interviews and the information that

²⁵ Art Pratten has commented that "His claim to fame was he played with Guy Lombardo once."

²⁶ Judith Rodger, "Chronology," in *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*, edited by Dennis Reid and Matthew Teitelbaum, 136-90 (Toronto, Ontario: Art Gallery of Ontario; Vancouver, British Columbia: Douglas & McIntyre, 2001), 151.

has been obtained ranges from John Boyle's retelling of how lacrosse was first introduced to the members of the Nihilist Party, to specific details like the location of the Benefit Lacrosse Game—held at the now demolished Talbot Street School—which is featured at the end of *No Movie*. The oral history interviews have also afforded a rather comprehensive account of the soundtrack recording for *No Movie* and Murray Favro has even provided some insightful comments on the film's editing (this will be discussed in the following chapter).

The commentaries for *Souwesto* have similarly contributed to a more complete understanding of the film's subject matter. There is certainly some benefit in the simple identifications of otherwise unrecorded people – the elusive London artist Brian Dibb, for example, who co-founded Region Gallery with Curnoe and a group of other artists, is pictured in the film and has been identified by a number of narrators. More revelatory, however, is the identification of entire sequences in the film. The fact that the film borrows footage from an episode of *The Umbrella*, a short-lived CBC program that was broadcast in 1966, is one such discovery. Background information on the shooting of the original episode and the program's host, Painters Eleven artist William Ronald, is also provided in several interviews. Another discovery that resulted from the oral history interviews is the fact that *Souwesto* features footage from both the 1967 and the 1968 Nihilist Picnics, neither of which is openly identified within the film itself. This range of content is only evidenced by an apparent change of venue (identified by Shirley and John Clement as the change from Pinafore Park in St. Thomas, Ontario to the small community of Poplar Hill outside of London) and a slight change in the attire and age of certain attendees. Bill Exley has additionally pointed out that he was absent from the 1967 picnic, which is consistent with his absence in the first sequence. A physical inspection of the 16mm release print in the collection of the AGO reveals that the first picnic sequence was shot on film stock

dating from 1966 but that was likely not used until the following year; the second picnic sequence actually contains a "PROCESSED BY KODAK" date that reveals that it was processed "SEP 68," confirming the hypothesis presented in the oral history commentaries that the second picnic depicted is from 1968. A relatively anomalous sequence near the beginning of the film has also been identified by Sheila Curnoe as amateur footage of Olympic gold medalist Barbara Ann Scott. A description of the film from the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre reveals that this footage was shot in St. Mary's, Ontario (another city within the film's namesake region), although the source of this footage remains unknown.²⁷

Of course, not every single person seen on-screen in either of these films has been identified in the course of these commentary recordings. It is tempting to think of this as a deficiency but it is also important to keep in mind the peculiarities of oral history, especially the process of spontaneously constructing a historical narrative based on the experiences and memories that each narrator interprets (either consciously or subconsciously) as the most personally significant:

There is little evidence to suggest that people generally misremember events or experiences and certainly not deliberately or consciously so. Even age does not appear to affect the veracity of memory. Overall, people retain memories over long periods of time with no significant memory loss. Rather, the quality, vividness and depth of an individual's memory of a specific event or experience will be dependent upon the encoding that happened at the time and the circumstances in which the remembering is taking place. It seems that people remember what is important to them. Some details might fade but the broad contours of the memory remain through life.²⁸

The recurring identification of certain elements at the expense of others indicates that some things were simply more impactful and have therefore proven themselves to be more memorable.

²⁷ "Sowesto," *Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre*, accessed 28 June 2016, <http://www.cfmdc.org/node/1303>.

²⁸ Abrams, 86.

Furthermore, some of the more insightful achievements of this project are only apparent when all of the oral history narratives are viewed together as a collective portrait of the community. For example, even in shots of a crowded room, the individual narrators frequently identified many of the same individuals: Gard Wigley, curator and future editor of *artscanada* Anne Brodsky, arts patrons Geoffrey and Goldie Rans, artists Ron Martin and Tony Urquhart, "the nurses" (a group of nursing students that frequently socialized with the group during the period depicted in *No Movie*), and several others are all established characters within this collective portrait of a flourishing local community.²⁹

Taken together, these oral history documents also serve as a collective portrait of Curnoe himself, both as an individual and as an artist interested in creatively observing and absorbing life. Several narrators weighed in with their personal interpretations of Curnoe's films and videos and some also discussed their understanding of Curnoe's motivations as the creator or instigator of these works. One common opinion that was shared during the interview process was that Curnoe's films and videos are not particularly artistic or well-constructed; instead, they were viewed by many as relatively unremarkable home movies. The films seem to be mainly focused on capturing the activities of the community and championing its liveliness, and in both *No Movie* and *Souwesto* Curnoe seems to deliberately dismiss his own authorship by openly borrowing footage from other sources. His reluctance to construct scenes or to direct the action was commented upon by both John and Shirley Clement, with the latter saying "I don't have any really specific memories about it but my sense is that he would have just been enjoying what was going on and taking pictures of that. [...] I would have remembered if Greg had done that and I don't think he did. I had the sense that he was just really enjoying all the crazy things that were

²⁹ There are typically only a few deviations in any given oral history narrative. Sheila Curnoe, for instance, is the only narrator to identify the aforementioned footage of Barbara Ann Scott and Art Pratten is the only narrator to recognize both future London mayor Jane Bigelow and artist Barry Richman of Grand Bend, Ontario.

going on and trying to take pictures of them."³⁰ Art Pratten has suggested that Curnoe was interested first and foremost in promoting the community and working to construct a coherent and self-sustaining local culture but that "He did not want to be the leader of it"; this prioritization of the community likely motivated Curnoe's apparent disregard of authorship. At the same time, Pratten has also credited Curnoe as the obvious creative force behind *No Movie*, suggesting that "The interesting thing is the idea of doing it and how it was done and the fact that it was viewed as something that should be put together and kept as a unit, that it was something." Without Curnoe's decision to compile this footage into a complete work, it is entirely possible that these home movies would have been entirely neglected and possibly even lost. Bill Exley has also commented on the crudeness of Curnoe's films but has further speculated that Curnoe's decision to work with home movies could be seen as a more provocative effort on the part of the artist to challenge existing preconceptions of what exactly constitutes art.³¹

This contestation of the realm of high art would not be uncharacteristic of Curnoe, as evidenced by his interest in folk art and his efforts at documenting and championing these works through his involvement in the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada (ADNACC) and through *The Laithwaite Farm* video series that he produced. It should be noted that the oral history interviews that address *The Laithwaite Farm* are noticeably less descriptive than many of the commentaries for *No Movie* or *Souwesto*. First-hand knowledge of *No Movie* in particular is plentiful because it was a project with which many people were involved, either as subjects or as participants involved in the recording process for the film's soundtrack; the project was truly collaborative. *The Laithwaite Farm* was produced

³⁰ In his interview, John Clement commented that "We weren't actors, we were people, just a part of the scene."

³¹ Referring to *No Movie* and Curnoe's later film *Connexions*, Bill Exley observed that "the movies have in them this home movie quality taken to a real extreme. He deliberately makes it unartistic. [...] They're almost deliberately crude I think and he's saying 'these things are art,' you see?"

under vastly different circumstances and there are significantly fewer potential narrators. The only participant in this project who was directly involved in the production of this video series is Peter Denny, who viewed excerpts alongside his wife Marion Johnson and Sheila Curnoe. Murray Favro was also shown excerpts of the video series but he was unaware of the videos' existence prior to the interview and could provide only immediate reactions. The only other people featured in *The Laithwaite Farm* are Pierre Théberge, who was unable to participate in this project due to poor health, and Clayton Laithwaite, the now deceased son of the sculptor George Laithwaite whose work is the focus of the first video in the series.

Although the commentary for *The Laithwaite Farm* is certainly less descriptive, it has still provided some insight into how the production should perhaps be understood. During his interview, Peter Denny was unable to recall any information relating to his personal involvement in the production of these videos. When asked by Sheila Curnoe if he recalled being video-recorded while viewing the sculptures, Denny admitted "Oh I don't know. He might have been doing that. I wouldn't have even noticed." Elsewhere, Denny admits that he was uninterested in the video-recording process and that his relationship with visual art in general was largely mediated through Curnoe: "You should keep in mind that I'm not in the art world except as a friend and a viewer. [...] No, I really didn't offer an opinion on visual art. If Greg would show me something that he was enthusiastic about that was the end of it. I didn't try to sense it myself."³² With this in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that Denny was unable to recall any additional details during his interview. Of course, there is also a certain informality to the videos, as seen in Curnoe's impromptu shot set-ups in the first part of the series and also in the apparent absence of any preparation from Théberge or Denny throughout their conversations. In fact, the

³² Also, when asked if he remembered the first time that he saw Curnoe working with film or video, Denny responded by saying "No I don't. I had no expertise and no interest. I don't know anything about filmmaking or video. The only thing I knew anything about was audio recording."

entire series seems to have been produced rather casually. When asked if he considered the videos to be typical of Curnoe's work, Denny responded by saying "Oh, I would say so, yes. Typical of his engagement with other people, bringing them into his world. He was so good at that, you know. He would let you experience all the parts of his world." Bill Exley also commented on this tendency in his interview, stating that "the whole tendency of Greg's art is inclusive. He always believed in bringing people together." It seems likely that Denny was integrated into the video-recording process simply at the behest of Curnoe and that the activity had little personal impact. In some sense, Denny's interview can even be seen as evidence of Curnoe's inclusiveness without any additional historical details being communicated.

Denny's interview is also notable for the fact that it has signaled an alternative use for moving image materials within an oral history context, namely the potential for films and videos to serve as a stimulant for the construction of a personal narrative. This particular project was focused on the films and videos themselves with the purpose of capturing a series of descriptive commentaries; in a different context, however, these same materials could be used to refresh an individual narrator's memory while providing a more personal oral history. This potential was only tentatively employed at different points throughout this project: in several interviews, the decision was made to change the design of the project and to have the narrators review the footage before proceeding with the interview. Although this did have the anticipated effect of requiring more question-and-answer prompts during the commentaries, it was ultimately beneficial for those narrators who had little recollection of the works being examined.

Chapter 5: A Brief History of Greg Curnoe's Films and Videos

Curnoe first started working with film in 1965 using a 16mm Magazine Ciné-Kodak camera manufactured in 1938.³³ The camera was donated to the editors of *Region* magazine, a local publication co-founded by Curnoe in 1961, by Matthew Wherry.³⁴ Curnoe used this magazine-loading camera to produce *No Movie*, a document of the first years of the Nihilist Party in London, Ontario. The Nihilist Party was founded in 1963 as a satirical pseudo-political party by Curnoe and a group of other individuals (mostly artists and students) active in London at that time. The film was shot in the summer of 1965 and includes footage of the first Nihilist Picnic, an annual event that recently held its fiftieth iteration; the first Nihilist Banquet, a short-lived formal dinner for the Nihilist Party; a Nihilist Convention at the York Hotel in London; and a Benefit Lacrosse Game in August of 1965. Also included is footage shot at "No Haven," a cabin in Port Stanley that was first rented by Curnoe and a group of friends in the summer of 1965. Several sections of found footage, including images of sea life and footage from an airshow are also featured. According to Murray Favro, this latter footage may have been provided by Hugh McIntyre, who was working as a film librarian for the London Public Library at the time; the remaining footage may have been sourced from the archives of the London-based CFPL-TV or from a local National Film Board of Canada (NFB) office. Favro has also attributed the editing of the film to Drew Gilles of the NFB, although this is difficult to confirm without additional evidence. In any case, the film does seem to have been largely a collaborative endeavour amongst the Nihilist Party with Curnoe serving more as the primary instigator than the film's director. Curnoe is frequently seen on-screen during the film (oftentimes inattentive to the camera), indicating that at those moments the camera was being operated by someone else

³³ Rodger, "Chronology," 151. This was also confirmed by Bill Exley during his interview for this project.

³⁴ McKenzie, "Greg Curnoe's *Connexions*," 19.

without any obvious direction from Curnoe. Even when operating the camera himself, Curnoe is known to have given minimal direction to the subjects in the film, preferring the unobtrusive documentation of events and a community of collaborators.³⁵ Indeed, the film was publicly attributed to the "Nihilist Party" (an attribution supplied by Curnoe) when it was first distributed through the London Film Cooperative.³⁶

The Ciné-Kodak camera that Curnoe used to shoot the film was incapable of shooting synchronized audio so a soundtrack had to be recorded independently from the images. Although it has now been lost (rendering the film permanently silent), a soundtrack of improvised music was originally recorded by Curnoe and a group of friends later in the year of 1965 using a reel-to-reel tape recorder that was borrowed from the London Public Library.³⁷ The soundtrack was never married to prints of the film, remaining available only as an accompanying audiotape that would be played asynchronously alongside screenings of the film. This soundtrack recording session eventually led to the formation of the Nihilist Spasm Band, with which Curnoe remained associated until his death. Curnoe's Ciné-Kodak camera is also worth mentioning here for the fact that it was incapable of shooting at twenty-four frames-per-second, which is the standard framerate for sound filmmaking. Instead, it was only capable of shooting at sixteen frames-per-second (a standard speed for silent filmmaking) and the slow-motion derivatives of thirty-two and sixty-four frames-per-second.³⁸ Robert C. McKenzie, in his review of Curnoe's later film *Connexions*, describes Curnoe's ad hoc solution to the problem: "he sets the control half way between 16 and 32. It's not quite right though, and motion in the film, particularly of people

³⁵ In his interview, John Boyle recalled "that [Glenn Lewis] came to the picnic and Greg asked him if he would shoot some film with the camera, and that was the only instruction he had so he just went and shot some pictures. [laughing] That's about as much design I think as there was in it."

³⁶ London Film Cooperative Catalogue, undated, Box 13, Folder 4, London Film Cooperative, Greg Curnoe fonds, SC066, E.P. Taylor Research Library & Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario.

³⁷ Robert C. McKenzie, "50 Years of No Music," *The London Yodeller*, 27 August 2015, http://20centsmusic.com/NSB_Yodeller_text.htm.

³⁸ Eastman Kodak Company, *Ciné-Kodak News* 14, no. 2 (March-April 1938), 12.

walking, has a quaint jerky rhythm."³⁹ Interestingly, a London Film Co-op catalogue—possibly compiled in late 1967 or early 1968—lists the film as running 11 minutes, whereas more recent publications list the film's duration as approximately 8 minutes.⁴⁰ A physical measurement of the 16mm release print of *No Movie* in the film collection at the Art Gallery of Ontario suggests that this discrepancy can be attributed to the difference between projecting the film at eighteen frames-per-second (equalling approximately 11 minutes duration) and projecting the film at twenty-four frames-per-second (equalling approximately 8 minutes duration). These runtime calculations suggest that the film was originally intended to be projected at eighteen frames-per-second. It is possible that the film was accidentally shot at a framerate well below the anticipated sound speed of twenty-four frames-per-second, possibly at a non-standard speed (due to the inaccuracy of Curnoe's camera) that was closer to eighteen frames-per-second. The error of the more recent publications may be explained by their reliance on the film's much more accessible video transfer. This transfer was likely produced by scanning the film at the faster sound framerate, resulting in a shorter overall duration. The quickened motion in the video transfer that has now been made available online by the Michael Gibson Gallery supports this theory and suggests that the film was never intended to be seen as speeded up as this video copy suggests.⁴¹

Curnoe's next 16mm film, *Souwesto* (1947-1969), is a compilation of documentary footage focusing on the film's namesake region (Southwestern Ontario). The artist has described the film as "A collection of footage from my friends or by my friends and me."⁴² The film incorporates home movies alongside a variety of appropriated footage from other film projects

³⁹ McKenzie, "Greg Curnoe's *Connexions*," 19.

⁴⁰ London Film Cooperative Catalogue, undated.

⁴¹ The quickened motion of the video playback had previously been attributed to Curnoe's use of a slower framerate during recording rather than the genuine error in the video transfer. See "No Movie," Vimeo video, 8:28, posted by Michael Gibson Gallery, January 29, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/85391538>.

⁴² "Souwesto."

with which Curnoe was involved. This appropriated footage includes material originally shot by Jack Chambers for *R-34* (1967)—a film that prominently features Curnoe as its subject—and also footage from two television programs: the first is an interview with Curnoe for CFPL-TV in London on the occasion of Curnoe's *An Exhibition of Things* in 1961; the second is an episode of CBC's *The Umbrella* that focused on London's flourishing arts community that was first broadcast on October 9, 1966. Also featured in *Souwesto* is footage from *The Celebration*, the first "happening" in Canadian art in 1962, and the opening of the short-lived Region Gallery. The home movie segments in the film feature the 1967 and 1968 Nihilist Picnics alongside other more family-oriented footage of Curnoe's wife, Sheila, and his first and second-born children, Owen and Galen. Curnoe is again seen on-screen in many shots of the picnics, indicating the continuing communal aspect of his filmmaking. Interestingly, the status of the film's soundtrack is at the moment uncertain. The 16mm release print of the film in the AGO's film collection has no soundtrack and is labelled as a silent film; however, the print currently in distribution through the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre does have a soundtrack. The soundtrack includes the original optical soundtracks from each of the appropriated segments printed through onto the CFMDC's release print. The fact that both sound and silent prints of *Souwesto* were at one point produced is problematic in itself but there are additional factors that need to be considered as well. Several participants in this project recalled having previously seen the film with sound, suggesting that it was at some point screened publicly with an accompanying soundtrack; however, Curnoe's 1991 CV lists the film as "silent," which would suggest the artist's intention to be that the film should be shown silently.⁴³ It is possible that the participants are conflating *Souwesto* with some of its source material (i.e., they are remembering the broadcast episode of

⁴³ Greg Curnoe, CV, 1991.

The Umbrella rather than Curnoe's appropriation of the same footage) but this seems unlikely given the number of times this was brought into question during the interviews.⁴⁴

In 1970, Curnoe made *Connexions*, a 16mm film that provides its own historical context through a pre-recorded oral history commentary that features Curnoe's own voice. The footage includes images of different people and places in London that Curnoe considered personally significant. The specific significance of each of the film's subjects is described in Curnoe's indexical commentary and is contextualized through its edited juxtaposition with adjoining shots, revealing the personal relationships (the 'connections' of the film's title) between the people and places that comprised Curnoe's everyday life. Curnoe is only known to have made one other 16mm film: *War Museum* (1970), a possible collaboration with curator Pierre Théberge. Almost no documentation for this film exists and its subject matter is unknown. The film is included on Curnoe's 1991 CV but no accompanying information is given.⁴⁵ The only mention of the film in the secondary literature is in the AGO's *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff* publication, in which the film is featured vaguely in a chronology of the artist's life: "Curnoe [with Pierre Theberge?] makes film *War Museum* (16mm, black and white, silent)."⁴⁶ It is possible that the film was never shown to the public and is now lost.

After 1970, Curnoe stopped working with the 16mm film technologies with which he had produced his earlier moving image works and instead began to work with the emerging medium of video. In 1970—the same year in which he completed his final film—Curnoe joined Video Ring, a collective of artists from Toronto and London that were interested in working with video but were unable to do so individually due to the inaccessibility of the equipment (inaccessible in

⁴⁴ Sheila Curnoe, Bill Exley, and Murray Favro all recalled having seen the film with a soundtrack.

⁴⁵ Greg Curnoe, CV, 1991.

⁴⁶ Judith Rodger, "Chronology," 164.

terms of both cost and the inexperience of its members).⁴⁷ By 1973, Video Ring had acquired funding from the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council and had established a mobile video studio. The studio, located in the back of a truck, was equipped to handle both ½" open reel tape and ¾" U-Matic cassettes, and was outfitted with cameras, editing equipment, projectors, video switchers, and sound recorders.⁴⁸ It was in this same year that Curnoe completed his first ½" open reel video, *1936 CCM Prolite Flyer* (1973). Although not much is known about this video, it is most likely a video documentary on the titular racing bicycle which Curnoe had recently restored; it is also possible that the video documents this restoration, although this can only be speculated. The bicycle is also the subject of an identically titled painting that Curnoe completed the following year. Based on a list of equipment available to Video Ring members around this time, it is likely that Curnoe shot this and all subsequent ½" open reel videos using a Sony AV/AVC-3400 portapak camera and video tape recorder (VTR) system.⁴⁹ This portable black-and-white VTR model had a 45 minute battery-life and was capable of recording 30 minutes of video with synchronized sound over twelve-hundred feet of ½" videotape.⁵⁰ Curnoe would exploit this durational limit to its fullest in his next video work.

In July of 1973, Curnoe was commissioned by the London Public Library and Art Museum to organize an exhibition on the topic of regional folk art.⁵¹ This commission came as a result of Curnoe and Pierre Th  berge's recent creation of the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada. The ADNACC was established in October 1972 with

⁴⁷ Judith Rodger, "Chronology," 164.

⁴⁸ See Ed Fitzgerald, "Video Ring," interview with Elke Hayden, *Artscanada* 30, no. 4 (October 1973), 65; and Greg Curnoe, CV, 1991.

⁴⁹ Video Ring Equipment Schedule, Box 14, Folder 12, Video Ring [ca. 1973-ca. 1974], Greg Curnoe fonds, SC066, E.P. Taylor Research Library & Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario.

⁵⁰ Sony Corporation, "Videocorder AV-3400" (owner's instruction manual, 1969), http://www.labguysworld.com/Sony-Manual_003.htm.

⁵¹ P.D. O'Brien to Greg Curnoe, July 3, 1973, Box 14, Folder 13, The Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Canadian Culture [1973-1983], Greg Curnoe fonds, SC066, E.P. Taylor Research Library & Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario.

the purpose of celebrating the work of non-professional folk artists, with the goal of contesting the cultural hierarchy of low and high art that historically permitted the institutional denigration of folk art.⁵² Curnoe collected 35mm slides depicting the work of folk artists across Canada for inclusion in the exhibition. To accompany these slides, Curnoe produced a three-part video series documenting the outdoor sculptural work of local folk artist George Laithwaite of Goderich, Ontario, entitled *The Laithwaite Farm* (1974). The series was shot on ½" open reel video and was presumably made using the same portable VTR system described previously. Curnoe recruited Théberge and London psychologist Peter Denny (also one of the subjects of Curnoe's painting *The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels*) to appear in these videos and to discuss on-camera the relationship between the Laithwaite sculptures and the other examples of regional folk art being shown in the exhibition. The first video in the series features the three men visiting the Laithwaite Farm on October 16, 1974 to view the sculptures and to discuss the works with Clayton Laithwaite, the son of the artist. The second video in the series features the three men discussing the visit later that day in Curnoe's studio, while the third video features just Curnoe and Denny one week later—again in Curnoe's studio—discussing the exhibition for which the videos were made. Each tape features a single uninterrupted shot and each runs approximately thirty minutes (the maximum recording time with the Sony AV/AVC-3400 VTR system). The exhibition took place from December 6, 1974 to January 2, 1975.⁵³ There is no evidence that *The Laithwaite Farm* was ever shown again to the public after the exhibition closed.

⁵² Greg Curnoe and Pierre Théberge, "The St. Eleuthère Manifesto," *The Review of the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada* 1, no 1 (December 1974): 1.

⁵³ Invitation to Neglected Aspects of Canadian Culture exhibition, Box 14, Folder 13, The Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Canadian Culture [1973-1983], Greg Curnoe fonds, SC066, E.P. Taylor Research Library & Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario.

It should also be noted here that Curnoe later listed the recording format for this series as ¾" U-Matic cassette in his 1991 CV.⁵⁴ Although the U-Matic format was first available in 1971, the series is known to have been originally recorded using ½" open reel tape and was perhaps only later copied to the cassette format for access or remastering. This is confirmed by the ADNACC's first volume of *The Review of the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada* which was published in December 1974 in conjunction with the exhibition at the London Public Library and Art Museum. Included in *The Review* is a list of the "Videotape Documentation" produced for the exhibition, which lists the recording format for all three components of *The Laithwaite Farm* video series as ½" open reel tape.⁵⁵ This first volume of *The Review* ultimately became the only publication from the ADNACC and the only documentation of *The Laithwaite Farm* videos published by Curnoe himself.⁵⁶

Curnoe's next video project was *Springbank Road Race* (1975), another ½" open reel video documentary. This video was shown during Curnoe's retrospective at the National Gallery of Canada in 1981, although the exhibition catalogue includes only a brief description of the video's contents: "This was the Seventh Annual Springbank Bicycle Race, promoted by Curnoe's cycling club, the London Centennial Wheelers (Curnoe designed the club jersey)."⁵⁷ The catalogue dates the videotape to April 27, 1975 but provides no other information. This is the only known documentation of this video; the title was excluded from Curnoe's 1991 CV.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Greg Curnoe, CV, 1991.

⁵⁵ "Videotape Documentation," *The Review of the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada* 1, no 1 (December 1974): 12.

⁵⁶ Although there is evidence that more volumes were at one time being considered, none were ever produced. See London Public Library to Vancouver Art Gallery, May 22, 1975, Box 14, Folder 13, The Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Canadian Culture [1973-1983], Greg Curnoe fonds, SC066, E.P. Taylor Research Library & Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario; and Pierre Théberge to Greg Curnoe, Nov. 27 1974, Box 14, Folder 13, The Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Canadian Culture [1973-1983], Greg Curnoe fonds, SC066, E.P. Taylor Research Library & Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario.

⁵⁷ Pierre Théberge, *Greg Curnoe: Retrospective* (Ottawa, Ontario: National Gallery of Canada, 1982), 106.

⁵⁸ Greg Curnoe, CV, 1991.

After *Springbank Road Race*, Curnoe stopped working with open reel tape and did not produce another video until 1983. When Curnoe returned to video, he began to use the more consumer-friendly Video Home System (VHS). This format allowed much longer recording times (up to two hours at optimal recording quality) without the prohibitive cost of earlier video technology. Using these VHS cassettes, Curnoe started recording a series of videos that documented his work in the studio. These videos include two cassettes labelled with the descriptive title "Working on large nude self-portrait" (recorded on May 2 & 26, 1983 and June 2, 1983, respectively) and one cassette labelled "In studio, etc. spring 1983." The first two tapes feature Curnoe alone in his studio working on a large self-portrait, while the latter tape features Curnoe working on portraits of his wife Sheila Curnoe and his second-born son Galen Curnoe. These VHS videos range from one hour to just under two hours in length and each features minimal editing, typically with no more than a few camera angle changes throughout. Every shot is recorded from a stationary camera with no active direction from Curnoe, who is often the subject of the recording and is visible in front of the camera rather than behind.

Curnoe's last known video work is *Video Noir* (1989), a title that is mentioned exclusively in Curnoe's 1991 CV as a "work in progress."⁵⁹ The date of this video was assigned by Curnoe in his CV, perhaps indicating that work on the project had stalled around 1989 and had not continued. Alternatively, the project may have been abandoned entirely with no intention of completion. There is no other known documentation of this work, although it seems possible that the project was somehow influenced by Curnoe's interest at that time in the American motion picture film genre *film noir*.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Greg Curnoe, CV, 1991.

⁶⁰ See List of film noir films 1940-1985, Box 4, Folder 5, Writing 1990, Greg Curnoe fonds, SC066, E.P. Taylor Research Library & Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario.

Conclusion

The Greg Curnoe fonds at the E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives at the Art Gallery of Ontario is already the single largest resource for material concerning the life and work of this influential Canadian artist. Now, with the addition of these oral history documents as an adjunct collection, future scholars will also have access to a series of descriptive commentaries and interviews that serve to document an otherwise neglected component of Curnoe's artistic practice. The brief history of Curnoe's films and videos written for this paper is a useful starting point for anyone interested in these works, but it will be the oral histories themselves that will provide researchers with the best possible understanding of the subject matter and historical context for the two films—*No Movie* and *Souwesto*—and the three-part video series *The Laithwaite Farm*. Curnoe scholars will now have the benefit of being able to watch these works with the accompaniment of the various audio commentaries (or their corresponding transcripts), allowing for a more complete understanding of what exactly is being seen on-screen at any given moment and in a manner that is appropriate to these particular works. This is especially advantageous for uninformed viewers (i.e., viewers without any pre-existing knowledge of the London, Ontario arts community at the time that these works were made) who would otherwise be incapable of identifying or understanding the significance of this subject matter without extensive additional research. In fact, as time passes, the number of people who are able to identify the subject matter in these works through their own lived experience will inevitably decrease. These oral histories are an attempt at preserving the unique insights afforded by first-hand experience before they are permanently lost.

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Appendix A. List of Greg Curnoe's Known Moving Image Works

Film

- 1965 *No Movie* (16mm, colour, sound [lost]) – 11 minutes
- 1969 *Souwesto* (16mm, colour and black-and-white, silent) – 20 minutes
- 1970 *Connexions* (16mm, colour, sound) – 14 minutes
- 1970 *War Museum* (16mm, black-and-white, silent) – *unknown*
(co-directed with Pierre Théberge)

Video

- 1973 *1936 CCM Prolite Flyer* (½" video, black-and-white, sound) – *unknown*
- 1974 *The Laithwaite Farm* (½" video, black-and-white, sound) – 1 hour 30 minutes
(The Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada)
- *1. October 16 1974, 11 AM*
Laithwaite Farm, Goderich, ON
(with Peter Denny, Pierre Théberge, and Clayton Laithwaite)
 - *2. October 16 1974, 5 PM*
Greg Curnoe's Studio, London, ON
(with Peter Denny and Pierre Théberge)
 - *3. October 23 1974, 8 30 PM*
Greg Curnoe's Studio, London, ON
(with Peter Denny)
- 1975 *Springbank Road Race* (½" video, black-and-white, sound) – 20 minutes
- 1983 [Working on large nude self-portrait] (VHS, colour, sound) – 4 hours

- May 2 & 26, 1983

- June 2, 1983

1983 [In studio, etc. spring 1983] (VHS, colour, sound) – 2 hours

1989 *Video Noir* [incomplete] (VHS, colour) – *unknown*

Appendix B. Oral History Transcripts

The following transcripts have been placed in order according to the date of the original interview. The narrators for this project were:

Name	Page
Peter Denny, with Marion Johnson and Sheila Curnoe	46
Sheila Curnoe	73
William "Bill" Exley	87
Art Pratten	112
John Clement	139
Shirley Clement, with John Clement	156
John Boyle, with Aya Onishi	172
Murray Favro	195

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

Narrator: Peter Denny (PD), with Marion Johnson (MJ) and Sheila Curnoe (SC)

Interviewer: Jesse Brossoit (JB)

Date of Interview: 2016-04-25

Location of Interview: London, Ontario, Canada

Length of Interview: 53:28

Description: In this interview, the narrator discusses his relationship with Greg Curnoe and provides commentary for the video series *The Laithwaite Farm* (1974).

Topics:

People

Assaf, Edward "Eddie" (1915-1990)
Assaf, Moses "Moe" (1914-1996)
Bartók, Béla (1881-1945)
Bowering, George (1935-)
Chambers, Jack (1931-1978)
Clement, John (1943-)
Curnoe, Greg (1936-1992)
Curnoe, Owen (1966-)
Curnoe, Sheila (1942-, nee Thompson)
Curnoe, Zoë (1971-)
Denny, Peter (1934-)
Exley, William "Bill" (1939-)
Glass, Philip (1937-)
Hassan, Jamelie (1948-)
Johnson, Marion (unknown)
Kelly, Alex (unknown)
Kelly, Bev (1943-unknown, nee Lambert)
Laithwaite, Clayton (1912-1982)
Laithwaite, George (1873-1956)
Manet, Édouard (1832-1883)
McIntyre, Hugh (1936-2004)
Onishi, Aya (unknown)
Patterson, Dan (1884-1968)
Riley, Terry (1935-)
Simmons, Ernie (1913-1970)
Théberge, Pierre (1942-)
Wallace, Brenda (unknown)
Vincent, Mary Bernice (1934-2016, nee Goodsell)

Places

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

20/20 Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada

202 King Street, London, Ontario, Canada (*Curnoe's second studio*)

London Regional Art Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada (now Museum London)

The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

York Hotel, London, Ontario, Canada (now Call the Office)

Other

20 Cents Magazine (pub. 1966-1970)

Because News (CBC Radio, 2015-ongoing)

The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels (Greg Curnoe, 1965-1966)

The Laithwaite Farm (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1974)

Nihilist Spasm Band

No Movie (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1965)

The Review of the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada (pub. 1974)

TRACK ONE (STE-000.wav)

00:07

Jesse Brossoit: My name is Jesse Brossoit. I'm here with Peter Denny, speaking about Greg Curnoe's videos *The Laithwaite Farm*. It is April 25th, 2016 and we're here in London, Ontario. I'll start with asking you: can you talk about how you first met Greg?

Peter Denny: I first met Greg at the old show they used to hold in the library in November.

Sheila Curnoe: I don't remember that.

PD: Yeah, where artists would sit there selling their own work. Remember that?

SC: No, did you meet him before I met him?

Marion Johnson: What year would this be? '61?

PD: I don't know, I'm guessing '64.

SC: Okay, I met Greg in March, no February of 1964.

PD: Yes, this would have been November. That art show, which was organized by the public gallery [London Regional Art Gallery], was an art show where they would invite artists to bring their work and to sell it to whoever wanted to buy it. It was run for maybe 10 years or so in the public library.

SC: I don't know anything about that.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

PD: Yes, well that's where I met Greg.

JB: And this was in 1964?

PD: I'm guessing '64. I could be wrong by a year or two.

SC: So how did you develop your friendship? Did he invite you to the studio? Or did you start to talk about music or jazz? How did that work?

PD: It's hard to say but we did, at the end of the evening at the art show, we did all go out to that pizza place. You know the one I mean?

SC: Vito's? What was that? No, not Vito's.

MJ: The one that was on Clarence. It's now an Indian restaurant.

PD: On Clarence, yes. That place. We all went out there in the beginning.

SC: What was that called?

MJ: I forget but we went there a lot in the '70s.

SC: Okay so you hung around and he invited you to go—?

PD: To come with the gang, and that's where I met him and probably several others that same night.

MJ: Well that was like Greg, right? [He] liked to meet new people and if they were interesting he would draw them in.

SC: Oh he would say "come along, we're all meeting at the Italian restaurant and come along." That is exactly what he would do.

PD: So how it developed I really can't say. Too bad that I can't recover that but—

SC: That's alright.

MJ: Well what year was the painting done? It was soon after that, wasn't it?

SC: Oh the big *Camouflaged Piano*? You know the one I'm talking about [*to JB*].

JB: Right, at the National Gallery [of Canada].

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

SC: Yes.

MJ: He [*referring to PD*] is the sax player in that.

PD: So that means that by then I must have known him reasonably well, because for instance I used to wear these dreadful looking yellow-grey flannels and he hated them. So he wanted a photograph so he could see where the hands went on the instrument. So a photograph was taken but it showed me in these dreadful grey flannels that he hated. So instead he just painted multi-colour pants on me.

SC: So did he come to see you playing jazz?

PD: Yes, oh yes.

MJ: Greg invited—

PD: Greg initiated it. Greg and his gang had been going to the York Hotel to drink their beer and he convinced the proprietors there that he could bring a jazz group in. So he only knew two jazz musicians. One was me and the other was—. What was his name?

MJ: Alex Kelly.

PD: Alex Kelly. So he invited the two of us to come down and try to play. What the picture shows is really the first night that we played because it showed Alex playing piano and me playing bass saxophone.

MJ: It was very early on.

SC: Oh really? I didn't know that. Okay.

PD: It wasn't long before I gave up trying to play modern jazz on the bass saxophone and I switched over to my main instrument which is the vibraphone. So the picture shows the very first night when I was trying to play bebop on the bass saxophone.

SC: I didn't know that.

PD: And Greg even put the word "bop" in there.

SC: Yes, he did!

PD: That was my one attempt, which failed, to play bebop on the bass saxophone. I've never found anybody in the whole internet that plays bebop on the bass saxophone. I've found a lot of bass saxophone players but they all play traditional jazz.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

JB: So around this time when you met Greg was he already working on films or videos? This was 1964.

PD: I don't think so no. I think that would have been into the '70s.

JB: Do you remember the first time you saw him working with film or video?

PD: No I don't. I had no expertise and no interest. I don't know anything about filmmaking or video. The only thing I knew anything about was audio recording. I did know a fair bit about that and I had some reasonable-quality equipment and I could borrow more from my employer, which was the University [of Western Ontario], if I wanted to record jazz or other music. My interest was only in audio.

JB: Did you perhaps lend Greg the audio equipment for the video that we'll be watching later?

PD: No, I don't think so.

JB: So you didn't really have any interest in film or video?

PD: No, none.

JB: Did you ever talk to Greg about it?

PD: No, probably not. He would've told me things about it because he was quite a good lecturer.

MJ: [*laughing*] A private lecturer.

PD: He would hold forth.

MJ: You would talk about jazz more than video.

PD: Yeah and other music. He collected a huge range of different music. He liked German rock and roll, with drummers that pounded the unit even harder than their current drummer does. What's her name?

MJ: Aya [Onishi].

PD: Aya, yeah. Aya plays hard in the Germanic style but Greg liked ones that played even louder and harder than he found in German rock bands.

JB: Do you remember anyone else that was maybe working with film or video around that time?

PD: No.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

JB: Were you friends with a larger group of artists or was it mostly through Greg?

PD: Well it was through Greg, yes. They were all linked to Greg, yes.

MJ: You were friends with a lot of people through Greg.

PD: Through Greg, yes. The whole of the people that became the Nihilist Spasm Band. I met them all [inaudible].

SC: That's right and so you knew Alex Kelly, who played with you in the jazz band, and his wife Bev Kelly was an artist. So there would be a connection, you see?

PD: Yes, I knew her too.

SC: And Bev Kelly exhibited her work at 20/20 Gallery and Greg arranged to have a show there.

PD: Right. Lovely work, yes.

SC: So there would be that connection with the art community.

PD: Yes, if Greg and I were talking we would probably talk about jazz.

SC: Music, you would talk about music, wouldn't you? Because Greg was interested in all music, wasn't he?

PD: Yes, but not folk music. He did not [inaudible].

SC: [*laughing*] No, excluding folk.

PD: Excluding folk music, which of course was very big at that time.

MJ: Or classical?

SC: Oh he loved classical music.

PD: He loved modern classical music. [Béla] Bartók—

SC: Yes, which I didn't like at all.

PD: No, I didn't like it either. And he changed the whole picture because he said listen to this and he put on the first recording of minimalism and I was converted in an instant. I became a minimalist after that.

SC: In music?

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

PD: Yes.

SC: What's a minimalist in music?

PD: It's a style of classical music.

MJ: What's his name? The famous—

SC: Oh, modern?

PD: Modern, yes.

SC: Oh I wouldn't like it at all.

PD: Oh yes he loved it.

SC: No, I wouldn't like it.

PD: Well you might, it's quite beautiful.

MJ: What is the name of the—?

PD: Philip Glass is the famous minimalist.

MJ: Philip Glass.

SC: Now Philip Glass. We went to the—

PD: Did you go to the concert?

SC: Yes, we went to concerts and I met him at Brenda Wallace's house. It's very hypnotic.

PD: Yes, that's right. That was one concert only. We never had a second one.

SC: That's right. Very hypnotic.

PD: Yes, that's right. Lovely stuff.

SC: But it's not something I would want to hear all the time.

PD: Oh I listen to it all the time.

SC: Oh you do? [*laughing*]

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

PD: Well that's what I played in the latter part of my musical career, in the '80s and '90s. That's what I played.

SC: You would call it minimalist?

PD: Yes, minimalist.

SC: Well that's interesting.

PD: I didn't stop playing jazz. I continued playing jazz, but I also played minimalist classical music. And Greg introduced me to that.

MJ: Yes, it's interesting that Greg showed him down that path.

SC: I didn't know that. Okay.

MJ: He showed a lot of people—. He opened doors to ideas for people. And I think he had a sense of what a person like Peter would respond to.

PD: Respond to, yes.

JB: In that case, how did you first get involved with the video? Do you remember how that came about?

PD: No I don't. I don't remember being involved with the video.

MJ: You were there when they made the video?

PD: Not that I know of. I might have been but I'm not aware of that.

MJ: Well how was it that you got so enthusiastic for those sculptures?

PD: Because they're good. *[laughing]*

MJ: I know, but somehow Greg ignited your interest.

PD: I'm not sure of that. I'm pretty sure I had seen them before Greg took me there. But I might not have, I might be wrong. It may be that Greg did introduce me to them.

MJ: I think he did.

PD: Alright, that's a possible story. I'm just not sure. At some point I'll have to write it into my memoirs. I'll have to go that way or the other way.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

SC: So you didn't go on a drive? Greg didn't call you up and you'd go on a drive out to the Laithwaite Farm with a video camera?

PD: Oh I don't know. He might have been doing that. I wouldn't have even noticed.

SC: What year would that have been?

PD: Oh, who knows? In the '70s.

SC: See he would have had a camera then.

PD: Oh maybe, I don't know about that.

JB: I believe it was around 1974. The video is dated—I don't know if I have it here—but I believe it is October 1974.

PD: That would certainly be possible. I went there and I saw them; they were works of genius. I wrote something about them in *20 Cents Magazine* once.

SC: Did you read that [*to JB*]?

JB: Yeah, I believe it was—. Actually, this was in *20 Cents Magazine*?

PD: Yes, I wrote about them at least once.

JB: Maybe I haven't read that, but I know you did contribute to the journal that Greg and Pierre wrote [*The Review of the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada*].

PD: Yes, that's true, I did.

JB: Was that the same article?

PD: Same thing, yes.

JB: Okay. I don't really have any specific questions about that but do you remember how that came about? Did Greg ask you to write something or were you already interested in writing?

PD: Oh I was already interested in that. I think it troubled me that the two of them didn't seem to understand how important they were. They didn't seem to have any idea that these things had to be restored properly and looked after. And it's still the situation now, that they need restoration by professional restorers.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

JB: I know at the time that the video was being shot Clayton, who was the son of George Laithwaite, he was interested in restoring them and he was making efforts at repainting them.

PD: Oh yes, I think I was told that.

MJ: Is it possible that you were the one who told Greg about them?

PD: It's just barely possible. It's not probable, but it's possible.

MJ: Do you remember the first time you went to see them?

PD: No, I don't. It's not very likely that I was the one who told him about them because he was interested in folk art. He was alert to the possibility of folk art being found in this area. He thought that artist from St. Thomas had a little bit of the folk artist to him. You know, that he shaded toward being a folk artist as well as a fine artist. Maybe nobody would agree with that but I always had a feeling that Greg had that feeling about that fellow.

SC: Yeah, there was a guy who did a sculpture of milk cans [Dan Patterson].

PD: Yes, well that was folk art.

MJ: Yeah, he liked him.

SC: What was his name? Ernie something.¹

PD: That was a great work. Lovely work.

SC: I don't know if Greg made a video of that but we went out.

PD: And that is in our national gallery in Ottawa. I'm pretty certain.

JB: So Pierre Théberge is also in the video. Did you have a relationship with him or was that again through Greg?

PD: No, I never saw him except when I was with Greg and he happened to be there too for one reason or another. No, I had no personal relationship with Théberge. I could see that he was a very clever and knowledgeable person. Anybody could see that.

JB: In the videos, you're having quite a long discussion with him. Did you get along with Pierre quite well?

PD: I guess so; I don't remember him personally.

¹ Dan Patterson has likely been confused here with Ernie Simmons, a folk artist from near Tillsonburg, Ontario.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

SC: You did at the time. You would have had a good conversation.

PD: I have no memories of that.

JB: Do you know of any time the Laithwaite Farm video was shown to the public?

PD: No, I don't. I wouldn't know about that.

JB: You mentioned that you don't really have any memory of the experience but have you had a chance to see the video at any point since it was made?

PD: Probably, but I can't remember.

SC: Do you have the video here [*to JB*]?

JB: Yeah, I have a copy on my computer and actually I'll show you in a moment.

SC: Maybe it would bring back some memories for Peter if he saw it.

PD: Yes, if I'm in the video talking to Pierre Th  berge that would be informative, certainly.

SC: Yeah, but just seeing the images, seeing the whole thing, it might bring back memories. Do you think? I think it would.

PD: It might, yes.

JB: Sure, let me get that set up for you then. I'll stop this for a moment.

[end of Track One]

TRACK TWO (STE-001.wav)

00:00

JB: Right where we left off.

MJ: Yeah, just tilt the computer a bit.

JB: Sure. Down? Or—?

MJ: No, this way for Sheila.

SC: It's okay. Just leave it. It's okay. You can see it Peter?

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

PD: Yes, this is fine. Good angle.

SC: Okay let's go.

The Laithwaite Farm (Part 1) Commentary

[video playback begins at first on-screen image]

Oral History Recording	Video Playback	Commentary
00:13	00:00	[playback begins] MJ: That's so long ago. SC: Feels like yesterday to me. MJ: <i>[laughing]</i> SC: '74 really does seem—. Sometimes when I'm in the house I feel like I'm still in 1974. PD: Oh yeah? SC: Yeah. I'm a very nostalgic person. PD: Yes, so am I, but still to me it seems a long time ago.
00:29	00:16	PD: Well that is me on the right. MJ: Oh my god, that is you! PD: I can hardly believe it but that is in fact me on the right. SC: This is fantastic Peter.
00:49	00:36	PD: And we're on site I would say. SC: Who's handling the camera I wonder. MJ: Yeah, is it Jack Chambers? JB: Oh it's Greg actually. It's Greg. They address him later on and that's how you figure it out. MJ: Well we can't hear what you're saying.
01:09	00:56	MJ: My god, look at Peter. JB: I'm afraid the audio isn't great so at times it's hard to tell. There's a lot of traffic.
01:12	00:59	PD: That was my long-haired phase. SC: I know. I can see that Peter. MJ: The '70s. PD: Long-haired phase.
01:46	01:33	SC: Pierre just looks like a nut. He looks so young. PD: Yeah.
01:52	01:39	SC: But this goes on forever, right? JB: It is quite long. SC: Yes, so you can whenever Peter wants to skip forward. JB: Yeah, we can skip around to the different sculptures. They

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

		walk around—
		SC: Yeah, we'll see how he feels.
		PD: Sure, yes, let's do that.
2:07	01:54	MJ: Now, can we get the sound any louder?
		PD: That's probably [inaudible].
		MJ: Can you move the computer closer to us?
		JB: [<i>adjusting the computer</i>] Is that still okay for angles?
2:59	02:46	MJ: Good lord, I hardly recognize him.
3:31	03:18	SC: So what happens if you go forward now?
		JB: We can skip around.
		SC: Are you okay Peter? Do you want to go forward?
		PD: Oh, I don't mind.
		SC: [<i>laughing</i>] You just want to watch the whole thing? It's an hour long.
		MJ: It's interesting what they're saying but it's hard to hear.
		SC: It would be nice to have a copy of this wouldn't it?
		JB: I can absolutely make some DVDs for you.
04:02	03:49	MJ: Well I think they're going to go.
		PD: We're going to go up [inaudible].
		MJ: Let's not move it up here. [inaudible].
		JB: This is about two minutes of walking.
04:11	03:58	MJ: This is what you looked like when I met you.
		PD: Yeah, right. [<i>laughing</i>]
04:17	04:04-06:01	[playback skipped forward]
04:24	06:08	JB: I think you and Pierre are under the impression that Greg is going to be editing this but he's just doing a long recording. So there are shot set-ups recorded [inaudible].
05:48	07:32	SC: Knowing Greg, this could just go on forever and ever and ever and ever.
		PD: Yeah.
		MJ: An hour and a half.
06:58	08:42	MJ: Does it bring back any memories Peter?
		SC: No? [<i>laughing</i>]
		MJ: You do recognize yourself? [<i>laughing</i>]
		PD: Yes, that's about it. And I can hear that I'm urging that the folk artist is a part of art just like the professional artist. That's what I'm urging.
		SC: Yes, that's what you're saying. Yes.
		JB: I think that's a big part of the second and third videos in Greg's studio. I think you really get that across.
07:28	09:12	MJ: Well of course you never were interested in a professional [inaudible].
		PD: You should keep in mind that I'm not in the art world except as a friend and a viewer.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

		MJ: Well you were a musician and composer.
		PD: No I'm talking about visual art.
		MJ: Oh here, right.
		PD: In visual art I don't know anything really.
		JB: Greg must have respected your opinion though.
		MJ: Yeah, you were educated and observant.
		PD: No, I really didn't offer an opinion on visual art. If Greg would show me something that he was enthusiastic about that was the end of it. I didn't try to sense it myself. Although we would agree quite regularly and quite easily. We could agree that [Édouard] Manet was the genius of that generation.
08:30	10:14	JB: We can skip a little bit
08:35	10:19-10:54	[playback skipped forward]
08:49	11:08	SC: What is Peter talking about? The behaviour—
		PD: I can't tell.
		JB: It's unfortunate about the traffic sounds. Quite a bit of the conversation gets drowned out.
9:09	11:28	JB: [inaudible].
9:19	11:38	MJ: It's interesting when you think that these ideas are current. [inaudible] a further stage of development.
9:28	11:48-12:28	[playback skipped forward]
9:29	12:29	MJ: In the theatre, he's talking about the audience not being so uptight and participating.
9:55	12:55	PD: Well if we can take one of the girls there we could probably do it this summer.
		MJ: It would be fun. It's been years.
		SC: It would be fun. I was just thinking that. You and I could drive out there for a drive. You've been out there have you [<i>to JB</i>]?
		JB: Actually I haven't. It's near Goderich right?
		MJ: Yes, the road going into Goderich.
		PD: On Highway 8, only fifteen miles this side of Goderich I'm guessing.
		MJ: Not even, closer.
		PD: Ten miles? Ten miles this side of Goderich. On the left side of Highway 8. The south side of Highway 8.
		SC: Greg loved driving around—. Yes, that's right. He loved driving around the Ontario countryside. He just loved it.
		PD: We still do.
		MJ: We love it too.
		SC: And you still do.
		PD: My father loved that too.
		MJ: Looking for the Tim Hortons. And the art.
		SC: Yeah. And Greg would argue with George Bowering about

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

		what was the most beautiful place on Earth and of course it was Ontario, as opposed to B.C.
		PD: Yeah, quite right.
		SC: Yeah.
11:16	14:16	MJ: Anne might like to go there.
		SC: Now when I drive through Ontario countryside I'm looking at it through Greg's eyes and it's even more beautiful than I—. Certainly coming from England I thought "well it's not like England" you know? Little windy roads and little quaint villages and all that.
		PD: Well you know our friend Linda. When they first came from England they weren't sure they were going to stay and they went to Lake Huron and she said to her husband Nick "we'll stay," as soon as they saw Lake Huron.
		SC: Linda and I have—. When she was reading her [inaudible] at that concert I thought "oh my God, we had the same childhood." Except she had a nice mum and dad and I didn't. [<i>laughing</i>]
		PD: [inaudible].
		SC: We're very similar. She doesn't know it but we are.
12:14	15:14	MJ: It does make you want to go there, even though—
		SC: Go where? Go there?
		MJ: Yeah, go there. Watching this.
		SC: I would love to drive. I would love to go to Goderich.
		MJ: I love Goderich.
		SC: We could go drive down the highway and go to Goderich. Go to the Laithwaite Farm.
		PD: Goderich has the nicest beach.
		SC: Yes.
		PD: And it's the best maintained.
		SC: It's lovely.
13:01	16:01	PD: He's talking about another artist.
		JB: Do you—?
		SC: Probably from Quebec, maybe.
		PD: Yeah, I think he's talking about some Quebec artist.
		SC: There are a lot of folk artists in Quebec.
		PD: Yes, that's true.
		SC: Everywhere you drive down in a village and there's somebody [that has] done something on their front lawn. It's quite lovely. But is it art? [<i>laughing</i>]
		MJ: That's what they're discussing. What they're saying in this. Interesting to hear Greg in this.
13:50	16:50	JB: [inaudible].
14:54	17:54	MJ: He's smart [<i>referring to PD</i>].
14:59	17:59	SC: You don't want to see the whole thing do you?

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

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		PD: No, this gives the flavour.
		SC: No, it's getting—. Go on.
		MJ: It's not showing very much of them, just talking. I'd like to see some [inaudible].
		PD: I remember that I was just trying to argue that this was good art.
15:15	18:15-20:39	[playback skipped forward]
15:19	20:43	MJ: I don't know. I think it's a special category.
		PD: In particular, that it deserved somebody to take it seriously and carry out—
		MJ: Restoration?
		PD: Professional restoration.
15:36	21:00	MJ: How could you not remember and going there and talking like this at so much length?
		PD: I don't know. I was probably busy with jazz and work.
15:54	21:18	JB: If we skip ahead a couple minutes Clayton Laithwaite appears.
15:58	21:22	MJ: Do you think Théberge has very long hair?
		SC: [<i>agreeing</i>]
		MJ: When I met him some years later, briefly, at your place he had business-like short hair. [<i>laughing</i>]
		SC: [<i>agreeing</i>]
		MJ: So he must have been a young curator at this point.
16:19	21:43	JB: I'm just going to skip ahead quickly.
16:21	21:45-22:42	[playback skipped forward]
16:24	22:45	MJ: Oh is this the farmer?
		JB: Yes, this is the son of George Laithwaite, who is the sculptor. This is Clayton.
		MJ: So this is the son of the man that built these?
		JB: Yes, and he's—
		MJ: When were these built? In the '20s? '30s?
		JB: Oh, let's see if I remember. I want to say '30s but I could be wrong about that. I'll look into it and see if I can let you know.
17:04	23:25	MJ: [inaudible]. He's going to say what [inaudible].
17:34	23:55	JB: That's Greg speaking, right?
		SC: [<i>agreeing</i>]
		JB: [inaudible].
18:06	24:27	SC: Well that is interesting. It would be nice to see the whole thing again and focus on what they are saying.
		PD: Yeah.
		MJ: Is it better on headphones?
		JB: I'm afraid not much better. I don't have external speakers and that would make it a little bit better but there are still quite a lot of traffic sounds.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

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18:26 24:47 SC: It would be nice if Peter and Marion could get a copy. Are you saying you could do that for them?
JB: Absolutely, I can mail you a copy or—
SC: You would like that would you [*to MJ and PD*]?
MJ: Yeah.
SC: And I'm sure your girls would love to see this.
MJ: Yeah, especially Anne.
PD: See Dad as such a young man.
MJ: Oh, you'll make me cry.
18:46 25:07 SC: I think the fascination that Greg had with folk art—I think that a lot of people do—is why does somebody decide to do this? What is it that compels them to make these things in their front yard?
MJ: Yeah.
PD: Yeah.
SC: And they're saying "no no, I'm not an artist, I just did it because I felt like it." It's fascinating.
PD: That's right.
19:53 26:14 SC: Okay then, isn't that enough? Are you getting tired [*to PD*]?
PD: Yes.
SC: Yes, he's getting tired.
20:00 26:21 [playback stopped]

20:02

MJ: Are we going to watch any in the studio?

SC: Any of the what?

JB: Oh sure, we can skip around.

PD: No, I don't want to see talking heads in this video.

JB: [*laughing*]

SC: Any of the what Marion?

PD: Meeting in the studio.

MJ: Footage in the studio.

SC: Oh.

JB: We won't watch any. I'll just show you what the—

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

PD: And what studio would this have been?

MJ: Greg's studio.

PD: Yes, which one?

SC: On King Street. 202 King.

PD: Oh on King Street is it? Okay.

MJ: Oh look.

JB: So it's just—

MJ: Oh let's see a little bit of this.

JB: Oh sure.

The Laithwaite Farm (Part 2 and 3) Commentary

[video playback begins in media res – refer to timecode for accurate starting point]

Oral History Recording	Video Playback	Commentary
20:36	06:34	[playback begins]
20:41	06:39	MJ: It's so interesting to see Greg.
20:45	06:43	JB: So this is later in the same day. The video on the farm was made at 11am and this was made at 5pm. And then there's another one—they're all half an hour long—and there's another one made at 8:30pm [the next week], and Pierre I assume has gone back to Ottawa. It's just you and Greg tying up loose ends of your conversation.
		SC: Okay.
21:10	07:08	MJ: This is the kind of thing—. It's why Greg had so many male friends that were so excited by him, because he would involve them in experiences like this.
		SC: Yes.
		PD: Yeah, that's true.
		MJ: It's fantastic. This is what Peter lived for before he had me.
		PD: Going to Greg's, that's true.
21:40	07:38-23:01	[playback skipped forward]
21:46	23:07	SC: This is really good.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

22:16	23:37	MJ: [inaudible].
22:49	24:10	JB: Well I don't want to bore you if you are—
		MJ: I like it, but you want to stop [<i>to PD</i>]?
		PD: No, I don't mind. Do what you think.
		MJ: Well just a little more.
23:16	24:37	SC: Let's just go on for ever and ever and ever. [<i>laughing</i>]
		MJ: But it's Peter, he hasn't had his stroke yet. So I like to watch that. And Greg's not dead yet.
		SC: And Greg's not what?
		MJ: Dead yet.
23:30	24:51	JB: I'd like to jump ahead very quickly.
23:34	24:55-25:55	[playback skipped forward]
23:36	25:57	JB: This is a good example of Greg just letting it go.
		SC: [<i>agreeing</i>]. Oh my goodness I remember that ring. Geez.
		PD: I bet. [<i>laughing</i>]
24:07	26:28	MJ: [<i>laughing</i>] It's so funny, oh my god. It brings back so much.
		PD: Yeah.
24:12	26:33-40:23	[playback skipped forward]
24:13	40:24	JB: And very quickly—. So this is just later in the evening [actually the next week] and Pierre has gone home I assume. It seems like quite a long discussion. There's only an hour of video that—
24:24	40:35	PD: Hey, there's one of the bicycles in the background.
		SC: Yes.
		MJ: Is it one of the posters?
		SC: No, he's working on the bike.
		PD: Yeah.
24:41	40:52	JB: So I think we can stop here. And of course I'll make you copies [<i>to PD and MJ</i>]. You can have a copy as well [<i>to SC</i>], so you can watch this at your convenience.
24:52	41:03	[playback stopped]

24:53

JB: We'll stop that for now.

PD: Well thank you for showing us that.

JB: Oh no problem.

MJ: My goodness.

SC: That's really something.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

PD: It certainly is a strange reminder of times gone by.

MJ: Strange, I know.

SC: Of times long gone.

JB: Does it bring back anything that you want to—?

PD: No it doesn't.

JB: It's just a nice glimpse into the past.

PD: Yes.

SC: But you see you're actually have a conversation with Greg about art, not music.

PD: That's true. Yes, right.

MJ: You're having an amazing conversation.

PD: Unusual isn't it? But that's because we visited the sculptures, and that's what set us off.

SC: Yes, it is and you had a lot to say about the whole thing.

PD: That's what set us off, yes.

MJ: You have to remember a day like that.

PD: Yes, well no I don't remember that there was such a day.

MJ: You were, afterward, very excited about showing me and the kids those statues.

PD: Yes, that's true.

MJ: We'd always stop and look at them.

25:47

JB: So I guess I just have one last question. Now that you've seen the videos, what do you think of them? Do you think they're typical of Greg? Or—?

PD: Oh I would say so yes. Typical of his engagement with other people, bringing them into his world. He was so good at that, you know. He would let you experience all the parts of his world. For me, that often was music. He'd have some new LP – my god the man bought so many LPs. I

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

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couldn't afford that many and [inaudible]. Of course in those days I had a good salary. Now I'm an impoverished pensioner.

MJ: Okay don't go into that for goodness sake.

SC: *[laughing]*

PD: *[gesturing]* Okay, yes, I'll have some water.

MJ: I'm sure you could afford more records than Greg could in 1974.

SC: No Greg just bought what he wanted.

PD: Yeah, that's exactly right.

SC: You know that, don't you?

PD: *[laughing]* I do, yes, I do know that. Amazing stuff. Wonderful.

SC: He never had any money. He spent it. As soon as he got money, he spent it. We lived very well.

PD: The first famous work of minimalism was the one that he saved for me. That's a piece called "In C" [by Terry Riley]. But then when Philip Glass's career started going, Glass had a famous opera called "Einstein on the Beach." It had nothing to do with Einstein and nothing to do with the beach.

SC: Yes.

PD: But Greg had a copy of that which he loaned me. Or do I have Greg's copy still?

SC: You might. I don't know. *[laughing]*.

PD: I have a funny feeling I do. *[laughing]*.

MJ: It's an LP?

PD: No it's a set of three LPs.

SC: You'll have to look for it.

PD: Yeah, look for it. See if I have "Einstein on the Beach."

MJ: Probably we do.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

PD: I have a suspicion that I borrowed it from you and probably it never went back.

SC: That's interesting. Well, that was great.

MJ: That kind of shook me up.

SC: Did it?

MJ: I don't really like watching old videos. I never took videos of my kids because it's too—. The emotional impact of watching them, you know. Seeing your child. It's our daughter's birthday today and to see her running around at 2 or 3 years old—. It's upsetting. It creates this longing.

SC: I don't find it upsetting at all.

PD: Yeah, I never took videos either.

SC: I love old photos. I love the history. I just love it all.

MJ: Do you have videos from your family when they were young?

SC: I think so, yeah. Oh gosh, yes. Owen is in videos. You've seen them, right? Greg took mostly photos. I didn't do any of that. He was the one with the camera, recording everything.

MJ: It's strange to see Peter healthy [and] young. So active. His brain is busy. He has ideas on everything.

SC: His brain is still okay.

PD: *[laughing]* It's fairly good. It's not really okay. It's passable.

SC: *[laughing]* It's okay Peter.

MJ: No, but those are the glory days.

SC: Alright, yeah.

MJ: That was the year we met, when our lives started.

PD: I was thinking through so many important things. I was just getting into my most important research work at that time. I'd only begun in 1971 to do my personal research. So I would have been deeply involved in it in 1974.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

SC: Well it's a record of a really interesting life.

MJ: It was. A very interesting life. The glory days, [the] '60s and '70s.

PD: That's right, because I was playing my jazz music at least once a week at that time and going to the York Hotel to hear whatever groups appeared. It took two or three years before Moe [Assaf] and Eddie [Assaf] would let the Spasm Band appear there and then they didn't like it. [*laughing*]. But after all, Greg had made them rich, to put it simply. So they had to let them in.

MJ: What? Bringing in more palatable bands and jazz groups? [*laughing*]

PD: Yeah, exactly. There was a lovely Caribbean group too. A brilliant guitar player and all his friends who all played drums and rhythm. That was a wonderful group too.

MJ: You played with other people at the York, didn't you? Besides Alex?

PD: I did, yeah, because that went on for quite a while.

MJ: You were still play at the York when I met you, after ten years.

PD: Yeah, I was still playing there.

MJ: I think it's fascinating to see Greg because his whole manner is magnetic. He was very different from other people. I guess it's charisma.

PD: Yes, I think so.

MJ: He would be excited about something and get other people excited about it.

PD: Yeah, that was it.

MJ: He had really a quality for that. He's so good looking but not in the conventional celebrity-type way. He didn't try to be pretty.

PD: He doesn't look like Cary Grant, no. [*laughing*]. Definitely not, no.

MJ: Just a combination of that physical energy—he was so physically fit—and then that mental energy, and he's so passionate about art. [*laughing*] And whether the art object was in the field or in a plain room, you know. These guys cared so much. It's wonderful. It makes me sad because I miss it.

PD: Yeah, well—

MJ: There was never anything to compare to the Curnoe gang and all that came out of that.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

PD: That's certainly true, no.

MJ: And a lot of socializing. Just a lot of fun. Greg more and more, in my experience—. Peter and I were married in '75 so I was kind of in on the tail end of the most creative period and then I think Greg became more of a professional inside the professional art galleries, don't you think? But then also he didn't interact with women the way we saw him interacting with Peter and Pierre. So I didn't see any of Greg sitting around, sharing ideas like that.

PD: Well that's true, I never heard him—

MJ: Once I was at your place and Théberge was there so I heard them talking.

PD: I never heard him talking about art with a woman, not even with Bev Kelly. Although he certainly liked Bev Kelly.

MJ: Or Bernice [Vincent].

PD: Or Bernice.

MJ: Well he was very friendly. Whatever he really thought of people, he was always friendly.

PD: He was supportive of Bev and Bernice. Outside of those two I never saw him support any woman artist.

SC: Jamelie? Jamelie Hassan.

MJ: Well, yeah. She's younger though.

PD: Well, that was borderline. She was really of a later generation than his.

SC: Well he supported—. Well, I have my own opinion about that but I'll keep it to myself.

PD: I'm sure yours is a more valid point than mine, that's for sure.

SC: Yes, but it might not be a popular one. *[laughing]*.

PD: Oh well, it doesn't matter.

MJ: It was just such a unique experience to be part of Greg's world. His personality was unique.

PD: I'm trying to write my memoirs and I've only got up to 1954.

SC: *[laughing]* You'd better get on it!

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

PD: When I get to this year or the '70s, I think I'm going to find it very confusing. I think I'm not going to be able to write concretely about particular events because I think they're all gone, really. I can write about people, perhaps.

JB: I'll get you a copy of the tape.

PD: Okay.

SC: Yes, and that'll be good because you can sit down and watch it. You never know what might come back.

PD: Yes, that would certainly be good, yes. That's true, yes.

SC: But even so, it's just really interesting.

PD: Yes, it is. And it might help, that's true. To reconstruct the '70s, yes, because that's where—

MJ: And I love when he says "this is video vérité." He just totally accepts that concept because Greg put it out there, right?

PD: Oh yes.

MJ: So Greg's friends, like Peter, didn't question Greg. Greg was a very dominant personality, [a] very dominant personality. He's so exciting to be around, you want to be on his train.

PD: Oh yeah, that's true. I could have lots of disagreements with Hugh [McIntyre] or with John Clement, and I used to have lots of disagreements with them. Because Hugh always wanted to talk about modern philosophy. Well I thought most of it was crap so I would always disagree with him about that. Of course, I'm friendly with [Bill] Exley independently of my friendship—

MJ: With Greg.

SC: Yes, well Bill's just really interesting. Have you met him yet [*to JB*]?

JB: No.

PD: Extraordinary personality by himself.

MJ: Oh excellent.

SC: Do you think you will?

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

JB: He's actually in England visiting family so I'm hoping he'll be back in the next couple weeks and I'll talk to him then.

SC: He should be back now.

JB: Oh great, I wasn't sure when he would be returning.

SC: I wasn't sure either.

MJ: Are there any videos with Bill Exley?

JB: Well there are the films. There's *No Movie*, which is about the Nihilist Picnic so they're [all] quite heavily featured. We can watch that later [to SC].

PD: Yes, so they'll be in that.

MJ: I actually heard a little snippet of the Spasm Band on CBC.

SC: Yes.

MJ: Did you hear that?

SC: Zoë wrote that on Facebook. My daughter.

MJ: *Because News*.

SC: Yeah, she said she was listening to the CBC and all of a sudden she heard the Spasm Band. And she couldn't believe it.

JB: That's a rare occasion.

SC: Well, it's—

PD: And why was it there? Was there any reason?

SC: I can't remember, because I didn't hear it.

MJ: They do three snippets with related concepts and you have to guess what the news story is representing from that.

PD: It wasn't about their recent tour to Japan?

SC: Oh right, something about that.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Peter Denny

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

MJ: No no, it wasn't really about the Spasm Band.

PD: No, nothing that rational.

MJ: It was the fact that Bill Exley was going "No Canada, No Canada."

SC: "I think I love you. Canada I think I love you." Wasn't that it? "I want to know for sure."

PD: Yes, right. Yeah, that's a lyric of a song they loved ["The Sweetest Country This Side of Heaven"].

MJ: Well anyway, it was an incredible privilege to be a part of that experience.

PD: Yes, it was. Yes, certainly. Thanks very much for coming out.

JB: Oh no, thank you all for helping out.

SC: Well I hope you got something.

JB: Yeah, absolutely. I think we know a lot more about the videos now so that's the big thing. Let me stop this.

MJ: Yeah, Peter looks so—

[end of Track Two]

[END OF RECORDING]

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Sheila Curnoe

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

Narrator: Sheila Curnoe (SC)

Interviewer: Jesse Brossoit (JB)

Date of Interview: 2016-04-25

Location of Interview: London, Ontario, Canada

Length of Interview: 49:28

Description: In this interview, the narrator discusses her relationship with Greg Curnoe and provides commentary for the films *No Movie* (1965) and *Souwesto* (1947-1969).

Topics:

People

Bice, Clare (1909-1976)
Bowering, Angela May (1940-1999, nee Luoma)
Bowering, George (1935-)
Boyle, John (1941-)
Brodsky, Anne (unknown)
Chambers, John "Jack" (1931-1978)
Chambers, John (1964-)
Chambers, Olga (1935-1991, nee Bustos)
Curnoe, Galen (1968-)
Curnoe, Greg (1936-1992)
Curnoe, Owen (1966-)
Curnoe, Sheila (1942-, nee Thompson)
Denny, Peter (unknown)
Dewdney, Alexander Keewatin (1941-)
Dibb, Brian (unknown)
Erickson, Gwen (unknown)
Exley, William "Bill" (1939-)
Favro, Murray (1940-)
Hilborn, Kenneth (1934-2013)
Johnson, Marion (unknown)
Kemp, Penn (1944-)
Martin, Ron (1943-)
McIntyre, Hugh (1936-2004)
Pratten, Art (1939-)
Pratten, Barbara (1941-)
Rabinowitch, Royden (1943-)
Rans, Geoffrey (1927-2001)
Rans, Goldie (unknown-1993, nee Wiener)
Reaney, James (1926-2008)

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Sheila Curnoe

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

Ronald, William (1926-1998, born William Ronald Smith)

Russell, Larry (1932-)

Scott, Barbara Ann (1928-2012)

Urquhart, Jenny (1949-)

Urquhart, Tony (1934-)

Vincent, Mary Bernice (1934-2016, nee Goodsell)

Vincent, Donald (1932-1993)

Wherry, Matthew (1915-1984)

Wigley, Gard (unknown)

Places

38 Weston Street, London, Ontario, Canada (*Curnoe's home and permanent studio*)

202 King Street, London, Ontario, Canada (*Curnoe's second studio*)

432 Waterloo Street, London, Ontario, Canada

Dorothy Scruton London Academy of Dance, London, Ontario, Canada

Forest City Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada

Laithwaite Farm, Goderich, Ontario, Canada

London Regional Art Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada (*now Museum London*)

Michael Gibson Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

No Haven, Port Stanley, Ontario, Canada (*demolished*)

Victoria Park, London, Ontario, Canada

York Hotel, London, Ontario, Canada (*now Call the Office*)

Other

The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels (Greg Curnoe, 1965-1966)

The Celebration (1962 – also "the Happening")

CFPL-TV

Connexions (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1970)

Dada / Mother (Greg Curnoe, 1964)

Feeding Percy (Greg Curnoe, 1965)

Kamikaze (Greg Curnoe, 1967)

The Laithwaite Farm (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1974)

Nihilist Spasm Band

No Movie (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1965)

R-34 (dir. Jack Chambers, 1967)

Souwesto (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1969)

The Umbrella (CBC Television, 1966)

TRACK ONE (STE-003.wav)

00:10

Jesse Brossoit: My name is Jesse Brossoit. It's April the 25th, 2016.

Sheila Curnoe: Just a minute. Just a minute.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Sheila Curnoe

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

JB: We're here in London, Ontario. I'm here with Sheila Curnoe and we're just talking about Greg Curnoe's films. So great, let's skip some of these because they're already answered. Well actually, let's just pick up [what] you were saying before. Before we started recording you were saying it was a day-to-day thing. Greg would just record.

SC: Yes, he would just pick up a camera or he would go off somewhere and videotape. So there was no real plan. There were no plans. And I wouldn't even notice - it was just part of my everyday life. It was just part of everyday life. He would just take photos and he would videotape or he would pick up a camera and do it.

JB: Was he mostly shooting I guess what you would call 'home movies?' I mean, so much of his work was—

SC: Well he would. He would do that, but as you saw he went out and videotaped in the studio and at the [Laithwaite] Farm. So really, that's about it really.

JB: Do you remember what kind of equipment he was using or where he might have found it?

SC: No. [*talking to the dog*] No. The films, the ones that are there, that would be 8mm film, right? It couldn't be videotape. So no, I don't remember anything about it really, except that. It was Greg's thing. It wasn't my thing.

JB: I know a few other people around that time were making films. Jack Chambers was doing his films. Did you get the impression there was a community or was it really that Greg was just doing his thing?

SC: Well it was a community, so Greg would film and then he would involve other people and if he was excited about something he would involve them. So it was a community thing. There were no plans. Things happened spontaneously. [*talking to the dog*] There were no obvious plans. There was no thinking it through. It was just more spontaneous. It was more picking up a camera and filming. I'm sure Greg had a plan in his head but that was it.

JB: I guess this is a silly question, but did he like movies? Was he interested in professional filmmaking?

SC: Do you mean movie movies?

JB: Yeah, I guess so. His are shown in gallery spaces nowadays, if at all. Was he more interested in just recording and documenting things? He recorded so much. Or was he really trying to—

SC: No, recording and documenting. Because he made lists of things. So that would be his main impetus, would be recording. Well have you seen *Connexions*? You've seen that right?

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Sheila Curnoe

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

JB: Yeah, that's the one with his—.

SC: Yeah, where he keeps connecting everything. So recording everything that connected. That's about it.

JB: And do you know if he had any intention of having these shown publicly? I think some of them were and they have titles obviously, so do you have any idea what his goal was?

SC: Yeah, he just made them. He didn't have any plans on showing them but at some point he would possibly. At the Forest City Gallery or somewhere.

JB: I know you're actually featured in some of the videos [films]. Were you interested yourself?

SC: No. *[laughing]* No I wasn't interested.

JB: Or was that really just Greg's thing and you were along for the ride?

SC: Yeah.

JB: So do you have any specific memories of them being shown? You mentioned the Forest City Gallery, or is that just a general thing?

SC: No, I don't. I don't have any specific memories of that, no.

JB: Do you have any idea of how they were received? Were people interested in Greg's movies? Or were they just on the periphery of whatever else he was doing?

SC: No.

JB: I guess the last time you saw them was [at] the Michael Gibson Gallery or have you—?

SC: Was what?

JB: The last time you watched any of the films, was it the Michael Gibson Gallery screening?

SC: Yeah, you could say that, yes.

JB: They're sort of home movies for you. Do you have any interest in just watching them every once in a while?

SC: Not really, no. It was nice to see them. It was nice that other people got to see them and that other people found them interesting and fun. Then, as I said, I spontaneously started to give a description of what was being shown because they were silent. And people liked that. And it was fun to see them, but they're just part of the whole thing.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Sheila Curnoe

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

JB: The much bigger—

SC: Yes, yes.

JB: In that case, should we try to pop these on? Let's see if we can do this.

SC: Yes, go ahead. We never watch videos anymore, you know, and—

[BREAK]

14:24

JB: Okay, so just before we start [inaudible] anything you want to do.

SC: Yes, just go.

JB: Is there sound on this one? I can't remember.

SC: I'm sorry, what?

JB: Is there sound on this one or is it silent?

SC: Well this is what I don't know.

JB: Oh this is the one that had the confusion about it.

SC: I don't know, yeah. So why isn't it playing? Oh there we go.

Souwesto Commentary

[video playback begins at first on-screen image]

Oral History Recording	Video Playback	Commentary
14:50	00:00	[playback begins]
14:54	00:04	SC: Yes, you see there is sound. But there's no sound. Alright. It's too bad that there isn't any sound. And I think this is what they showed at the Michael Gibson Gallery but I don't think I said anything about this one.
15:25	00:35	SC: That's Barbara Ann Scott, the skater.
15:30	00:40	SC: And this is the first show. And there is sound to this so I don't know. What did you do to make it work? Anything? Did you hook up anything?

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Sheila Curnoe

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

		JB: It all seemed to be hooked up, I just had to—. When it popped up and said "Video 2"—
		SC: Yes, okay, I just need to know that. But what I also need to know is how to get it back to regular TV when we're done.
		JB: Right, I remember what button I pressed.
		SC: Yeah, okay.
15:59	01:09	SC: But you see this is unfortunate. Now you know this? You've seen this right? So we don't need to see it again, do we? There's no sound.
		JB: Do you—
		SC: Oh I see, you're taping me. Well there's no reason. I wasn't even around when this was done.
		JB: Do you remember what the sound was?
16:20	01:30	SC: It was the interview with Greg.
		JB: Okay, so it was actually they're voices.
16:25	01:35	SC: Yes, Greg is saying to the guy from CFPL[-TV]—
16:31	01:41	SC: Oh that's Barbara Pratten, you see? There's Barbara, she's hanging up the laundry. This is at "the Happening" at the London Regional Gallery—or the London Art Gallery, at the time—that Greg arranged.
16:51	02:01	SC: With Clare Bice. That's Art Pratten. Don't know that person. I wasn't there, so I just know a few of the people that are in it.
17:07	02:17	SC: That's Jenny Urquhart, Tony Urquhart's wife.
17:14	02:24	SC: There's Greg. And that guy is Brian Dibb. He disappeared.
17:21	02:31	SC: They look familiar but I don't know.
		JB: Now you weren't at this opening but you knew Greg at this time?
		SC: I'm not sure when this happened—when "the Happening" happened—but I wasn't around.
17:47	02:57	SC: That's Art Pratten. There was a person that was involved in this and that was Penn Kemp, the poet. She lives in London here.
18:18	03:28	SC: And that's a painting of Matt Wherry by Jack Chambers.
18:21	03:31	SC: And that's Goldie Rans, on the left.
18:32	03:42	SC: Barbara Pratten and Jenny Urquhart.
18:44	03:54	SC: Geoffrey Rans.
19:00	04:10	SC: Those would be photos of Don Vincent's, I would imagine.
19:09	04:19	SC: Geoffrey again.
		JB: Now is everyone that you're naming, are they all part of the London scene?
		SC: Yes.
19:19	04:29	SC: Tony Urquhart. The other person, I've forgotten their name.
19:23	04:33	SC: And there's Hugh McIntyre on the bass. Well you see here with the Spasm Band. You should be able to hear the Spasm Band and you can't.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Sheila Curnoe

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

19:33	04:43	SC: There's Bill Exley on the horn, yelling. Which he's very good at.
19:45	04:55	JB: Now is that Greg on the drums or is he filming?
		SC: No, this film was made—
19:52	05:02	SC: That's Art Pratten. [It] was made for a CBC show. I think it was called <i>Umbrella</i> , but I could be wrong. And there was the artist [William Ronald]—. Well I can't remember his name right now but it might come to me. Unless I see him this might not be the one I'm thinking of.
20:35	05:45	SC: That's John Boyle.
20:53	06:03	SC: Yes, it is, because I remember. I was on my feet I think. Yeah, I'm sitting there. I just can't remember the name of the artist.
		JB: And he's the—.
		SC: He's the director and he came to London and he filmed the Spasm Band in the studio at 202 King Street. His name just escapes me.
		JB: Now is this whole film, was that made for the CBC? Or is that Spasm Band performance taken from the CBC footage?
		SC: No I think it was taken for a show that was on the CBC, but that's all I remember.
21:48	06:58	SC: That's Anne Brodsky.
21:54	07:04	SC: That's him [William Ronald], on the left. Whoever that is. That's the one that did it. And see, he's very unimpressed.
22:06	07:16	SC: And there I am at the kitchen. I'm pregnant with Owen, my first child.
22:14	07:24	SC: That's the painting of <i>Feeding Percy</i> , which is at the London Regional [Art Gallery].
22:28	07:38	SC: No idea what that is.
22:33	07:43	SC: Okay, Jack Chambers took this for his movie [R-34]. Those are two Java temple birds and there's me behind the cage.
		JB: Right, so Jack shot this and Greg—
		SC: Yes, he did.
		JB: Was that maybe an outtake that Greg got hold of?
		SC: It must have been. It must have been, because I do remember Jack asking me to do that.
22:57	08:07	SC: That's Billy the canary, who got eaten by Samantha the cat.
23:06	08:16	SC: That's Greg trying to tie his boots. They look like monkeys, don't they?
23:18	08:28	SC: This is the studio again. 202 King.
23:32	08:42	SC: This is Greg putting up the hotel sign for the painting <i>The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels</i> which is at the National Gallery.
		JB: The one with Peter [Denny].

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Sheila Curnoe

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

23:45	08:55	SC: And there are Peter's pants. <i>[laughing]</i> Which he didn't wear. Marion [Johnson] said " he would never wear pants like that." The pants came up in the conversation, didn't they? JB: Yeah, he said he was wearing green and yellow or something. SC: Yeah, I know. <i>[laughing]</i> That's very funny.
24:10	09:20	SC: And there he is attaching the lights to the hotel sign. And my brother, who was 18 at the time, he would come up and visit Greg and he saw Greg bringing in this sign that was covered in pigeon shit. My brother was really impressed with Greg because he thought Greg would clean it off. And Greg did not clean off the pigeon shit, which was really impressive to my brother.
24:38	09:48	SC: And there's the—. What's that called? <i>Kamikaze</i> .
24:43	09:53	SC: And there's Owen. My first one.
24:50	10:00	SC: I think he's sitting on Greg's knee inside <i>Kamikaze</i> . JB: I recognize some of this footage from the Jack Chambers film that he made about Greg <i>[R-34]</i> . SC: Yes, you would, that's right. JB: Is this mostly, again, outtakes or were they sharing footage? SC: In this particular instance it just may be. It may be but I'm not sure. It looks like it might be, doesn't it?
25:37	10:47	JB: So it seems like, just from the video that we watched earlier <i>[The Laithwaite Farm]</i> —. That was just a long document. There was no editing. With this there's obviously editing, there are quite short shots. Was that just the nature of maybe that Greg was working with other people's footage? SC: It could be. I really don't know. I have no idea.
26:02	11:12	SC: What is happening now? JB: Oh that may be the end. SC: Oh okay.
26:09	11:19	SC: Oh, alright. Okay, these are home movies.
26:13	11:23	SC: There's Asa the cat. This is 432 Waterloo Street, just above the Dorothy Scruton Dance Studio [Dorothy Scruton London Academy of Dance].
26:24	11:34	SC: And here's Owen about to steal my cigarettes, which annoys me tremendously because Greg is filming and he doesn't do anything about it. <i>[laughing]</i> Yes, Greg filmed this. These are just home movies.
26:43	11:53	SC: So now I think we're at a family picnic.
26:55	12:05	SC: Why is it so dark? Goodness me.
26:58	12:08	SC: No, now we're back at 432 Waterloo and that's at the front of the building.
27:04	12:14	SC: And there's the cat. Yeah, that's the walk beside the house. Asa the cat and Samantha.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Sheila Curnoe

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

27:18	12:28	SC: The backyard.
27:33	12:43	SC: Now there's me and we're going to Victoria Park. There's Owen in the baby buggy. And we're going to Victoria Park because there's a poetry reading there. JB: Do you know what year this would have been? SC: I was just thinking that. Owen was born April 30th, 1966. So he looks quite young here. So April, May, June, July, August, September, October. It may have been September or October, he looks about six months I think.
28:05	13:15	SC: There's a London City bus. Very interesting. <i>[laughing]</i> JB: Yes, they've changed quite a bit.
28:10	13:20	SC: And there's me walking back from 432 Waterloo with something or another for the baby.
28:18	13:28	SC: And there's George and Angela Bowering who will turn up in a minute.
28:25	13:35	SC: That's the bandshell at Victoria Park. There's George. And Greg's feet. And somebody toddling around.
28:41	13:51	SC: Oh there's Owen in his buggy. <i>[laughing]</i> JB: Now would this section have had sound as well? Or do you suspect it was silent? SC: Yes, as far as I know.
29:00	14:10	SC: And there's my dad, and we're on a picnic. These are just home movies.
29:07	14:17	SC: There's me doing something or another. Owen toddling around again.
29:21	14:31	SC: I've forgotten when they start to—. Maybe he was eighteen months here. JB: So '66, '67, '68 maybe? SC: Yes, around there.
29:33	14:43	SC: And there's my mum. She's filming too, so I must have home movies of this but I don't know where they are.
29:38	14:48	SC: There's me, for some reason, kicking the ball. JB: And these would have been 8mm films? SC: I'm sorry, what? JB: These would have been 8mm films, I'm guessing. Maybe 16[mm]. SC: I think so but I don't know.
30:02	15:12	SC: And that's me and Owen. <i>[talking to the dog]</i>
30:31	15:41	SC: Oh, I think this is a Nihilist Picnic. And they're playing baseball, right.
30:47	15:57	SC: All the folks in the art community. There's me.
30:54	16:04	SC: And there they're doing the three-legged race. And someone else is filming there. I wonder where their movie is.
31:06	16:16	SC: There's Owen running. <i>[laughing]</i>

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Sheila Curnoe

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

31:18	16:28	SC: That's Royden Rabinowitch there.
31:24	16:34	SC: And that's called the no-running jump. So the people jump up and down for as long as they can.
		JB: In one spot?
		SC: Yes. I think James Reaney Sr., he won. Everybody thought he was going to fall over from a heart attack, because he would— <i>[laughing]</i> .
31:41	16:51	SC: There's John Boyle at the—. Whatever you call that thing.
31:45	16:55	SC: Uh oh, what happened now?
31:48	16:58	SC: I think this might be the first one or the second one. The Nihilist Picnic.
31:55	17:05	SC: That's Bill Exley standing there.
31:58	17:08	SC: There's Kee Dewdney. And there's Owen riding his tractor.
32:08	17:18	SC: And there's Bill pushing his daughter to win. <i>[laughing]</i>
		JB: And what time of year would the picnics have been? Summer or Fall?
		SC: It was held in September. The first Sunday in September.
32:41	17:51	SC: There's Peter Denny. There, see?
33:00	18:10	SC: That was Greg, for a minute. Oh so someone else is taking this.
33:06	18:16	SC: There he is. But it's not me. I don't know who is taking this.
33:13	18:23	SC: Oh there they are jumping again.
33:19	18:29	SC: That's the side—. This is the house [38 Weston Street] when we first moved in. That's what it looked like. So this would be '68 or '69. We moved here in May 1968.
33:36	18:46	SC: So there's me and there's Owen. And Samantha. And Owen with his tractor.
33:46	18:56	SC: And there's little baby Galen.
33:57	19:07	SC: That's that door there, you see? <i>[gesturing]</i> . Everything's changed. Now there's a courtyard garden out there.
34:18	19:28	SC: A neighbour's child. And me with Galen.
34:32	19:42	SC: And that's Victoria Hospital and what it looked like then. There are many more trees down there now.
		JB: Is that the view from the studio?
		SC: <i>[agreeing]</i>

34:48

SC: So is that it, do you think?

JB: Maybe. It's tricked us before, but I think—

SC: Yeah, it's done isn't it.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Sheila Curnoe

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

JB: I think so.

SC: I just saw a Spasm Band thing.

JB: I'm not sure if it is done or not.

[BREAK]

36:34

SC: Now on *Connexions* I'm pretty sure there is sound.

JB: Yeah, Greg is talking over it.

SC: Yes, it's very funny because he's laughing as he's going through all the connections.

JB: So I guess there's two things we could do. We could watch *Connexions* and have you add on top of Greg. Or we can skip that one because he kind of goes through it and explains it.

SC: Yes, there's really no point. He'd made it before I knew him.

JB: Right. Do you have any interest in watching *No Movie* as well? It's silent, [inaudible].

SC: Sure, have you got it?

JB: I have it on my computer. The quality isn't great but I can plug it into your TV.

SC: Yeah, alright. Sure. [*talking to the dog*]

[BREAK]

39:44

JB: Okay great, so this is *No Movie*.

No Movie Commentary

[video playback begins at first on-screen image]¹

¹ This commentary was recorded using the video transfer of *No Movie* that is available online. This video transfer was produced by scanning the film at the incorrect framerate of 24 frames per second; it has a total duration of 8:28. For this commentary to correctly correspond to *No Movie*'s actual duration (approximately 11 minutes at 18 frames per second), the video playback timecodes will need to be advanced by 25%. See "No Movie," Vimeo video, 8:28, posted by Michael Gibson Gallery, January 29, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/85391538>.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Sheila Curnoe

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

Oral History Recording	Video Playback	Commentary
39:54	00:00	[playback begins] SC: Oh yeah, there we go.
40:05	00:11	SC: Sorry, I could never understand why Greg had put this in. I had no idea why he would do that, but he did. The movie started with us all running out of the Port Stanley water when we were on the beach. JB: That's after the underwater part? SC: This would be 1966 or '67. [<i>talking to the dog</i>] JB: [<i>talking to the dog</i>]
40:51	00:57	SC: That's Greg. That's me. [<i>talking to the dog</i>]
41:01	01:07	SC: And there's the bunch of us.
41:07	01:13	SC: I think that's Bill Exley. This is a banquet we had.
41:13	01:19	SC: With Hugh McIntyre and there's Ron Martin.
41:19	01:25	SC: Greg. Larry Russell. Bernice Vincent. Bill Exley. Art Pratten. So this would be—. [<i>talking to the dog</i>] JB: [inaudible]
41:56	02:02	SC: And they're all giving speeches. Bill is very good at giving speeches.
42:05	02:11	SC: Those are paintings of Greg's at the back [<i>Dada / Mother</i>]. I cannot remember what they're called now. JB: Do you know where this was? Where this banquet was? SC: No, I don't remember. Now Bill Exley would remember. [<i>talking to the dog</i>]
42:44	02:50	SC: I guess Greg just took bits and pieces of movies he liked and put them in. I have no idea why.
42:53	02:59	SC: There, everybody is standing on the cliffs at Port Stanley. That's Hugh McIntyre.
43:02	03:08	SC: This is at the York Hotel.
43:06	03:12	SC: That's a piano player [Gard Wigley] who John Boyle did a painting of. So you could always talk to John Boyle.
43:13	03:19	SC: That's a guy who's name I can't remember. That's Murray Favro. That's me in the green sweater.
43:31	03:37	SC: So we're all drinking far too much beer.
43:34	03:40	SC: Those are "the nurses." There were four of them and they were called "the nurses." JB: Were they actual nurses? SC: Yes, they were. Maybe they were student nurses. I don't know, but they were called "the nurses." And Bill Exley will remember their names; at the moment I just can't.
43:53	03:59	SC: And John Boyle did a painting of that guy playing the piano. [<i>talking to the dog</i>]

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Sheila Curnoe

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

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44:10	04:16	SC: There's Greg behind the counter at the York Hotel where the beer was.
44:25	04:31	SC: Oh and this is No Cottage. We all rented a cottage at Port Stanley.
44:34	04:40	SC: And that's Art Pratten holding up the—.
44:38	04:44	SC: This is one of the picnics again.
44:55	05:01	SC: And there's Bill reading another speech.
45:08	05:14	SC: That's Hugh McIntyre.
45:14	05:20	SC: They got this guy [Kenneth Hilborn], whose name I don't remember, to read a speech at the Nihilist Picnic at Port Stanley. And he was booed which I found really rude. Nobody else did but I found it very rude because they didn't agree with him politically. Bill Exley again will remember who he is or was.
46:04	06:10	SC: And there's Bill. [<i>laughing</i>] He doesn't look like that now.
46:20	06:26	SC: There we are, running around. That's me and Gwen [Erickson].
46:27	06:33	SC: Oh and that's Jack Chambers feeding his baby. And there's Olga [Chambers]. He's feeding his first little boy called John. We knew him as John John.
46:38	06:44	SC: And there's Greg. JB: Do you remember who would have been filming this if Greg is there? SC: I don't know who is filming this. I really don't know. Art Pratten might know.
46:56	07:02	SC: This is the lacrosse game that they used to play at a certain school. I never went there. [<i>talking to the dog</i>]
47:04	07:10	SC: That's Greg. So those would be good people to talk to: Art Pratten, Bill Exley, John Boyle. They were all involved in this.
47:38	07:44	SC: Quite a rough game, lacrosse.
48:06	08:12	SC: There's Greg in his outfit.
48:14	08:20	SC: Is that? Oh no.

48:17

JB: That's it I guess.

SC: So that's it, right?

JB: Yeah. I think that looked like the beginning of *Souwesto* at the end, but I don't actually have that. So let's skip *Connexions*. I think that's pretty good. So that's excellent.

SC: [*talking to the dog*]

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Sheila Curnoe

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

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JB: I don't really have any other questions but if you have anything that's immediately popping into your mind.

SC: Nope, nothing. But I do think you would get something out of talking to the people I mentioned. They could fill you in on those little details, which I can't remember right now. [*gesturing to the dog*] She's very excited, she's been sick. She picked up a dog flu at the dog park and so she hasn't had her exercise. That's why she's very silly.

JB: Excited to be well again.

SC: Plus, being a puppy. [*talking to the dog*]

JB: So I will end this and that'll be great.

[end of Track One]

[END OF RECORDING]

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Bill Exley

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

Narrator: Bill Exley (BE)

Interviewer: Jesse Brossoit (JB)

Date of Interview: 2016-05-22

Location of Interview: London, Ontario, Canada

Length of Interview: 83:14

Description: In this interview, the narrator discusses his relationship with Greg Curnoe and provides commentary for the films *No Movie* (1965) and *Souwesto* (1947-1969).

Topics:

People

Assaf, Edward "Eddie" (1915-1990)
Assaf, Moses "Moe" (1914-1996)
Bach, Johann Sebastian (1685-1750)
Beethoven, Ludwig van (1770-1827)
Bergman, Ingmar (1918-2007)
Boa, Fraser (1933-1992)
Bowering, Angela May (1940-1999, nee Luoma)
Bowering, George (1935-)
Boyle, John (1941-)
Brotsky, Anne (unknown)
Cairns, John (1943-)
Chambers, John "Jack" (1931-1978)
Chambers, Olga (1935-1991, nee Bustos)
Chaplin, Charlie (1889-1977)
Chapman, Toby (1939-2007)
Clement, John (1943-)
Clement, Shirley (unknown)
Crawford, Lenore (1909-1983)
Curnoe, Galen (1968-)
Curnoe, Greg (1936-1992)
Curnoe, Owen (1966-)
Curnoe, Sheila (1942-, nee Thompson)
Curnoe, Zoë (1971-)
Delaunay, Robert (1885-1941)
Denny, Peter (1934-)
Dibb, Brian (unknown)
Eckardt, Benjamin C. (1902-1993)
Erickson, Gwen (unknown)
Exley, William "Bill" (1939-)

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Bill Exley

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

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Exley, Laura (1967-)
Exley, Sylvia (1970-)
Favro, Murray (1940-)
Grist, Ken (unknown)
Gutteridge, Don (1937-)
Hilborn, Kenneth (1934-2013)
Leitch, Fred (unknown)
Leitch, Archie (unknown)
Martin, Ron (1943-)
McKenzie, Robert C. (1941-)
McIntyre, Hugh (1936-2004)
Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus (1756-1791)
Pratten, Art (1939-)
Pratten, Barbara (1941-)
Rabinowitch, Royden (1943-)
Rans, Geoffrey (1927-2001)
Rans, Goldie (unknown-1993, nee Wiener)
Reaney, James (1926-2008)
Reid, Dennis (unknown)
Ronald, William (1926-1998, born William Ronald Smith)
Russell, Larry (1932-)
Sadler, Elizabeth "Liz" (unknown)
Scholdice, John (unknown)
Scott, Barbara Ann (1928-2012)
Serveau, Michael (unknown)
Shankar, Ravi (1920-2012)
Shelley, Percy Bysshe (1792-1822)
Teitelbaum, Matthew (1956-)
Théberge, Pierre (1942-)
Urquhart, Jenny (1949-)
Urquhart, Tony (1934-)
Vincent, Mary Bernice (1934-2016, nee Goodsell)
Vincent, Donald (1932-1993)
Wherry, Matthew (1915-1984)
Wigley, Gard (unknown)
Youngblood, Gene (1942-)

Places

38 Weston Street, London, Ontario, Canada (*Curnoe's home and permanent studio*)
202 King Street, London, Ontario, Canada (*Curnoe's second studio*)
432 Richmond Street, London, Ontario, Canada (*Curnoe's first studio*)
545 Ontario Street, London, Ontario, Canada
652 Talbot Street, London, Ontario, Canada
Aeolian Hall, London, Ontario, Canada
Hyland Cinema, London, Ontario, Canada

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Narrator(s): Bill Exley

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

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Invererie Heights, Port Stanley, Ontario, Canada
London Public Library – Crouch Branch, London, Ontario, Canada
London Regional Art Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada (*now* Museum London)
Melody Tea Room, London, Ontario, Canada (*closed*)
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
No Haven, Port Stanley, Ontario, Canada (*demolished*)
Ontario College of Art, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (*now* Ontario College of Art and Design University)
Poplar Hill Park, Poplar Hill, Ontario, Canada
Region Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada (*closed*)
Talbot Street School, London, Ontario, Canada (*demolished*)
The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada
Victoria Hospital, London, Ontario, Canada
Victoria Park, London, Ontario, Canada
York Hotel, London, Ontario, Canada (*now* Call the Office)

Other

20 Cents Magazine (pub. 1966-1970)
The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels (Greg Curnoe, 1965-1966)
Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre
The Celebration (1962 – also "the Happening")
Chambers (dir. Fraser Boa, 1969)
Connexions (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1970)
Dada / Mother (Greg Curnoe, 1964)
Feeding Percy (Greg Curnoe, 1965)
Hockey Stick Blades from West Lions Park, London (1965)
Kamikaze (Greg Curnoe, 1967)
London Film Co-operative
London Free Press (pub. 1863-present)
Nihilist Spasm Band
No Movie (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1965)
Souwesto (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1969)
The Umbrella (CBC Television, 1966)

TRACK ONE (STE-004.wav)

00:00

Jesse Brossoit: Jesse Brossoit meeting with Bill Exley in his home in London, Ontario. It's May 20th, 2016 and we'll be discussing Greg Curnoe, his films and video work, and Bill's relationship to those works. So can you talk about how you first met Greg

Bill Exley: Yes, I met Greg for the first time in January of 1961. It was at a party held at a house on Talbot Street—652 Talbot Street—and Curnoe became interested in talking to me because I had brought to that party a recording of Indian ragas by Ravi Shankar. He thought that was very

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Narrator(s): Bill Exley

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interesting at the time and he invited me to come up to his studio to visit and he borrowed the recording, and that's when I first met him. I knew him continuously after that right up until his death in November of 1992.

JB: Now was your relationship mainly based on music then?

BE: No, it wasn't really based on music. I think I was at the university [The University of Western Ontario] at the time and Greg had just come back from the [Ontario] College of Art where he had left after studying there for some time. I think he was kicked out and he came to London and set up his studio on Richmond Street near Dundas [Street] [432 Richmond Street]. He wanted to establish relationships with a number of people in London and he decided that I was an intellectual sort of guy and he wanted to talk about ideas, because Greg was always an intellectual and interested in a variety of things and had a great curiosity. Not just about music but about art itself, of course, and politics and philosophy and all sorts of things. So we used to go up to his studio all the time – a whole series of people, some of whom are no longer around and some of whom are still around. But the interest was in a variety of topics – not really music because I really didn't know very much about some of the music that Greg was interested in. He used to listen to a variety—. He introduced me to a lot of things in popular music that I really didn't know much about, because I was a rather intellectual young guy and the main things I listened to were [Johann Sebastian] Bach and [Ludwig van] Beethoven and [Wolfgang Amadeus] Mozart. That type of thing. I really didn't know much about the popular music at the time. Of course, in about 1965 or 1966, the music quite changed and became interesting I think.

02:57

JB: Now in 1961, this is quite before he was working on his films, but did you encounter him [being] interested in films at all? In filmmaking or even film spectatorship? Watching films?

BE: Well we used to go to see movies, of course, at the theatres. Don Vincent, who with Bernice Vincent, was an important influence on a number of people. Don actually showed movies at his house – foreign films. And back then there was a theatre called the Hyland Theatre [Hyland Cinema], which was called at some time The Elmwood. They used to show foreign films – films by Swedish filmmakers like [Ingmar] Bergman and so on. They were new to me. I had seen the Hollywood movies but I hadn't seen these types of movies. And [for] some of them Greg was there so he was certainly interested in film at the time, that type of thing. But making them himself—. He borrowed the camera that he used to—. I think he borrowed it from a man named Matt Wherry, the camera that he used in order to make the movie of *No Movie*. I don't know where he got the camera to do *Connexions*. Perhaps it was the same one, I don't know. It was just a little thing. It wasn't a sound camera at all. And I don't think the speed was right.

JB: This is *No Movie*?

BE: That was *No Movie*. Of course *No Movie* was made in 1965. Should I say more about it?

JB: No that's quite alright.

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Narrator(s): Bill Exley

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

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BE: [*laughing*] Alright.

JB: Yeah, just to comment on the wrong speed – it's interesting because there's a London Film Co-op catalogue from 1966 I believe and it lists the film's length as 11 minutes. Now all current video copies are 8 minutes long so I think at some point it was slowed down during a transfer or something like that.

BE: [*laughing*] I think so.

JB: Actually the copy I'll be showing you is quite sped up but the idea is there.

BE: Oh yes, I know, I've seen the fast one. I think I've seen the slow one as well. But in the fast one—. [*speaking to someone in the background*]. In the fast one I know the people stand up from the table in the Banquet scene and they just split. I mean it's far faster than it really was obviously. [*speaking to someone in the background*].

JB: Great. So Don Vincent you said was showing films in his home. Do you happen to recall if that was 8mm—very small, shortened prints—or 16mm?

BE: No, that's a good question to ask Art Pratten because he will be able to answer it better than I can I think.

06:36

JB: Okay, so jumping ahead a little bit to 1965, the period when he [Curnoe] is making the films. Is your relationship with Greg still the same? Or I guess you had grown closer—

BE: Yes, we knew Greg then. I taught secondary school out of town in Elmira. I was there for 34 years but I came to London on weekends so much that there were people in London who thought I lived here, because on the weekend I would come and in the summer I would be here because my mother lived in London and I stayed at her place. I met my wife in London, of course, and we got married and we went to live up in Elmira but we still came down to London on the weekends. So when the children were little—when that girl Sylvia there was little [*gesturing to the background*] and her older sister Laura, who lives in Toronto, was little—we used to see the Curnoes constantly and their children Owen and Galen and Zoë. We went to the beach with them in the summertime and visited them there and so forth; and they came to visit us at the beach and cottages and so forth. We saw them quite regularly over a long period of time. They would come up to Elmira to visit and so forth. I invited him up to speak in I think it was 1963. Early 1963 I invited Greg to come up to show slides to one of my classes about the graffiti that he had photographed on walls in London. He was talking about different forms of creativity back then and he had taken pictures. They weren't movies, of course, but he came and he spoke to one of my classes. He hitchhiked up and gave his speech, then went out and hitchhiked a ride back home again because he was just young at the time and didn't have any money. This was before

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he met Sheila [Curnoe]. Well before. So we were very close to him for a long time and [we] talked about a variety of things and so forth.

JB: Now you mentioned his interest in the graffiti, for instance, and other forms of art. He was very interested in folk art, I know, and—.

BE: Yes, for example that artwork in the living room of my house is Hockey Stick prints from West Lions Park [*Hockey Stick Blades from West Lions Park, London*]. He had found these old hockey sticks and he put black paint on them and made prints, you see, and did a limited edition. I think there were twelve perhaps of it. Then he gave them to a variety of people. I don't think they were all given away. I think some were maybe sold but they're still around. I saw one in an art exhibition fairly recently. So he was interested in things that people would not normally think were art and he wanted to show that they were important. That they were art. I think that's true of the things he filmed too, but perhaps I should leave that for a later question.

JB: Actually that's a great lead-in. I was going to ask: do you think, from your knowledge of Greg and his films, that he perceived film as another neglected medium perhaps? I mean, underground filmmaking was—. It was underground in that period, artists working with film.

BE: Well he always opposed the idea of fine art set against things which were not art. He thought things which were not art were art if you viewed them that way. So, for example, the hockey stick prints. Or, for example, the kind of things he took the movies of. And the movies have in them this home movie quality taken to a real extreme. He deliberately makes it unartistic. He shows the movie and he makes the comments, and the comments—. You've heard his commentary, I'm sure, on *Connexions* for example. He just turned the recording on and off. It's not artistic at all, it's quite different. It doesn't have that finished quality that you've got in some of the films of [Jack] Chambers for example. So it's very different - a very different kind of thing. A home movie really. All those movies—*Connexions* and *No Movie*—they're like home movies of course. They're almost deliberately crude I think and he's saying "these things are art," you see?

11:43

JB: Right. Now I guess you mentioned him borrowing the camera, for instance, to work with film for *No Movie*. Do you remember the moment when he expressed that interest before he actually started filming? Did he plan *No Movie* as a project or was he just playing around?

BE: Well he knew back in 1965 that we were doing—. A lot of things were beginning at that time. For example, the movie of *No Movie*, which was done in 1965, it was—. Greg was the instigator, as he was of so many things. Greg had arranged that we have a place to stay at in Port Stanley so we all put in a little bit of money—I don't remember how much it was, not very much—and several of us lived there on-and-off at various times during the summer. It was on Invererie Heights in Port Stanley. We called it No Haven. It was a cottage and we stayed there and we could go down to the beach and walk on the boardwalk and so on. That was in 1965. Well then we got the idea of having a picnic, which we arranged. The first [Nihilist] Picnic was

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held on August 1st 1965 at the Upper Incline Railway Park in Port Stanley. I was the MC. I had a top hat on—well it wasn't a top hat but it was a funny looking hat—and a very formal, old-fashioned suit jacket. They invited the man called Hilborn, who had defended the American involvement in Vietnam, and Greg and some other people thought it would be interesting to have him come and speak and defend his position because very few people supported him at that time. And he came and he spoke and presented this position. And John Boyle made a lectern which had various nudes on it so that as the man gave his speech he had to look at the nudes, you see? And Curnoe had the camera and took the movie of it. So there are various shots: you can see the people who were sitting there at the tables, my mother, my grandmother, and various other people. And Geoffrey Rans, who was one of the people who was interested in the arts, and Hugh McIntyre. John Boyle was there speaking. And then he had pictures of people on the beach at that time too. At the same time, in that part of the movie, there are pictures of people running around the cottage. They look as though they were running in a rather frantic manner but that was because the camera was speeded up. And the people running around the cottage are such people as Jack Chambers and Olga [Chambers]—and Jack Chambers is feeding his little child in that scene—and John Boyle and Sheila [Curnoe] and Glen [Curnoe]—his brother Glen—and then Greg himself and myself and a number of other people as well. So he filmed those things, you see, because he wanted to use them and that was the first thing he filmed there. Then in December of the same year we thought it would be a good idea to have a banquet. So we booked a room at the Melody Tea Room in Old East of London. The restaurant is still there but it has a new name. It's on the north side of Dundas [Street] just near Elizabeth Street, between Elizabeth and Adelaide Street. We had the first annual picnic [banquet] upstairs. It's the first scene. Just after the picture of the undersea creatures you have a picture of the people speaking and there's the *Dada* paintings [*Dada / Mother*] in the background that were done. You can see Bernice Vincent and myself and Art Pratten and Greg. And Ron Martin was there. And Hugh McIntyre, who was the bass player for the Nihilist Spasm Band. And a number of nurses that we knew at the time were added. I remember I gave a speech. I actually still have the program of it, as a matter of fact. We made it very formal. We sang God Save the King at the beginning, which was quite interesting because of course the King had died about 14 years before, you see?

JB: Right, the '60s. [*laughing*]

BE: But that was part of making it interesting. And we had a variety of speeches. If I remember correctly, I think John Boyle had written large parts of the speech and I was the person who was supposed to read it because I had a loud voice and I was noted for my declamatory style. So Greg filmed that. So now he had his film of the picnic and he had a picture of the first banquet. And I don't have the date for the third thing he filmed which was the Nihilist Convention, he called it, at the York Hotel, which we played at. It's now called Call the Office in downtown London. We played there just a couple months ago as a matter of fact. The band just played there.

JB: Yeah, I quite like that bar.

BE: And again, the Nihilist Convention. Murray [Favro] was there. Sheila and a man called John Schoeldeisch. Archie Leitch, who played slide clarinet in the Spasm Band and who quit after

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Narrator(s): Bill Exley

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very few years in it near the beginning. And John Boyle was there. So that was the Nihilist Convention at the York Hotel. You have a picture of the guy[s] who ran it, Moe [Assaf] and Eddie [Assaf]. I think both of them who ran it are in the film. Certainly one of them is. So he had three events and you see the connections. We have No Picnic, we've got the first No Banquet, and we've got the Convention. Then on August 24th 1965, he filmed the so-called Benefit Lacrosse Game between the Nihilist Party and the London Talbots. I can't remember who was on each side but you can see it by looking at the film. And again it was a man named John Cairns, who was a friend of mine at the time, and Boyle and Hugh and Greg and John Clement and Shirley Clement. So there were four different events and Greg had his camera there filming all four. I suppose the point that was being made by putting them all together was this is a community of people. Greg was interested at the time in setting up a community of people that would be there. Friends who knew each other, trusted each other, respected each other, and were creative people doing things in their own way. Some were artists, some were sculptors, others were just ordinary people that Greg viewed as creative. He didn't want to draw the distinction between a person who was an artist and a person who was not an artist. Everybody had a creativity in his or her own way. So he filmed that on a 16mm colour silent film which was, as you say, supposedly 8 minutes. I was told it was a 1938 Cine-Kodak magazine-load camera but, you know, I don't know what that means because I'm not familiar with the terminology. And the speed, as you say, varied. Now all this was before the Nihilist Spasm Band existed, although shortly after that in the summer of 1966 we got together and we organized the first—. We got together in the summer with kazoos that we had bought, by the way, on the boardwalk at Port Stanley when we were at the cottage. We got together and we made a recording using kazoos. And I remember I did some ranting in the background, and so forth. That was recorded and that was to be the soundtrack, and it was in fact used during performances of the film because I remember watching the film at Greg's studio on Weston Street—38 Weston Street—and the recording was there and it was played while we watched it. Now it was lost some time after that, although whether it's totally lost, I don't know. It could be among the huge pile of cassettes that—. Although I didn't think it was originally recorded on a cassette. I think it was recorded in some other way, on a tape machine of some sort. I don't think it was recorded on a cassette.

JB: I'm not sure. The London Film Co-op catalogue that I mentioned before mentions "sound on tape" but it doesn't specify.

BE: Anyway, it was used and—. I don't remember the date when he performed it when quite a large number of people were there watching that. But it probably was '68 or something like that. I'm not sure. And that recording, as I say, was lost. So in future performances they just showed it, you see. Then of course the other movies, like *Connexions*, that was done at the end of '69 I think. I don't know the exact date. Now I have in front of me a review from *20 Cents Magazine*—March 1970—which is a review of Greg Curnoe's *Connexions* by Robert C. McKenzie, who was the editor of *20 Cents Magazine*, and the first exhibition of it was at Brescia College in February 1970. But since we were talking about *No Movie* maybe I should leave that for the moment and come back to it in a later question when we're talking about *Connexions*.

22:42

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Narrator(s): Bill Exley

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JB: Sure, actually we'll come back to that. I just have a couple of follow-up questions on *No Movie*. You mentioned some of the antics, I guess you would call them, that are recorded in *No Movie*: people walking around in single-file lines is one thing that comes to mind. Was that direction given to you by Greg or was that just everyone playing around?

BE: *[laughing]* I think he told us to walk around the building so we went around it I remember. And of course we were on the beach. The picture of the sea creatures went on for quite some time at the beginning. An octopus underground. Greg asked us if we would go into the water and run toward shore as though we were fleeing something in the water. So we all stood in the water and when he told us to move we all ran toward the camera. What he was intending to do obviously was *[laughing]* show the picture of the octopus and supposedly we were fleeing the octopus to come into shore. But the final picture is a picture of the word "no" and I think actually it's tucked into Sheila's bikini if I'm not mistaken. At the very end of the film *No Movie*.

JB: Now you mentioned the footage of the undersea creatures – I think there's an octopus and a starfish, things like that. Do you know where Greg may have seen that or taken that? I don't think he shot the footage, but where he would have acquired it?

BE: No, I don't. I should know the answer to that but I can't recall it at the moment. Did he get it from the [London Public] Library? Or from the [London] Free Press? I'm not sure. Art Pratten might know the answer to that because Art worked at the Free Press. He would have some knowledge of that perhaps. But I can't remember for certain, no.

JB: And Hugh McIntyre worked at the library, correct?

BE: Yes, Hugh McIntyre was a librarian and he was a film librarian. A film and records librarian at the main library [Central branch] for quite some time. The main library on Queens Ave.

JB: Would Hugh have been an encouraging influence on Greg's access to, at least, equipment? He didn't borrow the camera from him but say editing equipment – was that something Hugh would have had access to?

BE: Hugh organized a series of films—Kinotek—which was shown in the auditorium of the London Public Library and he would get films in, you see. Charlie Chaplin movies and a variety of other movies as well. And Murray Favro did the projection work for a while on that. And then Bob McKenzie, the man who wrote the article on *Connexions*, was the man who did it later on and he showed the movies. So they had knowledge of the technical things. Whether Murray gave Greg the information about the technicalities, I don't know. Greg was pretty smart about those types of things. He might have taught himself. I don't think it was all that complex really to make the home movies. My uncle Keith made home movies *[laughing]* similar to what Greg did back in the 1930s for heaven's sake, and showed them to us, you see. It struck me, it was the same kind of technology really.

JB: Right and he was even using an old camera from the '30s. Greg I mean.

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BE: Yes, probably.

26:53

JB: Now you were talking about Murray doing the projections and Bob McKenzie – everyone [who] was aware of the film technology. Do you recall other people working with film in London around that time? Obviously there was Jack Chambers but any others? I mean around the same period of 1965?

BE: I'm not aware of other people, no. I'm sure there were things going on that I wasn't aware of.

JB: Okay great. Okay let's—.

BE: But Jack Chambers, mind you, he did the same—. When he did some of his movies he took stock footage which he had gotten from a variety of sources. There's a long excerpt in one of those movies by Chambers taken at McCormick's [Manufacturing Company], for example, showing people on the production line. It was stock footage he got from somewhere and he put them into his movie. But of course it was a combination of films from a variety of sources too, you see. So it's the same sort of thing Greg did when he made *No Movie* and had the pictures of the airplanes flying through the air and the sea creatures battling each other under the sea.

JB: For *No Movie* specifically, but I think also in *Connexions* and one of his other films, Greg is frequently in the image so he's not filming it. Do you have any recollection of who may have taken over the camera during those moments?

BE: I don't know. Would it have been someone like Chambers? I don't know but I'm thinking in some of those pictures of Chambers for example—. Or am I getting mixed up with Greg's picture? I've seen some of them recently, I think I'm conflating the two together. There's a picture of Greg and Chambers on the roof of Greg's studio looking at Victoria Hospital, which was there across the river. That was interesting because that was where Jack Chambers did the painting of Victoria Hospital. The picture of this large—. All in very muted tones, this picture of this hospital. And then Greg did another version of the hospital which was all in very bright colours with little numbers in all sorts of places. Then of course beside each number he would write some event associated with that part of the hospital. Such as, for example, his wife Sheila having the baby and what room she was in and it would say when. So that was not filmed by either Chambers or—. Somebody else must have held the camera but it could have been Sheila for all I know.

JB: I think that painting you're referring to of Greg's is in that book [*gesturing*] but it's reproduced in black-and-white. It's quite unfortunate.

BE: Yes, there's a movie of it, you know, with Pierre Théberge—former director of the National Gallery [of Canada]—talking about it. There's a movie of it. A very short movie and Théberge is discussing it.

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JB: Do you have any idea when that was made? Quite a while ago I assume.

BE: It would be a while ago. I couldn't give the date.

31:05

BE: Yes, this book I'm looking at here [*gesturing*]. This is the book *Greg Curnoe*, the one edited by Théberge. It simply states that in 1964—. It says "Nihilist Spasm Band is formed when sound track of the film *No Movie* is recorded in Curnoe's studio."¹ Now I don't think that's the right date. That's not the right date. That's impossible as a matter of fact. No he's got the wrong date because in 1964 in the summer the things that are in the movie had not yet taken place. So this is inaccurate, it's 1965. He's got the wrong date. And this book here [*gesturing*]. This is for the exhibition organized for the Biennale in Sao Paolo.² He's got a picture of the Port Stanley, you see, in 1965. That's myself there on the beach at Port Stanley near No Haven, you see. They call it the "chalet No Haven" [*laughing*] where the Nihilists got together. So that's '65. That's accurate, you see?

JB: Yeah, that may have been compiled from loose conversations with Greg or something of that nature.

BE: Yes, the book on Greg that is done in—. This one that's done by Reid and Teitelbaum, called *Curnoe [Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff]*. Edited by Dennis Reid and Matthew Teitelbaum. This one at the back has got quite a detailed record of things and it's quite accurate. For example, here they have the exact date when *Connexions* was premiered at Brescia College, which is February 23rd 1970. Fifteen minutes long. And it has a quote from McKenzie from 1970 – the same thing that I'm going to give you to look at. And another quote: "*Connexions* [... becomes] a diary-narrative-biographical-autobiographical home movie of regionalism-provincialism. It is funny, naive, crude, unique."³ Youngblood, 1970. I don't know who that is.

JB: Perhaps that's Gene Youngblood. He writes quite a lot about artists and film.

BE: That's probably what it is. It would be explained in the record. And here [*gesturing*] they have the right date, 1965; that "Late August: The soundtrack for *No Movie* is recorded."⁴ Yes, so that's accurate. This book has it correct. And August—. The very same time as the soundtrack was recorded, the very same month, Greg prints the hockey stick blades from West Lions Park. The one that I was talking about earlier in our conversation. So it's done at the very same time, you see, as the film was being put together. They call it here in the book—. She says "In August

¹ Pierre Théberge, *Greg Curnoe: Retrospective* (Ottawa, Ontario: National Gallery of Canada, 1982), 59.

² Pierre Théberge, *Canada: Greg Curnoe, XXXVII Biennale di Venezia, 1976* (Ottawa, Ontario: National Gallery of Canada, 1976), 54.

³ Gene Youngblood, "The New Canadian Cinema: Images from the Age of Paradox," *artscanada* 27, no. 2 (April 1970), 10, quoted in Judith Rodger, "Chronology," in *Greg Curnoe: Life & Stuff*, edited by Dennis Reid and Matthew Teitelbaum, 136-90 (Toronto, Ontario: Art Gallery of Ontario; Vancouver, British Columbia: Douglas & McIntyre, 2001), 162.

⁴ Judith Rodger, "Chronology," 151.

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of that year the band whose name was not yet [set] recorded the soundtrack of "No Movie"—about the activities of the Nihilist [Party]."⁵ So—.

35:02

JB: Now you mentioned *Connexions*—obviously the premiere at Brescia College—and you also mentioned *No Movie* being shown, I believe, in Greg's home you said.

BE: Right, in the studio. He always kept the studio separate from the house. At the front was one area and he wanted to go out the door and walk and then go in the studio like it would be going to work, you see. It would be separate. Now after his death Sheila combined the two together, which made sense of course.

JB: But aside from—. I suppose that was something you might call a private screening for friends. Do you remember it being shown publicly? Was there a public screening for it? Perhaps at the library or at the [London Regional] Art Gallery.

BE: I don't remember myself and I wasn't there, for example for that *Connexions*—. As I said, I lived out of town. I wouldn't have been there during the week when it was done. There may have been something done earlier but that event at Curnoe's studio, that was not just friends. That was a fair number of people that had been invited. But of course Greg knew so many people, they probably all regarded him as their friend. Because the whole tendency of Greg's art is inclusive. He always believed in bringing people together. He never excluded, he never tried to reject. He would disagree with people but he didn't reject them. He wanted to learn from people who had different views from him and who were different from him. And so I think that's the reason why, when he died, so many people felt that there was just a terrible personal loss they had suffered. And all sorts of people felt they were Greg's best friend, you know? He was respected so much because of this quality in the man of generosity of spirit. And as they say—. Interested in such a wide variety of things and open, and he genuinely liked people of course. Chambers was actually a very different man [*laughing*], a very spiritual quality in his painting. And he tended to work privately. He didn't have a lot of people coming into his studio, for example, whereas Greg seemed to welcome it. He loved people to come in. He'd just keep painting and he'd chat away and he'd play music of all sorts. Not just jazz but classical music too. He was interested in such a wide variety of things.

37:54

JB: Now we've been discussing *No Movie* and sort of alluding to *Connexions*—and we'll get there in a moment—but are you familiar at all with the film that he made, I think, in-between? Or maybe the dates are quite blurred, but it's *Souwesto*. It's another 16mm film.

BE: Yes, I've seen that as well. I can't make statements about when it was shown though, I don't remember that. But again, it's a picture of so many different things that were going on at the time. And of course *Connexions* has to do with just the odd way that things were connected with

⁵ Ibid, 151.

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each other. For example, Don Vincent – the house he lived in was my grandmother's house. He rented it. His father and mother rented it from my grandmother and it was the house that my mother lived in when she came to London, from Innerkip to London. Back in the 1930s they lived in this house on Elizabeth Street. It's still there. And then they moved out and moved to a house on Ontario Street—545 Ontario Street—which is in *Connexions*. Greg shows the picture of the house and comments "this is where Bill Exley lived when he was young". But then he shows the other house on Elizabeth Street and says "this is the house where Don Vincent used to live which is owned by Bill's grandmother." So this was just a funny coincidence. And then of course he comments on a number of the other strange relationships too. But the movie turns out to be very interesting simply because it shows pictures of the cars of the time, what the street looked like at the time. Just to see the trees, for example, on the streets. The streets were much more tree'd in the old days in London. There's an organized program to destroy the old trees in London, I think, and some of the streets do not look at all the way they looked when I was young or even when I was in my twenties and so on. The city was a beautiful city of trees. When they get older, they destroy them. They claim they're dying and they just chop them down. They're going to chop down four on my street this summer. "They're dying" apparently. They don't look to be dying but then again I'm not an expert. They're experts, they know. So they've pretty well gotten rid of most of the big ones in Victoria Park. My wife biked down there today and said there's another huge stump in the centre of the park. So they're working on it. They'll succeed fairly soon, I think. "They could fall on someone," you know, and there would be personal injury.

JB: Must be careful.

BE: Yes, you've got to be cautious. You might say something wrong or do something wrong. One has to be cautious legally at all times, as you know.

40:53

JB: [*laughing*] Yes. So yeah, I guess we've broken into *Connexions*. But you—. Actually let's start with the review that you were mentioning. Was there anything that you wanted to highlight or something that stood out to you?

BE: Well he says here "The soundtrack is simply a narration of the film by Curnoe, the same as you would expect to hear if the film were shown silent and Curnoe stood at your shoulder explaining the pictures on the screen: 'That's looking out of my studio window towards Victoria Hospital . . . Now here's Benny Eckhardt's [*sic*] church⁶ . . . There's the house that Art Pratten used to live in---and there's the house that Don Vincent used to live in, which was owned by Bill Exley's grandmother, just around the corner from Jack's house; now it's owned by Bill's mother--and this is the house that Bill Exley used to live in on Ontario Street . . .' Curnoe recorded the

⁶ After the interview, the narrator provided the following comments: "Benjamin C. Eckardt (1902-1993), minister at First Church of Christ (Disciples) on Elizabeth Street near Dundas. He was the minister there for almost seventy years. In his Montreal mural Greg Curnoe quoted a line Eckardt had read on his radio programme "Eventide": "A great work of art was never created by a man out of breath," a line which was later used in a Nihilist Spasm Band song."

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narration during the winter using a tape recorder borrowed from the London Public Library"—which would be through Hugh probably, I think—"and had it transferred to an optical sound track by a firm in Toronto. The cost of that service represented about two-thirds of the total \$200 budget of the film."⁷ And then he goes on in the article—which there is no point in my reading on the recording here because you can look at it when you've taken it out—but he talks about Chambers being in it and then he talks about the other film that was shown at the same time that cost \$9000 [*Chambers*]. Not at the same time but [had been] recently shown and it was much more expensive. But this review preferred Greg's one. The comment made by Bob McKenzie: "Geoffrey Rans complained about the elitism of Curnoe's movie---'Who is Brian Dibb, anyway?' He's one of the people referred to by Greg and he was a friend of ours back then. "He felt it had been made for the appreciation of Curnoe's in-group, whatever that is, and for the mystification of everyone else. But that's just the point---you don't have to know who Brian Dibb is or even who Greg Curnoe is. Because the movie is really about Curnoe's feelings, and an explanation to an 'audience' of people and places with which Curnoe is intimately connected would make the whole exercise meaningless. There is something in this movie for everybody, even if you only look at it as a scenic tour of London. For most people, it will probably be a point of departure for making their own 'connexions,' helping them to see the incredible string of coincidences preserved in the memory of each of us."⁸ So I think this is a very good review that Bob McKenzie wrote back then. And of course we were all quite young at the time, obviously. Interviewing us now you'd get the impression we were old guys back then but of course we were not. Everybody was young.

JB: Oh of course, I've seen the films [*laughing*]

BE: [*laughing*]

JB: Actually you reminded me of something I meant to ask. The cost that's alluded [to] there, the \$200 for *Connexions*—. For *No Movie*, was the financial undertaking of making that film Greg's? Or was it a group effort? Was everyone interested in having this done?

BE: I never even thought of that question [*laughing*]. I suppose he paid for it himself. I have no idea.

44:49

JB: Actually, I think *Connexions*—. You know we've been talking about the commentary that Greg has provided for the film. I think it does quite a good job of explaining and sort of contextualizing it, so I don't think we need to spend too long discussing it. But I guess I just have a question that relates to *Connexions* and also *No Movie*—and you sort of touched on it—and that's Greg's community-building. But do you think his films are very similar or dissimilar to his

⁷ The ellipses have been reproduced from the original text; nothing has been removed from either this quotation or the narrator's commentary. Robert C. McKenzie, "Greg Curnoe's *Connexions*," *20 Cents Magazine* 4, no. 3 (March 1970), 19.

⁸ *Ibid*, 20.

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other artwork? I mean he was doing so much around that period and he only made three films. Were they aberrations or interesting extensions of what he was already doing?

BE: Well of course like many artists Greg went through a lot of changes in his career. He would do one kind of art and then he would change it. The very earliest art that he was doing when he was first there on Richmond Street, he deliberately made it run and deliberately made it look sloppy. And it was the same thing that he was doing in the film. I think you could draw a parallel there between what he was doing in the film and what he was doing with his art. But later on he did the lettered paintings and later again he did very finished-looking paintings of various scenes. He was influenced by a variety of people. I remember in Montreal we went to see an exhibition of Delaunay, Robert Delaunay. I think he influenced Greg's approach to colour in a number of his pictures. I can't give the date right off the top of my head but what I'm saying is Greg went through a whole series of periods in his life. I mean there is continuity of course but he kept experimenting with new things. So I think the film was one stage of experimentation but it didn't lead to other films done later in his life. So it wasn't a continuing interest, no. But it's true of so many artists who continually change and they go on changing. They don't get fixed. You think of so many artists, they do a certain style, a certain way of doing things. They do it extraordinarily well and they're trapped by it, in a sense, and they keep on doing it. And so the work done many years later is very similar to something done very early. It's not true of Greg. It kept changing all the time and it indicates the fact that he was constantly learning and constantly doing new things. If he had lived, he would have done new things. We would have had no idea what he could have done but they would have been interesting in a new way that we haven't thought of. And I think Greg was a wonderful illustration of that. And he never really had the chance to do later works because he died too young. Although at the end of his life so many of those pictures are pictures of himself – self-portraits. You think of him looking at himself and what he is. You think of—. Well it's not the same but you think of Rembrandt's paintings where he's looking at himself, you know. And you see the man changing. How interesting that is. And Greg was doing something the same in a way, looking at himself. Then of course some of those pictures of himself were right at the very end, right before he died. They were in the show that was scheduled to be shown prior to his death. The show went ahead anyway. I remember we went to it just a few weeks after he had died. In Toronto, I remember.

49:49

JB: Now I'm not going to be showing you these because I don't have copies, but you reminded me because of this self-portraiture that he was doing later in life. The AGO has a couple of VHS tapes that are just recordings of him in his studio and I imagine there are quite a few more than the AGO has. But they're just very long—they're a couple hours each—they're very long, just a camera on a tripod, and it's just Greg in his studio painting self-portraits.

BE: Oh isn't that interesting! I don't think I've seen those.

JB: Yeah, they weren't digitized for me so I can't show you, unfortunately. But yes, it's Greg working on his self-portraits but also recording himself painting so it's sort of a video self-portrait as well. It's not a stimulating watch. It's just him in the studio painting for a very long

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period of time by himself. But it's kind of interesting that he was doing that around that time. It was the mid-'80s I think. '83 I want to say but maybe later.

BE: There was a documentary done of Greg where it was a picture of him doing some of the coloured works—the wheels and so on—and Sheila is in there and he's asking Sheila's advice and [*laughing*] she says "oh I think that colour there should be changed" or something. So Greg does what she says, it was very interesting.

JB: I think that's great. I don't have any more questions. If you have any lingering comments, this might be a good time to catch those.

BE: Right, well I've talked a fair time. How long have we talked?

JB: It's been about fifty-one minutes.

BE: Oh gosh. Okay well that's good. Maybe we should stop for a moment and I'll walk up and down and think and if I think of any new things to say maybe we can add them. If we don't, then we probably have enough.

JB: Great. Then, if you're still willing we can watch some of the works and capture some commentary

BE: Alright.

JB: We don't have to watch everything I have. I have all three of his films on my computer but that would be quite a long session.

BE: Right, and I have seen them. It would just be a matter of refreshing the memory, that's all.

JB: So maybe I'll just stop here.

BE: Okay, we can stop it here.

JB: Great. Oh that's the wrong—.

[end of Track One]

TRACK TWO (STE-005.wav)

00:07

JB: So once again this is Jesse Brossoit with Bill Exley. It's May 20th 2016 at Bill's home and we're just recording commentary for *No Movie*. So *No Movie* will begin right now.

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No Movie Commentary

[video playback begins at first on-screen image]

Oral History Recording	Video Playback	Commentary
00:22	00:00	[playback begins]
00:27	00:05	BE: Well there we are fleeing from the sea creatures. And there are the sea creatures.
00:51	00:29	BE: You can certainly see where the addition of the soundtrack would be very powerful here during these undersea conflicts.
01:11	00:49	BE: Again, one would conclude that if it were more artistically done in the usual sense it wouldn't go on so long [<i>laughing</i>].
01:28	01:06	BE: And that's Lake Erie of course in the background and that's Sheila.
01:36	01:14	BE: And those people there I could name them if we stopped.
01:44	01:22	BE: And this of course is the banquet. Those are "the nurses."
01:47	01:25	BE: And there's Hugh McIntyre taking the money I guess.
01:51	01:29	BE: There's—. Yes, there's Greg.
01:57	01:35	BE: And there's Bernice. That's me, standing there preparing my speech.
02:02	01:40	BE: And that's Art Pratten.
02:08	01:46	BE: And Greg's at the head table, as well as myself.
02:12	01:50	BE: There's Larry Russell there.
02:16	01:54	BE: There's Ron Martin and there's Greg. We were all dressed in suits as you can see, with black and white.
02:22	02:00	BE: There's Hugh eating his dinner. He didn't wear a suit.
02:29	02:07	BE: Fred Leitch there. And Bob McKenzie at the table with the dark glasses beside me. I think Bob introduced me.
02:36	02:14	BE: And there I am giving the speech, reading the speech, you see. I even have a boutonnière on. I think one of the nurses gave that to me.
02:49	02:27	BE: I was very thin back then.
02:54	02:32	BE: [<i>laughing</i>] And there's Greg with his dark glasses.
03:08	02:46	BE: [<i>laughing</i>] Everybody just splits.
03:17	02:55	BE: I don't know what the significance of the airshow was. Things taking off? I have no idea.
03:28	03:06	BE: And there we are on the bluffs. The clay bluffs. That's Hugh there, by the way, holding that sign.
03:37	03:15	BE: And there we are at the York Hotel. That's Sheila and Art.
03:40	03:18	BE: That's the guy who used to play the piano [Gard Wigley].
03:47	03:25	BE: And Art. John Sholdice is the name of him.
03:49	03:27	BE: There's Murray Favro there and there's Sheila again.

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03:55	03:33	BE: That's the owner, Eddie. Moe and Eddie.
04:03	03:41	BE: But I wasn't present at that one.
04:09	03:47	BE: There are the nurses: Liz [Sadler] and Gwen [Erickson].
04:30	04:08	BE: Gard Wigley I think was his name, the piano player.
04:45	04:23	BE: There's Greg behind the place where we sold the beer.
04:54	04:32	BE: Archie Leitch blowing everyone a kiss, beside John Boyle.
05:00	04:38	BE: And that's at the cottage, you see, at Port Stanley.
05:12	04:50	BE: And there we are doing the races. The races were carried on like that—the very same type of race—for 50 years.
05:19	04:57	BE: That same sign was used at the one last year. The 51st. The very same sign. Art Pratten looks after that [and] brings it every year.
05:28	05:06	BE: That's me—very thin in my outfit—giving another speech.
05:37	05:35	BE: And that's the guest speaker [Hilborn].
05:42	05:20	BE: And that's Geoffrey Rans and Hugh.
05:50	05:28	BE: You can see the lectern which John Boyle made for him.
05:54	05:32	BE: There he is giving his talk. Sheila remembers that we interrupted him but I don't think that's true. I think that Sheila is not quite right there on that matter because I think—. Somebody might have but not generally.
		JB: Right, she mentioned that when I spoke to her.
		BE: Yes, I think he was listened to. We let him have his say.
06:13	05:51	BE: There's my grandmother in the background.
06:25	06:03	BE: What he was doing was defending the Vietnam War. Very few people around who would defend the Vietnam War today I think.
06:39	06:17	BE: And that's me looking very thin and cadaverous on the beach at Port Stanley.
06:54	06:32	BE: And there we are running around the cottage.
07:00	06:38	BE: That's Gwen. One of the—.
07:04	06:42	BE: There's Jack Chambers feeding his child, you see. And there's Olga, standing there.
07:08	06:46	BE: And there's John Boyle getting out of his car. And Sheila walking in.
07:18	06:56	BE: The cottage was demolished shortly after that. It was well located; it was on the hill.
07:23	07:01	BE: And this is, of course, on Talbot Street. It was at the Talbot Street School, which was torn down not that long after that. It was the lacrosse game.
07:46	07:24	BE: That's John Cairns there, who has since moved to the United States. Many years ago. He's a lawyer in New York.
07:57	07:35	BE: And there are Gwen Ericson and Shirley Clement sitting in the car.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Bill Exley

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

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08:16	07:54	BE: And I'm not playing the game. I was never that athletic to be able to do it.
08:35	08:13	BE: <i>[laughing]</i> And that's me arriving.
08:47	08:25	BE: That was Greg's shirt with "No" on it.
08:50	08:28	BE: Now we're moving into the next film.

09:00

JB: Okay, so that was *No Movie*. Now let me just check how long this is and you can decide if you would like to continue with this.

BE: This is *Souwesto*?

JB: Yes, so this is twenty minutes long if you're interested.

BE: If some of it is—. We could fast-forward through some if necessary, I suppose.

JB: Sure. So I believe it begins with a Spasm Band performance.

BE: Oh interesting.

JB: And then I think toward the end it is another picnic, although I'm not sure what year it is. That might be interesting.

BE: Ah yes, I think I know what year it is. I think I remember that. My daughter is in it.

[the following comments were made while preparing video playback]

JB: So this is—.

BE: Yes. That, by the way, that thing you just had a minute ago. The picture of the ball [00:16]. That is in my basement, right below us.

JB: Oh, amazing.

BE: The very same thing. I'm the custodian of it. This is the show that Greg had at the gallery on Hamilton Road [00:15]. The Landon branch [of the London Public Library]. Sorry, not the Landon branch. The branch of the library on Hamilton Road, right near Egerton Street [London Public Library – Crouch Branch]. I think that toilet seat is now in the possession of—. I think it's in the possession of Don Gutteridge, the London poet and novelist. And another one of those paintings is in the possession of Bob McKenzie.

JB: The "No"?

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Bill Exley

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

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BE: I'm not sure whether it's that one or one that's similar to it. I'm not sure it's that very one.

JB: Okay, so right here. Okay, so let's just start at 00:14.

Souwesto Commentary

[video playback begins at first on-screen image]

Oral History Recording	Video Playback	Commentary
11:11	00:00	[playback begins]
11:19	00:08	BE: It's the Crouch branch? For some reason the name of the branch, I can't recall.
11:29	00:18	BE: That drum is in my basement. "Nihilist Spasm Band." It looks much the same. A little faded.
11:38	00:27	BE: That's Barbara Ann Scott visiting London I think, years ago. I don't know why it was there.
11:48	00:37	BE: Barbara Pratten hanging out the wash, as a very young girl there.
11:59	00:48	BE: That was hanging at the—. That's Pat Elliot, that's her name. That's at the London Public Library and she was putting out the—. That's at "the Happening," which took place at the library.
12:15	01:04	BE: That's [Royden] Rabinowitch there. And Barbara Pratten was putting the—.
12:24	01:13	BE: That's Jenny Urquhart.
12:32	01:21	BE: Brian Dibb standing there.
12:38	01:27	BE: Michael Serveau. He used to drink quite a lot and quote Italian from Dante.
12:46	01:35	BE: Ken Grist there.
12:52	01:41	BE: Great condemnation was written of this event in the London Free Press by Lenore Crawford, who later changed her tune and was quite sympathetic toward Greg.
13:03	01:52	BE: It's the Crouch Library, of course. That's the name of the branch. And there's the branch, you see, where the art show was.
13:20	02:09	BE: That's the ticket wicket.
13:33	02:22	BE: I think there is a sound version of this somewhere. JB: Right, there's been some discussion about that. Sheila remembers sound. BE: I remember sound. I think in one of the documentaries, I remember Greg speaking. I think it's not lost either. JB: Yeah, the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre—that made this transfer—has a print with a soundtrack on it, but theirs is quite damaged so they borrowed another institution's print and

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Narrator(s): Bill Exley

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

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		it was silent. So I guess there was silent and sound versions produced. We're not quite sure why.
14:13	03:02	BE: This, of course, is Region Gallery, which was on Richmond Street. Very narrow, it was. It didn't last—.
14:21	03:10	BE: That's Don Vincent we saw a moment ago.
14:26	03:15	BE: Geoffrey Rans there chatting.
14:29	03:18	BE: Barbara Pratten in the middle and Jenny Urquhart.
14:38	03:27	BE: A picture of Matt Wherry. Matt Wherry.
14:44	03:33	BE: That's Goldie Rans on the left there looking at the picture.
14:52	03:41	BE: Matt Wherry was an interesting man.
14:55	03:44	BE: That's Barbara again. Jenny Urquhart, Tony Urquhart's first wife.
15:07	03:56	BE: Geoffrey Rans again.
15:10	03:59	BE: Some of these pictures were very tiny. The gallery itself was extremely small.
15:31	04:20	BE: There's Geoffrey Rans smoking his pipe.
15:41	04:30	BE: That's Tony Urquhart on the left and Fraser Boa on the right.
15:45	04:34	BE: And there's Hugh playing on his bass with the other members of the band.
15:52	04:41	BE: There's John Clement and Art Pratten.
15:55	04:44	BE: And that's me yelling through the megaphone. That megaphone is also in the basement of my house. That megaphone was used fairly recently at the memorial gathering we had for James Reaney at Aeolian Hall. We got the megaphone out and used it actually, just for old times' sake.
16:22	05:11	BE: But this is before we're electrified.
16:38	05:27	BE: <i>[laughing]</i>
		JB: It's really missing that soundtrack.
17:02	05:51	BE: John Boyle playing his kazoo.
17:09	05:58	BE: That's in Greg's King Street studio [202 King Street] by the way.
17:16	06:05	BE: And this is—.
17:30	06:19	BE: That's Angela Bowering there, to the right. George Bowering's wife.
17:55	06:44	BE: Lot's of smoking going on.
17:57	06:46	BE: That woman there is Anne Brodsky, to the right. She moved to Los Angeles after that. She's the one that the cameraman—. I don't know who the cameraman was.
18:14	07:03	BE: <i>[laughing]</i> As you can see, his interests.
18:18	07:07	BE: And that's the man from the <i>Umbrella</i> show on the left. I can't remember his name [William Ronald].
		JB: The CBC program?
		BE: Yeah.

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Narrator(s): Bill Exley

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18:28	07:17	BE: And now we're back, of course, at Sheila's, in the place where they lived. And there's—.
18:35	07:24	BE: That's <i>Feeding Percy</i> . Now Percy, by the way, was a bird that I brought. I gave that bird to Greg and Sheila.
18:59	07:48	BE: I don't know which one's Percy. I was teaching a poem by Shelley, Percy [Bysshe] Shelley, you see, and I brought the bird. I used it in my class to make the lesson memorable for the students. When it was finished, I thought "well goodness me." I was young, I didn't even think "what do you do with a bird?" When it's finished, I can't leave it in the classroom so I brought it to London. I thought "what will I do with it?" And I finally thought "well I'll give it Greg and Sheila" so I said "Greg do you want a bird?" and he said "oh sure," so I gave him the bird in the cage [<i>laughing</i>]. And then he made the artwork <i>Feeding Percy</i> , but that's why he's called Percy, because of the poem the bird was used for.
19:55	08:44	BE: And this, of course, is the hotel painting [<i>The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels</i>]. The one that Peter Denny was in, you see. There it is taking shape.
20:25	09:14	BE: That is a very interesting picture there, to see it being painted.
20:38	09:27	BE: [<i>laughing</i>] And there of course is Peter. "Peter Denny, PhD" [<i>laughing</i>].
20:53	09:42	BE: And that's a silly picture with Toby Chapman, Liz, and Greg and myself. I was doing an imitation.
21:03	09:52	BE: And that's, of course, Greg's famous pyramid [<i>Kamikaze</i>] that he did of the Spasm Band.
21:07	09:56	BE: And that's Owen when he was little. Owen has a little child now called Maeve in Toronto who looks in many ways like Owen when he was little.
21:41	10:30	BE: And that's the pyramid with that picture of that same drum that we saw before. We're looking at one side of it with Archie Leitch.
21:53	10:42	BE: And there's the other side of it with Clement and Boyle.
22:08	10:57	BE: And that is—. I think that's Hugh, isn't it? That's the bass, anyway. That bass, by the way, is in my basement as well. JB: Oh you have it? BE: Yes, I've still got it. I don't know why I have that. Of course, Hugh is dead so he can hardly have it now.
22:32	11:21	BE: And there's Sheila with little Owen again.
22:44	11:33	BE: So this really looks like a home movie, doesn't it? JB: Yeah, absolutely.
23:00	11:49	JB: Now I think this runs for a few minutes so if you'd like to skip ahead—. Or we can watch this.

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Narrator(s): Bill Exley

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

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		BE: We could skip ahead here I think.
		JB: So we're just going to stop at 12:12.
23:10	11:59	[playback paused]

[the following comments were made while preparing video playback]

23:23

BE: That's at one of those concerts they used to hold at the bandshell downtown [Victoria Park].

JB: Okay, here we go.

BE: Ah, now I think we're coming to the picnic.

JB: So let's pick up right here.

BE: Yes. This is the first picnic that was held at Poplar Hill.

JB: At 15:47.

Souwesto Commentary (cont.)

Oral History Recording	Video Playback	Commentary
23:54	15:33	[playback resumes]
24:05	15:44	BE: Wait a moment. I'm not sure it is the first. One moment. It's the picnic held, I think, in 1968. Yes, I think it's 1968.
24:27	16:06	BE: Because there's one of the races, you see? The three-legged race.
24:40	16:19	BE: That's Owen.
24:43	16:22	BE: There's the little kids running.
24:53	16:32	BE: <i>[laughing]</i>
24:58	16:37	BE: And that's the so-called Exley Jumping. They called it that for fifty years. You just jumped up and down.
25:06	16:45	BE: There's John Cairns reading the list of winners.
25:15	16:54	BE: John Boyle.
25:29	17:08	BE: And that's me, standing on the—.
25:40	17:19	BE: That's my daughter Laura and I'm pushing her to make her run and she won't do it. She would be—. This would be one year old, so it's 1968. She was born in 1967, so it's 1968.
26:06	17:45	BE: That's Lady's Kick-the-shoe. Later we added Men's Kick-the-shoe.

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Narrator(s): Bill Exley

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

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26:15	17:54	BE: <i>[laughing]</i>
26:22	18:01	BE: <i>[laughing]</i> The wheelbarrow race. We did it at Poplar Hill. I suggested to Greg that we do it at Poplar Hill. I thought it was a good location. My father[<i>'s business association</i>] had had picnics there. ⁹ His businesses had had a picnic there. It looks the same today. Very much the same, Poplar Hill.
26:47	18:26	BE: And there's the jumping again. Now are there two? Is this all one picnic? I think it's the same picnic, I don't think there are two picnics there. Although I had an impression for a few moments that the first scenes were from a picnic from the year before but I don't think so. It's all one picnic I think.
		JB: Well there was a section of black where I guess a second reel was shot.
		BE: If so, that first one, the first part, would've been from the year before which would be 1967. I was not at that picnic because my daughter Laura had just been born and she was ill. She had a problem with her eye and I had to take her to the doctor. I couldn't go.
27:36	19:15	JB: Now I think the remainder is—
		BE: This is back to the home movie again.
		JB: <i>[agreeing]</i> So why don't we stop there and we'll call that at 19:40.
		BE: Okay.
27:48	19:27	<i>[playback stopped]</i>

27:50

JB: And then, maybe we can just very quickly see if anyone changes their outfit or anything.

BE: We'll establish whether that is in fact the same picnic.

[the following comments were made while skipping through video playback]

JB: I don't think you were seen until after the black so it's possible that this is *[two separate picnics]*.

BE: That's right. But I missed the first picnic that was held at Poplar Hill and I have the impression that that might be it there. This is before the black right?

JB: Yes, this is the first section.

⁹ Corrected by the narrator after the interview.

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Narrator(s): Bill Exley

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

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BE: I think that may be the one held in '67 because I'm nowhere to be seen. And then after the black part it's the next picnic, the one held in '68. That's definitely '68, that one. You know it is too because Owen is older. Do you notice how he's older?

JB: Oh okay. Right.

BE: There are two picnics there, there are two picnics.

JB: Okay so '67-'68?

BE: Yes. The first one is—. The main emphasis is on the one in '68 but the first shots are from the one in '67 because Owen looks quite different. *[laughing]* The speed, of course, isn't right. Well, are we going to watch the other one too or just *Souwesto*?

JB: I think we should be okay if we just watch *Souwesto*.

BE: Okay.

JB: But if you'd like to watch *Connexions* we can certainly do that.

BE: No, it's long isn't it?

JB: I think it's about thirty minutes.

BE: No, we've talked about it and he explains everything himself of what's what.

JB: *[agreeing]* No yeah, this is perfect then.

BE: Yeah, very good.

JB: I can stop the recording.

BE: Okay. Well this has been very interesting. I hope you—.

[end of Track Two]

[END OF RECORDING]

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Art Pratten

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

Narrator: Art Pratten (AP)

Interviewer: Jesse Brossoit (JB)

Date of Interview: 2016-05-22

Location of Interview: London, Ontario, Canada

Length of Interview: 96:08

Description: In this interview, the narrator discusses his relationship with Greg Curnoe and provides commentary for the films *No Movie* (1965) and *Souwesto* (1947-1969).

Topics:

People

Assaf, Edward "Eddie" (1915-1990)
Assaf, Moses "Moe" (1914-1996)
Bartók, Béla (1881-1945)
Bergman, Ingmar (1918-2007)
Bigelow, Jane (1928-)
Bowie, David (1947-2016, born David Jones)
Boyle, John (1941-)
Brodsky, Anne (unknown)
Cage, John (1912-1992)
Cairns, John (1943-)
Chambers, Diego (1965-)
Chambers, John "Jack" (1931-1978)
Chambers, Olga (1935-1991, nee Bustos)
Clement, John (1943-)
Coughtry, John Graham (1931-1999)
Curnoe, Galen (1968-)
Curnoe, Greg (1936-1992)
Curnoe, Owen (1966-)
Curnoe, Sheila (1942-, nee Thompson)
DeChico, Frank (unknown)
Denny, Peter (1934-)
Dewdney, Alexander Keewatin (1941-)
Dibb, Brian (unknown)
Dixon, Willie (1915-1992)
Dewhurst, Graham (unknown)
Exley, William "Bill" (1939-)
Favro, Murray (1940-)
Fuller, Richard Buckminster (1895-1983)
Harper, Elijah (1949-2013)

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Art Pratten

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

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Hilborn, Kenneth (1934-2013)
Kelly, Alex (unknown)
Legault, Sarah (unknown)
Leitch, Archie (unknown)
Lombardo, Gaetano Alberto "Guy" (1902-1977)
Martin, Ron (1943-)
McIntyre, Hugh (1936-2004)
McKay, Sally (unknown)
McKenzie, Robert C. (1941-)
Monk, Thelonius (1917-1982)
Penikett, Tony (1945-)
Polanski, Roman (1933-)
Pratten, Art (1939-)
Pratten, Barbara (1941-)
Rans, Geoffrey (1927-2001)
Reaney, James (1926-2008)
Reich, Wilhelm (1897-1957)
Richman, Barry (1945-)
Rodgers, Nile (1952-)
Ronald, William (1926-1998, born William Ronald Smith)
Snow, Michael (1929-)
Stockhausen, Karlheinz (1928-2007)
Stravinsky, Igor (1882-1971)
Town, Harold (1924-1990)
Tudor, David (1926-1996)
Urquhart, Tony (1934-)
Vincent, Mary Bernice (1934-2016, nee Goodsell)
Vincent, Donald (1932-1993)
Wherry, Matthew (1915-1984)
Whitehead, Alfred North (1861-1947)
Wieland, Joyce (1930-1998)
Wigley, Gard (unknown)
Woodbridge, Hudson (1904-1981, also Tampa Red)

Places

38 Weston Street, London, Ontario, Canada (*Curnoe's home and permanent studio*)
432 Richmond Street, London, Ontario, Canada (*Curnoe's first studio*)
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Black Mountain College, Black Mountain, North Carolina, USA
Forest City Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada
H.B. Beal Technical and Commercial High School, London, Ontario, Canada (*now H.B. Beal Secondary School*)
Invererie Heights, Port Stanley, Ontario, Canada
London Public Library – Crouch Branch, London, Ontario, Canada
London South Collegiate Institute, London, Ontario, Canada

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Art Pratten

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

Meridian Gallery, San Francisco, California, USA
Michael Gibson Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada
No Haven, Port Stanley, Ontario, Canada (*demolished*)
Ontario College of Art, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (*now* Ontario College of Art and Design University)
Poplar Hill Park, Poplar Hill, Ontario, Canada
Region Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada (*closed*)
Talbot Street School, London, Ontario, Canada (*demolished*)
The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada
Victoria Park, London, Ontario, Canada
York Hotel, London, Ontario, Canada (*now* Call the Office)

Other

Bambi Meets Godzilla (dir. Marv Newland, 1969)
The Beatles
Boing (Murray Favro, 1965)
The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels (1965-1966)
The Celebration (1962 – also "the Happening")
CFPL-TV
Connexions (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1970)
Dada / Mother (Greg Curnoe, 1964)
The Dance of Death at London, Ontario (James Reaney, pub. 1963)
Dixie Flyers
Feeding Percy (Greg Curnoe, 1965)
Kamikaze (Greg Curnoe, 1967)
Knife in the Water (dir. Roman Polanski, 1962)
Last Year at Marienbad (dir. Alain Resnais, 1961)
London Film Co-operative
National Film Board of Canada
Nihilist Spasm Band
No Movie (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1965)
Scissors (dir. Alexander Keewatin Dewdney, 1966)
Souwesto (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1969)
The Umbrella (CBC Television, 1966)
What About Me: The Rise of the Nihilist Spasm Band (dir. Zev Asher, 2000)
Wild Strawberries (dir. Ingmar Bergman, 1957)

TRACK ONE (STE-006.wav)

00:01

Jesse Brossoit: Okay so this is Jesse Brossoit speaking with Art Pratten at his home in London, Ontario. It's May 22nd, 2016 and we are discussing Greg Curnoe's films and especially *No Movie*. Okay, so can you talk about how you first met Greg.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Art Pratten

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

Art Pratten: Well that's both easy and hard. We grew up in the same neighbourhood. We played in the same neighbourhood. I've known Greg since we were 7, 8, 9 years old. We didn't go to the same school, we went to adjoining schools, but we played in many of the same areas, the same parks, and one thing or another. Then when we became 12 both of us started paper routes. The thing that connected us was we both picked up our papers at the same depot that was only a few blocks from here, which meant we would see each other six days a week when we were picking up papers. So we always knew each other that way and being in the neighbourhood we'd see each other after that. It turned out that he was a couple years older than I and it turned out by chance I followed his route. After public school I went to [London] South Collegiate [Institute] and after South Collegiate went to Beal Tech [H.B. Beal Technical and Commercial High School], to the art course. I was just finishing the art course at Beal Tech when he was finishing the [Ontario] College of Art so that connected us again. I met him uptown one day and said "what are you doing?" He says "Hey, I'm back. I've got a studio, come up to my studio." Things just went from there [*laughing*]. And the studio became a meeting place for everybody. It was just a long flow of knowing him.

02:13

JB: Right. Now in those earliest days, or maybe right when he came back to London, was he interested in film at all? He wasn't making films at that point but was he chatting about it?

AP: Greg was interested in everything. Whether he was active in it or not, he was interested in everything. He was very much interested in people who were doing things and that has come up in conversation often. There was a thing that happened after his death: many people came forward and said that they viewed Greg as their best friend. And I knew that all these people didn't have a lot of contact with him. The thing was that Greg really was interested in everything and he was interested in people who were doing stuff, and he had this ability to zero in on them. When they were talking he gave them his full attention, he made eye contact, and he listened to what they had to say. And because he had a bit of reputation of an artist—right from the beginning—they were flattered that this person was interested in what they were doing. He had the ability to pick up on that the next time he saw them, saying "oh how are you coming along with that project?" This endeared him to the hearts of many and as his reputation increased, of course, the interest that he was having in them increased. So he had this ability. He was interested in everything. He would listen to you about—. On sports, he did paintings of boxers. That was one of the things he did with baseball. There was a fellow here – [Alexander] Kee Dewdney. He was involved in the '60s in Ann Arbor [Michigan] and he was doing movies then. You may have heard of Kee, he did *Scissors* and bunch of stuff. Anyway, he was around, we were all friends. Greg would see what he was doing and it was this general thing in the '60s that if you had an idea you could do it. You know, nobody seemed to stand in your way and say "oh no no, you can't do that." Somewhere along the line an 8mm camera came along. I don't know cameras well enough but at some point somebody had a Bolex. Are you familiar with those?

JB: Oh yes.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Art Pratten

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AP: I don't think this was a Bolex. I think a Bolex came a little later in the thing. And he had a camera, of course, so if you have a camera you have to aim it at stuff. By the time that came along the studio had been going for some time. And as I say, everybody was meeting there. I mean, I think I knew every president of the Philosophy Society for years on end because they would always wind up there, along with professors and people like James Reaney and Geoff Rans. All kinds of—. Playwrights and one thing or another. This whole art scene was churning and Greg's was sort of a meeting place. Totally unofficial, nobody ever said it was. It's just that all the people came there and he was an artist that felt perfectly at ease working with a whole bunch of people around who were talking to him, talking to other people. He didn't mind you coming back and saying "you know that's really nice, I like that. It could use some more green." And he would just nod his head and say "yeah." Whether he ever did it or not—. Whereas some artists didn't do that, guys like Jack Chambers. I think as long as I knew Jack, I was in his studio maybe three times for a total of seven minutes. I think Murray [Favro] looked in the door once. [John] Boyle can't remember if he was ever in his studio [*laughing*]. Greg's was entirely different and so things just happened. We had the Nihilist Party, it was—. There's a little poster Greg did up on the wall here [*gesturing*]—you can see it in a minute—of a woodcut of "Vote No, Vote Nihilist." It came out of conversations, we were joking. Then all of a sudden one day he printed off a bunch of posters, went around in the car, and started plastering them up on top of various real political posters, which was totally illegal of course. Then there was the Nihilist Party and we, of course, immediately had Nihilist Party membership cards and one thing or another because other parties did. And things happened, like we decided what we wanted to do was have a cottage. You know, somebody would have a cottage down at the lake at Port Stanley. Port Stanley was picked because when as kids we were growing up Port Stanley was this place to go because it was—. The "liver, pork, and sausage," it was the L&PS Railway that went from London to Port Stanley and as kids we'd have all gone there. So we wanted a cottage at Port Stanley and we thought we'd pool our money and get it for a couple weeks. Well the way it worked out was we sent the best-dressed people we had down and found a cottage and found that we could rent it for a month, and then found we could rent it for the whole summer. We rented the cottage for three months—June, July, and August—and it became No Haven. It must have been ten or fifteen people who threw in money, which was nothing. I think it startled and scared the hell out of the people we rented the cottage from because they had a house right beside it. But very quickly we endeared ourselves to their hearts and they were happy. They'd come over and we'd go over and borrow a larger pot for corn and one thing or another. They actually rented it to us a couple years after that. So there was No Haven. That got a lot of people together down there. That was another source you see in the movie. Of course, somebody talked about lacrosse and getting a lacrosse stick, and well we had to try out the lacrosse sticks and we were milling around in the schoolyard [Talbot Street School]. Again, it became a subject. Then, of course, because we were at Port Stanley there was a place at Port Stanley—. The hill, it's all got houses on it now. Inverness Heights [Invererie Heights] I think it was called. Anyway, it was traditionally a company picnic grounds. It was big and companies like Kellogg's or Labatt's [Brewing Company] or Sealey's Shoes or something—. The company would have their company picnic there and of course it would be all the traditional races and one thing or another. The bosses would all come in suits and the working people would come in whatever and bring their kids. And there would be speeches, the boss had to make a speech. So we had the same. This was at

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the height of hippie love-ins and the thing was we wanted it entirely different. We wanted an old '30s company picnic and that's what we did. We had all the traditional races and we had speeches. We even had a debate of sorts. We got a guy called Hilborn from Western [The University of Western Ontario] and he was a right-winger at the time. Nobody within the Nihilist Party was happy with American foreign politics—we're talking about '65 now—and he was. He was totally right-winged, "America's doing the right thing." But the man had a sense of humour. He came, he knew was walking into the lion's den—he was a professor at Western, he'd been harassed by students before—so he came and played it straight. Everybody got along fine, there was no problem there but there was this funny juxtaposition of people. We got along with him later all the time. And that was the [Nihilist] Spasm Band as such, the first people. We had kazoos there and we played No Canada, of course. But all these events you can see in the movies. They were just things we were doing and somebody would hold the camera. Now as often as this is referred to as Greg's movie, see how often Greg is in it. Somebody else is using the camera. The camera got passed around a dozen times, and what we shot—. I think the way it became Greg's movie with Greg in control—. He kept the camera, you see [*laughing*]. So when he tried out the camera we were shooting in it. That's how it was Greg's movie. Not taking anything away from it being Greg's movie, but it did fall into that same thing of a huge group effort.

JB: Right, more of a communal—.

AP: Yeah. Well the thing is, you can see from the movie that there isn't a lot of it. It doesn't take a lot of work. The interesting thing is the idea of doing it and how it was done and the fact that it was viewed as something that should be put together and kept as a unit, that it was something. I mean, I'm sure that there were all kinds of people making little home movies in their backyard that got lost. Nothing ever happened to them. This thing was recording what we were doing and it took on a life of its own and its own validity. It was just one of many little things that were moving at the same time. There was a lot of cogs and wheels and little things, like the banquet. Somebody thought that we ought to have a banquet and a prerequisite was to have rubber chicken. We had to have that. We made sure that that's what we were going to have. There were just—. There were a lot of things going on, it was a lot of fun. And this thing chronicled a lot of the stuff that was going on. The interesting thing is that nothing was ever staged for the movie. Nothing was ever staged. All those things are taking place regardless of the movie. The camera just showed up. I think the closest anybody actually did something directly for the movie is in the beach scene where people ran out of the water and Sheila [Curnoe] has a sign of something stuck in the front of her bikini. The rest of the time the camera was just moving amongst people, which is most obvious probably at the banquet. It never stays on one person too long, people are coming in and laughing and the camera is wheeling around. But it was probably truer than if somebody actually had tried to make a serious documentary about what was going on because the movie was really one of the people. Which I find, being part of it, as more interesting. You get the feeling that you're just in the—. You're part of being churned up in the thing, you're part of it. People with documentaries often go and try and make you feel that you're part of it [but] they can't always do it because they're professionals. This was not done that way. There were points where somebody was shooting like this [*gesturing*] and somebody would just hand off the

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camera because they wanted to go get a beer. So the height would change because you just handed it to somebody that was six inches taller or four inches shorter [*laughing*]. Yeah, it was fun. And it's good that—. The other thing—that if you've talked to Bill [Exley] you might've got and probably did—is that the one thing that was done for the movie as a group effort that we were doing for the movie, as opposed to the movie just floating around amongst us, was the soundtrack. We needed a soundtrack. So we had some kazoos—. Greg's studio, one of the big things up there was—. This was a time when there was lots of music. Everything from Béla Bartók, Stravinsky, Cage, Tudor, Stockhausen, The Beatles, rock and roll. Everything was going on. There was lots and lots of music. And for some reason there was a kettle drum up there. Why it was there, no one will [know]. And there was a terrible—what do you call it, not a xylophone—autoharp. There was an autoharp. And of course there was sticks that became drum sticks and we beat away because it was people like [inaudible] drummers like—. Well, I'm losing track of names. It was only sixty years ago. And so people would be playing on the back of chairs and stuff and somebody at some point had a couple kazoos and we started playing kazoos. So there were these things around. So we needed a soundtrack and what we got was some more kazoos [and] sat in a circle with a microphone in the middle and beer. We needed beer. There must've been—the mind moves—somewhere maybe sixteen of us. Maybe a little more, maybe a little less, all in a circle with kazoos and we did this soundtrack which was just everybody playing away as wildly as they could with no direction whatsoever. The only breaks you could get is if you went to get a beer or got another swallow of beer. The thing went on for some time until we just got tired. Somebody said "I think we've got enough" and that was the soundtrack. And that was really done for the movie, it was the only thing. The nice thing about it is it's lost [*laughing*]. It's gone, nobody knows where it is. But it was the genesis for the Spasm Band because out of that we had the kazoos. Now a lot of people thought—. We're talking about really sixteen, maybe as many as twenty people who were playing the kazoos. But then weeks later—and there had been kazoos at the No Picnic, just two or three of them—this was at the end of the summer, and into September some of us—. There was a guy called Tampa Red, a bluesman that played and I still have one of his records here. He had a kazoo and it had a bell on it, you know like a funnel on the top to make it a little louder. Harp players, blues harmonica players, would use a sort of funnel-bell on a harp, holding [it] out at the front to get a little more volume. So Hugh knew this could be done so he got a horn and we put that on and I made some kazoos. My first big kazoo was about this long [*gesturing*] and it was a—. Do you know what Gestetner is?

JB: No.

AP: It was a printing system. A Gestetner printer. The interesting thing was the fluid you used for it was poison. It was terrible stuff. The smell, it would be like having a Varsol can. Anyway, what I did was I got it cut down, rolled into a sort of funnel shape, cut a hole in the top, sauldered on a—. I think in this case I used the top off of the can and put it on top, so then you could screw something down on it. I screwed another horn down on top of that and put a membrane in so now I had a kazoo like this [*gesturing*]. Of course, the thing was that everybody could do stuff and was interested in stuff. I couldn't possibly have a kazoo like this and Greg not have something else. All of a sudden he was off to the wreckers getting car horns like they had on the top of transports and stuff. It just kept going from there. But then all of sudden, of course, not

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everybody wanted to be a kazoo player. Hugh McIntyre, being a big man liked Willie Dixon, he wanted to play bass. So all of a sudden there was a gutbucket. Murray was working with various things and he was doing a painting that still exists called *Boing* and what it was basically started out as a rectangle, of which he cut sort of—. Oh, you can see it in that picture up there, right behind you [*gesturing*]. The poster on its side.

JB: Oh yes, okay.

AP: Okay, that funny shape? Well he cut that and then there were positive and negative pieces to that and it was a painting that you hung on the wall and it looked like it fell and fell [*gesturing*] and went "boing" on the floor. Anyway, he found that if he got that thing and warped it, put strings on it and warped it, the whole thing would be like a big whammy bar. So he got a pickup out of God-only-knows-where. At one point he wound a pickup by winding wire around a magnet from our refrigerator door because basically that's what an electric thing is, you winding—. Anyway, there was that level of sort of inventive craziness. Anyway, all of a sudden Murray had a guitar and then it went from there. It was one of those things that grew out of the only thing that was actually deliberately made for *No Movie*, and it was lost but what it generated was the Spasm Band and that's gone on for fifty years [*laughing*]. Okay, you'd better get back to your questions because I've probably wandered all over the place.

25:42

JB: No, that's quite alright. Actually, you mentioned a lot of things that I want to return to so I'll just go through these.

AP: Okay, if you want to ask them I'll limit my answers and be more specific.

JB: Oh no, you speak as freely as you'd like. You know, I encourage that.

AP: [*laughing*]

JB: So you mentioned Hilborn from Western, the speaker that came to the picnic. I spoke to Sheila about that and she seemed to recall that he was booed or ill-received during the picnic. Was that something you remember? Bill didn't quite remember it that way so I'm just trying to—

AP: The speaker? Hilborn?

JB: Yeah.

AP: No, Hilborn was an active right-wing political at Western. A professor. He knew full-well who we were and he came. Now that says a lot for him in the first place. He knew that he was walking into the lion's den. Nobody was ferocious or violent in any way. This was all good fun. This was a picnic. He knew that, we knew that. Of course, he wasn't well-received, we harassed him. He came to be harassed and he had all the stock answers that a professor who had been harassed before had. He was in his element and he thought this was fun. He knew he could get

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away with responses with us that he couldn't get away with at school. So the thing was buoyant. Sheila sees things differently than I do at times. On other interviews and remembering things, I've noticed this. I've seen things differently than her. She may be right; I probably am wrong [*laughing*]. No, Hilborn—. You've been at university, you know what professors are like, they get harassed all the time. If they were thin-skinned they weren't going to make it to the second semester [*laughing*].

28:09

JB: [*laughing*] Right. Now just about the film – you mentioned that it gets attributed as Greg's movie quite frequently.

AP: Sure, nobody would argue that.

JB: Yeah, but you mentioned that the camera was getting passed around. Were you ever the camera operator at any point? Do you remember?

AP: I can't remember. Oh, I think I was in one of the lacrosse things. I held the camera one day. For whatever reason they were running up and down and I—. Yeah, if I remember correctly I was thinking in terms of tennis. [*gesturing* back and forth] You know how people—?

JB: Oh sure.

AP: I had the camera and I was panning back and forth. But that's a vague memory and I don't know if it ever—. A lot more stuff was shot than ever used, as you can imagine. You know people forget what they're doing and hold the thing down at their side and you've got a really great two minutes of their foot [*laughing*].

29:22

JB: [*laughing*] Right. Now I'll mention this because I came across this recently. There's a London Film Co-op catalogue from—. I think it's undated but sometime in the mid-'60s. And *No Movie* is in the catalogue. It's attributed to the Nihilist Party, not Greg.

AP: Right, that would be Greg.

JB: Oh okay, so that was his undertaking to make it available?

AP: Yeah, well right from the beginning, this was part of being interested in everything. You have to understand that Greg came from Toronto. He lived here, he came from Toronto, and what he wanted was a community. Okay? And this plagued him in a sense his entire life. He wanted a community and he encouraged people to do stuff. He didn't care what it was but he liked the idea that there were other artists like Jack Chambers and Tony Urquhart, and then along came Murray and Boyle. He encouraged everybody. What he wanted was the biggest thing possible and he did not like the idea—. He did not want to be the leader of it. What he wanted was this thing on its own and this is where it worked out with people like Reaney, who was into

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poetry and had a reputation of his own. He would collaborate with Reaney. He did painted sets for him and there was a lot of back and forth stuff. Jack Chambers illustrated—. Was it Book of the Dead [*The Dance of Death at London, Ontario*] for Reaney? A book of poetry. You know, there was this thing even with the Spasm Band. They would say "who's the leader of the Spasm Band?" We'd all say Greg is and he'd say "no I'm not!" [*laughing*]

JB: [*laughing*]

AP: It was this sort of thing. So having it in the catalogue, he probably—. See this is the thing that was a two-edged sword. He was probably very influential in having a catalogue of London movies. And in it is the Nihilist movie, which he would not agree to that it was his. And so he was probably the one that put it down there saying it was a Nihilist movie or something. But that was again one of Greg's endearing qualities. It trapped him in stuff, like he was head of Forest City Gallery forever and he had a hell of a time trying to get out of it because after a few times nobody could run it as well as he could. So nobody would stand for president, nobody was willing to run him off or anything and he was getting damned tired of that. He wanted other people to do stuff [*laughing*]. He was an interesting guy.

JB: Yeah, everyone I've spoken to speaks so endearingly of him. Yeah.

AP: You'd be hard pressed to find anybody that didn't like Greg. Oddly enough, a quick aside is that after he died they had a big show of his work at AGO [Art Gallery of Ontario] and they had speeches and one thing or another. One of the people they had speak was a London woman who was an artist [Sally McKay] and she said she had left London because of Greg, because his persona seemed to go through everything and she couldn't stand it anymore. But she is one of the people chosen to speak about Greg and, of course, even when she was saying things that on the surface might sound detrimental or [as] if she disliked [Greg], they all supported the persona of Greg being a bigger than life person and a nice guy and influencing all kinds of people in good ways. There was this element of "he's damned annoying because he's such a nice guy" [*laughing*].

JB: Right [*laughing*].

AP: But anyway, whoever asked her to speak—. And then she spoke and nobody took offence at it. They all could read between the lines.

34:25

JB: I think maybe I know the answer to this but the stock footage that ended up in the film—. So there's the octopus, the airplanes and stuff, that was all Greg editing and putting that in there?

AP: Yes. Well some of that is crazy. Like the octopus stuff. Do you know anything about Jack Chambers's films?

JB: Oh yeah, sure.

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AP: They got a lot of stuff from CFPL-TV, okay? And they got some stuff from the National Film Board [of Canada]. They just trashed the stuff to get what they wanted out of it. Now *No Movie* has very little. They got the octopus and some stuff that they stole from nature thing. But Jack just butchered stuff and gave them back the remnants [*laughing*]. That was one of the things that his—. It became a joke after but they said "never give Jack anything" [*laughing*]. You lend it to him, you sort of expected you'd get it all back. He just pillaged it. Artists, you got to keep an eye on them.

JB: Oh yeah, they're tricky [*laughing*]. Okay great, just one last question about that. I asked Bill about this and he wasn't too sure but the cost of buying the film and having it developed – was that something that you remember as Greg's undertaking or were people just chipping in the same way as No Haven?

AP: Well—. Okay, there were a bunch of artists and they were poor. Greg's studio as I said was big, it's probably been described to you. It was a great place. His rent at the first studio [432 Richmond Street] was \$29 a month. He couldn't always come up with the money so there were a few of us who would give him some money, lend him some money. When I say that, [inaudible] \$4, \$5, because he was that short. Hugh and I always had some money and we could always give him a few bucks and that would keep him. But lord, for the way we were living and the way it was, three or four bucks was nothing but he needed it. So if there was money needed for developing or one thing or another, somebody would always hand him some money. He would be using his money but if he needed some extra money, money appeared. That was the crazy thing with—. Greg was always short money. We'd be at the studio and somebody would say "it's 11 o'clock, if we're going to get beer we'd better go." Now we're talking about a day when you were buying glasses of beer at ten cents and hamburgers were thirty-five cents. We'd be going out the door and Greg would say "do you think you could buy me a couple beer?" "Sure" [*laughing*]. And a hamburger or something if he was hungry. I have a painting in there and the receipt for the painting is "for beer and hamburgers" because he always paid off debts and he'd give you a painting or a drawing in lieu of money because he didn't have money. But there was that sort of thing going on. It was all low budget. Nothing we ever did cost a lot of money and it was always a co-op thing, like the cottage. Everybody chipped in on the cottage and nobody spent a lot of money. Nobody had a lot of money. Can you imagine having a studio now—. Do you have any friends that are artists? A studio now for \$29 a month?

JB: Oh I'm sure they would love that [*laughing*].

AP: I think the going price for a studio now is something like \$500 a month and not in a very nice place.

JB: Yeah, I have quite a few friends in Toronto and I think they're paying more than that.

AP: Sure, yeah. A different world.

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JB: *[laughing]*

AP: We were making considerably less money overall then but—

39:13

JB: Right. So we've been sort of alluding to Jack Chambers and Kee Dewdney, and I mentioned the Film Co-op. Were you very aware of that film community at the time? Have you seen a lot of the London films?

AP: Well I've seen, of course, all of Jack's things and most all of Dewdney's and some of the other stuff too. But again, as I said, you couldn't be unaware of it but you weren't hyper aware of it because there was so many things—. The Film Co-op was just one more of many things and you were seeing the films anyway. My feeling about the Co-op was it was just some place where they were trying to archive them. There was this big idea that they've got to have a copy of everybody's work. That was sort of the main thing. And Hugh McIntyre was the films and music librarian at the main branch. He did all kinds of movies, Kinotek movies, and had film societies. This was before you could have movies on Sundays and he wound up renting a major theatre downtown. You could be a member of Kinotek and then you could go to the movies on Sunday. The movies would be *Wild Strawberries* or [Ingrid] Bergman or French New Wave or Italian New Wave or something. There was that sort of thing going on. And he also had movies at the library. A movie night at the library every week which always had that classic film *Bambi Meets Godzilla*. Every week *[laughing]*. And he'd have Laurel and Hardy and foreign movies. Most of them all were foreign movies because you didn't get foreign movies here. But the movie thing was interesting in the sense that—. Saturday night my wife and I—at the time my girlfriend—would go to the show. We'd go out and get something to eat and then somewhere after twelve we'd go to the Vincent's house. I don't know if you've heard the name Don and Bernice Vincent.

JB: Oh yeah.

AP: Okay. We'd go to their place and knock on the door and it was times that you'd go in the door and there were 10-15 people there and we'd talk 'til morning. Bernice was notorious for wrapping herself up in an afghan, going to sleep on the floor, and waking up later *[laughing]*. But you could knock on the door—it happened more than once—knock on the door and the door would open a little and they'd say "just a minute, be quiet, there are people on the floor." You'd open the door and slip in and we're watching *Last Year at Marienbad* sitting on the floor at their apartment. So there was a general level of interest in movies all the time.

JB: You were just speaking about watching movies at the Vincent's house. I think Bill told me this, that there was a rather large screening at Greg's studio of *No Movie*. I think a lot of people were invited. Do you have any recollection of that?

AP: No, a large number of people at Greg's studio would be a blur. There was always a large number of people at Greg's studio *[laughing]*. There may well have been, they may have done that. Something I just don't remember.

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JB: Sure. Do you remember it being shown at all around that time period? Was it shown—?

AP: Oh, I don't know where it was being shown but I saw it often enough. I think along with *Bambi Meets Godzilla* it was shown at Hugh's Kinotek, because Hugh ran Kinotek. There was two things. Kinotek took two forms: one, there was the form—I'm not sure if it was once a month, I think it was definitely once a month—at one of the major theatres downtown where you would see a big European movie; and then there were weekly Kinoteks that were in the theatre at the library. At the library, as I said, *Bambi Meets Godzilla* was there every week. Kinotek was huge. He did damn well what he pleased and showed the movies he liked. Now he'd show movies that some of us requested. Laurel and Hardy and one thing or another, we needed to see those over and over again. But he would show *No Movie* there every once in a while too just because it was his. He ran the thing. Murray was the projector and then this other fellow Bob McKenzie ran the projector. Hugh used the thing to be able to drum up money to pay Murray. Murray was an artist, he needed money, so he hired him as a projector.

JB: And I guess at those Kinotek showings, do you remember the audience response? Was it mostly people who were involved? I mean, the Nihilist Party.

AP: Well there was always the people who were involved in the movie there, some of them at least, but other people seemed to like it. If you were looking at foreign movies and things like Kinotek in the '60s because basically there wasn't anything like this anywhere else, you were already an appreciative audience. You were willing to take a look at anything because between a [François] Truffaut movie and Bergman movie you could see Dewdney's *Scissors*. This was what people were doing. Of course, Dewdney was getting his access to stuff that they were doing at Ann Arbor. There was a big film community there. Which reminds me, I've got to get my brochure back. I have a brochure of Ann Arbor from that time and I just lent it to the young lady down the street because she's doing stop-motion movies. She won several awards, big awards, and her next project is she's working with—and I keep forgetting his name—a black guy who is older now, almost as old as me, who did David Bowie's *Let's Dance* album and a couple others [Nile Rodgers]. He worked with David Bowie and she's working with him now in New York. The thing is once you know some people you tend to find out [about] other people. Or where somebody's mentioned—. They say "oh you do a movie" and you say "that's nice" and it goes by you. If you've had some contact and they say "you've made a movie" and you say "oh yeah" and all of a sudden it becomes a talking point and you veer off in that direction for a while. This girl down the street is very good, I've helped her make sets. I have a saw in the basement so I can make things. And for stop motion you need good, sturdy sets so I've been helping her make those.

JB: What's her name?

AP: Don't do this to me.

JB: [laughing]

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AP: Sarah Legault. Sarah Legault.

JB: Okay.

AP: She had one that was a film short and she had sent it to Cannes and got a letter back saying that they really liked the movie and if she does another one be sure to send it to them. They were overwhelmed this year and could only show so many of them, but it was a nice enough response back. Yeah, she's done a couple things. More than a couple things now.

49:15

JB: Now we've been mostly chatting about *No Movie*, for obvious reasons, but are you familiar with Greg's other films?

AP: Oh yeah.

JB: Maybe we'll chat about it after—. We'll take a little break after the interview before we watch them but I have video copies of all of them, or at least the ones that are readily available.

AP: You know that they're also online at [Michael] Gibson Gallery here?

JB: Oh right, that's where I found them. But we also have *Souwesto*, which is not online but—. Anyway, I have a copy.

AP: Okay. I lose track, what's in *Souwesto*? Is he wandering around the streets?

JB: No, that's *Connexions*.

AP: *Connexions*, right.

JB: Yeah, he does his own commentary, with names and places.

AP: "Where Jack Chambers lives" and "wound up on the roof." Yeah.

JB: Yeah, exactly. But *Souwesto* is from 1969 and it has footage of the 1967 and 1968 picnics and there's some footage from an *Umbrella* CBC—

AP: Yep, okay.

JB: Do you have any memory of that film? When Greg was working on it? Anything of that nature?

AP: Sort of yes or no. I certainly remember the *Umbrella* thing. That was an interesting thing. Greg—. You have to understand how it worked. You know how you go to school and you're a

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student and you're fairly influenced by your professors, whether you like it or not? You move to [Alfred North] Whitehead or—. And you tend to walk away with that. For some reason, whatever it was, Greg quickly found that he wasn't entirely in sync with the College of Art, within a year. But he was in sync with some of the painters there. There were people like [Graham] Coughtry. Harold Town was just one step ahead. He knew [him] but didn't get to hang out with him, but there were people like Mike Snow and all this sort of stuff. So he hung in at the College of Art, whereas some of the painters around here didn't, like there are several local guys that lasted four months or six months and said "to hell with this" and left. Greg hung in so he could stay in Toronto. That was the trick, to stay in Toronto and hang out with the artists. Going to school was a legitimate thing because, like [in] many cases, families were hoping their son was going to amount to something rather than be an artist. And there wasn't a lot of money in the family but he could continue to get some help as long as he was at school. But basically his last year he failed out. He was getting really things like a quarter of a mark and a third of a mark for a whole course! So there was this thing. He got to know these people in Toronto but he had this thing for London, he wanted to come back here because he liked it and it was cheap, cheaper than Toronto. This is a preamble for many of the things that happened. He wanted to have a scene here too. This is the thing with *Umbrella* when they came: the guy that ran the show [William Ronald] was also a Toronto artist, you know, and of course they were coming down to the hillbillies to see what they were doing. They were coming down for a laugh and the thing was we just shocked the hell out of them. We were too stupid and naive to know that we may be being viewed as the country bumpkins. We just flew right over them and they were shocked, they didn't know what the hell to do with the thing. And we were totally naive in this, we just thought we were having fun and they came down to have fun. They wound up—. I guess when they got the stuff they didn't know what the hell to do because what they would have liked to have done is just forgot it. But they couldn't do that because there were some people in the group—programmers and one thing or another—that thought "this is crazy." And I can't remember the name of the guy that did the interview but he was a Toronto artist, an established artist. He wasn't sure what the hell to do with us but he wound up doing the show anyway and of course it became somewhat notorious. Shortly after that, London wound up in *Time* magazine. Another thing was *Time Magazine* asked Greg to do a cover and he said "no." He was going to do a magazine cover for *Time Magazine*. It was another one of those things I've heard at least six or seven times in Greg's career: people say "he's done it this time, his career is over, he's really screwed himself this time." Every bloody time he worked right through it. There was that and then there was the Toronto papers sent down people and *Time Magazine* did do something on it and [the] York [Hotel] got all kinds of notoriety. Again, the thing was—. This is the thing with Greg that you have to understand. This place, the York Hotel, you've heard of?

JB: [agreeing]

AP: Okay. Greg's studio was just up the street. It was the closest place to drink beer, that was the main thing and also it wasn't very busy. And there was a ladies and escorts—this is the old days—a ladies and escorts side and then there was a men's side. So we could always gather up a woman and a table and we could get to the good side. So we would go down there and there was a piano. And there was a guy who wore a bowler hat and a black and white striped shirt with arm

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garters and his name was Gard Wigley. He played sort of ragtime piano. Maybe. It's hard to say what he played. His claim to fame was he played with Guy Lombardo once, and Guy Lombardo just lived over here a few blocks away [inaudible]. Anyway, that was his claim to fame. So the piano is there and we're down there with Peter Denny from Western and another fellow [Alex Kelly], who's name will come back to me in a minute, who was a piano player. We were drinking beer and this piano player went over and started to play piano. Moe [Assaf] and Eddie [Assaf] came running out and said "don't touch the piano." We said "no, he's a piano player, he can play, listen" and he played and they said "well alright." So he was fiddling around playing because there was a lot of [inaudible] jazz. He was hardly doing Thelonious Monk, but that sort of thing. He did this [for] a couple weeks on a Tuesday night when we were down. Because he was at Western, Tuesday night was his night that he could get away. At one point we said to Moe "if we brought down a bass player and horn player, could they play some jazz?" He said "well we'll try it." Anyway, they did and this was Greg sort of spearheading this thing, just agitating it. So it turned out that's what they did, they started playing jazz on Tuesday nights, sort of free jazz. Then somebody else said "if they can do that, maybe we can play on Wednesday night." This is happening really fast. Like '66 mid-winter, around New Years. And somebody else talked about playing on a Wednesday night. So Greg came down again—we were there one night—saying "we've got a band." This is the Spasm Band. We've only been going since—. Well we didn't know we were going, it was just that we kept getting together and making noise but we had been playing since the first kazooos for the *No Movie* in '65 and we fooled around with building in the Fall. And so, I don't know, by May we asked if we could go down and we'll play on Monday night. Now Monday night is absolutely the deadest night in the world at a bar. Nobody is there Monday night. And they said "alright." So word spread. We packed the place the first night, all full of crazies, and then we played. Moe and Eddie did not like the sound at all but they liked selling beer. They'd never sold so much beer in their life [*laughing*]. So it went on like that. It went on like that for years and we attracted people. Then other groups came. There was a group called Dixie Flyers, a bluegrass group that still exists, they still play a bit. They moved in I think on a Thursday or Friday night and a blues band playing on a Saturday night. All of a sudden they were the place to be. There's pictures of Buckminster Fuller down there with us playing. Now the thing was everybody was surprised that Buckminster Fuller was down at the York listening to the Spasm Band but they forget that Buckminster Fuller was on the cutting edge his whole life. He was part of the Black Mountain [College] people in New York. He knew what the hell we were doing; he knew better than we did. But to people here it was a complete surprise. But again it was that sort of thing, that sort of churning. People were just doing stuff and it was moving so fast. And in a sense, what was achieved was what Greg wanted. Like we had no connection with the bluegrass group in a sense, except we went to hear them, or the other groups that were playing. Now the jazz group on Tuesday night we did because we sort of knew these people and we got it going and one thing or another, but all of a sudden all these autonomous things started to take place. And along with that crazy stuff is Murray and John Clement were racing motorcycles. Modifying and racing motorcycles and they were working with a guy called [Graham] Dewhurst, who was an English crazy guy who knew about motors and a couple guys wound up making—. During the '60s—

[end of Track One]

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TRACK TWO (STE-007.wav)

00:00

AP: —motorsport was going, it had just started, and there was a thing called Canada Class Racers where you built something and basically you got to use a Volkswagen engine or something in it. These guys were building race cars. They were racing. Clement still does race motorcycles. He falls, gets himself all banged up and one thing or another. He's got really good bikes. He's in his 70s now, he doesn't know you're supposed to stop. But that's the thing that's happened to many of us, we didn't know there was a time limit. Greg knows there's a time limit now and so does Hugh, they're both dead. But there was that sort of thing flowing through. You wouldn't have to know—. Like you're talking about the film—

JB: Oh *Souwesto*.

AP: Yeah, I didn't have to know about that, that was just more stuff. Oh, there was one guy, I don't know whatever happened to him, but he was here. He fooled around with making movies for a while. He saw Roman Polanski's *Knife in the Water*. Are you familiar with that?

JB: [*agreeing*]

AP: Okay, he saw that and it was a life changing event. Six months later he was on his way to Poland to go to the film school that Roman Polanski went to. I don't think I ever heard of him again but there was that sort of thing happening to everybody all over. That was one of the things with the picnic. The picnic, we did it a couple times in the summertime, then what we did was we moved it to the first Sunday after Labour Day. The point was we caught people coming back to university and the professors because they went to the thing, to the picnic. And so it became—. There were no invitations, everybody just knew it was the first Sunday after Labour Day. And we're still doing them. The last official one was for fifty years and now we've had a couple that [are] whoever shows up, and people still show up. And people who would leave and go elsewhere and then four years later come back to the picnic because they knew that it was like a reunion that was going to take place. There were all kinds of people who did that. Tony Penikett. Tony Penikett was in at the beginning, he was in theatre here. But Tony Penikett, through a long round way, he became the NDP Premier—oh I guess he wouldn't be Premier—but for the Yukon and he was at the Charlottetown—. No it wasn't Charlottetown. What was the thing when we pissed off Quebec?

JB: Oh—

AP: The thing where they wanted special status and one thing or another and [Elijah] Harper—the good Harper, the Indian—waved his feather and said "no go." Anyway, Tony Penikett came down for that. He made a speech at that thing. So there were all these people—. Then he came to

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the picnic [*laughing*]. It was all those kind of crazy connections. Which reminds me I'm going to have to try and chase down Tony and find out where he is now.

JB: [*laughing*] Okay, great. So I think at this point this might be a good chance for a little break.

AP: Sure.

JB: I don't have anymore specific questions and you've gone through quite a bit so let me stop this.

AP: Okay. This is where you find—

[end of Track Two]

TRACK THREE (STE-008.wav)

JB: Okay, I'll just introduce this one more time. So this is Jesse Brossoit with Art Pratten at his home in London, Ontario. It's May 22nd, 2016 and we're just going to watch No Movie and record commentary. That's going to start right now.

No Movie Commentary

[video playback begins at first on-screen image]

Oral History Recording	Video Playback	Commentary
00:17	00:00	[playback begins]
00:22	00:05	AP: [<i>laughing</i>] Immediately, out of the sea.
00:35	00:18	AP: [<i>laughing</i>]
00:45	00:28	AP: I don't know, maybe just this—. I've watched it before and I see it paler than I remembered. I thought the colours were more vivid but I guess they just simply weren't. JB: It could also be the video reproduction. AP: It may be but I think if you watch it on Gibson's [Michael Gibson Gallery] ¹ it's a similar sort of thing.
01:22	01:05	AP: Yeah [<i>laughing</i>]. See there's Greg and there's Sheila. Sheila's got her ring.
01:32	01:15	AP: Okay. Oh some of these are "the nurses," we inherited a bunch of nurses.

¹ "No Movie," Vimeo video, 8:28, posted by Michael Gibson Gallery, January 29, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/85391538>.

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01:41	01:24	AP: There's my wife [Barbara Pratten]. There's Hugh. Hugh without a beard.
01:46	01:29	AP: Ron Martin with a beard.
01:50	01:33	AP: And Greg. See somebody else has got the camera.
01:55	01:38	AP: And Bill, he looks—. Bill wound up with my hat and my high collar at one point.
02:04	01:47	AP: See those are paintings of the posters—that I've got here—that we made that were on real political posters [<i>Dada / Mother</i>].
02:20	02:03	AP: And rubber chicken.
02:24	02:07	AP: Ah yes, speeches. We still have treasury reports. We don't have any money.
02:36	02:19	AP: Bill is so skinny there. Bill on the beach has a maroon seersucker bathing suit that his mother bought him when he was about seven years old and he was still wearing it.
02:55	02:38	AP: Yeah, see this is great panning. JB: Oh do you think that's your work? AP: [<i>laughing</i>] I don't know but let's hope not.
03:06	02:49	AP: Oh a Vulcan. I actually went under the wing of that. Not this time—this is a separate thing they've got—but it was out at an airshow here at the airport and I was flying a Cessna and we taxied in under the wing of that thing when it was on display.
03:25	03:08	AP: This is Port Stanley again.
03:29	03:12	AP: Ah, that's interesting. Hugh was just growing a beard that summer.
03:33	03:16	AP: There's Archie [Leitch], long-lost Archie.
03:35	03:18	AP: There's Gard Wigley!
03:45	03:28	AP: [<i>laughing</i>] And Murray with hair.
03:50	03:33	AP: There, that's Moe. They ran the place [the York Hotel]. Oh yeah, the nihilists had blue sunglasses. This is for real in the late nineteenth century.
04:11	03:54	AP: I don't know who this fellow is. We'd have adopted him; he may have bought beer.
04:20	04:03	AP: Oh, there's Gard.
04:32	04:15	AP: [<i>laughing</i>] And the men's room.
04:45	04:28	AP: Again, every time you see Greg obviously he isn't the cameraman.
04:51	04:34	AP: [<i>laughing</i>]
04:56	04:39	AP: Ah, the cottage No Haven.
05:02	04:45	AP: You'll notice it's summertime; Bill's wearing a coat.
05:08	04:51	AP: Oh races.
05:16	04:59	AP: We still have that sign. I still have it downstairs and put it up at every picnic.

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05:25	05:08	AP: See now Bill has inherited my hat and I think he's got my collar. Bill isn't one person. I don't know who Bill is really but he's a series of personas.
05:38	05:21	AP: That's Geoff Rans, he was a writer. He was a professor at Western.
05:45	05:28	AP: Here's Hilborn. He doesn't look too threatened there. The lynch mob is enjoying the show. You can see what kind of a turnout we could get. I went down and got my parents. If I could find me, I went and got my parents there with me. And it was that sort of thing. Oh, we needed kids so people brought children off their street. They went to parents and asked if they could borrow their kid for the day and the parents said "take 'em" <i>[laughing]</i> .
06:28	06:11	AP: Strangling a dog?
06:35	06:18	AP: Yep, Bill.
06:38	06:21	AP: Here we go, aeroplanes. Those are Supermarine Swifts.
06:49	06:32	AP: <i>[laughing]</i>
06:53	06:36	AP: Oh, he had his "NO" sweater that early.
06:58	06:41	AP: Yep, there's Jack with Diego and a pregnant wife [Olga Chambers].
07:20	07:03	AP: <i>[inaudible]</i> . What's the date? August?
07:30	07:13	AP: Have you ever played lacrosse? JB: Not since my school days I don't think, no. AP: Then you know the fantastic speed that you can hammer a ball. JB: Oh yeah <i>[laughing]</i> . AP: You get hit with one of those things and it can just kill you. We put one right through this chain-link fence. The ball hit the fence and just distorted and went right through. JB: They're solid rubber, right? AP: Hard as a rock. You throw them and the first bounce is high, the second bounce is straight out.
08:07	07:50	AP: <i>[laughing]</i>
08:14	07:57	AP: There's two guys in here I can't see. There's a guy called John Cairns and he was "Big John" and then there's John Clement who was "Little John."
08:27	08:10	AP: I'm not shooting this because I was—there I am—somewhere around in here with a striped sweater.
08:35	08:18	AP: And Bill with a suitcoat. Bill did not run around.

08:47

JB: So that's that.

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AP: That's kind of nice, I don't remember that.

JB: Now we don't have to watch all of Souwesto. As I said it's quite a bit longer and some of it is home movie footage of Sheila—

AP: There is some of the beach, I remember, that is missing, because I remember a bunch of people walking along parallel to the beach. A bunch of people. I remember one particular person in it; she wasn't there.

JB: Was that footage that you've seen or you just remember shooting it?

AP: That I've seen, yeah. I don't know where, it wasn't here.

JB: Oh, interesting. But if we can jump ahead.

AP: Oh, there was the kettle drum. We kept that for a long time but it was just a bitch to transport.

JB: So this was "the Happening" I believe.

AP: Oh hell, I know people who would love to have seen that.

JB: Would you like to watch that?

AP: "The Happening." The background of that was that—. "The Happening" was early.

Souwesto Commentary

[video playback begins at first on-screen image]

Oral History Recording	Video Playback	Commentary
10:04	00:38	[playback begins]
10:06	00:40	AP: It really was the thing that declared [that] Greg was back, [that] Tony Urquhart was here, [that] Jack was here. The art scene—
10:16	00:50	AP: Oh that was the mayor of the city right there, or she became the mayor [Jane Bigelow].
10:20	00:54	AP: There I am wandering around with Jack. If you see somebody doing the laundry that was my wife. My wife was doing the laundry.

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10:29	01:03	AP: Is that James Reaney? [My wife] was doing the laundry and had a washing machine up there and she was hanging out the laundry.
10:38	01:12	AP: Now who was this? [inaudible] good.
10:46	01:20	AP: Oh that's Brian Dibb, a legendary person.
10:55	01:29	AP: And this, see this, this was a display cabinet. Mike Snow and Joyce Wieland were up in here and this drove the curator of the gallery just crazy. He just went out of his mind. "This is a gallery! This is an art gallery!" And it wasn't Crouch [London Public Library – Crouch Branch], this is something different. That was the main gallery. This is the first big show that Greg had in London, it was at Crouch gallery. JB: Do you know what year this would have been in? Greg was back— AP: Greg was back and working. If I can see a work, maybe I can tell. It would have to be [1963]. ²
11:52	02:26	AP: This was like nothing else this city or any place else had seen because you see some of his stuff was sort of neo-Dadaist. And this was the thing that we argued about, that London was a place like—. [inaudible] place like New York and Toronto. London was like a workshop. You could come here and work and nobody told you what to do. You could do stuff here.
12:23	02:57	AP: Ah there I am, looking casual and smoking a cigarette.
12:27	03:01	AP: "Region Gallery." "Group show."
12:33	03:07	AP: With pipes. God, I was a good looking guy.
12:39	03:13	AP: That's Geoff Rans. Jack.
12:43	03:17	AP: My wife.
12:49	03:23	AP: And something. Oh Matt Wherry. He was an out-and-out card-carrying communist here. He was the head of a union, the book-binder's union here. Greg and Jack did paintings of him. Really a nice guy.
13:11	03:45	AP: One leg.
13:21	03:55	AP: Yep.
13:26	04:00	AP: I think it was Geoff Rans—. I took my copy of <i>What About Me</i> down and gave it to Geoff Rans when he was dying of cancer and I think that's how it got separated from me is that I just never got it back.
13:48	04:22	AP: Greg was getting away with doing stuff like this.
13:53	04:27	AP: And there's Tony Urquhart and I don't recognize that guy.
13:58	04:32	AP: Oh there's the gut bucket!
14:02	04:36	AP: And there's Clement.
14:10	04:44	AP: And Bill.

² The narrator misspoke here and corrected himself after the recording had finished.

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14:19	04:53	AP: Murray.
14:29	05:03	AP: There is one of my kazoos.
14:36	05:10	AP: And there is—. Yeah. That's a Gestetner kazoo.
14:50	05:24	AP: <i>[laughing]</i> He's totally demented.
15:10	05:44	AP: Somebody said that Bill does a terrific Hitler imitation even when he's not <i>[laughing]</i> .
		JB: Actually, that's funny, I think there's a photo of him in this—
15:26	06:00	AP: Hugh's here. Hugh had started growing that in the summer and now he's up to this point. This is in the fall. This is before we really go out and attack the world.
15:37	06:11	AP: This is the size of the studio, you know. There were all these people hanging around and us playing and there were places—. And there was smoke, you notice that? People are smoking.
15:49	06:23	AP: <i>[laughing]</i> Look, they had a bonfire.
15:53	06:27	AP: I think it's this guy! I think it's this guy that went to Poland! What the hell is his name?
16:10	06:44	AP: That's Anne Brodsky. She headed the gallery up here and then she wound up with a big gallery in California [Meridian Gallery]. And she was a very big favourite of John Boyle's.
16:25	06:59	AP: For that reason, right there.
16:31	07:05	AP: Oh this is him. That's the guy that came up here [William Ronald]. Look at him. He doesn't know what the hell he's—. Look at his eyes! It's perfect. <i>[laughing]</i> He didn't know what the hell to do with us.
16:44	07:18	AP: Sheila and the cat.
16:49	07:23	AP: That's a nice one. <i>Feeding Percy</i> .
16:54	07:28	AP: Greg did this, part of this, very early in his relationship with Sheila, I think even before they—. I think when they practically first dated. She lived over here a couple blocks.
17:11	07:45	AP: And there's Percy. I don't know what the hell the other one's named.
17:49	08:23	AP: Siamese cats. Yuck. They're dangerous animals.
17:58	08:32	AP: There's all our lacrosse sticks.
18:04	08:38	AP: This is the studio and there was a room behind it.
18:06	08:40	AP: R-34 was a dirigible. That <i>[gesturing]</i> . That's it up there.
18:16	08:50	AP: Oh, the thing was with that sign, they were tearing down a hotel. Greg and a guy that would soon become his brother-in-law saw it and they just grabbed it and ran off with it, lightbulbs and all.
18:32	09:06	AP: This is one of his best paintings [<i>The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels</i>].
18:38	09:12	AP: And you could go up there and run around and "Yeah, needs more blue."
18:46	09:20	AP: It's nice to see it in work. Screwing in the bulbs.

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18:52	09:26	AP: "Art is the complement of a weak mind."
18:58	09:32	AP: That's Peter Denny, of course, and that's—. Damn. This is the first band at the York. JB: Right, the Tuesday nights. AP: On Tuesday nights.
19:15	09:49	AP: And this is the band. He made this orgone box [<i>Kamikaze</i>] and you could get in there and supposedly warp your mind. In an orgone box. Do you understand those? JB: No. AP: No? Okay, it was a type of art therapy used in Europe and at the moment—. The guy who developed it, I forget his name [Wilhelm Reich]. But it was a real thing and Greg made one but the Spasm Band were painted all over it.
19:46	10:20	AP: That's Owen [Curnoe]. See that was another thing—
19:55	10:29	AP: There's Archie. That's his side. It'll probably spin this thing around.
20:02	10:36	AP: See that was on of the things right from the beginning, as opposed to being—
20:06	10:40	AP: There's Clement and Boyle.
20:17	10:51	AP: Instead of wanting to be starving artists—
20:22	10:56	AP: And Hugh and I.
20:27	11:01	AP: —starving artists and garrets and one thing or another, we all wanted to have homes and families. Greg, when he got on Weston Street [38 Weston Street], where you were, he went in through the studio, but you went through the house. That never existed. That wall was—. He'd have breakfast, say goodbye to Sheila, go out the door, walk to the back, and go into his studio. He went to work and came home from work. And he never had that open, not as long as he was alive. Sheila opened it.
21:04	11:38	AP: Isn't that good to have a little kid to go get your cigarettes for you? That's what you have kids for, isn't it? To get your cigarettes and go get you a beer and stuff.
21:24	11:58	AP: Yeah, this one I haven't seen in a long time.
21:36	12:10	AP: Have you met Owen? JB: No, I've spoken to him through email but I've never met him. AP: He's in Toronto. He's a got a little kid of his own now. Oh, I'm not sure how little the kid is now.
21:51	12:25	AP: [<i>laughing</i>] Did you see the cat? It walked along and just fell over.
22:07	12:41	AP: See there was a lot of attention paid to lighting [<i>laughing</i>].
22:17	12:51	AP: See now this really is Greg's movie. He'd shoot the whole thing. There's things in here—young ladies walking away from you, swinging their ass—that's definitely Greg's. And the kids.

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		He really liked the kids. You know how some dads tolerate kids? He really liked them.
23:02	13:36	AP: This is up at—. [<i>laughing</i>] Archie. That's at Victoria Park up here. I don't know what the heck this would have been. I wonder if it was one of Reaney's plays or something being put on. That was the sort of thing he did. You see there was a time when—
23:38	14:12	AP: That's Sheila's father.
23:41	14:15	AP: There was a time when Reaney was putting on a play a week. He had rented the upstairs of a place downtown. It was just deserted. You knew he was having plays, that he was going to do these plays, and you went on a certain night. It cost next to nothing to go but you brought your own chair, your own fold-up chair. They were a cross between dress rehearsals and readings and the play. And sometimes, knowing Reaney, that whole thing was one thing. The play itself looked like a reading. But the thing is that you could be grabbed and [they would] say "we need another reader. You're in the play, this is your part, read it." That happened to Boyle more than once. You went up to see a play and you were in it [<i>laughing</i>].
24:34	15:08	AP: That kid's got teeth.
24:40	15:14	AP: Oh, I think this—. Is this one Galen? You've got to see the hair; Galen's hair was never red.
24:53	15:27	AP: Yep, this is more likely Galen.
25:03	15:37	AP: Okay, this is another picnic – and where the hell are we?
25:08	15:42	AP: Oh that's my car.
25:12	15:46	AP: [<i>laughing</i>]
25:16	15:50	AP: Oh, this may be the first picnic at Poplar Hill.
25:21	15:55	AP: There's a guy I worked with. See you started dragging in all your friends. Work friends and one thing or another.
25:28	16:02	AP: That was Barry Richman. He's wound up an artist and lives in Grand Bend.
25:37	16:11	AP: There's a camera in the midst and that's the sort of way that movies were made.
25:48	16:22	AP: It would really be good—. You've seen this a dozen times, is there a guy in a wheelchair? JB: Not that I remember. AP: Okay, there was a guy—Frank DeChico—and he came to the picnics and he was in a wheelchair. He was hunched over like this [<i>gesturing</i>] and he had legs that sort of ended in paddles, about his knees. He was really a great guy. He worked in St. Thomas as a human resources person. Anyway, we had two-legged races, three-legged races, no-legged races. He said "no-legged race is for me" and he rolled out and he threw himself out on the ground and crawled to the other end [<i>laughing</i>].

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Art Pratten

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

26:46	17:20	AP: <i>[laughing]</i> They're trying to get the kid to go. "Go, go, go!"
26:54	17:28	AP: This is at the same place that we're having picnics now still.
27:05	17:39	AP: We have kick the shoes. We have it all. Nothing like kicking your shoe into the tree. <i>[laughing]</i> What are they doing?! That's obscene!
27:20	17:54	AP: That's Peter Denny I think.
27:26	18:00	AP: Yeah, you don't want to fall on your nose.
27:32	18:06	AP: And there's a camera there going too.
27:34	18:08	AP: <i>[laughing]</i> Look at this. This is sort of a crawl.
27:42	18:16	AP: And again, you see Greg running around so somebody else has got the camera.
27:50	18:24	AP: Oh, this is the Exley jump. The whole point of this thing is to do this <i>[gesturing]</i> for as long as possible. We actually had one guy doing it for an hour. James Reaney Sr. was the winner at one point. Now everybody is pretty aware of it and they only do it for fifteen minutes. You've got to be stupid to do it but everybody does it.
28:24	18:58	AP: Ah, that's Galen.
28:42	19:16	AP: He's got that look of a little kid that's got gas or something. He's either going to throw up or take a shit.
28:55	19:29	AP: You know—. Well you were over at Sheila's. They had cats. At one point years ago, one of their cats went down into the back, which goes down to the river, and caught a pheasant. It dragged the thing up, hauled it through the cat door into the back kitchen. Sheila seen it and sort of freaked out that this thing was dead and flopping. Her mother took a look at it and said "hey, this is great!" She grabbed it, rung its neck, they plucked it, and ate it <i>[laughing]</i>

29:27

JB: *[laughing]* Oh, now it's done.

AP: I like your cones.

JB: Oh thank you *[laughing]*.

AP: They seem to be the appropriate thing to have in there.

JB: Yeah. Okay, great.

AP: Okay, I'm happy. I don't think I've said anything that will embarrass myself.

JB: No, I don't think so.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Art Pratten

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

AP: As long as you strip out the stuff about Sheila and Bill.

JB: Oh sure.

AP: They've heard it all.

JB: [*laughing*] Well I'll send you—. Let me stop this here.

[end of Track Three]

[END OF RECORDING]

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): John Clement

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

Narrator: John Clement (JC)

Interviewer: Jesse Brossoit (JB)

Date of Interview: 2016-05-22

Location of Interview: London, Ontario, Canada

Length of Interview: 57:41

Description: In this interview, the narrator discusses his relationship with Greg Curnoe and provides commentary for the films *No Movie* (1965) and *Souwesto* (1947-1969).

Topics:

People

Assaf, Edward "Eddie" (1915-1990)
Assaf, Moses "Moe" (1914-1996)
Boyle, John (1941-)
Brotsky, Anne (unknown)
Cairns, John (1943-)
Chambers, John "Jack" (1931-1978)
Clement, John (1943-)
Clement, Shirley (unknown)
Curnoe, Galen (1968-)
Curnoe, Greg (1936-1992)
Curnoe, Owen (1966-)
Curnoe, Sheila (1942-, nee Thompson)
Denny, Peter (1934-)
Erickson, Gwen (unknown)
Exley, Norma (unknown)
Exley, William "Bill" (1939-)
Favro, Murray (1940-)
Hilborn, Kenneth (1934-2013)
Kropotkin, Peter (1842-1921)
Laithwaite, George (1873-1956)
Leitch, Archie (unknown)
MacDonald, John A. (1815-1891)
Martin, Ron (1943-)
McIntyre, Hugh (1936-2004)
Nechayev, Sergey (1847-1882)
Picabia, Francis (1879-1953)
Pratten, Art (1939-)
Pratten, Barbara (1941-)
Rans, Geoffrey (1927-2001)

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): John Clement

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

Rabinowitch, Royden (1943-)
Robarts, John (1917-1982)
Ronald, William (1926-1998, born William Ronald Smith)
Théberge, Pierre (1942-)
Urquhart, Tony (1934-)
Wherry, Matthew (1915-1984)
Wigley, Gard (unknown)
Woodward, Michael (unknown)

Places

38 Weston Street, London, Ontario, Canada (*Curnoe's home and permanent studio*)
432 Waterloo Street, London, Ontario, Canada
Laithwaite Farm, Goderich, Ontario, Canada
Melody Tea Room, London, Ontario, Canada (*closed*)
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
No Haven, Port Stanley, Ontario, Canada (*demolished*)
Pinafore Park, St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada
Poplar Hill Park, Poplar Hill, Ontario, Canada
Region Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada (*closed*)
Talbot Street School, London, Ontario, Canada (*demolished*)
York Hotel, London, Ontario, Canada (*now Call the Office*)

Other

The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels (Greg Curnoe, 1965-1966)
The Celebration (1962 – also "the Happening")
CFPL-TV
Dada / Mother (Greg Curnoe, 1964)
Feeding Percy (Greg Curnoe, 1965)
Kamikaze (Greg Curnoe, 1967)
The Laithwaite Farm (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1974)
London Free Press (pub. 1863-present)
Making Bombs (John Boyle, 1965)
National Film Board of Canada
Nihilist Spasm Band
No Movie (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1965)
Souwesto (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1969)
The Umbrella (CBC Television, 1966)
Video Noir (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1989, incomplete)

TRACK ONE (STE-009.wav)

00:01

Jesse Brossoit: Okay, so this is Jesse Brossoit. I'm speaking with John Clement on May 22nd, 2016 at John's home in London, Ontario and we are watching *No Movie*. That's going to start now.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): John Clement

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

No Movie Commentary

[video playback begins at first on-screen image]

Oral History Recording	Video Playback	Commentary
00:17	00:00	[playback begins]
00:24	00:07	John Clement: <i>[laughing]</i> Yeah, I remember these sequences. The octopus. Greg would have enjoyed the moray eel eating the octopus.
00:54	00:37	JC: So this movie was playing in Greg's studio. It grew out of the Nihilist Party, which was something that was formed by a bunch of us. I'm not sure who can claim credit for it.
01:20	01:03	JC: "The Nihilist Party of London."
01:40	01:23	JC: Barb [Pratten]. Hugh [McIntyre].
01:46	01:29	JC: Ron Martin. This would be at the Melody Tea Room. This is the banquet.
01:53	01:36	JC: And this is Bill [Exley] giving a speech.
01:58	01:41	JC: There's Art [Pratten] doing the nihilist salute.
02:03	01:46	JC: The [inaudible] of John Robarts.
02:13	01:56	JC: I'm not sure who was holding the camera for all of this.
02:18	02:01	JC: That's Hugh.
02:21	02:04	JC: Oh that's [Kenneth] Hilborn, a right-wing politician. So these are the speeches. This is the banquet, the first annual banquet.
02:34	02:17	JC: And Bill giving a speech. Who remembers what he said, I have no idea.
02:43	02:26	JC: It's also off-speed. JB: Yeah, there's a—
02:52	02:35	JC: <i>[laughing]</i> Whoever was holding the camera didn't get it.
03:03	02:46	JC: So the spliced in—. The Conchord, of course. Greg used spliced in sections that I think he got from Hugh as remainder films or film pieces, or he may have gotten them from somebody at the NFB [National Film Board of Canada] because there was a NFB office here and a screening studio.
03:24	03:07	JC: There we are on the dunes. I wasn't there at that particular time.
03:29	03:12	JC: You can hardly read what that sign says.
03:31	03:14	JC: So he's splicing back and forth between the cottage [No Haven] and—. This is in the York Hotel.
03:39	03:22	JC: Moe [Assaf] and Eddie [Assaf].
03:42	03:25	JC: And I know that face.
03:44	03:27	JC: That's Murray [Favro], that's Sheila [Curnoe].

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): John Clement

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

03:49	03:32	JC: There's Moe at the bar in the York Hotel.
04:03	03:46	JC: A bunch of different people.
04:08	03:51	JC: Archie Leitch.
04:10	03:53	JC: Oh I forget who that guy was [Gard Wigley]. I think he may have been the piano player. Did Art identify him as such? JB: Was that—? JC: Art would be good.
04:20	04:03	JC: There he is again. JB: I'm trying to find his name now. JC: Maybe Wigley.
04:55	04:38	JC: Now this is No Haven, which was the cottage at Port Stanley. Shirley [Clement] and I were part of that but we're not in that particular picture.
05:06	04:49	JC: And this is the games. The three-legged race. So there was a bunch of—. This is like an annual company picnic, which Art would have grown up with and to some extent Greg would have grown up with, his parents going to that.
05:27	05:10	JC: And this is Bill making a speech. I think that's probably from the first picnic. JB: From 1965? JC: No the picnic would have been before then. The Nihilist Spasm Band doesn't start until '65 but the Nihilist Party and all that stuff starts around the time before the election when Robarts was elected. So if you look in the background of that initial banquet scene, there was Francis Picabia and then there was the picture of John Robarts, who ran for Premier [<i>Dada / Mother</i>]. We had gone around and pasted "Vote No" on his eyes, on the face, and that was an image of that particular thing. Now that had happened earlier. And out of a lot of discussion and talk, Greg was pretty interested—and I got interested through him being interested—in the Russian anarchists. He did a painting [John Boyle's <i>Making Bombs</i>] with a bomb like the Russian anarchists had thrown and he placed—. I forget who the anarchist is in the picture [Peter Kropotkin or Sergey Nechayev]. He placed the anarchist, which you can find out who the anarchist is by going to look at [John]'s painting.
07:02	06:45	JC: This looks like John Boyle and his Volkswagen.
07:18	07:01	JC: And this is us playing lacrosse. I'll be in there somewhere.
07:24	07:07	JC: That's me back there [<i>gesturing</i>]. Played at the Talbot Street School which is no longer there. It's been long ago torn down. Some condo or something up there now.
07:49	07:32	JC: None of this—. This is all off-speed.
07:51	07:34	JC: That's Shirley.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): John Clement

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

08:12	07:55	JC: I wonder who was holding the camera. It certainly wasn't Greg because he's out there playing.
		JB: Yeah, Art mentioned that the camera just got passed along. If somebody wanted a beer, it got passed along.
		JC: Probably but it could have been one of the wives or partners out there.
08:35	08:18	JC: [<i>laughing</i>]

08:41

JB: Okay, so that's *No Movie*.

JC: Not the end? What's this?

JB: So this is actually the beginning of *Souwesto*.

JC: Oh *Souwesto*. Does it have a soundtrack?

JB: See now that's actually a bit of a mystery because—

JC: Because *No Movie*'s soundtrack is lost. Nobody knows where it is.

JB: Right, it was the kazoos and that sort of thing.

JC: We sat down in Greg's studio in a circle and there was somewhere between fifteen and twenty of us with these twenty-five cent kazoos. And watched the movie and tootled in in accord with that and that's the event that the band grows out of.

JB: So the soundtrack for *Souwesto* is—. This copy is silent but I guess there are some sound copies available and it's not quite clear whether Greg intended it to be shown silent or [with] sound. This is silent in any case but it's kind of a mystery. So this is *Souwesto* and this is a little bit better quality. This is a recent transfer right from a film print.

Souwesto Commentary

[video playback begins at first on-screen image]

Oral History Recording	Video Playback	Commentary
10:05	00:00	[playback begins]
10:08	00:03	JB: Is that bright enough? Can you see?
		JC: [<i>agreeing</i>]

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): John Clement

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

10:12	00:07	JC: So Greg is talking to somebody about what's going on in the painting. These were all—. There's a particular style. There's almost a wash in the background. Sort of a translucent quality.
10:38	00:33	JC: I don't know what that was about.
10:41	00:36	JC: Art. This is Barb Pratten putting out laundry. Did Art tell you that? JB: Oh, yeah. JC: [<i>laughing</i>] The laundry at "the Happening," which happened before I came to London. So I came to London in '62-'63 and didn't meet Greg until maybe February, maybe December. Somewhere in there. I don't know what the date of "the Happening" was but I heard about "the Happening." It had happened shortly before I got to know Greg. I'm sure Art had lots of good stories about it. I can't tell you any stories because I wasn't there. JB: That's alright. JC: But it certainly reverberated. This is an event that reverberated for a long time, in terms of discussion. The sense that there was a group of young people that were establishing their own thing, their own presence, their own ability to judge what they should do. This was kind of like giving the middle finger to the establishment, who were seen as pretty unamicable at the time.
12:21	02:16	JC: Who's interviewing Greg? It's one of the [London] Free Press people I think. Did Art tell you? JB: No, he didn't say a name. JC: Yeah, Mike somebody [Michael Woodward?]. He was a CFPL-TV guy. I think his name was Mike. So he was a news anchor kind of guy. And I could be wrong about the Mike part.
13:03	02:58	JC: I think that was Art Pratten standing out front there.
13:09	03:04	JC: "November 23rd"
13:11	03:06	JC: So this is, I think, Region Gallery. So this will be—
13:17	03:12	JC: That's Geoff Rans. So that's going to be 1962. November '62. JB: So it was right around the time that you came to London? JC: Well I came to London in the fall of '62 to go to school and I met Greg some time after that. My roommate was John Cairns, who was a philosophy student. As was I. He brought Greg to our apartment because he wanted to show him the found object that he had found, which was a stain on his ceiling which he had carefully painted an orange frame around. Orange being—. I'm not sure at the time how derivative that was of Greg because Greg used a lot of orange. I met Greg then and got invited back to his studio and went back to his studio and just got aggressively more involved from there.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): John Clement

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

14:29	04:24	JC: Yeah, this is all early stuff.
14:33	04:28	JC: Tony Urquhart.
14:36	04:31	JC: Art. Hugh McIntyre. John Clement. [<i>laughing</i>] I'm in it. There we go.
14:43	04:38	JC: Art Pratten playing a kazoo at that point. [<i>speaking to someone in the background</i>].
14:55	04:50	JC: Bill was always worried about being discovered.
15:01	04:56	JC: So this is Murray and I'm playing a kazoo at this particular point. Before I had a beard, so that's got to be early on. I wanted a guitar and I couldn't afford one so I built one for myself over the Christmas holidays. This may be just before that.
15:31	05:26	JC: This is in Greg's studio. This is Archie. Not Archie; this is Bill singing. Bill was always afraid somebody would recognize him so he was happy to have something in front of his face. JB: Right, he was a teacher. JC: He was afraid that he would be completely discredited in the teaching community. He was always very paranoid about that.
15:52	05:47	JC: That's John Boyle.
15:56	05:51	JC: And these are kazoos that we ended up having made or making.
16:04	05:59	JC: This is our first gutbucket, which is truly a gutbucket: one string played on a washbasin.
16:14	06:09	JC: I'm sure this a movie being done.
16:18	06:13	JC: That's Barb.
16:21	06:16	JC: I forget who she is. One of "the nurses," I think.
16:28	06:23	JC: Oh, from Britain—. I can't remember his name right now. It may come out about ten minutes after you leave. JB: [<i>laughing</i>] That's alright.
16:44	06:39	JC: God, we all smoked.
16:50	06:45	JC: Oh, Anne Brodsky.
16:55	06:50	JC: I'm not sure—. That's Anne Brodsky but I'm not sure who this is. She looks familiar.
17:03	06:58	JC: Somebody's shooting cleavage [<i>laughing</i>].
17:10	07:05	JC: Oh, I recognize [him] but I don't remember his name.
17:20	07:15	JC: So that's up at the apartment, on [432] Waterloo Street I think.
17:28	07:23	JC: <i>Feeding Percy</i> .
17:45	07:40	JC: I'm not sure what this work is.
17:50	07:45	JC: Java temple finches. You could buy them for about two bucks each and we all had them. Now you can't buy them because they were captured out of the wild, somewhere in the far East.
18:15	08:10	JC: Looks like one of Greg's canaries and one of his cats. Or kittens more appropriately.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): John Clement

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

18:25	08:20	JC: No idea who that was.
18:38	08:33	JC: So at this time, this is Greg's studio. [<i>gesturing</i>] This was his bedroom back here before he got married and moved into an apartment with Sheila.
18:48	08:43	JC: Oh, and this is for the famous <i>French Roundels</i> or something Piano [<i>The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels</i>]. Sheila has done a print of that which I have here.
		JB: Yeah, Art had the same print.
		JC: Well, you can't keep the painting but you can keep the print. And I remember being there and coming up and visiting and this—. Him working on it as we went through. He'd stop painting and sit down and look at it and we'd talk about whatever was going on.
19:35	09:30	JC: Peter Denny.
19:46	09:41	JC: A scene from one of the parties, I'm guessing.
19:53	09:48	JC: Oh right, the pyramid [<i>Kamikaze</i>].
19:59	09:54	JC: And there's Owen. I mean it was such a funny contrast, you know? On the one hand he was doing this unconventional art that was very interested in looking at the world and looking at it from a perspective and talking about what that perspective was. The perspective being something that you've developed and thought about. At the same time, he was going out to work. He'd take his lunch pail and he'd go to work in his studio from home. The connection between the studio and the home was outside. Now if you go visit Sheila there you can walk through into where the studio was.
20:46	10:41	JC: John Boyle and me.
20:48	10:43	JC: I could show you the—. I have the drawings that he used of me to make this particular painting.
		JB: Really?
		JC: Yeah. Very faint by now. Pencil seems to change with age.
		JB: Oh absolutely. Just notebook sketches, that kind of thing?
		JC: They were fairly big. He got a light and he shone the light sideways and projected it and then traced my outline.
21:28	11:23	JC: That looks like Asa.
21:31	11:26	JC: And that looks like Owen [<i>laughing</i>].
21:35	11:30	JC: Not sure who that person was with the chair.
21:41	11:36	JC: Greg didn't smoke because of his asthma but Sheila smoked.
21:48	11:43	JC: [<i>laughing</i>]
22:02	11:57	JC: I'm not sure whether this is by the time he's moved to his factory-house [38 Weston Street].
22:15	12:10	JC: He was interested in home movies. He was interested in a lot of the things people did at home. He was interested in

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): John Clement

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

		refrigerator art. Things that people made just in the actual culture and stuck on their refrigerators.
22:43	12:38	JC: Not very clear.
22:47	12:42	JC: I'm guessing that's—. I think that that was probably at Weston Street.
23:13	13:08	JC: Did he ever talk anywhere about the films to anybody? JB: Sorry, this is Greg? JC: Yeah, was he on record with anybody formally about it. JB: Not that I've really found. I think it's something that he was interested in. Like you were saying, home movies and the non-conventional art. JC: Well, at this time of course Jack [Chambers] was very much doing movies and the discussion about Jack's movies and what was going on in them was in the air. But his interest was more in that—. The homeliness of the found object. His collages are full of things that he picked up that he would have found on the street as he was walking along. Or a bus transfer or a label from something.
24:18	14:13	JC: Is this Jack?
24:20	14:15	JC: This looks like a picnic. Whether it is the picnic or just a picnic.
24:27	14:22	JC: That looks more like Port Stanley. I thought I saw a lake in the distance.
24:37	14:32	JC: It probably shows better in a dark room. JB: As long as you can make everything out. Well this section especially is actually quite dark.
24:47	14:42	JC: Yeah, that's down at Port Stanley. That's Pinafore Park, which no longer exists. Somebody sold it off and built condos.
25:23	15:18	JC: Here, this looks like the cottages that we rented. So the group of us that rented a cottage, that was a separate thing. This would be later on when we're more individual families and having children and that sort of stuff. This is before Shirley and I were having kids. This looks like the picnic at Pinafore Park, so this would be the first picnic.
25:59	15:54	JC: In earlier years the baseball game happened and in later years it got dropped.
26:12	16:07	JC: There we go. The three-legged race.
26:33	16:28	JC: Royden Rabinowitch.
26:42	16:37	JC: Oh, this is the no-running jump or the standing jump or the Exley Jump as it's known.
26:58	16:53	JC: This is John Boyle giving the speech. And I guess that's the end of it. JB: I think it keeps going.
27:10	17:05	JC: Oh, here we go.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): John Clement

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

27:21 17:16 JB: There are quite a few sections of black for some reason.
JC: Now this is now at Poplar Hill by the look of it. This is not at Port Stanley. This is later on.

27:29

JC: [*telephone rings*] Excuse me. Can you pause it for me?

[BREAK]

[end of Track One]

TRACK TWO (STE-010.wav)

00:09

JB: Okay, so we're at 17:48.

JC: Your mouse is way up here. How do you get it to go? Oh, here we go.

Souwesto Commentary (cont.)

Oral History Recording	Video Playback	Commentary
00:21	17:34	[playback resumes]
00:22	17:35	JC: There we go.
00:34	17:47	JC: Kick-the-shoe, women's.
00:40	17:53	JC: [<i>laughing</i>] The three-legged race. That was an event we didn't do very often.
00:50	18:03	JC: This is the four-legged race.
00:59	18:12	JC: [<i>laughing</i>]
01:07	18:20	JC: Did you get the mic back on? JB: Oh, yeah.
01:14	18:27	JC: The Exley Jump.
01:21	18:34	JC: I hold the world record for the Exley Jump. JB: [<i>laughing</i>] I think Art said somebody did it for over an hour. Was that you? JC: For an hour. That was me.
01:40	18:53	JC: So these are the first days of Weston. I guess Weston Avenue.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): John Clement

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

01:52	19:05	JC: I think that's Galen. Or maybe not, but it doesn't matter.
02:16	19:29	JC: So this had two renovations: the initial renovation to move in, which was relatively cramped to give Greg a studio out back, but for the family relatively cramped; and then later on when he was able to—he had more money for a little while there—he got our friend to help him with architecture, whose name I'm temporarily blanking on.

02:46

JC: There you go.

JB: So that was *Souwesto*. So yeah, maybe we can move into some questions.

JC: Sure.

JB: Let me get this out of the way.

JC: So what do you do about that computer? Buy a new one?

JB: Yeah, it's an impending purchase. I've been sort of making due. It's not very mobile these days so it kind of defeats the purpose of having a laptop. Yeah, I think I just need to get a new one.

03:31

JB: So we actually covered quite a bit of this stuff. Okay, so do you have any memory of when Greg first started shooting the film that became *No Movie*?

JC: No, I don't have a memory of that.

JB: Do you recall him being interested in film at all? Maybe not even shooting films but just cinema?

JC: Oh, he was always interested in film and talking about film, for sure. Both popular film and other film. The NFB was just—. It was part of the world and the discussions. Do I remember a particular discussion? No. Do I have a signal of when the *No Movie* was going to happen? It seemed to me that the community of people that developed around and became, roughly speaking, the Nihilist Party—. [It came] out of that, in the sense that that was somehow an important creation just by itself, the activities that everybody was doing. The movie thing comes across more as trying to just capture a record in home movies of that. Did we talk about camera angles and shooting techniques? No.

JB: Right. Were you given any sort of direction during shooting or was it really just a documentary?

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): John Clement

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

JC: It was a documentary. There was no sense of "this is what I want you to do." The sense was "somebody is going to film a bit of us here doing this" but the filming process wasn't to be taken into account. We weren't to be thinking about what our shot—. We weren't actors, we were people, just a part of the scene.

JB: Well you observed that Greg isn't in a lot of shots. Obviously he's not filming. Do you have any recollection of who else would have been shooting? Or do you remember shooting yourself?

JC: I think it's like Art said: it got passed around and I could easily have been holding it at some point but I have no memory of it.

JB: I believe Bill told me this. The equipment, Greg borrowed that? Do you have any knowledge of that?

JC: I'm not sure who he borrowed it from but sure. He may have acquired his own. I think he was shooting—. Some of this stuff was on 8[mm] but when he was doing films specifically he was trying to do it on 16mm I think. So is it there in 16mm what we have?

JB: Yeah, I think it was released and made available on 16mm but I think it's possible that he shot some of that on 8mm. The home movies especially would have been probably on 8mm and then blown up and put on 16mm.

JC: 8[mm] and maybe even Super-8, whatever that was.

JB: Right. You already mentioned Jack Chambers, which is a nice little lead-in to what I was going to ask: were you aware of the larger film community around that time in London? Jack was obviously doing his films and Greg.

JC: Well, there was the National Film Board office. Apart from Jack, I'm not aware of thinking about movies being filmed about people. I'm sure there were but I don't remember particularly.

JB: Do you remember how these films would have been shown in London, especially around the time that they were made?

JC: Well it would have been either done at Greg's studio or as a home movie or perhaps as part of an art show. But no, I don't remember. The memories I have from the *No Movie* are the memories of making the soundtrack for it.

08:36

JB: Okay, for *Souwesto* then—. It was finished in 1969 but it's taking footage from all of these earlier events. Do you remember Greg working on that film? I think it took him a while to compile.

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Narrator(s): John Clement

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JC: I remember him talking about it. I don't remember any of the actual editing because that would have been hard editing, splicing stuff together. I don't remember any of that.

JB: Hugh was the film librarian.

JC: Yes.

JB: Do you have any—what's the word—inclination to think that Hugh was involved in that? Or Murray? I think he was also doing some film work—

JC: Murray certainly could have been involved. Have you talked to Murray?

JB: Not yet. I sent him an email but he hasn't gotten back to me so I'm going to follow up and see if I can get him again.

JC: Call him. Murray will remember whether he did any of the assembling of the movie for Greg or how that happened. Greg could be not particularly skilled in some of those technical things. He would always wade in and do his best but he would often job that out to somebody. It could easily have been Murray and Murray would remember. You should talk to Murray about that because he'll have a lot more of the discussion stuff around film and those parts of things.

JB: Okay. I guess we've also alluded to this, just by watching them: do you think that Greg's films are growing out of his other interests? The home and that sort of thing. Obviously he was working with home movies. Do you see that as an extension or are the films this other thing? I think you commented on it but just to—

JC: I think the way he does the film is the way he does the rest of the stuff in his life, which is—. He's observing. These are all reflections on observing stuff. He was very interested in the region. The regionalism stuff was not out of a sense that this particular region was any different than any other region anywhere in the world, but grew out of this rejection of the sense that was widespread in Canada at the time and I think artistically too, which was to say the stuff that matters is being done in Paris or New York or somewhere else." So there's a kind of colonial view of what we were about. What Greg was saying was "art comes out of observing and being in what's around you and having a world around you." It's not about being somewhere else, it's not about playing on a stage in New York, it's about doing stuff here. Of course, it's still the same old discussion: if you want to get noticed you need to have some currency on the larger stage. Those were times when there was a fair bit of money federally. We didn't really notice because there was never ever enough, but there was a lot more attention and support for arts in Canada. Maybe growing out of 1967 and the centennial year. The sense that Canada was its own place as opposed to important only because it was a colony or a neighbour. But the movies for me are just all of a part of him looking around himself and observing closely and trying to do that difficult thing which is to be both enmeshed and observing at the same time, which is always problematic. I mean, it's interesting in the *No Movie* that he goes to the undersea stuff. You know, that he splices in this picture of an octopus being attacked by an eel. Greg loved that kind of spontaneity

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that just was an event that just shocked you or stood out as something memorable. He liked that kind of stuff but he was never really sure where that fit and what that was all about. He would enjoy the kind of confrontation with the audience standards that was involved in the Nihilist Spasm Band, whereas I was not happy to be attacked or reviled but just happy to do what we were doing. And Greg was certainly happy to do what we were doing but he also had that extra enjoyment of that kind of thing, which for me was part of what was going on in that underwater scene in the movie. This "my god, life is pretty crazy, pretty sudden, pretty fragile in a way." So there's a need to put it out there in order to have it there, if that makes any sense.

JB: Yeah, I think there's also—. I think Bill told me this. During that first shot where everyone is running out of the water, I think Greg said "everyone run out of the water now" and then subsequently spliced in the "sea monster" footage.

JC: [laughing]

JB: So I think there's also a real playfulness to it.

JC: Right, yeah, there would've been that sense of the sea monsters under the water. Well, I wasn't there at the time when he had everybody running out of the water. I don't remember shooting that. But the sense of being able to get anybody to do anything that you wanted them to do is minimal so you were going to end up having to film what you can get.

16:06

JB: Now, I didn't show you this [but] it's a later video that Greg made from 1974 and it's Peter Denny and Pierre Thérberge from the National Gallery [of Canada] and they go to visit the Laithwaite Farm in Goderich [*The Laithwaite Farm*]. Are you familiar with the farm?

JC: No.

JB: He's a folk artist, I guess [George Laithwaite].

JC: Oh, I've probably heard about it. What kind of stuff did he make?

JB: Mostly sculptures, statues.

JC: Out of farm equipment?

JB: Yeah, so there's some architectural stuff that's branching off of his home and there are some statues of John A. MacDonald and—

JC: I've certainly heard about it.

JB: Anyway, it was around that period Greg was getting interested in folk and promoting the work of, let's say, non-institutionally embraced artists. He was involved with an organization that

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he and Pierre made up which was the Association for the Documentation of Neglected Aspects of Culture in Canada.

JC: Neat.

JB: It was, I guess, a little bit of a satirical institution.

JC: I was not very aware of this. I heard some of it. This was during my first years in medical school so there were times in there where I was less connected just because I was busy doing what I had to do.

JB: In any case, that's an anti-institution in some sense. Is that—?

JC: I'm just moving out of the sun.

JB: Oh sure. It's this anti-institution and that's from a little later, it's from the mid-'70s. But do you—. Without having seen the film and just from my brief summary, does that sound like—the earlier films and the later video works—there's a continuum there?

JC: It all sounds like the same. It's all a piece. Again, it's all about being interested in life locally and in what's going on and being interested in somebody who just did that and had this desire to create works of art whether they were accepted or ignored.

JB: I'm afraid this is kind of a barebones question because I can't really give you a lot of information behind it, but Greg was making a film—sorry, a video—much later into his life, around 1989. This is a bit of grasping-at-straws question because I'm trying to find as much information as I can. It's a video called *Video Noir*. It's very rarely mentioned. It's just in his CV at one point. Is there any chance you've heard about that one?

JC: Unfortunately, no. There may have been some discussion that went over my head or that I didn't particularly notice. No, so I'm sorry, I'm no use.

JB: No, that's alright. That was a desperation question.

JC: But again, you should ask Murray that.

JB: Okay.

JC: Murray was very much more involved in an ongoing way in terms of the discussion of what was going on in their work. They both supported one another in the difficult job of being somebody doing independent stuff out on your own. Murray and he did things differently but they were both very interested in one another. And the way Murray approaches things would be more nearly, in some ways, like the guy on the—. Raithwaite Farm did you say?

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JB: Oh, the Laithwaite Farm.

JC: Laithwaite Farm. Murray makes objects that are reminiscent of 1870-1895 technical objects.

21:09

JB: Now jumping back to *No Movie* and the soundtrack. You sort of mentioned it, you said that there were fifteen to twenty people in the room and Art said the same thing. A very large group that eventually whittled down to the Spasm Band in the coming year. Do you have any specific recollection of who was involved in that initial group of fifteen to twenty?

JC: If I saw a picture I could probably identify them. There was Art and me and I'm pretty sure Murray was there and John Boyle. John might not have been around. There was a group of women who were involved in dating various members and they would have been involved. So there would have been Gwen [Erickson], who has since died, and Norma, Bill's wife, might have been there. She might not [have been], I don't have a clear memory of that.

JB: Okay. So that was the first recording of what would eventually become the Spasm Band in some respect.

JC: Yeah.

JB: Art recalled that during the picnic there was also a performance of, I think he called it No Canada? Was that a similar thing? Do you remember that at all?

JC: I don't.

JB: I don't remember Bill mentioning that but Art seemed to recall that at the time.

JC: Well, Art's memory seems to be fairly good for some of these details. I'm never sure at this point because memory can be pretty plastic but Art's pretty reliable. If he said it happened, I would tend to believe it. If I had to choose between what Bill said and Art said I would have to look carefully at it. I mean we all color the memories and then they become memories and they're not necessarily what happened.

JB: Yeah, I guess from everything that I've been talking to you and Art and Bill [about], and Sheila as well commented on this: the films were really an effort at community-building, or not necessarily community-building but documenting this community.

JC: Documenting the community that existed, yeah.

JB: Yeah. Do you think that Greg was interested in preserving that, or was that really a document for its time, for the community to enjoy for themselves?

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JC: Yes [*laughing*]. I think for Greg part of living life was observing life. There's always this balance between being in it and being outside it. So the movies are part of that, being in it and outside it. The parties are part of that. [*repositioning*] Can I move here? That's still—

JB: Oh sure, I'll just twist this around so it's more at you.

JC: So I think doing the movies and making the movies is part of the activity that was going on in the community at the time, so they were part of what was going on. They were not talked about. They may have been done with a great sense of this is going to be really important to look at twenty years from now, but I don't think so. We didn't sit around looking at stuff we'd done twenty years or ten years ago or five years ago. That was over and past and on somebody's wall. The movies are—. From your perspective, they're archival and they have significance in that sense. I think the movies were just another object in a sense. They were something else. They were done almost the way any snapshot of your family is done. "Here we are right now and this is part of the celebration of now." That was always the sense that I had with them, that they were part of the celebration of now. Not necessarily "we better capture this moment because we're going to want to come back and see it later." I don't know if that makes any sense to you.

JB: No, that makes perfect sense. As you said, I'm sort of tinging it with my own archivist perspective but I think they've become this real window into the past that maybe they weren't—. Greg wasn't looking into the future and seeing the present as the past.

JC: No, but he was aware of the evanescence of time. And he was aware that refrigerator art and today's found object would look very different down the road. So he had that sense that these things he was picking up were something unique and interesting to look at and that the detritus of today's life that you don't pay attention to had qualities about it, visually or just in terms of experience, that were worth noticing.

JB: Right. I think I have, in one way or another, covered everything.

JC: Okay. Do you want to ask Shirley any questions?

JB: Sure, if she's around. I may have to ask her to sign the consent thing.

JC: Let me see if I can find her.

[end of Track Two]

[END OF RECORDING]

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Shirley Clement

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

Narrator: Shirley Clement (SC), with John Clement (JC)

Interviewer: Jesse Brossoit (JB)

Date of Interview: 2016-05-22

Location of Interview: London, Ontario, Canada

Length of Interview: 47:00

Description: In this interview, the narrator discusses her relationship with Greg Curnoe and provides commentary for the film *Souwesto* (1947-1969).

Topics:

People

Bice, Clare (1909-1976)
Cairns, John (1943-)
Chambers, Diego (1965-)
Chambers, John "Jack" (1931-1978)
Chambers, John (1964-)
Chambers, Olga (1935-1991, nee Bustos)
Clement, John (1943-)
Clement, Shirley (unknown)
Coyer, Yvonne (unknown)
Curnoe, Galen (1968-)
Curnoe, Greg (1936-1992)
Curnoe, Owen (1966-)
Curnoe, Sheila (1942-, nee Thompson)
Exley, William "Bill" (1939-)
Laithwaite, George (1873-1956)
Lewis, Maud (1903-1970)
McIntyre, Hugh (1936-2004)
Pratten, Art (1939-)
Pratten, Barbara (1941-)
Rabinowitch, Royden (1943-)
Rans, Geoffrey (1927-2001)
Rans, Goldie (unknown-1993, nee Wiener)
Vincent, Donald (1932-1993)

Places

38 Weston Street, London, Ontario, Canada (*Curnoe's home and permanent studio*)
202 King Street, London, Ontario, Canada (*Curnoe's second studio*)
244 King Street, London, Ontario, Canada
432 Waterloo Street, London, Ontario, Canada
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

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Narrator(s): Shirley Clement

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Dorothy Scruton London Academy of Dance, London, Ontario, Canada
Galleria London, London, Ontario, Canada (*now* Citi Plaza)
London Central Collegiate, London, Ontario, Canada (*now* London Central Secondary School)
London Regional Art Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada (*now* Museum London)
Pinafore Park, St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada
Poplar Hill Park, Poplar Hill, Ontario, Canada
Ryerson Public School, London, Ontario, Canada
Talbot Street School, London, Ontario, Canada (*demolished*)
Victoria Park, London, Ontario, Canada
York Hotel, London, Ontario, Canada (*now* Call the Office)

Other

24 Hourly Notes (1966)
The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels (Greg Curnoe, 1965-1966)
Car (Greg Curnoe, 1967)
Deeds/Abstracts (Greg Curnoe, pub. 1995)
Feeding Percy (Greg Curnoe, 1965)
Hybrid (dir. Jack Chambers, 1966)
Kamikaze (Greg Curnoe, 1967)
The Laithwaite Farm (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1974)
London Film Co-operative
Neglected Aspects of Canadian Culture (exhibition, 1974)
No Movie (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1965)
Souwesto (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1969)

TRACK ONE (STE-011.wav)

00:01

Jesse Brossoit: Here we are. So this is going to start at twelve seconds.

Souwesto Commentary

[video playback begins at first on-screen image]

Oral History Recording	Video Playback	Commentary
00:08	00:00	[playback begins]
00:13	00:05	Shirley Clement: Is there sound? JB: No, it's— SC: Greg has got short hair [<i>laughing</i>]. JB: There are some versions with sound but it's not quite clear if Greg wanted there to be sound. I guess this version is silent and he recorded it as "silent" in his CV at one point.

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Narrator(s): Shirley Clement

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00:37	00:29	SC: Oh that's the early stuff.
00:45	00:37	SC: Is that—?
		John Clement: I didn't recognize him.
00:49	00:41	SC: There's Barb Pratten, isn't it?
01:18	01:10	SC: And you don't know what this is?
		JB: Well, this was the—. Where are we? So this was the
		Happening. Correct?
		JC: Yeah, that's at the [London Regional] Art Gallery.
		SC: Oh okay.
		JC: That's before my time. You were in town but you weren't
		connected to me and I wasn't involved in this.
		SC: This is at which gallery?
		JC: Queen Street. The main library, upstairs. You remember the
		art gallery was upstairs?
		SC: Oh, okay. Yep.
		JC: Clair Bice went into a shit dip.
		SC: I'll bet.
		JB: So you were in London around this time. Were you involved
		in this arts scene?
		SC: I was at university and I met John at Western. He had a
		roommate, John Cairns, who knew Greg. My understanding is
		that's how John got connected with Greg in the first place. And
		then John and I connected and he took me over to Greg's. I went
		to a New Years Eve party. It was one of the first times I was over
		at Greg's.
		JB: Was that—?
		SC: We got married in '66. I started university in '62, so
		September of '63 I met John. It might have been New Years Eve
		'63 that we'd have been—. No, you invited me there. It would've
		been New Years Eve '64. It would've been the first time—
03:26	03:18	SC: There's Geoffrey [Rans]!
		JC: Yeah, there's lots of shots of Geoff.
		SC: Yeah, it would have been New Years Eve '64. It would've
		been the first party that I went to at Greg's, at the studio.
03:45	03:37	JC: That's Goldie [Rans]!
		SC: Oh, it is Goldie.
04:05	03:57	SC: There's Geoff again, isn't it? Yeah.
		JC: Yeah.
04:26	04:18	SC: Yeah, so once John and I were together, then we were in and
		out of Greg's all the time. We lived downtown.
04:43	04:35	SC: There's Hugh [McIntyre].
04:46	04:38	SC: And there's John [Clement].
		JC: Where was I?
		SC: Right there.

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05:07 04:59 JC: Oh, yes.
SC: Yeah, we lived downtown at 244 King Street and we were frequently out in the evening and would drop in at Greg's studio.
JC: There's me again.
SC: We're in a couple of his paintings. The Twenty-Four Hour series [*24 Hourly Notes*], I think we're in 2 or 3 am. It was a panel for every hour of the day in letter stamps. I think it's in the AGO [Art Gallery of Ontario], isn't it?
JC: It is in the AGO, yeah.
SC: And it talks about "John and Shirley dropped by" or something.
JC: At two or three in the morning.
SC: Yeah, it was somewhere around there.
JC: We don't keep those hours now [*laughing*].
JB: [*laughing*] Can I borrow your pen again? Sorry.
SC: Yeah, so we became friends that way and Sheila [Curnoe] and I were good friends for a long time. Their kids were born—. They were a couple years ahead of us having kids. Our kids sort of knew each other too.
06:21 06:13 JB: Now when you were living on King, was that Greg's King Street studio [202 King Street]?
SC: Yeah.
JB: Okay, and what year was that? That was '66 you were saying?
SC: We got married in '66 so it would have been—. And our first apartment was at 244 King Street, where Galleria [London] is now. We would have been dropping in and—. I mean we helped them paint their apartment, we helped them paint their house on [38] Weston Street. I remember painting the living room one night. That would have been—. Well we got married in '66 and left in the December of '68 so it would have been in through there.
07:33 07:25 JB: Okay.
SC: *Feeding Percy*.
JB: So you were saying that you came to know Greg through John and through John Cairns.
SC: Through John, yep.
JB: But were you aware of the arts scene before you met him or Greg as an artist?
SC: Not really, I was pretty sheltered, let's say [*laughing*]. I was born in London, grew up in London, went to Ryerson Public School and [London] Central Collegiate. My dad was a doctor and a coroner and it was a fairly traditional life I suppose. It

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wasn't until I met John that I became involved in the arts scene.
Well, my degree was in English.

08:36 08:28 SC: It's one of the Siamese kittens.

08:41 08:33 SC: Lacrosse sticks.
JC: Did you ever attend a lacrosse game at the Talbot Street School?
SC: Oh, yeah.
JC: Would you have held the movie camera?
SC: I don't remember that.
JC: But you might have?
SC: I might have. I might have. That's a vicious game.
JC: *[laughing]* No, nobody's checking anybody. It's all much faster on there than it was in real life.
SC: Not as bad as the Houses of Parliament.
JC & JB: *[laughing]*
SC: Did you tell Jesse that Greg was colourblind?
JC: No, I didn't.
JB: Oh, is that right?
JC: He wasn't completely colourblind but I had a colourblind manual.

09:43 09:35 SC: Oh, there's the—
JC: Yeah, there's the *French Roundels* or the—. What is it called *[The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels]*?
SC: The York Street Hotel?
JC: No, it's something "the Piano."
SC: Greg is nuts.
JB: Oh, the *Camouflaged Piano*.
JC: Yeah, the *Camouflaged Piano*.

09:58 09:50 JC: It's knees. That was sitting on a toilet. I was trying to figure out that shot.

10:02 09:54 SC: Oh, there's the pyramid *[Kamikaze]*.

10:05 09:57 SC: Oh, there's Owen *[Curnoe]*. God, he looks like Maeve.
JC: *[agreeing]*

10:16 10:08 SC: What was I saying? What were we talking about a minute ago?
JC: Don't remember.
JB: The lacrosse game?
SC: No, it was after that.
JC: The pyramid.
SC: No, I saw something on here. Oh, colourblind.
JC: Oh, right.
SC: Yeah, we took Greg and Sheila and the kids up to a cottage we owned on Lake Nippissing and they were there—. I think it was Thanksgiving weekend. John happened to have one of his

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		books with all the various tests for colourblindness. You know, where you have all the dots in green and red and numbers?
		JB: Oh, and it's a number in the middle?
		SC: Yeah, in the middle. He couldn't see them. He was really pissed off.
		JC: <i>[laughing]</i> He was, wasn't he?
		SC: I can't remember what kind of colourblindness he had.
		JC: It was sort of red-green. It was not complete but there was some of it there.
		SC: It was pretty funny.
11:35	11:27	JC: That's Asa, right?
		SC: Yeah.
		JC: Now where is this? Is this at Weston?
		SC: Well they didn't have a garden above Dorothy Scrutton's [London Academy of Dance] so it might have been Weston. I don't know.
11:54	11:46	JC: Sheila pissed off that her cigarettes are having trouble <i>[laughing]</i> .
		SC: It must have been at Weston.
12:10	12:02	SC: Wasn't that the building in behind?
		JC: I think so.
12:29	12:21	SC: Samantha. Was that the Siamese cat? And Asa.
		JC: Was that a rabbit?
		SC: No, it's a Siamese.
		JC: That's the cat. That's Asa.
12:40	12:32	SC: Yeah, that's Weston Street.
12:45	12:37	JC: That's not though.
		SC: That's not, no.
		JC: Maybe it's at somebody else's for a picnic or something.
13:01	12:53	SC: Have you talked to Owen?
		JB: Not in person, only through email. But more about some of his other videos that Greg was making, not so much about this one. But he's in Toronto, right?
		SC: Yeah, he lives in the beaches. He and Meredith have just bought a—. Well, a couple years ago bought a house.
13:32	13:24	SC: That was Central Collegiate. So maybe that was when they still lived above Dorothy Scrutton's on Waterloo.
		JC: Maybe. Maybe.
13:47	13:39	SC: There's the bandshell at the park [Victoria Park]. Wasn't Owen a baby there?
		JC: Yes.
14:11	14:03	JC: No idea what this is.
14:23	14:15	SC: Is that Jack [Chambers]?
		JC: That's Jack, yeah.

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		SC: So maybe that was Diego [Chambers] and—
		JC: And maybe Olga [Chambers].
		SC: What was their other son's name? John?
		JC: John [Chambers].
		SC: John and Diego.
14:48	14:40	SC: <i>[laughing]</i>
15:46	15:38	SC: So where is this? Pinafore Park?
		JC: I think so. We were at that picnic.
15:55	15:47	JC: That's Barb pitching. But I don't think we stayed for the baseball.
16:17	16:09	SC: <i>[laughing]</i>
16:28	16:20	SC & JC: <i>[laughing]</i>
16:39	16:31	JC: And I think that's Royden [Rabinowitch].
		SC: Right there?
		JC: The man with the funny cane.
16:50	16:42	SC: The Exley Jump.
17:00	16:52	SC: God, it sure could have done with some editing.
		JC: <i>[laughing]</i> Yes, it's so awful isn't it? Well it could have done with better camera work is what it could have done. Then there's this long blank section. You think it's over and something else shows up.
		JB: I think Bill [Exley] thought that the first part was the '67 picnic and this is the '68 picnic because he was absent from the '67 picnic.
		SC: Oh, he would know.
		JB: That's a hypothesis for what the black is but we're not too sure.
17:37	17:29	JC: That's Bill trying to get his daughter to run.
		JB: Now were you both frequent attendees at the picnics?
		JC: Yes.
		SC: Yes, although our oldest daughter, her birthday is September 11th so we were frequently doing her birthday at the time of the picnic and didn't go.
		JC: We aren't every year attenders.
18:19	18:11	SC: I won the ladies kick-the-shoe contest one year and John set the record for the Exley Jump.
18:32	18:24	JC: So this is clearly Poplar Hill, right?
		SC: Yep.
18:42	18:34	SC: Oh, there's Weston.
		JC: Early on, right?
		SC: Yep.
		JC: We tackled projects like that, didn't we?
		SC: <i>[questioning]</i> .
		JC: We tackled projects like that, always.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Shirley Clement

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

19:00 18:52 SC: Oh, that must be Galen.
JC: Yeah. Have you seen yourself yet?
SC: No. Do you know what year Galen and Owen were born? Or
what year they moved to Weston?
JB: I want to say '68 but off the top of my head I wouldn't want
to say for sure.
JC: Could be.
SC: Well, I know I helped paint the living room there. So we
hadn't left for Europe for that point.

20:06

JB: That's the actual end. And you didn't see yourself? [to JC] Where did you—?

SC: At least I didn't notice myself.

JC: I was pretty sure it was in the twenty-two minute one.

JB: I didn't write it down but you would have been at the picnics so you might have been
amongst the crowd and we just missed it this time.

SC: Okay, yeah.

JC: I did, I saw you. It was a black-and-white photograph.

JB: Oh, it was a photograph? It might have been—

JC: Not a photograph but a black-and-white movie.

[the following comments were made while reviewing video playback]

JB: Perhaps a little earlier on.

JC: There, that's you.

SC: I don't think so.

JC: Yeah, back up. That's Barb. I thought it was somewhere in this sequence but I may be wrong
about the sequence. Remember who he was?

SC: No. It's okay, it doesn't really matter.

JB: Well, you're in there somewhere [*laughing*].

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Narrator(s): Shirley Clement

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Date of last update: July 6, 2016

SC: Okay.

JB: But as I mentioned to John I can get you a DVD copy or something. I can try to mail it to you in the future.

JC: Yeah, I'd like a DVD copy.

JB: So, I kind of broke into a few questions during the video but just to follow up. So you knew Greg through John and John Cairns and met him that way. Do you happen to remember him being interested in filmmaking or even actually doing some filming?

SC: I remember him being interested in it. There were certainly films taken at the cottage. I don't remember much more specifically about it.

JB: At the picnics specifically, do you remember those being filmed? Obviously some of the footage that you just saw—

SC: Yeah, I think Greg would've been photographing at the picnics.

JB: Do you have any specific memories of that, of how he was doing it? I think we were chatting about it before. Was he doing any sort of directing or asking people to do anything for the camera.

SC: No, I think he—. I don't have any really specific memories about it but my sense is that he would have just been enjoying what was going on and taking pictures of that. My dad was a real photographer, a hobby photographer, and he always directed people and it used to really piss me off when he did that. So I would have remembered if Greg had done that and I don't think he did. I had the sense that he was just really enjoying all the crazy things that were going on and trying to take pictures of them.

JB: Now I think it may have been in that one—or it may have been in the one we didn't watch—but there is at some point a shot of another person running around and filming one of the picnics. I think it might have been Jack Chambers but it's hard to tell; the quality is not great. Once you became a little bit more aware of the arts scene in London and a little more immersed, were you aware of other filmmaking going on around that time period in the mid-'60s?

SC: I knew that Jack was doing it, doing photography. Other people, I don't—

JC: Same answer. I don't think so. There wasn't a big sense of filmmaking here that I remember.

SC: Now, Don Vincent was a photographer who was involved in the whole group and he [inaudible] them at the picnic and they were friends and at parties and everything else. Don was a photographer. He was a photographer who worked at London Life [Insurance Company] but he did still photographs and I think he did almost exclusively black-and-white.

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JC: Yeah, I don't remember—. No movies out of Don though.

SC: No.

JC: Don just shot—. He did a lot of portraits and lots of stuff. He was a great photographer but not film. So lots of photography talk and lots of filming but not a lot of film talk.

SC: No. Now Hugh McIntyre was very involved in film. He was a film librarian.

JC: He was the film librarian, yeah.

SC: At the library. So he'd have been deeply involved in film. Was his master's degree in film?

JC: I don't remember. It could've been.

SC: I'm trying to think of all the people who were involved. That's about as much as I can remember. Don Vincent and Jack, of course.

26:51

JB: And have you seen Jack Chambers's films?

SC: Yeah. I don't remember them well, but I've seen them.

JB: I guess they're more—

SC: Political, I would've said.

JB: Yeah, put together and really constructed.

JC: Not home movies.

SC: Yeah, Greg was more home movies, kids, family, community. I don't remember a political bent to them at all.

JC: What I said earlier on was my sense was that here was this guy who was an artist at the leading edge of what was going on in the art community in Canada, but at the same time he was very interested in being a working guy who went home to his family and went off to work and did all those kinds of standard family things. Own a house, have kids, all that stuff.

SC: And he incorporated all of that in his work. Like he had a car and he did a cut-out of the car [*Car*]. A Morris Minor, was it?

JC: Something like that.

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Narrator(s): Shirley Clement

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SC: It was yellow, the painting was. I remember Greg's artwork much more than I do his films so I may be able to help you less if you're zeroing in on his films.

JB: That's okay. Have you seen the films before, from your memory, at any point?

SC: They don't look unfamiliar. I may have seen them but I may also have been at the events and be remembering them that way.

JB: Okay. Now I think Art [Pratten] suggested these were mostly shown in Greg's studio.

SC: Yep.

JB: And people were invited around. It was very, I guess, casual; it wasn't a big theatre. Do you have any recollection of maybe seeing them in that setting or another setting? Or if you have any memory of them being shown publicly in a gallery or anything of that nature.

SC: It seems to me I've seen some film in his retrospective after he was killed. There were films set up there at the AGO and I think I saw some of them there. I seem to remember having seen them in art galleries, in kind of an amphitheatre setting. But I'm also almost sure I'd have seen them in his studio at some point.

JB: Do you happen to remember what the reaction was to these works? They weren't really shown to a completely uninformed public – they were friends and family invited around.

SC: It'd be friends and family who would've seen them largely. Everywhere around Greg I remember people laughing. He was a really gregarious, outgoing guy who enjoyed everything around him and would frequently be laughing about stuff. He was the kind of guy that—. He was everybody's best friend. One other thing I remember. You were talking about him wanting to do ordinary things and going out to work. The studio—. Have you been at Weston Street?

JB: Yeah, about a month ago.

SC: There's a door now between the house and the studio. Sheila put a door through from the hall into the studio. Greg never had that. He insisted on going out the door to work and he'd go out the door and along the path and into the studio. So that was done after.

JC: He even took a lunch pail [*laughing*].

SC: Yeah.

JB: I guess from a perspective of not really having clear memories of Greg actually shooting the film and just coming at it as having just watched one of them as an example: do you think the film is typical of what Greg was interested in?

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Narrator(s): Shirley Clement

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SC: Yeah.

JB: Sort of an extension of what he was doing elsewhere?

SC: Yeah. He was interested in ordinary stuff and ordinary events and the ordinary kinds of things that people did. He incorporated all of that in his paintings and certainly the films are like that in a way that—. I remember Jack's being really political, trying to make a statement, and I don't remember Greg's trying to do that.

JC: Well, Jack's is that famous one of the "picture of a flower, picture of a child in the Vietnam War" [*Hybrid*]. You know: beauty, horror, beauty, horror.

SC: [*agreeing*]

33:43

JB: Now I haven't shown you this because it's a lot longer and not as interesting but—[to JC] I mentioned it to you—Greg made a video in 1974 with Peter Denny and Pierre Theberge, the curator from the National Gallery [*The Laithwaite Farm*]. They went to a farm in Goderich. It was an artist, a folk artist, who did a lot of sculptural work on his farm and some architectural things added onto his home. His name was George Laithwaite, are you familiar with—?

SC: George?

JB: Laithwaite.

SC: No.

JB: In any case, that interest in folk art and people who were just doing art and not necessarily artists. Is there anything that you remember from Greg talking about that or being interested in folk art, or not high art or however you want to phrase that?

SC: Craft?

JB: Sorry?

SC: More craft?

JB: Yeah, and really just people who weren't making art for galleries and just sort of making art for their own lives.

SC: Like Maud Lewis. Maud Lewis is a—

JC: A primitive artist from the Maritimes.

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SC: Yeah, who did scenes from her life and it turned out—. She painted in house paint, didn't she?

JC: I think so.

SC: She painted ordinary things and sold them out of her house. They were all along the front of her house and there are hundreds of them, but they're now worth a hell of a lot of money [*laughing*]. Yvonne Coyer has two of them and they're about that size [*gesturing*] and I think she paid ten thousand dollars for one. And Maud was selling them for five dollars out of her front yard.

JB: When was this that she was making the work?

JC: Up until fairly recently, she would have died ten years or so ago.

SC: Oh, I think earlier than that.

JC: More than that?

SC: Yeah. Throughout the 1900s. Maud Lewis. L-E-W-I-S. Yeah, she was a primitive folk artist. Greg was pretty clear about the fact that his work was art. At the time, I was weaving. I made these pillows—there's one there and there's the blue, there's a whole bunch in the house—and Sheila wanted some. We wanted one of Greg's watercolours at the time and I was selling my pillows back then for twenty-five bucks a piece. And he was very clear that this was not art, that this was craft. I think I sold them three pillows and he was very clear that there would be a difference between the price of the watercolour and the \$75.

JB: When was—?

SC: Yeah, he was pretty clear about—. They were at Weston Street. It would have been 1972 to '75. Somewhere in there because that's when I was weaving and back in London. But yeah, he was very clear that what he was doing was art and what I was doing was craft, which was fine. I had not trouble with that.

JB: Do you remember Greg promoting the work of other artists?

SC: Yeah, he was pretty supportive of other people. There was a painting that he had traded Jack. They had traded. Greg gave Jack one of his works and Jack gave Greg one of his works. Then Jack got sick and Jack came to Greg and said "I have to have that painting back because I don't know how much longer I'm going to live and the prices have just gone straight up. I need the painting back."

JC: I had forgotten that.

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SC: Which Greg did. Yeah, he was incredibly supportive of other artists.

38:51

JB: Would you—. Well I guess I'll set this up. The other film that you and I watched [to JC], *No Movie*—. There's a catalogue from the mid-1960s from the London Film Co-op and that movie is, I guess, Greg's movie. He was the leading force in putting it together and releasing it, even if it was shot amongst everyone and everyone had the camera. He credited it as the Nihilist Party of London rather than his own name.

JC: [*laughing*]

JB: So I guess my question is: was Greg a modest, self-effacing community person? The reason I'm asking is just because you mentioned him making that distinction between art and craft. Was he more—?

SC: Possessive about stuff?

JB: I don't know if possessive is the right word but I guess he saw himself as an artist—.

JC: He was not a modest, self-effacing guy.

SC: No.

JC: I'm not sure why he did that as the Nihilist Party of Canada. That would've been thought through and there would have been a reason for it but I don't remember the discussion. It might have been something along the lines of "I edited it but it's about the Nihilist Party and it really belongs to the Nihilist Party." I'm not sure.

SC: He was not modest or self-effacing but he wasn't arrogant. I wouldn't call—. No, he wasn't arrogant.

JC: No.

SC: He was just a really nice guy.

JC: Well, he had a very strong sense of his own paintings being his art and his work. Maybe the films were being done more as folk art and not as main art. I'm not sure how he saw that.

SC: I don't have a sense of that because the films are really like his paintings in that they incorporate everything in his life.

JC: Yeah, I think you're right. Yeah.

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Narrator(s): Shirley Clement

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

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SC: One of the things he had in his studio on King Street—I remember them because I really like them—they were these boxes that had glass on the front. They'd be about four or six inches deep and they'd be about that size [*gesturing*] and they had stuff in them. Fruit.

JC: A hole in the top.

SC: And there was a hole in the top and he'd pour water in. He'd water these things and stuff would grow in there. It wasn't a terrarium. It wasn't planted with plants. It just had stuff in it and gradually mold grew through it and it was kind of an experiment.

JC: And at the same time, he wasn't photographing, he wasn't filming it, he wasn't doing a time-lapse. It was just this process going on.

SC: Yeah. And that happened with a lot of stuff. I just had the sense of this mind that was teeming all the time with stuff he—. I never had the sense that he ran out for stuff to paint.

JC: Right.

SC: Or stuff to think about. He didn't hit a dry spell; I didn't have a sense.

JC: He had a tough '80s.

SC: Oh yeah, but that was for selling.

JC: Yeah, but it was also creatively too. There were times when he—. It was at the end of the '80s or we had just got into the '90s when he really started to do the big lettered works. He was doing more of the portraits—the family and the self-portrait stuff—and there's a couple of those things that just didn't really work. So he was really trying to work inside the family stuff and he had to break out of that. And when he did, he does these big lettered works which are so, in a way, austere and so strong an image. He loved words but he loved the texture and the look of them as well.

SC: Has anyone talked to you about his work with the aboriginal people and the First Nations stuff?

JB: Not specifically. I spoke with—. Well, I've only met with Peter Denny on the topic of his—. He made a series of videos about folk art that were intended for an exhibition at the London Public Library [*Neglected Aspects of Canadian Culture*] and I think there was some interest in aboriginal art in that video but I haven't really spoken to anyone specifically.

JC: Well, he became very involved just before the end of his life in dealing with the aboriginal community. He started to dig in his own backyard and found some artifacts and became interested in the Native treaties. And actually made an important discovery for the aboriginal community, in that they had a treaty Indian that they took around. The same signature on a whole

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bunch of treaties. Nobody realized that until Greg pointed it out. So this was part of the way we colonially had dealt with the aboriginal community, which was a pretty important discovery.

JB: Right, I guess that was research for his book.

JC: *Deeds/Abstracts*.

JB: *Deeds/Abstracts*, right. Let me just check if—

SC: You were asking about his work with other artists. If he thought you were doing good work he would be incredibly generous, in terms of his support and encouragement and talking to you about it. All that kind of stuff I would think.

JC: Yeah, I agree.

SC: He wasn't—

JC: He wasn't small or vindictive.

SC: No, he wasn't at all.

JC: There were people he didn't like and didn't appreciate.

SC: In which case, he would just not deal with you but if he liked you or thought you were doing good work he would be very generous.

JB: Okay, great. I don't really have any more questions so I think that's it. Thank you so much for sitting down—both of you, obviously—for sitting down and chatting with me.

SC: You're welcome.

JC: You're welcome.

JB: Let me stop this from going.

[end of Track One]

[END OF RECORDING]

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): John Boyle

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

Narrator: John Boyle (JBo), with Aya Onishi (AO)

Interviewer: Jesse Brossoit (JBr)

Date of Interview: 2016-05-15

Location of Interview: Peterborough, Ontario, Canada

Length of Interview: 110:01

Description: In this interview, the narrator discusses his relationship with Greg Curnoe and provides commentary for the films *No Movie* (1965) and *Souwesto* (1969).

Topics:

People

Askew, Robin (unknown)
Barrymore, John (1882-1942)
Bice, Clare (1909-1976)
Boyle, John (1941-)
Brodsky, Anne (unknown)
Chambers, John "Jack" (1931-1978)
Chambers, Olga (1935-1991, nee Bustos)
Clement, John (1943-)
Clement, Shirley (unknown)
Cowan, Jane (????-, nee Elford)
Curnoe, Greg (1936-1992)
Curnoe, Owen (1966-)
Curnoe, Sheila (1942-, nee Thompson)
Denny, Peter (1934-)
Dewdney, Alexander Keewatin (1941-)
Dibb, Brian (unknown)
Estes, John Adam (1899-1977, also Sleepy John Estes)
Exley, William "Bill" (1939-)
Favro, Murray (1940-)
Guthrie, Woodrow "Woody" (1912-1967)
Hilborn, Kenneth (1934-2013)
Leitch, Archie (unknown)
Lewis, Glenn (1935-, also Flakey Rose Hip)
Lippard, Lucy R. (1937-)
Logan, Joseph (unknown)
Martin, Ron (1943-)
McIntyre, Hugh (1936-2004)
McKenzie, Robert C. (1941-)
Mekas, Jonas (1922-)

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): John Boyle

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

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Mirvish, David (1945-)
Monet, Claude (1840-1926)
Nauman, Bruce (1941-)
Penikett, Tony (1945-)
Pratten, Art (1939-)
Pratten, Barbara (1941-)
Rabinowitch, David (1943-)
Rabinowitch, Royden (1943-)
Rans, Geoffrey (1927-2001)
Redinger, Walter (1940-2014)
Ronald, William (1926-1998, born William Ronald Smith)
Snow, Michael (1929-)
Tingley, Merle "Ting" (1922-)
Urquhart, Tony (1934-)
Vincent, Mary Bernice (1934-2016, nee Goodsell)
Wherry, Matthew (1915-1984)
White, Sheila (unknown)
Wieland, Joyce (1930-1998)
Wigley, Gard (unknown)
Zelenak, Ed (1940-)

Places

38 Weston Street, London, Ontario, Canada (*Curnoe's home and permanent studio*)
432 Richmond Street, London, Ontario, Canada (*Curnoe's first studio*)
20/20 Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada (*closed*)
Bruce's Caves Conservation Area, Wiarton, Ontario, Canada
Forest City Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada
London Public Library – Crouch Branch, London, Ontario, Canada
London Regional Art Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada (*now Museum London*)
Michael Gibson Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada
Mirvish Village, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
Ohsweken, Six Nations of the Grand River, Ontario, Canada
Poplar Hill Park, Poplar Hill, Ontario, Canada
Region Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada (*closed*)
The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada
Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
Victoria Park, London, Ontario, Canada
York Hotel, London, Ontario, Canada (*now Call the Office*)

Other

20 Cents Magazine (pub. 1966-1970)
An Exhibition of Things (exhibition, 1961)
Annual Juried Western Ontario Exhibition
artscanada / Canadian Art (pub. 1943-present)
The Best Profile in the World (Greg Curnoe, 1963)

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): John Boyle

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

Brooklin Hillcrests (lacrosse team)

The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels (1965-1966)

Canadian Artists' Representation (CAR) (*now* Canadian Artists' Representation/Le Front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC))

Canada Council for the Arts

CFPL-FM

Chippewas of the Thames First Nation

Connexions (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1970)

Dada / Mother (Greg Curnoe, 1964)

Deeds/Abstracts (Greg Curnoe, pub. 1995)

Kamikaze (Greg Curnoe, 1967)

London Film Co-operative

Niagara Artists' Co-op (*later* Niagara Artists' Company; *now* Niagara Artists' Centre)

No Movie (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1965)

On the Bias: Private Reflections of the Human Condition (exhibition, 1969)

Pop Art (Lucy Lippard, pub. 1966)

Region (pub. 1961-1968)

Seated Nude (John Boyle, 1966)

Souwesto (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1969)

St. Catharines and Toronto (dir. John Boyle, undated)

The Umbrella (CBC Television, 1966)

Vancouver Carlings (lacrosse team, *now* Vancouver Burrards)

TRACK ONE (STE-012.wav)

No Movie Commentary

[video playback begins in media res – refer to timecode for accurate starting point]¹

Oral History Recording	Video Playback	Commentary
00:00	00:13	[playback begins] John Boyle: —we made a soundtrack. These shots, I have no idea where Greg got them or what he was thinking about [laughing] but he found them. I've done that myself, found bits of film by somebody and stuck them in a film.
00:29	00:42	JBo: I don't know who's winning here, the octopus or the [laughing]— AO: [laughing]

¹ This track begins several seconds into the narrator's commentary due to a technical error.

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Narrator(s): John Boyle

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

00:54	01:07	JBo: And that's Sheila [Curnoe]'s bathing suit, her nihilist bathing suit. The red and black were the colours of the anarchists and we all latched onto that.
01:11	01:24	JBo: That's Hugh [McIntyre], our bass player. And the people: Ron Martin, a painter; and various others.
01:21	01:34	AO: That's Bernice [Vincent]? JBo: Yeah, that was Bernice.
01:23	01:36	JBo: Bill Exley giving a speech.
01:27	01:40	JBo: Art Pratten, dressed like a—
01:31	01:44	JBo: Oh, this is a banquet for the election campaign. In fact, it may be the first Nihilist Banquet.
01:42	01:55	JBo: That was Greg. AO: <i>[laughing]</i>
01:52	02:05	JBo: And I saw Tony Urquhart in there.
02:03	02:16	JBo: And Bill, who's still the vocalist with the band.
02:06	02:19	AO: Whose painting is behind them? JBo: Greg's. I think that one was one of the election campaigns [<i>Dada / Mother</i>]. The previous year, in '63 I think, there was a provincial election. They formed the Nihilist Party to—. I wasn't there.
02:29	02:42	JBo: That was me getting up. AO: <i>[laughing]</i> JBo: —to contest the election by urging people to destroy their ballot.
02:42	02:55	JBo: That's the Avro Arrow. We were all thinking about and talking about subjects like that—the Avro Arrow and nihilism—because we were all friends just hanging out a lot together.
03:02	03:15	JBo: Archie Leitch. An early band member.
03:04	03:17	JBo: Gard Wigley was a pianist at the York Hotel before the band started playing there.
03:12	03:25	JBo: I don't know who that guy is.
03:13	03:26	AO: Murray [Favro]. JBo: That's Murray Favro, and Sheila.
03:19	03:32	JBo: That's Moe [Assaf], one of the owners of the York Hotel. He was a very nice guy. He didn't like the [Nihilist] Spasm Band. AO & JBr: <i>[laughing]</i>
03:33	03:46	JBo: And those are "the nurses" I think. I didn't really know them very well but they hung out for a couple of years.
03:50	04:03	JBo: <i>[laughing]</i>
03:56	04:09	JBo: Gard said "I'm not a pianist, I'm a pi-anist." AO & JBr: <i>[laughing]</i>
04:18	04:31	JBo: Archie. That's me beside Archie. The one year in my life when I had a beard.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): John Boyle

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

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04:26	04:39	JBo: And that's the cottage that we rented. No Haven I think they called it.
04:35	04:48	JBo: Oh, "1965" it says. "August."
04:42	04:55	JBo: The banner is still used at Nihilist Picnics.
04:57	05:10	JBo: Bill is no longer skinny. AO & JBr: <i>[laughing]</i>
05:04	05:17	JBo: At the first Nihilist Picnic—
05:07	05:20	JBo: That was Dr. [Geoffrey] Rans, who taught at Western [The University of Western Ontario]. I drove Professor [Kenneth] Hilborn who was the guest speaker. He used a lectern that I had just painted so the paint was still wet—
05:23	05:36	JBo: There it is. And he got paint on his hands. It was a set up because he was a right-wing guy who had all these right-wing opinions about the Middle East, which was an area of his specialty, and most of the people who came to the picnic had opposite opinions. He was heckled rudely during his speech. He was entirely innocent. He didn't know what he had gotten himself into.
06:02	06:15	JBo: I guess sunbathers at the beach. AO: <i>[laughing]</i> JBo: Look at the ribs. AO: Wow, so skinny.
06:08	06:21	JBo: Greg loved planes and airshows and he went every year to the London Airshow. I don't know if these shots are from that.
06:18	06:31	JBo & AO: <i>[laughing]</i>
06:26	06:39	JBo: And that's Jack Chambers with his baby [John Chambers] and his wife Olga [Chambers].
06:33	06:46	JBo: And I'm arriving. I wasn't one of the people who rented the cottage so I just showed up from time to time.
06:48	07:01	JBo: And then the lacrosse game, the lacrosse team <i>[laughing]</i> . AO: <i>[laughing]</i>
06:55	07:08	JBo: I don't know how people got the idea to have this game. None of us had played lacrosse much but we tried our best <i>[laughing]</i> . AO & JBr: <i>[laughing]</i> JBo: I had four or five sticks and Greg had a pile – I don't know where the heck he got them from.
07:23	07:36	JBo: That's Shirley Clement I think, isn't it? John [Clement]'s wife. AO: Geez, people change.
07:33	07:46	JBo: <i>[agreeing]</i> JBo: <i>[laughing]</i> It was kind of a dangerous game and I think people didn't particularly like getting hit with sticks. AO: Yeah, with checking.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): John Boyle

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

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07:47 08:00 JBo: [*agreeing*]
JBo: Like he just got clipped with a stick there. So I think we played about two or three games at most.
AO: They look like, amazingly, they know what they're doing.
JBo & JBr: [*laughing*]
JBo: But real players wouldn't be dropping the ball all the time.
JBr: [*laughing*]

08:12

AO: [*clapping*] The end [*laughing*].

JBo: So just for your interest, I discovered lacrosse in 1962 when I went to St. Catharines to teach. I'm not, of course, saying I discovered lacrosse [*laughing*], but personally. Lacrosse was dead in London but it was alive in St. Catharines still. They had a team that was in the league of the best lacrosse players there were in the world. So I got to go and watch these guys for a couple of bucks once a week in the summer. I thought lacrosse was a game played by the Indians hundreds of years ago that no longer existed. I was totally mesmerized by it and I went to the Indian reserve, the Six Nations [of the Grand River] reserve at Ohsweken near Brantford, and found this lacrosse stick maker Joe Logan and bought a stick from him just because they were such beautiful things. And I tried playing but I was—what was I by this time?—twenty-one or two and I just couldn't learn the skills that I might have been able to learn ten years earlier. I don't know [*laughing*]. I played a bit of scrub lacrosse but I was never any good at it. But I still love it. In fact, the main reason I picked Peterborough to move to in 2000 was because it's a real hotbed of lacrosse. And it's still very strong here. But out here [*gesturing*], kind of relevant to the film in a way—in a roundabout way, the lacrosse way—this is a drawing that Greg did of me when we just got back from going to a Mann Cup lacrosse championship game in—. I think it was in Oshawa. Either Oshawa or Whitby. I was fascinated by the goaltender's glove that he had. It looked like it was made of plaster of Paris or something, it was very unusual. When we got back to Greg's studio, I started doing a drawing of the goalie and his glove. So Greg did a drawing of me doing the drawing of the goalie. And he's got all the information there of the game, if you can read it. It was a team from Brooklin, Ontario [Brooklin Hillcrests] near Whitby, now part of Whitby, and the Vancouver Carlings I think they were.

JBr: Right, "Vancouver Carlings goalie, November 20, '64."

JBo: Right, so that's the year before the making of the film and our game in London. And this [*gesturing*] is a painting that Greg did around that time, [*inaudible*], that I bought from a show that he did. And then this [*gesturing*] was a painting that I did around that time—'64 or '65—and that was my little special lacrosse stick. So we were just—. It came out of something that we were all interested in. I was more excessive about it than anybody but that's the way that ideas happened. People would—. Especially in Greg's studio [*inaudible*]. He was a really sociable guy and he would [*inaudible*].

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JBo: Often, there would be four or five people sitting around watching him paint and sometimes, jokingly, applauding after each stroke. [inaudible]. So it was a very friendly—. Almost like a club, like a weirdo outcast club. He had many many friends from every walk of life. He loved cycling. He wasn't totally obsessed yet at that point but he knew athletes and cyclists. He had friends at Western, various professors and students. And of course every artist he could unearth in London who he found interesting in some way or open. If they were closed-minded and conservative in outlook, then he wasn't so friendly and they would get the message and stop hanging around. But with these people coming and going all the time conversations just morphed, one into the other into the other. The nihilism stuff, everyone was interested in. Possibly some people were studying it at Western or teaching it and so the topic would come up and everyone would get interested. Music. Greg was always playing records, whatever the latest interesting records he had found. And people would find out about the musicians and find other records or find someone else who influenced that musician, that kind of thing. I think that's the way the film unrolled. It was just all the weird stuff that was happening in his life among himself and his friends. And he just documented that. You must have heard from Art or somebody that we did make a soundtrack for it.

JBr: Oh, yes. Now lost.

JBo: Yes. Someone found a kazoo in the store, a twenty-five cent kazoo at the time. And it appeared to be, in the light that they found it, it appeared to be black and red. In fact, it was kind of a Prussian blue and red. But it was too late because someone had bought twenty-five of these little kazoos. Maybe Greg, I don't know, just had the idea that we should sit around and tootle on these nihilist kazoos, which is what we did. The group included most of the members of what became the Spasm Band and some other people who were not. I remember one artist—Jane Elford—who happened to be there and she tootled on her kazoo and not too long after moved away from London and was never heard from again. So there were maybe about a dozen or fifteen people who sat around and just honked on the kazoos for about ten minutes. And then the tape was later lost so the soundtrack doesn't exist. But just out of that came the Spasm Band, because people—. Hugh, who was our bass player [inaudible]. And all it is is a vibrating membrane of a strong paper. It's [inaudible] skin, which clarinet players and oboe players used to wrap their reeds in. [*playing kazoo*] So anyway, Hugh was aware of a—. The record is actually a blues singer, Tampa Red; more of a blues songster. He was kind of a one-man band and he had a kazoo with a [inaudible] welded onto the top and the front to make it louder. So again, somebody—I don't know, it might have been Greg—but the next thing I knew, the next week I came and there was a kazoo. And then other people made kazoos. Art worked at the London Free Press and they had big metal cans that all the inks came in. So he got some of those empty cans and soldered them into unique sort of kazoos. They were long, conical shaped things but basically the same idea of [inaudible]. Some people didn't like the kazoos. Art didn't. He started groping around for other instrument ideas. He made a door stopper kind of instrument that was basically a piece of wood with a bunch of those spring door stoppers. You'd twang them to make a noise. Which he played about twice and then he was onto other things. And Hugh seemed more inclined to be a bass player because he was big. Him and some other sculptor made a gutbucket,

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a metal wash bucket with one string on a broom handle or something and a [inaudible]. So it seemed like about two weeks after making the soundtrack for the film, the band was [inaudible] and then it quickly evolved into—. Murray Favro had made, for whatever his creative reasons, a sculpture, a painted sculpture, that hung on the wall [*Boing*]. Basically a rectangle and then the bottom part he cut into various shapes so it looked as though they were falling off and falling down to the floor. And the bottom one was shaped like a rectangle but with a couple of shallow angles like that [*gesturing*]. Somehow, the shape of that last piece gave him the idea of making a guitar so he put strings on it and made a pickup. He either made it himself, which he's done frequently, or found one on an old, rusted guitar. And [he] put strings on it and then he would play it by applying pressure with his arms to the Masonite and bending it and getting sounds that way. So Murray had a stringed instrument that he started and then Art decided to make a violin-type instrument. And someone made Hugh an electric bass that he designed. [inaudible]. So we were electrified within a month or so.

JBr: Was this still in '65?

JBo: Well, is that '64 or '65 [*gesturing to the drawing*], do you remember?

JBr: That's '64.

JBo: Right, it was in those two years. They were tremendously fruitful years for the creative juices. And I don't think this stuff would have happened if Greg wasn't there and didn't have his personality of just letting people hang out. He was, like I said, very selective in a way. I never saw him be rude to anybody but I remember I once brought somebody up to his studio and he took a dislike to the person, just the things they said and whatever. And the next time I saw him he asked me not to bring people like that up to his studio. So that's the only time I heard—. But whatever his methods, he would prune the audience down to people he found interesting. So that's all I—. I don't know [*laughing*].

23:11

JBr: Oh, no, that's great. If you're interested, I can show you *Souwesto* as well, the second one.

JBo: Okay. I don't know if they [Michael Gibson Gallery] have his other films. [*reading*] "Mini Documentary."²

JBr: I think they have *Connexions* but *Connexions* has Greg's own soundtrack to it so it's—

JBo: Okay. What do you have, a tablet?

JBr: Well, I have a laptop but I also have it an external hard drive, so if it's easier maybe I can plug it into your computer. You have—

² "Greg Curnoe Mini-Documentary," Vimeo video, 10:23, posted by Michael Gibson Gallery, January 16, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/84357228>.

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JBo: So anyway, my only role in this film was just being there. Being one of the people. Greg never talked about a plan for making a film or anything. I guess he did a little bit of directing but it would have been joking directing, like all the people lined up and then running out from behind the cottage to the beach, but that's about all. [*gesturing*] Is it a USB or something?

JBr: Yeah, it should just go here.

JBo: It's kind of dark down in this—. All the plugins are down there. Oh, you got it.

JBr: Is it alright if I just—?

JBo: [*agreeing*]

JBr: Okay, so this one also has no soundtrack so it's just silent.

Souwesto Commentary

[video playback begins at first on-screen image]

Oral History Recording	Video Playback	Commentary
26:16	00:00	[playback begins]
26:20	00:04	AO: Young. JBo: Yeah. I don't know where it is but it could have been a show that he had at the Crouch branch library in east London [<i>An Exhibition of Things</i>], which I saw and was impressed by.
26:40	00:24	JBo: This, I have no idea. JBr: Right, so I think this section may be Greg's own home movies from his parents or something like that.
26:50	00:34	AO: Barb? Geez. JBo: That's Barb Pratten, Art [Pratten]'s wife.
27:04	00:48	JBo: This must be some kind of theatrical event.
27:08	00:52	AO: Art, geez.
27:14	00:58	JBo: I don't know, maybe this is "the Happening" at the London [Regional] Art Gallery. JBr: I believe so, I believe someone else identified it that way as well. JBo: Ah, which I missed sadly. But the director [Clare Bice] was absolutely scandalized.
28:01	01:45	AO & JBr: [<i>laughing</i>] AO: [<i>laughing</i>] JBo: Yeah, they made a big mess.

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28:07	01:51	JBo: Yeah, it is the show in east London in my neighbourhood, where I grew up.
28:22	02:06	JBo: Greg was about five or six years older than I was. But I hadn't been to art school; he was the first real artist that I met so he seemed older to me.
28:44	02:28	JBo: I don't know who this guy is but he looks as though he's being interviewed.
29:11	02:55	JBo: What a funny guy.
29:15	02:59	JBo: Oh, and this [Region Gallery] was a tiny little gallery kind of in the entrance foyer of a store on Richmond Street in London. He and a guy named Brian Dibb opened it and had these strange shows of collages and things.
29:28	03:12	AO: Nice ceiling [<i>laughing</i>].
29:45	03:29	JBo: That's got to be—. I wonder if that's a Jack Chambers.
30:00	03:44	JBo: It seems like centuries ago. AO: Yeah.
30:06	03:50	JBo: This stuff was pretty radical for London.
30:36	04:20	JBo: Geoff Rans.
30:42	04:26	JBo: Tony Urquhart on the left. AO: Geez.
30:47	04:31	JBo: And there we have—. That's his gutbucket [<i>laughing</i>].
30:52	04:36	JBo: John Clement. AO: Wow, unbelievable. What happened to you guys? JBo & JBr: [<i>laughing</i>] JBo: Oh, I've stood in front of people who have a photograph of the band from 1967 and they can't tell which one is me [<i>laughing</i>].
31:19	05:03	JBo: Now that's one of Art's kazoos that he made. JBr: I think there's a good shot of you coming up in just a minute.
31:39	05:23	JBo: Oh, Bill's megaphone, which he still has. Or has again. I think Sheila gave it to him when Greg died. AO: Did Greg make that? JBo: He had it made by somebody.
32:00	05:44	JBo: Yeah, there I am. AO: [<i>laughing</i>] JBo: I couldn't play two at once.
32:17	06:01	JBo: I wonder if this was for the television show that CBC did [<i>The Umbrella</i>]. JBr: I believe so. Sheila said it was. JBo: For—. What was the show called? William Ronald had it. He was a moderator.
32:37	06:21	AO: She's pretty, Barb. JBr: <i>The Umbrella</i> .

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		JBo: That's right, <i>The Umbrella</i> . It was a very good show but it was scrapped after a year.
32:54	06:38	JBo: Yeah, Barb was a beauty.
		AO: Unbelievable, she's smoking! Wow!
		JBo: Yeah.
32:59	06:43	JBo: That's Anne Brodsky, the blonde. She was the editor of—. Well at that time she was a curator at the London Art Gallery and she became the editor of <i>artscanada/Canadian Art</i> .
33:14	06:58	AO & JBo: <i>[laughing]</i>
33:19	07:03	JBo: And that's William Ronald, the late. He was an abstract painter. A little bit of an obnoxious guy but he was okay. He was a good, real artist.
33:59	07:43	AO: <i>[laughing]</i>
		JBo: Right, I think one of their birds was named Percy.
34:13	07:57	JBo & AO: <i>[laughing]</i>
34:27	08:11	JBo: It's amazing the cat didn't eat the bird.
34:46	08:30	JBo: He liked rocking chairs.
34:50	08:34	JBr: There are the lacrosse sticks in the corner there.
		JBo: Oh, right <i>[laughing]</i> . I have no idea where he got them.
35:01	08:45	JBo: Yeah, when I said that people would sometimes applaud when he put on a colour, I was thinking of that painting [<i>The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels</i>] when he was working on that. One particular night, I remember about six of us watching him paint just like this.
35:46	09:30	JBo: That was Peter Denny that played a bass saxophone in a jazz group. A friend of ours.
35:56	09:40	JBo: <i>[laughing]</i>
36:05	09:49	JBo: Oh, and that was his pyramid painting [<i>Kamikaze</i>].
36:12	09:56	JBo: Owen [Curnoe]. He turned into a nice young man. I think that his kids were a bit intimidated by their father's reputation and inhibited in their own development as artists but not through any fault of Greg's, that's for sure.
36:48	10:32	JBo: Archie's instrument was a slide clarinet, basically two metal tubes that slid neatly one over the other with a clarinet mouthpiece. He played it like a trombone.
37:11	10:55	JBo: Greg had some metal worker or plumber or something who made most of those kazoos according to our designs.
37:37	11:21	JBo: So this has no soundtrack either?
		JBr: Well, there's a bit of a confusion about that. Sheila seems to remember there being sound.
37:50	11:34	AO: Cigarettes <i>[laughing]</i>
		JBo: <i>[laughing]</i> Rotten kid. She was probably mad at Greg for letting him play with them.

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38:27	12:11	JBo: I had made 8mm films all through my teenage years and they were as bad as Greg's [<i>laughing</i>]. JBr: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that but maybe we'll save that for afterward.
39:08	12:52	JBo: [<i>laughing</i>]
39:30	13:14	JBo: He was so interested in and excited by everything in his life and everything that popped into his head that he couldn't believe that the rest of the world wouldn't be either, and he was right.
39:52	13:36	JBo: That's the bandshell at Victoria Park.
40:02	13:46	AO: [<i>laughing</i>]
40:37	14:21	JBo: [<i>laughing</i>]
40:52	14:36	JBo: It basically looks like twenty million other home movies. AO: [<i>laughing</i>]
41:50	15:34	JBo: And that's got to be the picnic. We had fifty annual picnics and after the fiftieth Art wanted it to stop but people wouldn't let it stop so they still go. I think this year was the fifty-second. Or no, it will be the fifty-second. JBr: It happens in September? JBo: Yeah, in September. But it's dwindled. In the early days, it was a perfect thing to do because a lot of the people were married and had kids. AO: Yeah, lots of kids. JBo: But then the kids didn't have so many kids so now there are hardly any kids.
43:00	16:44	JBo: Oh, who was he?
43:04	16:48	JBo & AO: [<i>laughing</i>] JBo: And there I am with another—. Or maybe it's the same lectern.
43:18	17:02	JBr: Yeah, there are a few of these blank sections but it always comes back.
43:25	17:09	JBo: Bill Exley gave a speech at every picnic and I think he has them all recorded on cassette tapes. I used to give speeches at every one until it became difficult, more and more difficult to get to the picnics.
43:38	17:22	AO: [<i>laughing</i>] JBo: But my daughter grew up going to the picnic every year and winning ribbons.
44:04	17:48	JBo: [<i>laughing</i>]
44:24	18:08	JBo & AO: [<i>laughing</i>]
44:41	18:25	JBo: I think that every one but the first one has been at Poplar Hill, northwest of London.
45:23	19:07	JBo: He bought that place [38 Weston Street] for very cheap, that Sheila still lives in.

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46:07 19:51 JBo: Jack Chambers painted his Victoria Hospital as seen from Greg's studio across the river. And of course Greg did it. Most of us were born in that hospital.

46:27

JBo: Well that's a disjointed film [*laughing*].

JBr: [*laughing*] Yeah, it's a little bit of pieces from everywhere.

[end of Track One]

TRACK TWO (STE-013.wav)

00:03

JBo: I don't know how you make sense out of films like those [*laughing*]. There's certainly no script, no master plan. They're a little bit like stream of consciousness things.

[BREAK]

01:34

JBr: Okay, great. Actually, why don't we just start by returning to what you were just saying: that there wasn't really a plan for these films. They're pretty close to being home movies, obviously. Do you know if Greg started them with a plan or was it really just—?

JBo: I never heard any talk of a plan. I think he just believed in the life that he was living, which was his great insight. Most artists in Canada get the notion taught to them that art is international and has a kind of linear progress from this movement to that movement to this to this to this to this. Up to present day New York or something like that and that's where it is. And they find out where it's supposed to be and then go there and learn how to do it and try to become part of it. And Greg's—. In my opinion, his view was at the opposite end of the telescope: that the only path you have toward truth is through your own existence and your own reasoning, your own experience and observations. Somehow he just acquired an absolute belief in his creative life and the creative lives of the people around him and believed that this was revolutionary. You know, that this was as important as anyone else's insights anywhere about anything. Whether it's [Claude] Monet studying the effects of atmosphere and light or whether it's Greg exploring the neighbourhood or his house or his backyard. As you know, with his property, he got looking into doing some dealings with his deed. So he got investigating it and ended up with a book full of—the *Deeds/Abstracts* book—very interesting stuff he turned up. And according to some of the—. What are they? The Chippewas of the Thames [First Nation] guy, he made some important discoveries about the history of the native people in London, Ontario from his investigations that started with his own little patch of land deed in south London. Whatever he found to be exciting, he believed was as valid as anyone else's insights and discoveries and then he went about

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proving it with the incredible output that he churned out. And it's unique. It doesn't look like any other school of art; it doesn't look like it comes from Paris. One of my favourite little moments was when I met Lucy Lippard, who had written a book about—. She was an American art historian and she wrote a book about American pop art [*Pop Art*] and then there was a little section in the back on Canadian pop artists, which included Greg. I think she must have been going—. I don't remember the occasion but probably she was being taken somewhere by Anne Brodsky of *artscanada* and I was just tagging along, and she knew that I knew Greg. She came up to me and asked confidentially "with Greg's painting *The Greatest Profile in the World*, was that"—what's his name?—"was that John Barrymore?" The one the Americans think of as having had the greatest profile in the world. And I had the great pleasure of telling her "no, that was Bill Exley, the singer in the Nihilist Spasm Band, English teacher in Elmira, Ontario." She was kind of nonplussed and didn't know what to say but for Greg his was the greatest profile in the world, and if he thought of Barrymore at all it would have been as a joke on Barrymore. I think that was his approach to everything he did, including the films. I think later, didn't some of the films begin to have a little bit more form?

JBr: Yeah, the film that he made after *Souwesto* was a little bit more of a deliberate project. It's him going around London to different places that he found significant and he narrates it and says—

JBo: Oh, is that *Connexions*?

JBr: Yeah, and "this is Bill's grandmother's house" and that sort of thing. Still very much a home movie but a bit more of a project, I guess.

JBo: Right. The Jonas Mekas films—kind of stream of consciousness films—are theoretically a similar approach but they're not similar at all. They're in-camera editing; no editing in the cutting room. But yeah, probably home movies are the closest thing you can compare them to in my opinion. And that's a good enough comparison [*laughing*].

JBr: [*laughing*]

JBo: My films were just silly adolescent things, where I would try to tell stories of someone trying to conquer the world or whatever, using all my little metal soldiers in my basement [*laughing*] That kind of silliness. I don't know if Greg made movies when he was a kid. He did lots of drawings.

JBr: Well, *No Movie* is from 1965. When did you meet Greg before then?

JBo: I believe it was 1960. It might have been the following year. I went to see a show by accident in Detroit of Vincent van Gogh and this completely floored me. Up until that point, I thought I wanted to be a writer and immediately I thought I want to be a painter. So I went home and got some paints. I think I was around twenty at the time—nineteen or twenty—and just started painting in my parents' attic. A friend of mine—the one who's sitting beside me in the

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drawing Greg did out there [*gesturing*]*—*Bob McKenzie, when he saw that I was interested in becoming an artist said "I know an artist." And I didn't know how he met Greg but I guess he met him through Bill Exley and I'm not sure—. Greg must have met Bill, who had been a student at Western, through some of the people he knew in the philosophy department there. Bill and Bob McKenzie and I all grew up in east London and I had known Bill as a child and then lost track of him after early high school. So Bill must have told McKenzie about Greg and Bob McKenzie took me up to Greg's studio on [432] Richmond Street in London and introduced me. I don't know why because I had only done about four or five paintings by that time but Greg didn't ask McKenzie not to bring people like that up to the studio anymore [*laughing*] and for some reason he took a bit of an interest in me. I think that was in about '61. Then in '62 I moved to St. Catharines but I came back from time to time and it wasn't really until '64 that I came back to go to Western. That's when my friendship with Greg really took form and when all this activity was going on. It was such an exciting time. I had seen Greg's gallery – well not Greg's but the group he started Region Gallery with. Although I didn't really know them at the time, I had only met them. And I had seen his show at the Crouch branch of the library in east London. But it was in that year—'64 or '65—that I was hanging around with them all the time and doing the picnics and doing speeches and developing the band and taking part in exhibitions that I probably didn't deserve to be in at that stage. In fact, I think it was '65 [that] Greg and Jack were invited to have a show at the London Art Gallery and they asked me to show with them, which was kind of outrageous. But I did. I was just groping, trying to figure out how to paint with no training. He was very encouraging to young artists. I think before—. Maybe in that same year, '65, he sent the director of the Vancouver Art Gallery, who was in London and visited with Greg, he sent him up to my mother's attic to see me and my paintings. Which he did; he wasn't too impressed. Then the next year, I moved back to St. Catharines to teach again and during that year he sent David Mirvish, who was his dealer then. He had a gallery in Mirvish Village there, whatever the street is next to Honest Ed's. And Mirvish dropped in on me with—. Oh, whatever his assistant's name was then. Alkus [unknown] somebody, who later opened a gallery of his own. They were on their way to Buffalo and stopped in and they weren't too impressed either. Still, it was amazing to me that Greg took an interest and kept sending people around and being as encouraging as he possibly could. And I know he was with all the other artists too, the young artists: Ron Martin, Murray Favro, David and Royden Rabinowitch, the sculptors at West Lorne, Ed Zelenak and Walt Redinger. A whole slew of them. And it made for an exciting art world, for Greg as well as for all of his friends.

15:05

JBr: So for *No Movie*—I guess we'll start there—it is sort of a home movie or I guess community home movies, about the community. Do you remember how that came about? I already asked you if it was a project and you said that he just got started, but did he just appear with a camera and start recording?

JBo: Yeah. Well, you can see at the picnic in the film, there was somebody with a camera shooting. I don't know where Greg got the camera but there was a lot of interest of various people in film. Kee Dewdney in London who, along with Jack Chambers, started the London Filmmakers Co-op. Jack Chambers was interested in film. I had been shooting films with 8mm

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film since I was about twelve. And Greg, no doubt, was interested in film too but from a fun, personal, "how can I make this part of my creative world" approach. For him, I think it was just natural to include all of the things that were going on in his life, which meant all these friends he was meeting and the picnic that they were doing and the cottage that they did and the election campaign and the banquets. All started by themselves, almost like a parody of London culture. London's culture was very conservative and all the cues were taken from abroad, whether it was Paris or New York or London, England. So this was with no plan at all, having a banquet—. Well, having a political party, everybody had political parties and we had this fun kind of anti-political party. And the banquet. Banquets are a part of the culture of Southern Ontario. "To honour this, to honour that." So we had a banquet. We weren't as diligent with them. We didn't have them every year. I think we had maybe half a dozen altogether, Nihilist Banquets. They were done with ordering a prepared meal in a lousy local restaurant with hot turkey sandwiches type things, with this dollop of canned peas and a scoop of mashed potatoes with a dimple in the middle for gravy, that kind of thing. And we would give speeches. They would be funny, mostly ironic speeches. No plan. He never had any idea—no one else did—what anybody would speak about. The picnic was also a part of the culture of Southern Ontario. All the local industries would have a company picnic. "Silverwood Dairy Picnic" and all the employees would come with they're families and do three-legged races and all that stuff and there'd be a few speeches. Maybe the manager or the foreman or whatever from the company. But mostly it would be for the kids and they'd have ice cream and people would either bring their own food or the company, in a few cases, would provide food. Or they would pay in advance and have something catered. So we had a banquet, we had a political party, we had a picnic. And the summer cottage was also part of the culture. I don't know if companies had summer cottages but certainly all the individuals did. So we made [a] summer cottage culture. And the band was the musical part of our parodic culture. In a way, the band was sort of a parody of maybe a jazz combo or something, with a bass-like player and percussion and stringed instruments and horns and a vocalist [*laughing*]. The whole thing, of course, doing things that are never done at any of the other southwestern Ontario bands or banquets or picnics. Except for the races. They were very similar. Then another arm of it was *20 Cents Magazine*, which eventually—. First Greg—. Well, not first. There was another guy, Matt Wherry, [that] started a little Gestetner type magazine that he wrote and printed himself, only I'm not going to be able to remember the name darn it. There's something like the something or other *Sentinel Review*. Matthew Wherry was his name. And Greg started *Region Magazine*, which was done on Gestetner, also on Gestetner. He gave me a Gestetner sheet to write stories on for it, which I did. Then he printed it and stapled it together. A while later, a group of people from Western—I think maybe even those same two seminal years, '64-'65—decided they wanted a kind of a literary magazine and they started *20 Cents Magazine*. Art Pratten was one of them. Hugh McIntyre, the bass player, was one of them. Robin Askew, who now lives in Toronto, was one, and who were the others? There was one guy – I'm not going to remember his name. He went off in later life and became the Premier of the Yukon territory. [Tony] Penikett, somebody Penikett. Gordon or David Penikett. He was one of them. And there was an actress from London who later died. Sheila White I think was her name. They were interested in poetry and criticism. Hugh was not interested in poetry and I don't know if Art was either. It quickly reduced the poetry and became a review, so they asked various people to go and

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review something or other: a film that had just come out or a book or a play that was going on in London or some musical thing. Have you seen *20 Cents Magazine*?

JBr: Yeah, I think Sheila might have all of them. When I spoke with her she showed me a few of them.

JBo: Okay. They were just stapled together. That group just lasted for a year or two, then it was carried on by one or two of them for another couple of years and then it kind of died for a couple of years, and then Bob McKenzie—the guy sitting beside me out there [*gesturing*], who had introduced me to Greg—became the editor for a number of years. It was quite a good magazine but a strictly London perspective and people could do whatever they wanted. There was no censorship or no firm instruction on "we want this" or "we want that" or rejecting articles. They just did what they wanted to do, including myself. And I became the sort of correspondent from Niagara when I had moved down there to teach. So we then had a publishing arm of our cultural world. And later on Bob McKenzie actually even got a radio show on an FM station in London (CFPL-FM). So for a while we had a broadcast arm. But it was, kind of like I said, a parodic culture that we established without any plan or any design and without trying to tear down anything else, just to make life exciting and liveable for us. Something to feed our creative urges from, rather than the typical—. You know, like I said, going off and learning whatever the latest style is in New York and coming home and doing second rate copies of that. I think it's one of the reasons—. Well, I was going to say that we didn't become a jazz band. The main reason was none of us knew much about music. None of us had ever studied music, although Art claims to have had a lesson or two in violin. I wouldn't call him a liar [*laughing*], he may have but if he did he didn't benefit by them much [*laughing*]. And I think Hugh claimed to have known a little bit about something or other. Bagpipes or something like that. But basically, none of us could play music, so we were forced to invent a way of making sounds. That was the kind of thing again, without a plan—that we seemed to enjoy and relish: being forced to just create something from zero and then make it interesting and fun for ourselves. And I can't imagine Greg deciding that "I'm going to make this film and I'm going to make it look like a home movie and therefore I'm going to have a certain number of baby shots and a certain number of this and that." I'm sure that it was just a spontaneous looking at the things that were happening in his life. But the filmmaker, the guy with the camera shooting the race, the wheelbarrow race where people were falling down—. I think that was an artist from Vancouver. Flakey Rose Hip he called himself. He was a pretty prominent Canadian artist. He has a real name but I can't—. Glenn Lewis was his real name. And I remember that he came to the picnic and Greg asked him if he would shoot some film with the camera, and that was the only instruction he had so he just went and shot some pictures. [*laughing*] That's about as much design I think as there was in it.

28:16

JBr: Right. Were you ever tasked with filming during these events?

JBo: Not that I can recall, I don't think so. No, usually I wasn't even aware that anybody was filming anything, so no. And also, I was usually only there from time to time so if there was any "can you take the camera and shoot this and that," I wasn't there for that part of it. I just showed

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up and there was the picnic and there was a camera, or there was the cottage and there was a camera. I didn't know what the purpose was. I assumed it was just the way I would do, to just shoot some footage and have it and probably never do anything with it. But Greg's was a 16mm camera, mine was 8[mm], so I don't know how he got that. But he was an inveterate collector of things, anything. Like the sign from the hotel sign that he ended up putting on that painting. Just anything he would find he would drag back to his studio and luckily when he found that studio on Weston Street in London, he had tons of space to store all that stuff. So he was uninhibited. I used to do that too but I lived for twenty-five years in an old church in the country up near the Bruce Peninsula and I had tons of space and filled it with all kinds of things that I later had to get rid of when I moved out of there. It is amazing how—. Like once, I remember, I decided I needed some legs for a piece that I had made. A three-dimensional sculptural thing that I thought needed to be up in the air. And then I remembered the desk that my mother had bought me for my bedroom when I was in high school to do homework on that had screw on legs. I still had the desk and I remembered where it was and I remembered the legs and I unscrewed them and took off the hardware and put it on the thing I need, and this was like twenty-five years after the last time I had ever used the desk. I know Greg operated in a similar way. He would find these things and then eventually find some use for them.

JBr: Now you've mentioned you were making the 8mm films. Did that continue up until around the same time that Greg was making his?

JBo: Yeah, it did. It lapsed because of the technology changes. The 8mm became obsolete and it switched to super-8, and even now you can find super-8 projectors and equipment but you can't find 8mm. The technology world has been like that ever since: you get something and two years later it's obsolete and you have to get something else or you're left behind. And within five or six years, what you have is no longer compatible with anything else [*laughing*], so you're in danger of losing everything that you did. Or you have to do a whole lot of work to convert everything and change it. I think that's how people spend their lives nowadays. But eventually, later in the '80s, a couple of people, videographers that I knew, offered to make films for me and they made a couple. One of which was basically just a shot of the Spasm Band playing. I organized a gig for us in Owen Sound, which was near where I lived, in an old courthouse and then my friend came and shot it for me. It just shows the band playing for twenty minutes and in the middle of the film the camera goes off to the Bruce Trail, which runs through Owen Sound, and follows the Trail for a bit to some caves that someone had shown me. The Bruce Caves. It goes into the caves and alights on some graffiti from the 1880s that somebody painted inside the caves. And then it comes back to the concert for the end of the concert. And all through this side trip along the Bruce Trail, the sound of the band playing continues and it sounds fantastic. I thought "why wasn't the Spasm Band ever hired to do the soundtrack for a horror film or something like that?" It seemed to be suitable for whatever was on the screen. So anyway, I did that and then I did another little film about a lacrosse player. Then I lost touch with the videographers and the film fell by the wayside. I still have copies of a couple of the early 8mm films but I think if I opened the can now they would just fall into dust [*laughing*]. So my film career [*laughing*] kind of petered out.

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JBr: I came across a London Film Co-op catalogue and it's undated but it looks like it's from maybe '67-'68. You have one film in the catalogue and it's called *St. Catharines and Toronto*. Is that something that seems familiar?

JBo: Right. Gee.

JBr: [*laughing*]

JBo: I can't even remember what it was. I must have given them a copy of it though. It would have been an 8mm film because that's all that I—. I later actually got a 16mm camera but by then I had moved on and I never actually used it. I did shoot some stuff with it and plan to make a film with it but I never did. So it would have been an 8mm film. Oh, what might have happened was—. I think what did happen was that I was in an exhibition [*On the Bias: Private Reflections of the Human Condition*], a touring show, that the National Gallery [of Canada] organized. I made a box, a plywood box, that was about maybe five feet long and two-and-a-half [to] three feet wide and the same deep. It may have been the thing I needed the legs for because it was up off the floor and it was painted on the outside and on the inside. I made, on the inside of the box, a platform for my projector and the projector showed a film on the inside of the box. In order to watch the film, you had to sit on the floor underneath the box and stick your head up through the hole. Only one person could watch it at a time. Yes, that's what happened to it. So it went with the exhibition—. I can't remember what the show was called but it was a group show and it toured across the country. They kept patching and fixing the film and the projector and getting new projector lamps as they burned out because this was going constantly in each venue for a year, or a year and a bit. And by the time the show was over, the film was ruined, just completely destroyed. The projector was also destroyed. I just got it back with a ruined film and a ruined projector and I wasn't even compensated for it [*laughing*]. They were terrible to artists in those days, maybe they still are. I remember once, the Spasm Band played at the National Gallery at an opening of Greg's work. I had a truck and I drove the Spasm Band and the equipment to Ottawa for the show from where I lived—I would've been near Owen Sound at that time—which was quite a drive. And it was a Suburban, a GMC Suburban, so it ate quite a bit of gas. They told me they would pay me for the gas and at the end I said "well can I have my gas money?" And they said "oh you'll have to submit a claim." So then I calculated the number of miles from Elsinore, from where I lived, to Ottawa through London and back to London and back to Elsinore, and gave them the total. Well, they looked up the mileage and the mileage from London to Ottawa was whatever it was so they would pay me based on that. And I said "well I had to drive home with the equipment afterward. You know, I went both ways with the car" and they actually said "well I'm sorry, all we can pay is the mileage based on the distance from London." I also said "I don't live in London I live—" [*laughing*]. But they paid me eleven cents a mile for the distance from London to Ottawa and not back and not up to Elsinore, so it was less than the money I actually spent on gas to go [*laughing*]. So that's how they treated artists in those days [*laughing*]. But anyway, yeah, that film was destroyed. It was a—. Well, it didn't look like Greg's at all but it was a similar sort of thing of shooting because I was having a life in St. Catharines too with artists there, meeting the artists in that area. We actually did start a group called the Niagara Artists' Company. The Niagara Artists' Co-op actually, to begin with, which still exists today.

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Initially, it was a group of artists who wanted to have a project a year that everyone would work and pull off and then go away from and recover, and then next year do another one. And we did this, we rented a store in downtown St. Catharines and we had exhibitions by some of the local artists. We brought in Mike Snow to show film, a couple of films of his. We had artists from—. I forget. There were six or seven exhibitions, there were talks, there were performances and whatever for the month. And then we did cancel it. We paid all the artists who were in the shows. We paid the artists who ran the gallery space for the month. That was our main operating principle, that any money that came in, we would make sure that all of the artists got paid something for what they did. Then we relaxed for a year and then the next year we came up with another. Eventually, they were forced—. I moved away after a few years and eventually they were forced by the funding agencies. They wanted the group to be ongoing, they wanted it to have a space, and they wanted it to have a paid director, meaning not one of the artists, and a board of directors from the community and all that. They wanted to bureaucratize it, which they did. So for the next couple of decades, the artists spent most of their work fundraising so they could pay the rent for this ongoing space and pay the salary of the director and a secretary, basically, then try to come up with enough shows to fill the place for the year. Anyway, I was shooting stuff, some of the projects that we did, which I found really exciting. And then also shooting my life in London, which went on going back-and-forth between these two places. But it's lost [*laughing*].

43:24

JBr: So just picking up on the fact that there was a bit of an overlap between you and Greg making films, and from what it sounds like you were also interested in documenting the artistic community, in St. Catharines at the time—. Was filmmaking something that you and Greg talked about or shared ideas on?

JBo: Not really. He saw some of my films. He certainly saw that one and I think I showed him this other silly thing that I had made as a teenager about the—what was it called?—"conquest or defeat." This, you know, adolescent drama thing, which he liked I remember and we talked about. He never showed me any films. The first films that I was aware of were these ones that he was mostly having somebody shoot for him. If someone happened to be there, he would ask them to hold the camera. I don't think he knew much about making film; I certainly didn't. Chambers was much more serious and so was Kee Dewdney, Keewatin Dewdney, who now I think calls himself Alexander Dewdney. He had films in that co-op. So the fact that there were serious filmmakers might have gotten him more interested, other than myself. I can't claim to have been any influence on him at all. I was certainly influenced by—. Again, there was absolutely no structure in this London stuff. The Nihilist Party didn't keep minutes or didn't have regular meetings or a board of directors or policies or anything. The banquets, it was all ad hoc and off the top of everybody's heads. But it was still group activity and that was what interested me and excited me. So that was what I tried to help happen in St. Catharines when I was there and things did happen that were very exciting. But it did get pushed more into this bureaucratic direction, as happened—. Well, I forgot to mention Forest City Gallery in London. There was another gallery, there was 20/20 Gallery before Forest City, which just some local people—interested people who had a little bit of money—chipped in and paid for themselves and rented a

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space. They asked me to have a show there, among many others. They also got in, I don't know on whose suggestion, but they got in Bruce Nauman, a Los Angeles artist, who did a show that was—. There were two rooms in the gallery—a big one and a little one—and he built a wall between the big room and the little room. And he had a camera in the little room looking through a hole in the wall into the big room. Then there was, of course, a TV monitor where you could see the big room, which was empty. That was his idea of the show, that he's just walled off a space and the only evidence of you have of the space is the camera looking in there and the monitor. So that was pretty intellectual for us, I think. But it was interesting and people enjoyed it. My show was fifty drawings of penises that I had done. Line drawings. And they just stuck them up, there was no question of any censorship because this was quite outrageous and censorship was going on in London at this time. In fact, I had a painting in a show at—. Oh, it was the Western Ontario Juried Exhibition. I entered a painting called *Seated Nude*. The studio I found in St. Catharines was above a used furniture store and when I moved in it was packed with old elementary school furniture. Or high school, I don't know, but wooden desks and wooden chairs. Gradually, the landlord moved them out during my first year there but a number of chairs and a couple of desks stayed all the time I was there. And one of these chairs I decided to do a painting on. So I painted the chair with the little portraits on the slats in the back and I made a platform to sit the chair on, a wooden platform, and then on the platform I painted a couple of people: Woody Guthrie, American folksinger; and Sleepy John Estes, American blues singer, a black guy. The chair, it seemed to me, was for sitting, so somehow I had the idea of painting on—. Well, I sat on it and traced around myself. My elbows touching here [*gesturing*] and my feet on the platform and then I painted all these impressions skin colour. Well, you know, pink sort of. So on the chair, all you could see was just the thighs and a bit of the buttocks and where the testicles sat and just the tip of where the penis touched. And the elbows touched on the arms. The feet happened to be on Sleepy John Estes down there. They didn't cover his face but they were sort of on his chest. The jury in the juried show thought this was hilarious and they accepted it for the show but the director, Clare Bice, came in and saw it and he said "we can't hang this." They said "well, why not?" And he said "well, it's obscene." Then, which I thought was quite clever, he came up with the idea that it was racist because there were white footprints on this black guy. That was ahead of his time because political correctness didn't arrive for another ten, fifteen years. Anyway, he overruled the jury's decision and removed the thing from the show. But Murray Favro happened to be working, carrying things in and out for the jury to look at. Just a little odd job to pick up a few bucks. He's the guitarist in the band and a fantastic, brilliant artist. He saw all of this happen so he told everybody. his friends, that Clare Bice had come in and removed my painting. And then they looked at the entry form again and at the bottom of the entry form it said "the jury's decision will be final." He had overruled the jury and the jury's decision wasn't final, so at the opening of the show Greg and Murray and Bernice and a couple of other artists came in and removed their paintings from the wall in protest. A couple others—. There were big moralistic debates among the artists. A couple of them decided to leave their works in and dreamed up reasons. But there was a big kerfuffle anyway at the opening. The director came and tried to prevent them from taking their paintings, saying that "they agreed in the contract that their works would be here for the exhibition, these are the dates." They happened to have a law student friend with them who said "yes, but you broke the contract because it says the jury's decision will be final and you overruled the jury and we have a witness

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who can prove this." It made a big splash and it was headline news in London and it even made national news and Ting [Merle Tingley], the London Free Press cartoonist, did a cartoon of it. He had a little worm in all of his cartoons so he had the worm sitting naked and saying "for those of you denied the opportunity to see the *Seated Nude*, here's our *Seated Nude*." And I was getting phone calls. I was at school teaching, getting phone calls from the national media about it. So this was the kind of atmosphere in London. Nothing was planned [*laughing*], it just happened.

53:48

JBr: Okay, so I just have a couple of wrap-up, general questions. Can you speak about the London Film Co-op at all and how that—? I guess your involvement or Greg's or really just how it came about.

JBo: Well, again, because I wasn't living in London, except for that one year, I was approached by Jack about it and [he] asked about my films. He had heard that I had some films and I told him that all I had was 8mm. He was basically looking for more people to be members of the film co-op [*laughing*] so it would have some stuff available to rent. So at that point, he certainly hadn't seen it but he asked me for the film and I put it in. But because I wasn't there, I wasn't meeting with Jack regularly or Kee, who I think were the two key people. I didn't know what was going on but I knew Jack was very concerned about professionalism, professional issues. In other words, artists being paid for things that they do. So if you do make a film and someone wants to show it, you get paid for the screening because that was the kind of thing that was always overlooked; intentionally overlooked, of course, to save money. Jack in fact later had the idea of starting Canadian Artists' Representation [CAR], which was a quasi-union for visual artists. He got me involved in that too and I became the Niagara region rep for CAR and worked at it for many years after that trying to make it into an actual organization with some kind of teeth. And it worked in some respects. It did get public galleries to pay exhibition fees when artists had a show of paintings, whenever their art was displayed. It's done some work on copyright issues as well, so that today I get a little check every year from some pool. You know, a few hundred dollars from some pool that mostly comes, I think, from the Canada Council [for the Arts] and maybe a little bit of contributions from museums and libraries for when artists' works are reproduced in art books or magazines. Previously, artists got nothing, including Jack. So he was ready to fight for this stuff and I'm sure that this was his thinking about the Film Co-op. But because I let my filmmaking lapse, I never got more involved in the film end of things and I don't know what they did.

JBr: Do you—. Actually, let me ask first—. You've already mentioned that Jack Chambers and Kee Dewdney and Greg and yourself were making films, all these artists in London or around London I guess in your case. Do you remember many other artists that were maybe doing film work around this time?

JBo: That's a good question [*laughing*]. I can't think of anyone who was doing it as seriously. Lots of people did documentary stuff of their works and themselves and whatever, but I can't think of any people doing actual creative filmmaking among the visual artists. I could be wrong, but no [*laughing*]. No, I knew a couple in Niagara who did but they tended to go off in a totally

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separate world of filmmakers. The overlap people, like Jack in particular, seemed to me to have been far and few between. Mike Snow, of course, is a huge exception in Toronto. And Joyce Wieland, his then-wife, who is also a very important filmmaker. But I can't think of too many, no.

JBr: And then, yeah, we'll say this is my last question. I guess you weren't really living in London at the time but do you remember Greg's films being shown to the public and maybe what that reaction might've been?

JBo: Other than in his studio, I don't. And people would just smile and nod and say "that's so-and-so and that's so-and-so," but no serious discussion. I don't remember any, which doesn't mean it didn't happen but I don't remember it. And it didn't happen when I was there. [*standing up*] Excuse me.

JBr: Oh, sure.

[end of Track Two]

TRACK THREE (STE-014.wav)

00:00

JBo: —like the London Art Gallery, the London Regional Gallery, and the National Gallery. So I shouldn't say I never saw them, but I don't remember, other than that, screenings of his films. Somehow I don't think I've been very helpful.

JBr: Oh, no, absolutely. No, the project is really interested in people's personal recollections so I mean this is perfect. I don't have any more questions so unless you have any general things that are popping into your head, I think we can wrap it up.

JBo: Well, if I think of anything I'll email you [*laughing*], but I can't think of anything off the top of my head.

JBr: Okay, great.

[end of Track Three]

[END OF RECORDING]

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Murray Favro

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

Narrator: Murray Favro (MF)

Interviewer: Jesse Brossoit (JB)

Date of Interview: 2016-06-21

Location of Interview: London, Ontario, Canada

Length of Interview: 95:03

Description: In this interview, the narrator discusses his relationship with Greg Curnoe and provides commentary for the films *No Movie* (1965) and *Souwesto* (1969) and the video series *The Laithwaite Farm* (1974).

Topics:

People

Besse, Bill (unknown)
Bice, Clare (1909-1976)
Borden, Robert (1854-1937)
Boyle, John (1941-)
Brodsky, Anne (unknown)
Chambers, John "Jack" (1931-1978)
Clement, John (1943-)
Clement, Shirley (unknown)
Curnoe, Greg (1936-1992)
Curnoe, Owen (1966-)
Curnoe, Sheila (1942-, nee Thompson)
Denny, Peter (1934-)
Dewdney, Alexander Keewatin (1941-)
Exley, William "Bill" (1939-)
Favro, Murray (1940-)
Gilles, Drew (unknown)
Hayden, Michael (1943-)
Hilborn, Kenneth (1934-2013)
Isaacs, Avrom (1926-2016)
Laithwaite, George (1873-1956)
Lamanna, Carmen (unknown-1991)
MacDonald, John A. (1815-1891)
Martin, Ron (1943-)
McIntyre, Hugh (1936-2004)
Ondaatje, Michael (1943-)
Pratten, Art (1939-)
Rans, Geoffrey (1927-2001)
Rans, Goldie (unknown-1993, nee Wiener)

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Reaney, James (1926-2008)
Redinger, Walter (1940-2014)
Ronald, William (1926-1998, born William Ronald Smith)
Russell, Larry (1932-)
Snow, Michael (1929-)
Théberge, Pierre (1942-)
Town, Elkie (unknown)
Town, Harold (1924-1990)
Urquhart, Tony (1934-)
Wesselmann, Tom (1931-2004)
Wherry, Matthew (1915-1984)
Wieland, Joyce (1930-1998)
Wigley, Gard (unknown)
Zelenak, Ed (1940-)

Places

38 Weston Street, London, Ontario, Canada (*Curnoe's home and permanent studio*)
202 King Street, London, Ontario, Canada (*Curnoe's second studio*)
432 Richmond Street, London, Ontario, Canada (*Curnoe's first studio*)
20/20 Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada (*closed*)
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Forest City Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada
London Public Library – Crouch Branch, London, Ontario, Canada
London Regional Art Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada (*now Museum London*)
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
No Haven, Port Stanley, Ontario, Canada (*demolished*)
Ontario College of Art, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (*now Ontario College of Art and Design University*)
Pinafore Park, St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada
Poplar Hill Park, Poplar Hill, Ontario, Canada
Region Gallery, London, Ontario, Canada (*closed*)
The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada
Victoria Hospital, London, Ontario, Canada
Victoria Park, London, Ontario, Canada
York Hotel, London, Ontario, Canada (*now Call the Office*)

Other

Allied Record Corporation
An Exhibition of Things (exhibition, 1961)
Bedroom in Arles (Vincent van Gogh, 1888-1889 – three identically titled paintings)
The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels (Greg Curnoe, 1965-1966)
Carmen Lamanna Gallery
The Celebration (1962 – also "the Happening")
CFPL-TV
Circle (dir. Jack Chambers, 1969)
The Clinton Special: A Film About the Farm Show (dir. Michael Ondaatje, 1974)

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Cortical Foundation

Dada / Mother (Greg Curnoe, 1964)

Down Wellington (James Reaney, 1966)

Farnborough International Airshow

Feeding Percy (Greg Curnoe, 1965)

The Four Horsemen

Half-Scale Sabre Jet (Murray Favro, 1965-68)

Hybrid (dir. Jack Chambers, 1966)

Kamikaze (Greg Curnoe, 1967)

The Laithwaite Farm (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1974)

London Film Co-operative

London Free Press (pub. 1863-present)

Maltese Cross Movement (dir. Alexander Keewatin Dewdney, 1967)

Mosaic (dir. Jack Chambers, 1965)

National Film Board of Canada

Neglected Aspects of Canadian Culture (exhibition, 1974)

Nihilist Spasm Band

No Movie (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1965)

No Record (Nihilist Spasm Band, 1968)

Picasso and Man (exhibition, 1964)

The Plough (George Laithwaite, c. 1935)

R-34 (dir. Jack Chambers, 1967)

Seated Nude (John Boyle, 1966)

Souwesto (dir. Greg Curnoe, 1969)

Star Weekly (pub. 1910-1973)

Synthetic Lake (Murray Favro, 1972-1973)

Time Magazine (pub. 1923-present)

The Umbrella (CBC Television, 1966)

Van Gogh's Room (Murray Favro, 1973-1974)

Wildwood Flower (dir. Alexander Keewatin Dewdney, 1971)

TRACK ONE (STE-015.wav)

00:03

Jesse Brossoit: Okay.

Murray Favro: Can you tell if it's recording me now?

JB: Yeah, so it's started here. So this is Jesse Brossoit speaking with Murray Favro. It's June 21st, 2016 and we're watching *No Movie* and *Souwesto* and recording commentary.

No Movie Commentary

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Murray Favro

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

[video playback begins at first on-screen image]

Oral History Recording	Video Playback	Commentary
00:23	00:00	[playback begins]
00:26	00:03	JB: Would it be easier if the lights were off? MF: Yes, a lot easier.
00:36	00:13	MF: Okay, my recollection is this sea stuff, as far as I know, comes from—what do they call it?—the National Film Board [of Canada]. See they had an outlet in London that had a copy of all their films. And there was a guy named Drew Gilles, he helped make this movie. So did Hugh McIntyre. Hugh McIntyre was a film librarian but he's also in our band [Nihilist Spasm Band] and—. You know, so we were all friends and so on but they actually helped Greg with all this stuff and this really went well—this moray eel and all these things—really went well with the kazoo stuff. JB: Right, you said— ¹
01:31	01:08	MF: These signs are stamped by Greg. They're his, he was doing stamps. And this would be, I would guess, '65. We all—
01:48	01:25	MF: That's Hugh McIntyre. He had a big part in this movie actually.
01:53	01:30	MF: Ron Martin. Do you know him? Anyway—
01:56	01:33	MF: There's Greg. Don't know who that is.
02:00	01:37	MF: That's Bill Exley.
02:05	01:42	MF: That's Art Pratten.
02:10	01:47	MF: This is the convention sort of a thing. I did not go to that but I had some of the things here. So we're trying these different things like a picnic for the group. Group stuff. There was the picnic and there was the—what do you call this?—the convention. You know, the meal thing. There were speeches at these.
02:47	02:24	MF: These are Greg's pictures in the background [<i>Dada / Mother</i>]. Greg was a very enthusiastic person about wanting things to happen in London. He was a total encouragement of that and so his studio was a meeting place where we would all meet and talk about things and come up with things like this. Like the band, the movies, the cottage [No Haven]. The cottage was in there at the first—

¹ Prior to recording, the narrator described the film's original soundtrack as "animal sounding."

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Murray Favro

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

03:21	02:58	MF: This is a Farnborough [International] Airshow. This comes from Hugh McIntyre's collection at the [London Regional] Art Gallery/[London Public] Library. They were combined.
03:36	03:13	MF: That's Hugh McIntyre right there.
03:38	03:15	MF: That was me for a fraction.
03:42	03:19	MF: This is Gard Wigley. Before they would allow bands to play they would only allow one musician to play and then the law changed.
03:51	03:28	MF: That was me. That's Greg's wife [Sheila Curnoe]. I can recognize some people.
03:57	03:34	MF: This is one of the guys from—. Oh, by the way, the camera was Greg's. He had this 16mm camera and what he could do, if he had the lights on and everything, he could—. Really, it's hard work for him but Greg could run the camera. But he wasn't very good with mechanical things at all. He would always get things wrong, like he thought [with] a TV set the picture started at the TV set and so if you wanted to record it [<i>gesturing</i>]—. He would get in and out all mixed up and he would do that with our amplifiers too. He'd get in and out mixed up. Like "where does the sound come from?" He thinks it comes from the [<i>gesturing</i>] and goes into your instrument or something, I don't know. He did catch onto the camera though. So this is all done in his 16mm camera that you wind up.
05:02	04:39	MF: This is No Cottage, or No Haven they called it later, but it was a cottage that all of us rented because we couldn't afford it individually. So on the weekends, everybody would go there.
05:18	04:55	MF: And that's the picnic, the first one.
05:21	04:58	MF: That sign's still around, the same one. Art Pratten looks after it. It was on top of a hill in St. Thomas, where this was [Pinafore Park].
05:39	05:16	MF: This is the guy that spoke [Kenneth Hilborn] and I can't remember his name but the other guys will get that. JB: Right, I think they mentioned it. MF: And the podium that the guy is speaking on was painted by John Boyle and you'll see it in a few minutes.
06:01	05:38	MF: There. Oh, see all the pictures on it? It also had a picture of a woman's crotch right facing the man giving the speech. Bare. So it was made to intimidate him by John Boyle. Or anybody who spoke. So there was all this jokester stuff going on. A lot of the things we did were connected to that. They were fun. That's what they were about, group fun, a bunch of people. And this is like a home movie of it but I think it—. For Greg, he wanted it to go beyond so I guess putting in this stuff [06:47], he accepted what the guys suggested because he wanted all kinds of input

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07:23 07:00 from everybody. Greg liked to be influenced, by the way, as an artist but he wanted to be influenced by his environment, where he lived, more than like New York or some other place. But he was influenced by everything. He was a very curious person and a collector. That's why he was very outgoing: he wanted all these people to have input, to get something happening.

JB: So was the footage with the sea life and the airplanes, was that Hugh or Drew contributing?

MF: Both of them. Drew did the actual editing, like Greg wouldn't be able to join the films together. He wouldn't know how to work that equipment. They had a film—. What do they call that?

JB: Oh, a film rewind? So it goes reel-to-reel?

MF: Yeah, I know, there was a name for that. You can look it up.

JB: Sure [*laughing*].

MF: Film Oddity or something, I don't know, some kind of funny name.

JB: Oh, like an Intercine or a Steenbeck?

MF: It was all mechanical though, it's not like we do stuff now on a computer.

JB: Was it a reel-to-reel?

MF: Yeah, two reels together. That was done by Drew. Hugh knew films and bought films and he got the footage, I think, for the airshow. They were all three of them together when that was put together. It was the three of them that edited it, put it together. So that's something I do know.

08:32 08:09 MF: Now this is lacrosse. I used to play lacrosse as a kid and I was there—I may have been running that camera at that minute—but they didn't let me play because I didn't have a stick [*laughing*]. But it was okay. They weren't very good at lacrosse but it was not bad.

JB: Right, just a fun game.

MF: Yeah.

09:00

JB: So that was *No Movie*.

MF: And we only did that one game. Never did it again.

JB: Oh really?

MF: Yeah.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

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Date of last update: July 6, 2016

JB: [*laughing*] Alright, so—

MF: And there was a magazine started which—. Is this still recording?

JB: Yep, so if you want to—

MF: —which Art might have talked about because him and Hugh actually did a lot to do it.

[the following comments were made while preparing video playback]

MF: Now, this film that you're watching right here, I don't know where it comes from but it's before my time knowing these people.

JB: Right, I think this would be—

MF: This was at the Art Gallery when Greg became an outcast at the London Art Gallery, after this I believe. Was this "the Happening?"

JB: That's actually—. I think that's next.

MF: Okay, I wonder what this is.

JB: I think this is from '62 or '63. It was *An Exhibition of Things* [1961]. I think it was actually—

MF: '62-'63? I met Greg in '64, winter.

JB: Oh, okay. I think this is actually in this library if I'm thinking of the right segment. You'll see it in a second.

Souwesto Commentary

[video playback begins at first on-screen image]

Oral History Recording	Video Playback	Commentary
10:12	00:00	[playback begins]
10:14	00:02	JB: So it's started here. MF: You think it was shot here? It's possible. JB: Yeah, at some point—either this section or the next section—it is the Crouch Library at some point in this. MF: Oh, okay.
10:28	00:16	MF: Oh, I remember that. We've lost that, I think, or it's stored away somewhere.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Narrator(s): Murray Favro

Transcribed by: Jesse Brossoit

Date of last update: July 6, 2016

10:35	00:23	MF: This again was Greg but it wasn't stamped, he used stencils, but he was getting into doing that stuff right from the beginning. That stencil work.
10:48	00:36	MF: This is "the Happening," which I've heard so many times. But Art was there and Art remembers all these details.
10:56	00:44	MF: Look at the mess. That is a mess [<i>laughing</i>]. It turned Greg into an outcast, they wouldn't let him in there. We had to start our own gallery called 20/20 Gallery after.
11:16	01:04	MF: Was that Jack Chambers there for a moment? I'm not sure. I'm not sure if he was back yet. He might have been. But actually, this was the first of the funny ideas.
11:41	01:29	MF: And there are a lot of students around at this time. University of Western Ontario students and—. I don't know if professors were around yet, I think that came later.
11:59	01:47	MF: [<i>laughing</i>] Boy, look at that! Oh no! And they wanted Greg to clean it up and he just walked out I think [<i>laughing</i>]. But this is interesting stuff.
12:11	01:59	MF: That's probably Crouch. JB: Yeah, this might be the room next door.
12:20	02:08	MF: See, a library not the Art Gallery. It's sort of separate.
12:29	02:17	MF: I remember that, seeing that in Greg's studio. MF: And he liked—. What I call hokey but it's, you know, hometown stuff. He liked that kind of stuff.
12:36	02:24	MF: Like that, where the guy is from the local radio station and they talk through this thing. He liked that kind of thing.
12:51	02:39	MF: I wish we could hear him but—. Was there ever sound for this? JB: Yeah, Sheila remembers there being sound. MF: I thought so. JB: And I think Bill may have remembered there being sound as well. But this came from a 16mm film print and that print didn't have sound, for whatever reason. MF: It might have been on tape or something. JB: Yeah, and there's actually another print somewhere else in Toronto that has sound. MF: Oh, it would be nice to get it. JB: Yeah, we're trying to get to the bottom of whether there was supposed to be sound or not.
13:25	03:13	MF: Oh, he was around [Geoffrey Rans]. I forget his name. A professor. Art would know that guy's name.
13:38	03:26	MF: And this guy [Matthew Wherry] ended up in both Greg's and Jack's work.
13:49	03:37	MF: And that's Goldie Rans. That man I said who he was, that was Geoff Rans.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

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Date of last update: July 6, 2016

13:59	03:47	MF: So there's how his lettering is starting to show up. This is very early. It's kind of new for me to watch it. JB: Have you seen this before, this one? MF: Just roughly but I have yet to really look at it.
14:17	04:05	MF: There are interesting little things in there, like this.
14:31	04:19	MF: Geoff had a funny pipe. He got rid of that after a while. He stopped smoking altogether.
14:40	04:28	MF: Oh, Tony Urquhart.
14:44	04:32	MF: A little bit of colour there.
14:46	04:34	MF: This shot is from <i>Umbrella</i> . And there is sound for it by—. The guy, he may have talked over a lot of the music sounds. He just threw the sound in.
15:07	04:55	MF: That's me there, sitting down. A lot of kazoos were made. Art's was interesting, he got someone else to make it for him. Very funny thing. Art used to say to anybody—. They would say they were making some funny kind of instrument or something to experiment with and he would always say "bring it down and we'll play it, doesn't matter what it looks like or anything, bring it down."
15:42	05:30	MF: Oh yeah, Exley didn't want people to see his face too much. He thought he'd lose his job. JB: Right, he's a teacher. MF: But at this time he seemed to be okay with this. But later on he wouldn't.
16:00	05:48	MF: Boyle still has these same kazoos. That same one.
16:17	06:05	MF: And this would be like—. Every Saturday we would go up to Greg's and sit around in all these funny chairs and stuff, listen to music stuff and have a big tub full of beer. So we'd do that every Saturday, it was a lot of fun. It was a gathering place and that got people thinking of all kinds of ideas: newspapers, magazines, the art gallery. I can't think of everything.
17:06	06:54	MF: Anne Brodsky. She ran the Art Gallery after they got rid of the guy that Greg didn't like [Clare Bice].
17:14	07:02	MF: Somebody's taking a picture of her boobs there.
17:17	07:05	MF: Oh, this is the guy who ran the program. Do you know his name? JB: Yeah, William Ronald. MF: Ronald, yes.
17:31	07:19	MF: This would be Greg's first studio [432 Richmond Street]. There's some colour.
17:38	07:26	MF: <i>Feeding Percy</i> .
17:41	07:29	MF: The colours really look off there compared to what you get with video.

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17:51	07:39	MF: That's a lot like him copying something I did. Greg was a collector.
18:04	07:52	MF: And then he did this because—. Or they did this, whoever shot this. This must be the television program—maybe footage that wasn't used—but it relates to that <i>Percy</i> thing, which is the name of that bird.
18:35	08:27	MF: Greg used to fight with his cats. It's a bad habit because his hands were just all scratched [<i>laughing</i>] by the time they got bigger, you know.
18:46	08:34	MF: Oh, I remember that stuff in his studio. All kinds of little interesting things stuck all over the place.
18:57	08:45	MF: And that hotel painting [<i>The Camouflaged Piano or French Roundels</i>], this is it starting out before he actually painted it. It took a long time to do. Sheila's made a print of this since and gradually—. I was wondering about this right now because somebody said "oh, who did airplanes first? You or Greg?" I said "that comes from me." Like he just grabs anything going on because when he got over to there he put "R-34" on, which is a balloon. It's not quite an airplane but into the flying stuff. He was influenced all the time. He wanted to be and he could get away with it because he would always make it his thing. Because it was his detail with colours, the way he played colours off, that was really him. That was really his stuff. And the lettering and all that. So he could pull it into being a Greg work. Like he's been blamed for copying [Tom] Wesselmann and he says "oh no I didn't" but I mean it's pretty damn close [<i>laughing</i>]. Do you remember him? Did you ever see him? JB: No, I've never— MF: Look it up on the web. JB: Sure. What's his first name? MF: Like the pictures of Sheila nude are very much like Wesselmann but Greg would see the differences. And there were differences.
20:58	10:46	MF: Like this is really different [<i>Kamikaze</i>]. This is funny. This is an ozone thing [orgone box] so you're supposed to go inside it and it's supposed to get the bad spirits out of you or something like that, you know. An ozone box or whatever but it's his version of it. Oh and he wanted to stick a balloon [<i>gesturing</i>]—. He went and bought a balloon. Here the flying thing comes in. He bought one of those air balloons, for—. A weather balloon. But it only floated for about a quarter of a day [<i>laughing</i>]. It didn't work and so he got rid of it, just kept the other part. It was joined to the top of the thing, you see [<i>gesturing</i>] there's the thing and then the—.

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JB: And it actually elevated the whole pyramid?
MF: Yeah, I think he only had it on and tried it out. But he didn't like it anyway.

22:04 11:52 MF: Oh now, I'm just trying to guess. Owen is in his forties. He might be fifty now or close to it. Forty-nine or fifty, so this would be about fifty years—. Well, he's crawling. Forty-nine years ago. What year is that from now? I'd say fifty.
JB: Yeah, I think it's around '67, around here.
MF: Yeah, that sounds about right. Yeah.
JB: I think he was born in '66 so he might be about one year old here. So yeah, that would be fifty years.
MF: [*agreeing*]

22:57 12:45 MF: Now this is home movie stuff [*laughing*]. This is not the same as the other stuff, this is straightforward home movie. It was good to see some old things. The old cars and all that.
JB: [*agreeing*] There's an old bus that comes in at some point.
MF: See when people did their home movies and showed them, I don't know if you know about that, but they did what I'm doing right now. You'd just talk over them because there's no sound. But the video stuff is way better nowadays because you get the sound. And slideshows were even weirder. Slideshows on the wall and you'd talk about "oh, there's Aunt Vie waving at the camera" and stuff like that.
JB: [*laughing*] Right.
MF: But slideshows are not like that anymore. Now they're on a computer. Yeah, you just change pictures. Somewhat the same but it's more of a review now.

24:25 14:13 MF: Whatever that is. You'd have to talk to Sheila to get what this is about.
JB: Yeah, I believe this is a family picnic and then shortly after is the Nihilist Picnic from 1967, I think.
MF: Well, there was a picture of the banner there in the last movie.
JB: Right, so that was from '65, I think. And this will be from '67 and '68.
MF: With kids in it?
JB: Yeah.
MF: Okay, this is later then. See it started out just being a fun picnic where people had a meal and they had speeches but then it got to be where the kids and everybody got together and people from out of town came back, you see, so it got to be like that. Because it was always the same weekend, just before school started I believe, or maybe after it started.
JB: Around Labour Day, right?

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		MF: Yes.
25:47	15:35	MF: Where is this? There were three places where we had it.
26:00	15:48	MF: I have no idea where that is.
26:21	16:09	MF: We kept doing the same old stuff year after year. I mean, the same old races.
26:30	16:18	MF: <i>[laughing]</i> One-person race.
26:49	16:37	MF: They called this the Exley Jumping Contest because he invented it. You just jump up and down. Whoever's the longest wins.
27:10	16:58	JB: So I think that was from '67 and then what's coming up is from '68. I think. That's what Bill deciphered.
		MF: Okay. He's good for that stuff.
27:22	17:10	MF: That looks like the place we've had a lot of picnics at in a little town north of here <i>[Poplar Hill]</i> .
27:47	17:35	MF: What should I say about picnics? I don't know.
		JB: Would you have been in attendance for this one maybe? For '68?
		MF: I might have been at this one, yeah. I went to a lot of the early ones but I don't know if I went to this one. I think I went to all of them for years.
28:20	18:08	MF: There's that same old sign over there.
28:30	18:18	MF: Wherever you see that striped shirt, that's art. That's red and black because those are the colours of the picnic and the Nihilist Party stuff and he had that funny shirt.
28:44	18:32	MF: Oh, this is when Greg bought his place. Have you seen it now?
		JB: Yeah, I went there with Sheila.
		MF: This is back what it looked like when he first moved in there, pretty well.
28:53	18:41	MF: I think that's his parents'. That's an old car.
29:09	18:57	MF: More home movie stuff. I didn't know Greg took so many home movies with that camera.
29:41	19:29	MF: I forgot about that cat with no tail.
29:57	19:45	MF: That's all torn down. Are you from London?
		JB: Not from London but I lived here for a few years.
		MF: Well, you know that hospital in Greg's paintings?
		JB: <i>[agreeing]</i> Victoria Hospital.
		MF: You could see it from his studio. It's torn down now, finally.

30:15

JB: Okay, so that was those two.

MF: Sorry, I didn't have much to say about his home movie part.

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JB: Oh, no, that's alright. I think a few people had that same reaction.

MF: Who?

JB: I think a few people had that same reaction to Greg's home movies.

MF: Yeah, you'd almost have to show that to Sheila. Have you?

JB: Yeah, actually I went to Sheila and Greg's home and saw the studio or what's left of the studio. Yeah, she talked about it as well.

MF: [*gesturing*] Is this the way this computer is or have you been messing with it?

JB: Oh, no, it's broken a little bit. This is kind of separated so I've got it leaning on the books [*gesturing*].

MF: Oh, I see. I like it. But you don't like masking tape [*laughing*]?

JB: [*laughing*] Well, I need—

MF: Not masking tape.

JB: Duct tape or something?

MF: Yeah, that'd make a mess though. It's too sticky.

JB: Yeah, I need to be able to keep it open or closed or something.

MF: Yeah.

JB: So yeah, as I mentioned, we spoke on the phone. So you answered a lot of questions that I was going to ask anyway, so I won't keep you too long, but I was wondering—. One thing that—

MF: It would be good if you asked me stuff.

JB: Oh, sure. I think one thing that Art mentioned that you might know is Hugh McIntyre's Kinotek, the thing that he was doing out of the library.

MF: Oh, Kinotek, yeah.

JB: Was that a venue that these films were shown in? I mean, where were these films being seen?

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MF: No, Greg's was never shown there. Jack Chambers's was shown there. And did you ever hear of Michael Ondaatje?

JB: Oh, sure.

MF: I showed his films here. I ran the projector. I showed them and Hugh ran it. One night we showed Michael Ondaatje's latest film and Jack Chambers's latest film. Jack Chambers used—. You know how Greg was using stuff from other places?

JB: [*agreeing*]

MF: I can't tell you exactly but there's a similarity in that Jack used footage from the [London] Free Press. The Free Press used to—. Not the Free Press, the television station. What did they call it?

JB: Oh, CFPL[-TV]?

MF: CFPL, yeah. So Jack used CFPL's old footage and just cut it all up. [*laughing*] He wrecked their archives. He had no respect. He just cut it and used it and threw some over there and some over there. But he got neat pictures though of—. There were a lot of deer around here or something. There's a picture of a pile of dead deer and a pile of foxes or wolves. Where did they come from? I don't know but there'd be piles of them, people all smiling with their guns and stuff. They would just hunt these things down. But there was all this footage and he used that stuff, some of those shots. And he used bleached shots a lot, where it was the junk stuff at the beginning end of film where it's almost all white. Exposed to light, you see. He used a lot of that in the beginning of his film and then all of a sudden you see some deer or some stuff if you really looked at it. And he was getting interested in this negative—. It was black-and-white film. A negative, when you go like that [*gesturing*] and you get a positive picture if you turn it to a certain spot. Jack started doing pictures like that too.

JB: Right, the silver paintings.

MF: Yes, that's where that comes from, from making that film. Then at the bottom he stuck some colours. So that's the surface he was starting to look at and he talked to me about that. "How do I get that look?" I didn't know so I said "the only way you're going to get it is experimenting. I mean, nobody is going to be able to tell you, you just got to try it." And that was his paintings, those ones. He thought I'd know because I projected films and stuff like that. When I showed that film—you know, where I said it's all bleached out—it was a brand new copy. It was in perfect shape because after a while there would be scratches in that part but it really looked good when you first saw it, the first time it was ever projected. It looked good. And another film of his that I showed was his backyard. He took it through the window. It jumped all over the place but it's a fantastic idea. So there was influence back and forth with Greg in that. They both wanted to do films and paintings. Now Ondaatje was a writer who did films. Of course, he made some pretty good films later on but back then it was—. I can't even remember what the film was. It was like a

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short film. And then there was a guy named Kee Dewdney, he showed his films too. He did things [that] were sort of animation-experimental stuff. The Kinotek showed all these guys but Greg didn't put his in there, no. And some of these guys started loaning their films out through something [London] Film Co-op and they would make copies. I don't know if Greg made copies of his films.

36:39

JB: Well, there's a catalogue that I found from the Film Co-op and it's undated but it's probably '66, '67, '68. Somewhere in there. And *No Movie*, the first one we watched, is available for rent or loan but it's—

MF: Did he make copies for distribution though?

JB: I think so. Or maybe it was just one copy.

MF: That's what I wondered. And then when it's gone that's it.

JB: Well, the AGO [Art Gallery of Ontario] has a copy.

MF: Okay, it has a copy. Then somebody got one made.

JB: So I'm not too sure where that came from. I think that was maybe a later thing they found. Actually, from the Film Co-op, the movie is attributed to the Nihilist Party, not Greg. So I think he was acknowledging that collaborative stuff that he was doing.

MF: Yeah, there should have been copies made of it though. Everybody else was getting copies made of their stuff. And I used movies but I didn't use movies like 'movies movies.' Do you know of anything about my work?

JB: Yeah, a little bit. You did more like looping installation stuff, right?

MF: Looping like a wave machine. A thing that simulated waves coming down on the gallery floor [*Synthetic Lake*]. That was a machine. Then onto that would be a loop of waves coming down and it just ran forever. Well, people couldn't—. They'd wait, wait, wait for what's going to happen. That's what it is [*laughing*], it's the waves. But there was one guy where I sold it, the National Gallery [of Canada]. There was one guard that said "I really like that." He'd be working there in the middle of the winter and he said "I like to go in there and sit there and watch it, let it remind me of Florida" [*laughing*]. Watching the waves. The other one, I think the AGO may have it. Lightbulbs, do they own that?

JB: Maybe.

MF: Maybe not though.

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JB: I don't remember seeing it on the list.

MF: I don't think they do. Maybe the London Art Gallery has it, I'm not sure. Lightbulbs is why that thing about Greg's thing there reminded me of it. What it is is it's an animation I made of four lightbulbs, I think. They're really blown up big and I made huge lightbulbs, you know, to hang on the wall. And it projects this loop and they turn on and off. And since it's animated on a stand, I also changed the lightbulbs around. The colours. They're all coloured lightbulbs, different colours. It's just a funny looking thing but it looks good. You can read the writing on the bulbs when it's so big and clear: "Sylvania" or something. But what I liked about it is when the bulb came around and there's another bulb here [*gesturing*], the reflection of the bulb that was in here, if it's a flat picture, is a fun shape because it's on the side. But when you go and look at the real thing and you get to the side, it's stretched around. It looks like a lightbulb again, see? So it's funny, it takes out all the distortion. So there were funny reflections like that going on. It was nice to look at. Anyway, that's the two things that I used films on. I don't think I used it on anything else. Yeah, I used slides for *Van Gogh's Room*. They got that at the AGO. I was in Paris, I had a show, and when I was there I finally—. I always liked that painting of Van Gogh's room, you know [*Bedroom in Arles*].

JB: Oh, sure, with the distortions.

MF: He did three of them. But anyway, they had the slides there and I was doing the slide stuff so I got it and made lots of copies. Then I made the *Van Gogh's Room*. It was very nice, I liked it. It was so good to be able to look not at his painting because it's his painting that's projected of room. His painting stretched back out into the room and you'd go and look around at it. I liked doing that. It's playing around with the concepts. So Greg liked that kind of stuff that I did. We used to visit every week anyway at his place and I'd talk to him about stuff and he'd show me his latest stuff. He liked people to be around when he worked and he could work and talk to you. Amazing. I couldn't do that. So that's why his place was a collection place. I mean, for people to go and all stand around because he could work there while we were all talking about other stuff and play music and do all that stuff. He liked all that activity. So that's what was amazing about him, he's not like a usual artist. Usual artists are loners; Greg is not a loner. He liked, like I said, all the influences and all the things around and he could actually work in that environment. So that's where we would go when we wanted a break [*laughing*], was to his place. I can't think of anything else about that.

43:01

MF: Oh and I met many different kinds of people at Greg's. Of course, there was Art, who was a printer and didn't really do artwork himself anymore but he had a background in it. But he was more a commercial artist, they called him then. Worked at the newspaper. Hugh McIntyre was a librarian/philosopher sort of person. Bill Exley turned into a high school teacher but acted like a professor, but he's not [*laughing*]. He likes English but spoken. He doesn't care for the written stuff. He likes plays and things and he likes to hear it. So we met him. John Clement is mechanical. He's a bit like me, he likes mechanical stuff. He turned into a doctor but he went to school for ever before he became a doctor. He took every course that he could like math, science,

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English. He just kept going back and finally—. Oh, finally, he started getting practical. He wanted something to earn some money out of this stuff so did something where he went up to Bancroft and helped underprivileged people or—. I don't know, somehow. You know, helping people, whatever that is, but he hated it after. I'd say "you don't get anywhere, you think you're getting somewhere and they're right back where they were" [*laughing*]. So he found that frustrating. Then he went back and did the doctor thing which he liked and ended up doing it. Then he was a doctor. I think he just retired about a year ago. Have you talked to him?

JB: Yeah, I met with him a couple weeks ago, I think. I've just been coming back and visiting London for a day or two and trying to talk to people.

MF: Do you think he's seen these things? He's in a couple of them.

JB: Oh, yeah, I showed him them as well. Yeah, he did a commentary, he spoke about them, and then his wife Shirley [Clement] came in and she watched the second one because I think she's in it very briefly so she wanted to see it.

MF: Okay, yeah. He helped Greg make something that had a mechanical leg in it. I don't know where that is but Greg couldn't solve it. So John Clement took a motor out of a record player and got this thing working, got it working for Greg. That's kind of how he met him I think. He was looking for somebody to solve this for him, then he met him. That was before I met any of these guys. I was a student. I went back to take fine arts just for painting and sculpture because I had taken sort of more general kind of art. I tried commercial art and I did not like it. I was too independent; I couldn't do that stuff. I figured my ideas were better than the salesman, but the salesman didn't think that [*laughing*]. Anyway, so I went back and I took fine art and that's how I got to meet Greg because he had just come back from Toronto about a year before and got a studio in London. I was wondering about what I do after I get out of this course to be an artist. To be an artist, I needed a studio. "How do you get one?" And all that. So a couple of us, me and Ron Martin, went down. He lived on the same street as Greg actually. We went down and visited Greg at his studio after coming back from a Picasso show in Toronto. We looked at a Picasso show at the AGO [*Picasso and Man*]. You could even find out what year that was and all that [1964]. I'm sure it was Picasso, I'm pretty sure. And then we came back and on the train—. He had talked about this guy he knew who had studio and I said "well, why don't we go and see him?" So we got off the train and went and saw Greg, which was about two blocks away from the train station on King Street [202 King Street]. So I thought "wow, this is great. Great big things, you do whatever you want. This is what I like! That's what I want to do, just what I want to do." So I think I visited him in the daytime a little bit later because I was almost getting out of the school and I had to get a studio. There was a guy up there named Larry Russell, he said "I'll show you how to get a studio." So we went out at Greg's—see it was a gathering place even back then—and so we went down the street and he said "what you do is you look. You want the top floor of one of these old buildings. So look at them and most of them will be empty ut just pick one you think looks good and then go in and find out who owns the place and say you want to rent it." So I went into this place. The bottom was a haircutter and somebody, but they gave me the owner's name. Well, they gave it to this Larry Russell guy and he wrote it down for me and it

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was a lawyer and he rented it to me for sixty bucks a month. It was fantastic and it was huge. It was an old Polish Hall or something, on the top floor. It had a little stage in it and everything so it was a great place. That wasn't hard but then as soon as I got that, the of course I was downtown and I'd go over and visit Greg all the time. I'd invite him over once in a while but I had to work on my own more. I'm that kind of an artist; Greg is an unusual artist. So we visited him and we'd go and have beer and I met Jack Chambers at Greg's. I think I met Tony there, Tony Urquhart. Other artists from out of town, once in a while they'd drop by. From Montreal maybe. Not many from Toronto. Greg felt like he was a reject from Toronto, pretty well. Except for Mike Snow, he got along with Mike Snow. He'd just come back from New York to Toronto and they got along. I get along with Mike Snow too. His work and my work—. I understand his work, he understands mine. The kind of playing around with stuff. Oh and then, probably in there somewhere [gesturing], there's that stuff about *Umbrella*. Around that time, almost the same time as the record company coming down to see the band. See, there was all this interest in the band going on all of a sudden from outside. It got printed up in—. I'm not sure what magazines were doing stuff but there was a thing called the Saturday—. The *Star Weekly*, it was on Saturdays and they did a whole article on London and they had—. This is around '68 maybe, '67-'68. No, it was '67, or '66 actually because I was sitting in my jet plane [*Half-Scale Sabre Jet*]—and that was one picture—that I'd been building for a couple of years. I was sitting in that. Then they had Ron Martin, Greg, Jack Chambers, the two guys from West Lorne—. The guy that just died recently, I can't think of his name right now. Walt Redinger, that's it. As soon as you give up you remember. Walt Redinger and Ed Zelenak both worked in the tobacco because their parents were in it but they had been to the [Ontario] College of Art and they were making big sculptures, very big. They would come into London once in a while or we'd go out and visit if we could get a ride. Hugh McIntyre was the guy with a car back then who'd give us rides places. I think Art had a car by that time too. Anyway, they had us in all these—. I'm not sure if it was *Time Magazine*, the Canadian version. I'm pretty sure it was. It was a Canadian—. I think that comes in a little later, a couple of years later. But it seems like every week there was somebody there. Photographers, all kinds of stuff. And the record guy showed up where we were playing and did that first record of the band. I did the cover of it. We got somebody's photographs and none of them were any good except for the one of Hugh McIntyre so I made the cover of Hugh. Everybody was pissed off [laughing]. But we put the whole band on the back but on the front—. It was a good cover, it's still good.

JB: Was that *No Record*?

MF: *No Record*. It's got a picture of Hugh on it, it's just "NO" on both sides. "The Nihilist Spasm Band Record" is the words. And it's angled, it's not square like that [gesturing], it's angled like the writing, so no matter how you put it in it looks okay in a record store. That's been reprinted many times. It's the most popular. It's the first one we did and it got all over the world. It was everywhere. It was distributed worldwide. That helped us a lot and that's why it's reprinted. But that guy just showed up and he showed up and he said he'd heard about the band and he wanted to hear us really, so he came down to the York. He could hardly get in the door; it was jammed with people. People like Bill Exley only came down—you got to know this—he only came down on school holidays because he was a teacher. He had no idea of what was going on at the York.

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He didn't play there so he thinks everybody hated the band but we were filling the place. When this guy came to make the record or was interested in the record, couldn't get in the door, and he saw the huge audience he was very interested. There was something going on there. Another person who wasn't around an awful lot was John Boyle. He was teaching in St. Catharines and he would come down. More often than Bill though. See Bill was around for a play we were in: *Down Wellington* by James Reaney. Bill wore a monkey mask so nobody would recognize him and spoke through that big megaphone. And he saw people he'd had issues with in the past at the university and stuff and so he would aim it at them and be obscene and everything. So he got away with it. But he remembers everybody walking out, you see, because it was objectionable and he would insult the audience. He wouldn't insult the audience now; he would insult the band. "We're all losers" and he understands the audience. That's his attitude, it's changed because he's caught on that people like the band so now he has an obligation to the audience. But before, no, he was against the audience. He vented his anger on the audience. Yeah, built up anger from teaching in school. He had this anger. Did no one else mention that? Like Art?

JB: Bill unleashing on the audience? No, I don't think so.

MF: Originally, he did not like the audience.

JB: No, I don't think so actually.

MF: Anyway.

58:06

JB: Now was that attention from the record label and from *Time Magazine*, was that all from the *Umbrella* show?

MF: That was around but the *Umbrella* show was late. What year was it? '67? '66 maybe.

JB: I think it might have been—. Yeah, '66 or '67 because the band was formed in '66, right?

MF: All these things were happening in around there through those few years. It was just constant. Every few weeks or month, it was just constant. Visits from people from all over the place. Photographers were here doing stuff and recording stuff. See, the recording was probably done in '67 I think but the record came out maybe '68 I think. But it was recorded before that and the guy came down before it was recorded. So it was around the same time as *Umbrella* but it wasn't a follow-up to *Umbrella*, no. It was a follow-up maybe to that *Star Weekly* thing. It's hard to tell. It could've been something else. You have to lay these things out in time, which happened first, and then you can sort of see it. If you do that, you'll see. Because we started the band in—. I think it was '65 sort of we started but we really got it going late, maybe early '66, something like that. We played every night and recorded it on [an] Ampex. A big tape recorder. And we'd listen to it too and hear the funny stuff going on. I think that would be '66, yeah. But the *Umbrella* show was not [*noise outside*]—. A bunch of kids or something. The *Umbrella* show was not the start of anything. The guy was dragging his ass to get there. He didn't even like us.

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JB: Right, I heard something like that.

MF: [*laughing*] He kind of had to do it. Because I talked to him since – he showed at the same gallery with me in Toronto. He was very surprised when I said I thought the *Umbrella* show was a very important show. I thought it was back then, you know, it was showing art stuff and he was travelling around and that. When I mentioned the Spasm Band he said "oh that Greg Curnoe and that band!" He didn't like it at all [*laughing*]. Greg didn't get along with him. But he liked it when I said that his—he was self-centred the guy—he liked it when I said that the *Umbrella* show was important. Then he suddenly started talking to his partner about "where are those negatives?" and all that stuff. You know, for that stuff. They're all lost now, I guess.

JB: I think you can—

MF: Or maybe they are somewhere.

JB: Yeah, I don't think they're readily available but I'm sure the CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] archive probably has them. I think I looked it up and—

MF: A copy of his edited thing.

JB: Yeah, not the camera negatives or anything.

MF: But he was talking about all of the shows in general.

JB: Oh, right. Yeah, I imagine a lot of that would be gone.

MF: Yeah, I guess he still—

[end of Track One]

TRACK TWO (STE-016.wav)

00:00

MF: —owned them. But the record company was—. When we recorded, it was a guy called Bill Besse who had a program we all had listened to on radio when we were kids because it would start with a rooster in the morning. Radio stations didn't stay on all night—did you know that?—back then. They would shut off at twelve o'clock; so would television shows. Then they would start up at like six o'clock in the morning.

JB: Right, I kind of remember that actually.

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MF: Yeah, so at six o'clock in the morning you'd hear this rooster crowing [*laughing*] and that'd be his show. And by a certain time in his show you'd know it was time to go to school.

JB: Oh, interesting.

MF: Yeah.

JB: Was that a local London radio?

MF: Radio was from Toronto, he was Toronto. And we recorded it in his basement. He had a recording studio there. There weren't any others at that time in Toronto. Later on there was lots. And the guy's name was [Jack] Boswell who actually owned the tapes and he finally sold them to a guy in the States. This is interesting. Boswell. I don't know if he's still alive, he'd be awfully old though. But he was the guy who started Allied Record [Corporation]. It was an offshoot of something like some big company. It was an offshoot of a big company and it was all experimental stuff that he was going after. He did The Four Horsemen. A whole bunch of these bands. Anyway, then he sold this to a guy in the States who was a young guy called Cortical Foundation. He bought all the tapes from Bill Besse, from the records, because he wanted to own them. And he does own them but he brought out the record and he did a deal with us and a bunch of other people. But this Cortical Foundation saves all really old vinyl artists, all the really old experimental guys all over North America. The guy's in California, this Cortical Foundation. It'd be worth looking him up. He did other Canadian guys too. Have you ever heard of the—? Well, you can find out from there but he did a lot of very famous Americans too and what he's doing is trying to preserve this stuff, you see?

JB: Sure.

MF: But he's been in accident and I don't know if he's still alive now. He was just alive from the neck up. He had a fall down a flight of stairs or something. I can't think of his name. If you look up Cortical Foundation, you'll find his name.

JB: And they're distributing or re-releasing these old works?

MF: Oh, you'll still find this stuff. It's sort of on the web, yeah. I think he's still selling Spasm Band stuff but he sells it for more than anybody else. Who was it that told him about this Canadian, this Bill Besse? Elkie Town's husband was not Town. What was his name?

JB: I'm not too sure.

MF: He may have changed his name. It may have been Town but he changed it because he didn't want it to be like Harold Town because I think he's related. That's possible. Hayden! Michael Hayden. I got the guy. This is the guy that happened to move in below the Cortical Foundation guy in the same big building in California and the guy saw he had a huge record collection. He started showing him some of this Canadian stuff and that's how he got onto us, it was through

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Michael Hayden. So these funny connections happen. We almost got to California once, the band, but we never got there.

JB: On a tour you mean or to record? To record in California?

MF: No, just play. We'd travel around to play. Last place was Japan, a couple of months ago.

JB: Right, I heard about that.

05:53

MF: Anyway, that's something we started as a group, that band, and it's the one thing that's still going. The picnics, I think they're finished.

JB: Right, it's been fifty. Fifty-one is this year?

MF: Yeah, I think it won't happen this year. The banquets, there only were about three or four of those. 20/20 Gallery collapsed after a few years and then Forest City Gallery started up [inaudible] the same people. But Jack Chambers was in the first one. There was me, Greg, Jack Chambers, and—. I don't think Tony had anything to do with that. And our first show was John Boyle. All penises [*laughing*].

JB: Right [*laughing*].

MF: Drawings. I remember this one professor and he was walking around laughing. Geoff Rans, I believe. He phoned up his wife and he said "I just bought a drawing by John Boyle but you have to come down and pick out the one you want, they're all priced the same" [*laughing*]. So he kind of played a trick on her. I'm pretty sure it was Geoff Rans. Why we got John Boyle was because he was rejected from the—. This is sort of why we started a gallery is that we were all being rejected by the Regional Gallery, you know, the one downtown. They wouldn't show any of the young artists at all so that's why we started 20/20. And we thought we would get the one where they—. Actually, I was not on the jury, I was helping a juried show [Annual Juried Western Ontario Exhibition] where me and Ron Martin, we were students, we would carry out the paintings and they would vote on it and then we would take them out. And the ones they accepted would go over there. Well, the John Boyle we took out—. There was a lot of crap to pay because the people in the jury accepted it but the gallery itself would not accept it. It was called *Seated Nude*. It was a chair sitting on a platform and Boyle had put paint on his genitals and ass and sat on the chair [*laughing*] and then got up and let it dry like that. So that was the painting and they wouldn't have that in the gallery. They may even own it now [*laughing*], after all these years. But that was why we gave him his first show. It was symbolic, in that all these rejected people would show in that place. I didn't get to show my airplane in there. Where did I show it? I showed it in Toronto. I never showed it there in London at all, ever. Oh, [not] until later, yeah. But I showed it in Toronto at Carmen Lamanna Gallery. That's where I showed my airplane and that was in the late '60s. Before that, I showed guitars at his place—like '67 or something—that I had just made for the band, right? I showed them, put them on the wall and

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had a couple amplifiers there. I had been at other galleries; they'd say "I can't show guitars." That was Av Isaacs. He said "oh I can't show that" but I went up to Lamanna and right away he wanted the stuff. He was from Europe; he knew what art was. You know, it's experimental stuff. And that's what he wanted, he wanted to create a fuss. That's what you do. So it was a lot of fun, those years. It wasn't us trying to be professional. It was to do what was the most fun and fun to look at and fun to attend. All that kind of stuff. It was a great time in those movies at that time. I think I'm finished.

JB: *[laughing]*

MF: Unless you've got a question.

JB: No, that's great. I mean, you covered a lot of stuff so I think that's good.

MF: Yeah.

JB: Let me see if I have anything from the other meetings.

11:29

MF: I'm just wondering about—. Greg was able to load that camera himself. You know, you had to do it in a dark room. They were in rolls. He must have went in the closet and done it but he was able to do it in the absolute dark. That's pretty amazing because he wasn't all that good at that stuff.

JB: *[laughing]*

MF: Like our amplifier—. Don't worry about this part.

JB: Sure.

MF: Like our amplifier had at the back, it said "effects send," "effects return." He always would want to switch it around. And "speaker." He didn't know if you put the speaker in there. He thought the speaker fed into it. He was just funny with that and I'd have to keep telling him and then he'd say "oh yeah." And he had a video machine and he got it all wrong, like "it comes out of the TV and goes into the video machine" or something. No, it's coming out of something, a cable. Then when you play it, it comes out there. It's funny, he always had trouble with that. But films he was better with. Oh, and he loved tape recorders.

JB: Oh sure, he's got a lot of tapes.

MF: Yeah, when he bought this Sony tape recorder he took it with him everywhere—before video—and he recorded everything, all these conversations. I wonder if there's any tapes—. We used to have these meetings, him and I and some guys from Western, we used to have these meetings every month or so talking about mechanology. Machines and—. I remember one time

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the guy from Northern Telecom—. You know, they were the first ones to make the telephone thing that [*gesturing*] at the tone, the tone dial. They made the chips in Ottawa. That was called "Silicon Valley North" for a while.

JB: Really?

MF: It was. They made the stuff for the Alouette satellites and stuff like that too.

JB: Oh really?

MF: Yeah, it just folded though.

JB: Yeah, I didn't even know that.

MF: And it's even gone, Northern Telecom, I think. I don't even know if it exists now. It used to be a big factory here that made telephones. Anyway, that guy was in one of them and he had this little chip when they were new in the early '60s there. They were pretty new and he was talking all about it and stuff. We had different people like that and he used to record that stuff. I wonder if it's around.

JB: The AGO might have it.

MF: Or it might be even video.

JB: Oh, sure.

MF: Reel-to-reel video. But I think it could be recording on sound because we did some in a pub and there was no camera. That had to be on a tape.

15:10

MF: Greg and I took part in a movie that Western made of an inventor. His name was Dysee and he was supposed to—. Something Dysee. Anyways, this guy was in paranoid in a sense—he always thought people were going to steal his idea—but he trusted Greg and he wanted to give Greg all the secrets about it because he was getting older and he knew he was never going to make anything else. I found that amazing that Greg was like that. He took so much of an interest in people—this guy is a good example of it but he did it with a lot of artists from all over like Quebec and all over the place, art people, this guy Sanouillet, all these different people—he would take such an interest in what they were doing that they would think that they had influenced him. And in a sense, they kind of did a bit but not really. Greg had no opinions, almost none. Did you know that?

JB: No, that's interesting that you're—

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MF: He had opinions about Americans but that was it. His opinions were—. You'd go over to his place and he would say something about what's in the news and "so-and-so says this and so-and-so says that, what do you think about it?" After a while I started—. "What's all this about? What do you think Greg?" I said. That made him mad. He said "I don't think anything about these things. I'm just collecting all your ideas about it." He was funny like that. He was interested, very interested, in other people's ideas about stuff, which he would not have an opinion about himself at all. He collected that kind of stuff. But with Dysee, see Dysee—. Oh, so artists would see him taking an interest in it and Dysee saw that he was very interested in it. Dysee would not give away his secret but he wanted to give it to Greg. Greg said "oh no, I don't want that." That one he didn't want, isn't that funny? It was too much responsibility. It was how to run a car on water. We did a movie, me and Greg were in the movie, with him in the pub, sitting around the table. And there were the cameras, 16mm big ones. It was Western that was making this movie on this guy who was doing the mechanology stuff. Shot lots of footage of this and all the sound was being recorded and it was very interesting talking to him but he would keep certain things secret. He had his own tape recorder so he could keep track of what he actually said. So it was great—. We never got to see the movie, it was never made, but the guy who made that movie said that he didn't believe he could burn water; he said he believed it was really a steam engine. He had a little bit of oil in there burning it. But he ran that thing during the Second World War and he travelled all the way from London to Montreal and back when everything was rationed. You couldn't buy gas to go on that trip so he was doing something but they weren't sure what it was. I liked his way of explaining it. When we were doing the movie he explained and he said "how I got the idea was" he was walking along or in a car or something and he saw a lightening bolt strike a tree and the tree actually exploded. He said that's what caught him, is if you could—. Whatever that was doing there, if you could capture that and do that in an engine. See, he said there was the water vapour and there was the electricity so he was indicating there that he was doing something with electricity that was like a lightening bolt inside that engine, which is very interesting to me. But to a scientist, they don't like that. You know, "bumblebees can't fly, they're too big." That sort of idea. Greg and I were both quite interested. We gave him a show at the Forest City Gallery. No, the 20/20 Gallery. He had his pictures up. He had also thought of radar back in the Second World War when other people had been thinking about it too but he didn't know that. He suddenly got a visit from the government and they found out he hadn't actually made anything so they just [said] "oh, very interesting" and left. They just wanted to know if he had anything. Anyway, Dysee kept thinking up ideas and he wanted to give them to Greg, and Greg did not want them. Isn't that too bad? I wished he had have [*laughing*] because I would like to know what it was. It was something to do with capturing what lightening does. So I tried to find out just in the last year or so "what is lightening?" So I looked it up; it won't tell you. It tells you how to not get struck by it, that's all it will tell you. Then by accident I found it, what lightening really is. I looked up thunder and in that roundabout way, when you look up thunder, in order to tell you what makes the thunder they have to tell you what lightening does and what it does it makes a little column through the air of ions and they implode and that's where the noise comes from. So it's funny, it is like an explosion but it's kind of the opposite: it's an implosion, it's a collapse. These ions collapse and it's as hot as the sun in there. God, very hot. There's a few things they will tell you about it but you have to look up thunder, not lightening. I like that roundabout way of finding stuff. You look up the real thing and they assume you don't want to

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be struck by it. Anyway, that Dysee created that interest for Greg and me but I want to know what it is; Greg didn't want to know what the guy was doing. Does that tell you anything about Greg what I just told you there?

JB: Yeah, no, that's all great. It's kind of interesting, you touched on a few things that other people didn't get to.

MF: Like, when he did that with Dysee and other artists, when he wanted to know what they thought or what people think but got mad when I wanted to know what he thought. Yep, that was a part of what Greg was like though.

JB: Okay.

MF: He was an unusual person. You never met him did you?

JB: No, I was barely born when he died. I would have been two years old I think.

MF: Pardon me?

JB: I think I would have been two years old when he died.

MF: Oh, when that happened. Yes.

JB: But yeah, everyone I've spoken to has had such positive things to say. I think he really endeared himself to the community.

MF: Yes, he was very interested in his surroundings and what everybody thought and what everybody did, and encouraged everybody. Okay, are we finished?

JB: Yeah, let's say we're finished. Great.

MF: Okay, great. When did you start this?

JB: Oh, a couple months ago. I met with—. Let me just turn this off.

[end of Track Two]

TRACK THREE (STE-017.wav)

[the following comments were made preparing video playback for *The Laithwaite Farm*]²

² After the recording had ended, it was decided that the narrator would like to view excerpts of Curnoe's *The Laithwaite Farm*.

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00:00

MF: Who's that guy? Oh, that's Pierre [Théberge] with hair [*laughing*]. We all had lots of hair. But we don't know what they're saying?

JB: Oh, there's sound but it's kind of—

MF: Oh, Greg's sound? I can't hear anyway.

JB: It's kind of bad anyway, there's a lot of traffic sounds. They talk about folk art for a while and then they go around—

MF: But you can make it out?

JB: Well, in some parts. In other parts, it's hard.

MF: So the guy [George Laithwaite] did it in his backyard. Pierre knows all these guys in Quebec that do this kind of stuff. Boy, it's spooky. Spooky looking stuff. It's not chainsaw work is it? I don't think.

JB: No, I don't think.

MF: Boy it's spooky. It's got a lot of character in it [*laughing*]. You know, like totem poles are spooky too.

JB: I think that sculpture specifically [*The Plough*] is John A. MacDonald and Robert Borden and there's two oxen and they're tilling the field, so it's a very creative interpretation of the—

MF: So the guy is really choosing stuff.

JB: Yeah, so it kind of goes on like that and then later on they just end up in Greg's studio.

[BREAK]

02:17

JB: Yeah, so then they just chat about it for about an hour.

MF: Oh, in the background, the bicycle. Greg's. The plastic one or something. Greg was smart to get that in there [*laughing*]. Yeah, it's not colour. This is that Sony stuff. Anyway.

JB: So he did that and he did a—

MF: I've never seen this.

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JB: Yeah, it was done for an exhibition that Greg curated on folk art [*Neglected Aspects of Canadian Culture*]. So he did a lot of slides, a lot of slide images, and then he made these videos and I think that was screened maybe once at the exhibition. Or maybe on a loop, I'm not too sure.

MF: Yeah, this would be the black-and-white part and the slides would be the colour part. This would be the conversation.

JB: Yeah. So he did this and he did a couple other videos but we're not really too sure where they are so they might be gone, they might be lost. It's kind of an interesting thing that he was doing.

MF: That's Greg's studio there.

JB: Yeah, this is 38 Weston? The studio?

MF: That's one of the windows.

JB: Right. Yeah, that's sort of what the AGO has. Okay, great. I won't keep you any longer [*laughing*].

03:55

MF: I think you should check—. That Film Co-op stuff. You'll find lots of interesting things. Or do you know all about it?

JB: Actually, not too much. I mentioned that catalogue I found and—

MF: Jack Chambers, do you know his stuff?

JB: Oh, yeah. I think I've seen all of his films because he made about five or—. Yeah, five films.

MF: I don't know how many. Is there something called *Hybrid* or something like that?

JB: Yeah, *Hybrid* is one. *Circle*, *Mosaic*—

MF: He did one on Greg.

JB: Right.

MF: Or is that a movie?

JB: Yeah, that's *R-34*, he called it that after the—

MF: Oh, *R-34*, yep. I wasn't too impressed with it but it was okay. Now what about people like Kee Dewdney?

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JB: To speak to about this?

MF: No.

JB: Oh, his films.

MF: Films. He was doing them at the same time as these guys. He was a professor in mathematics.

JB: Yeah, I've seen a couple of his films. From my understanding, he's not that interested in the films at all.

MF: No, he's not.

JB: I don't know if he's disowned them but he's sort of distanced himself from his early film work.

MF: Oh he has? That was back when he smoked a lot of funny stuff. [*laughing*] And his pictures, his things were like that [*gesturing*]. You know, animations. Oh, I remember the first one we ever saw was the *Maltese Cross Movement*. That was the name of his film.

JB: Oh yeah, I like that one.

MF: What it is is it's—. Mechanically, he just made the parts but it is what is in a projector that moves the frame.

JB: Right, the single frame drop-down.

MF: But also he liked it because it's that German symbol, this Maltese cross. Then he did another one [*Wildwood Flower*] where it was a picture of a girl—which he just wanted to get a picture of the girl—and she's doing something but all around the edge is animated, a plant growing like a vine. Very funny idea.

JB: Right, I've seen that. It's a girl on horseback and she's topless.

MF: That's right, on horseback, yeah.

JB: I forget what that's called but yeah, I've seen that. I saw that recently actually.

MF: Now what about those films that I mentioned by—and then we'll go—that film by Ondaatje [*The Clinton Special: A Film About the Farm Show*]. What did he make in London?

JB: I'm not too sure, I've never seen any of his films but he was—

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MF: He made a very famous film, did you know that? And books.

JB: No, I wasn't aware. Oh, well I've read a couple of his books. Well, I knew he made films but I've actually never seen them

MF: Oh, he made a very famous film. Something about "On a Desert." Very famous.

JB: He was only in London for a couple of years though, right? He was teaching at Western?

MF: Yep, I'll tell you what happened there too. There's funny jealousy goes on at universities, you know?

JB: [*laughing*] Right.

MF: The fact was he wasn't what they would called qualified. He was too much self-taught. So they purged all these people and he was one of them. One of the best guys that ever came out of there. He wrote all these books; they kick him out of the English department because he doesn't have as many degrees as the other people. [*gesturing*] I think we're supposed to go.

JB: Oh, yeah.

[end of Track Three]

[END OF RECORDING]