

Virginia Dwan

Carl Andre: A Video Portrait

1976

Video

Laufzeit / Running time 1:05:28

Courtesy Virginia Dwan

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Virginia Dwan (VD)

You have a slightly Rasputin sort of quality.

Carl Andre (CA)

Rasputin was very hairy.

VD

Well, that's one part of it. It might be something else, I'm not sure.... But, um... passionate ideas.

CA

But there's also... It fulfills a kind of fantasy of mine to have a study of the window overlooking the park... a worktable... So this is, um...

VD

Something that you would want for yourself.

CA

On a fantasy level, absolutely...To drink champagne in the afternoon.

VD

A daydream?

CA

Yes, exactly.

VD

What's the source of the fantasy? I mean, what is it like? Is it a composer, you know, that you originally imagined doing this as, or an artist, or a writer...or a social reformer?

CA

Well, there were a series of programs on Sunday morning, on the wake of Sunday school. We would listen to it, because they would be on and they all originated in Boston and one of them, which I loved very much, was E. Power Biggs playing the organ in the Germanic museum in Harvard. And they would get an half an hour Bach or Buxtehude or whatever and then there was another program, which was kind of sermon-like program that was called "From my window on Bacon Street" I think, or Park Street. It would be more or less a sermon, but delivered by the preacher as if he was sitting in his study and looking at the park. I can't remember anything that this man said and his moral lessons, but it was to me a very attractive practice.

VD

Lifestyle...Yeah, you're right... He just, theoretically, he just sat there and waited until Sunday, always looking out, right?

CA

Exactly!

VD

Got his few bonmots together.

CA

He was never very heavy... He was not into hellfire and brimstone, that kind of thing, at all... a Gentleman preacher.

VD

Have you ever found yourself, previous to this moment, in a situation like this, where this was brought back to you?

CA

No, not that I can remember ... What I recall is the quality of weekends and I haven't had weekends for years...to the degree that I haven't had to regulate my activities to the weekend-weekday-cycle.

VD

Does this feel like a weekend to you? Well, this is the first day of the Jewish New Year.

CA

Yes! I think that's one of the things that the city has a different feel today... and Saturday is always very strange because the post office is open only from 9-12am, where I go to pick up my mail. And usually on Saturday I don't get to the post office at all, because I'm not up or I am not in the world before noon... But today I was up really early and I did go up to the post office and I did get my mail.... of course, the mail on Saturday is never interesting... I've never got an interesting piece of mail on Saturday.

(The telephone is ringing)

VD

Excuse me...

CUT

VD

It's quite ideal in some way since the window is clean... because I can cut out some of the sound and of course nobody can see me, I can shoot people walking around, doing their unconscious thing and... also the trees in a certain kind...it's just fabulous to zoom in on them.

CA

Is that a Burmese cat?

VD

Mhm. He's too dark to shoot, I nearly can't do anything with him... I'd have to find a solid black background. Otherwise he just turns into a black furry ball.

CA

Shall I read to you about portraiture?

VD

Ah, okay. Is that what you would like to read? Or would like to read something about Carl Andre, or?

CA

No, This was very interesting to open... by H. P. l'Orange. "The antique origin of the medieval portraiture. The history of art ... emphasizes ... a new technical form in sculpture, which developed in the course of the Roman Empire. While in classical times the whole sculptural form was worked out with the chisel, in late antiquity sculptures availed themselves more and more of the mechanical drill. How expressive that such a technical detail would seem in relation to the whole art of that time. The chisel works corporeally and plastically, quietly following all the molds and hollows in the form, all the ribbles of its surface. The drill on the

contrary works uncorporeally and illusionistically. Instead of the form itself, which is torn up, it leaves a glimmer of illuminated marble edges between shade and drill traces. The body by this technique loses its fertile consistency, it is dissolved... and vanished...“ – which really sounds like video... the video drill.

VD

I don't know if there are edges. We have to see that... You work a lot with the edges, in a way, you know, when you do sections of metal and the edge becomes a very important element. Well, I mean, video has boundaries, certainly ... But edges, no.

CA

But it's even made like, the author there in that paragraph was describing the change, in one can say, the Greek practice of using the chisel and the Roman practice of using the drill, therefore composing an image the same way, that the electron beam in video composes an image that is point point point rather than a flow. The drill, the use of the drill, is relatively plastic, that is with the breaking the image down into points of depth the way the video camera breaks down a scene into points of light, of relative degrees of light and dark.

VD

Yeah. There's also the lack of physical contact between the medium, or rather the material, which is not the medium in this case I am touching, but the material I am not. I am not touching the roll and I am not touching you. Which is the end product in a way. I guess in a way you become the object.

CA

But the protons have to be streaming into the camera. I mean, the proton that's striking me from whatever light source and being reflected and is being gathered in by the lens and...

VD

The image is coming right off the sun and onto you and into the lens, that's right.

CA

So, there has to be a connection, but, it's an invisible, it's a connection that's invisible to us, because it's light.

VD

And yet all we can see ever is light, right?... See, not touch.

CA

Let's answer the question: do we actually see light or do we see the impingement of light?

VD

The impingement.

CA

Yeah, I think light passing through a vacuum or avoid, you see nothing.

VD

Oh, I see what you are saying, right. We see the obstacle.

CA

Yes, the interaction between light and obstacle or medium.

VD

It really is an obstacle in a way, I think. With any energy, what we become aware of in describing any energy form, what we become aware of, is the obstacle that it counteracts and its behavior because of that counteraction or interaction, whatever, right?... I'm thinking here of water against rocks which really obsesses me. It's very difficult to even conceive of just filming over water as such. I mean, say, put a base of water and shoot it, it's not moving at all, really nothing happens. You have to at least share what it's

contained in, and then ideally it shows some kind of movement. I mean either water dropping onto it or it's swishing around or if it's the shore of a lake or a river, there's always some sort of under surface current that's going on, that would change the aspect of it.

CA

That's how Joseph Kosuth began to do conceptual art. He, I think, was a student of the school of visual arts and he wanted to use water as a sculptural material.

VD

Oh, really?

CA

And he pondered the question continuously and he came to the conclusion that if you put water in a container, actually the container would be the sculpture. Put it in a glass basin or anything that contains the water would actually be the sculpture and the water would just, you might say, be the ballast of the sculpture. And if you just pour water on the floor it scatters and disappears if it's uncontained. Of course I guess, Joseph was much too advanced to realize, that certainly the most pleasing sculpture in the world, are fountains.... which didn't occur to him. But he couldn't materialize that sculpture with water so he decided that he would express his sculptural desire instead of with water by just showing the definition of water on the wall.

VD

Well that does bespeak a certain mental set of mine... Is there anything in that glass of yours you're holding?... Yeah, but I was about to say something, I can't – I am trying to think – but uh, is it the container is the ... It's something about the bowl and that its only function is what it contains. But that's going back again there in this direction.

CA

The Daoism?

VD

Yeah, that's what I am saying. It's from Lao-Tse.

CA

Did you when you first read Lao-tse have that ... strange feeling that this was not so much philosophy but use of temperament?

VD

Yeah!

CA

I get that feeling.

VD

That's a really great way of expressing it.... Meaning your temperament, you personally, Carl Andre?

CA

Yes, I thought this ancient and legendary sage was not describing the truth of the universe but was describing the inescapable aspects of my nature, in its best aspects and its strongest.

VD

He and Kwan [Yin] said also, well it really is right there, and Kwan starts laughing half the time through his writing and everything and you really sort of have that wonderful feeling of relief or I did, that it's really all there anyway. And my reading it is only almost a waste of time. It's always just a way of saying to myself: "Yeah, I knew it anyway and it's okay, and don't worry about it." It's probably the most peaceful, un-dynamic in a sense writing but it's not taken that way by many people, but it really doesn't demand anything ultimately.

CA

Which?

VD

Well, both Lao-Tse and Kwan (?), they're both Daoist.

CA

I don't know the second.

VD

Well you probably like him a lot, because he's a contemporary Confuzius. So he's later than Lao-Tse. And he makes fun a great deal of the former series and particularly Confuzius and is quite involved with satire, but through the satire comes a message of reality, a sense of reality. He keeps referring to the great Claude (?). And it's possible, it only occurred to me recently, that the great Claude (?) is himself but I don't think so. I think the great Claude (?) is God, and it's his term for God.

CA

Yes, it goes that one of the reasons that... It was Lao-Tse on one hand, that I had this feeling when I read it, that this is deeply connecting with my nature, my unarmed nature. But to a certain degree, which may sound startling at first, it's a very similar reaction I had to the writing of Marx, because both Lao-Tse and Marx are dialectical thinkers. They are not linear thinkers. There's always in Marx a Yin and Yang, used to an entirely different end. The dialectical matrix of Marx is similar in its dynamic, of course not in its direction as Lao-Tse. I mean, it's an ancient kind of Eastern thought, which seems more surprising in a Western context.

VD

Do you think of Marx as being similar in his approach to an Eastern thinker?

CA

I don't know whether Marx had any regard for Eastern thought at all.

VD

Well, versions were already more impinged, to use that term, in a certain way.

CA

Because Marx gets his dialectical vision from Hegel and turns it on his head, but it's the idea, that, I think, Stalin expresses alone, I've only read it in Stalin, but it has been, somebody said, he's been quoting Hegel or crippled from Hegel the statement, which I only know from Stalin, that "contradiction is not the nature of relationships between essences, but the very nature of essence itself", which is the same dialectical thought as in Taoism.

VD

I can certainly feel that to be true in terms of living matter, you think that that extends to an element?

CA

Oh, I am certain of it. The whole idea of indeterminacy in atomic physics is the idea that you cannot grasp a point in both time and in magnitude. I mean you can decide you will record a point in time or you will record the magnitude of the advance of a current but you cannot do both, because you are impinging, your observation impinges upon the existence of the particle and that's on the very basic level of matter. To observe it, means to have interacted with it, means to have changed it.

VD

Right, But that influences the living, perceiving person.... As I am saying, you take two rocks and there's no human being around. Is there a dialectic involved between them and something else, or between the two of them?

CA

Well, I'm just saying, on the very deep level of matter in its - whether - that's a question in the physics of course, about whether matter is ultimately particle or wave and this was a discussion that went on with Newton and Huygens in the 17th century. Newton believed very much in the corpuscular theory of light. I think he believes in it. And Huygens, a Dutchman, was very much involved with lenses, and believed in the wave theory of light. They were sending opinions back and forth. Contemporary opinion pretty much in physics is that in certain aspects light is treated as a wave phenomenon but in other aspects is treated as a particle phenomenon; when people talk about protons they talk about the straight particle. but then the progress of light can be predicted in the terms of wave in certain circumstances and particles in other. But this is then even extended to matter. That matter in its finest divisions can be treated either as matter of particle, fine particle, or matter of wave. There are different ways of dealing.

VD

So you're saying the polarity in that case is in behavior or at least we perceive it as being a behavioral polarity. Whether it acts as a wave, whether it acts as a particle. Or you're saying, it really is inherent in the material?

CA

To be both. That's the Yin/Yang of matter, it's wave and it's particle. You cannot say there's one or the other. Its reality is it's dialectic. That certainly is very much in accord with Lao-Tse... I thought it amazing that people had to spend so much money to come to a conclusion which seems to come to the Chinese for nothing.

CUT

VD

A lecture situation in Princeton recently: A man, I think you would have enjoyed listening to, was saying that the more, in essence, the more eccentric to the individual a statement appears to be, the more information is conveyed. I was quite surprised, because I tend to think that information has to have a certain common denominator, basic common denominator, something you recognize from television, or something. And if it doesn't, people just won't get and that's the end of that. But apparently he's approaching it in a semi-psychoanalytic way and if psychoanalytics does hold up to an consciousness and unconsciousness even.... The more individualized the statement is, the more actual information comes through, because it is information... it's new.

CA

But you cannot transmit something to someone unless they know what that message is.

VD

But that's ... what I intend to say. From a more so general way, you can't transmit something to someone, that'll really stick as information - information defined as a new particle or a bit, right - unless it is foreign. If it isn't foreign, there is no information, it's just part of the same ... So I think the problem is, information as something that will last to accept and information as something that's irritating and nettling. So that information as something that's nettling, which would be the individual kinky way of expressing something,

may ultimately have more impact, to say, than the thing which the other person wanted to hear about ... For instance, I would like to use an example with you. The other evening at your place you were talking about the nature of time and you said: "I prefer to think that time is not ... going in this direction to that direction, but is going, and then you showed multiple lines going off horizontally which was going in those directions..." This is something I don't really conceive of in my own mind, I've gone over and over and over in my mind but... the very fact that I've gone over ... it isn't something I already wanted to hear, it isn't something I already had confirmed, it's a new particle of information or attitude.

CA

But I think that gets into verifiability, you might say, that my stipulation that time was not in the direction of looking forward and looking back but really from the left to the right, or from right to the left, I think that was probably the diagram. That's an article of faith after all.

VD

Well, most statements about time are anyway.

CA

Yes, I would say they are.

VD

But I don't understand your article of faith, that's what I was staying.

CA

Right, well, you don't understand because you don't accept it. It's like I don't understand; well, I am not sure. Could I say that I understand the immaculate conception but don't accept it? To speak of an article of pure faith or... To what degree is understanding... To a certain degree understanding something is an act of faith in it. It's like the people who say about some novel conjecture or a new work of art or something, they say, "it's nonsense", they say "I will not understand that".

VD

Oh that's a non-will to understand.

CA

It's very much like people saying about quite innocent works of art "how can you call that art?" They will not grant it the degree of faith required to establish this as a work of art and then go on to say what a terrible work of art that is. And that's really quite unfortunate, because I always try to convince these people, that the much stronger statement is not "how can you call that a work of art?" but "that's such a terrible work of art"... I mean that would connect them much more closely... that leads me to the other thought...

VD

You're trying to tell them that that's what they're really saying.

CA

Well, they of course believe that to accept something as a work of art is a positive act. It's a value in itself to say "that's a work of art". That's a common everyday expression. "Just look at that, that's a work of art!". And you could be talking about a pie or a cake.

VD

That's true.

CA

And so, that something is a work of art is to already place it in a hierarchy of values. What I try to convince people, that something is art does not place it of being any value, if it is just describes in what area of human activity it's a

specimen, of what area of human activity. And then I say, don't you really mean, that what you're saying is, and of course this is usually in terms of my work, that it's really a terrible work of art, that you strongly dislike it. And it's very hard to bring people to that conclusion. For one reason, the people who don't like art anyway spend all their art energy disliking art that they dislike or rejecting things that they don't want to be involved in the category of art, a category which they don't like. But people who do like art, I found this to be true with myself. The more I like art, the less time will I spend with art that I dislike and the more time I want to spend with art that I like. I think, that's the great difference, I found between, you can always tell, whether somebody is truly art interested. A person who really loves art will not waste their time with art that they dislike. They'll dismiss it, they'll go away, they'll perhaps huff and puff a little bit, but to spend your time with art that you dislike is draining the art libido energy that's available to you to have any reaction to art. But people who dislike art, period, consciously or unconsciously spend their time hooraying and disliking works of art. I found this true with this controversy in England in the Tate Gallery in London. Commentators and editorial writers who really don't care anything about art, plastic art, were the first to condemn and dwelled on their condemnation and so forth. And people who really had some involvement with art and a pleasurable involvement with art and didn't like my work would say Let's get on to something else. This is a folly, which is a much more real attitude of ...

VD

Then, why do people associate pleasure with art?

CA

Well, I think it's rather with ... if food were not a necessity, we would only associate pleasure with food or disaster. Unfortunately people can be poisoned by bad food directly and immediately, apparently, people can get ... and botulism from food which is bad. I think art may perhaps have the same effect but it's just more slow and less apparent but I myself believe that art is a system of pleasure

CUT

CA

I think as part of my own psyche, insofar as I've been able to do any self analysis, I am not a visual person, hence not a painter. I think painters are visual people, and are people who project across... I think of painters as people who hurl themselves across gaps and voids and distances. And I think of sculptors, of course when I speak of myself, as a person who doesn't hurl but extends tactilely in a certain sense ... And... I think the painter I have observed most closely in my life and seen the work of is Frank Stella and he is a person of utterly different temperament from myself but I could see that his temperament was essentially a projective one, he was a mesomorph, is involved with athletics, with physical projection in the world, whereas I am very much of an endomorph, with whatever remaining components I have much more ectomorph than mesomorph. And that's usually the athletic type of person is the mesomorph except in weightlifting where the ultimate gigantic weightlifters are endomorphs, they seem to somehow go on to the absolute static work of moving great masses, the endomorph prevails again. But also I think in a certain way, undoubtedly, sculpture or at least my practice of sculpture represents, if not a regression, certainly an earlier or more primitive state of development. I am sure there was sculpture before there

was painting in human development, insofar as one can divide these things. Just as I am certain there was poetry before there was prose, because poetry is rhythmic and repetitive and iterative, the cry of an infant is a lot closer to poetry than it is to prose. Prose on the other hand, although it has its periods and its structures and so forth, it gets away from the regular periodicity which I think represents an earlier state of development. And even my most radical poetical experiments have always been attempts to build new periodic structures, not to do something that might be called free verse which is to eliminate periodic structure but rather to build new and hitherto unimagined periodic structures, which I think is the earlier...

VD

More primitive.

CA

Yes, I think that's much earlier. For one thing rhyme and meter were aids to memory. I mean after we got beyond the cry and the call and the moan and the sigh. The reason for periodic structures, certainly once there was a self-conscious construction of, orally, of language, was so that it can be remembered. Rhyme and meter are aids to memory as you know - 30 days have september april june and november all the rest have 31, except February has 28, except in the leap year it has 29. And it is by those catches that we can remember things and certainly Homer and his, you know the great bards of the oral tradition, were really grateful for rhyme and meter and regularity and periodic structures, because that's how it could be remembered.

VD

But it also affords a relief to chaos.

CA

Yes, absolutely. And I think the closer you are to chaos the more regular must be the structure of that relief. If you feel comfortably removed from chaos you can then build structures which are more amorphous. I suppose the regularity of my work and the periodicity of my work comes very much from the fact that I don't feel very much removed from the chaos of total, not disorder - I am fairly comfortable with disorder - but I suppose it's a terror of each point being unconnected with any other point. As I've said my work has an axial symmetry, any one point can be substituted for any other point or any plate, like the copper piece you have, any one of these 64 copper plates can be replaced for any other one and it's quite the same. The symmetry is uniaxial. But the opposite of an uniaxial symmetry would be uniaxial chaos, in which no plate could be replaced with any other plate and you would have no memory of any experience, you would have no point of reference.

VD

Well yeah, I can see this... What about the Scatter piece? That to me is a very interesting dialectic between that and the other pieces ...

CA

Yes, I now look upon the scatter pieces, which I maybe did a couple or a few, as failures of imagination in terms of the sets of particles that I had. I could consider them failures and would ideally like to recall. I have recalled one scatter piece that was in a museum show in Europe and so forth. And it's no longer a scatter piece, I've restored it to its elements.

VD

How? You put order to it?

CA

Well, what I have is withdrawn the work essentially. And the scatter piece which was made out of about a thousand small plastic blocks to be dumped out of a bag, I now would take that thousand blocks and happily make it into a line or a rectangle, and I would accept the fact that the blocks are small and the structure would be unstable. But one thing that I found very disappointing about the Scatter pieces was when you do dump them out and scatter them, they always look the same, they look far more the same to me - these spills - than does a square or a rectangle, which immediately because of its regularity displays its irregularity, whereas the scatter piece seems to be a generalized irregularity, it's impossible to tell one from the other. It's impossible to kick a scatter piece back into shape again the way as you know with the copper piece again has a tense to drift away and you kick it back into line, like a piano that falls out of tune.

VD

Still aren't you saying that you dislike that kind of chaos or disorder? That it makes you uncomfortable?

CA

I am not sure it makes me so uncomfortable. It may be a temptation which I fear and dread.

VD

Well, isn't fear and dread discomfort also?

CA

Oh, of course! Yes, yes. But as a temptation. Cause, I as a person, as I live my life, I am really personally much more comfortable with disorder. I've tended to turn the places I've lived in, when I've lived alone, I've tended to turn them into vacant lots by just bringing in things in a melting debris and disorder.

VD

And yet some part of you obviously wants order also on that plane, because you live with someone who is very ordered.

CA

Exactly! Extremely so.

VD

Your place for instance in West Bath, that I saw it some years ago, it was pretty ordered at that time. Did it become kind of like a trunkyard?

CA

Oh, yes indeed. Yes, very much. Stuff was scattered on the floor. I began accumulating great corners of books which I piled up on the floor everywhere. It gets to me, when this has happened, when I've lived in a space and just surrounded myself with this really kind of uniaxial chaos, the only way to extricate myself from it, is just to leave. I once lived in East Broadway and I had to leave everything behind and just walk out and leave everything, all my possessions, everything. As results I've lost a lot of sculpture which was pretty good but also as result I was finally released from this nest of disorder which I have created. Hardly created, accumulated is much more to the point. But it's... in Texas, I know, when I was meeting people, I had a show at Barbara Kusack's gallery in Houston, and the people there, I think, are really fundamentalist people. They kept on expressing surprise that they expected me to be a tall, thin, ascetic person, who would shun all excesses of the flesh and would turn away from intoxicating spirits.

VD

Quite a surprise!

CA

It was indeed! But the image they had obtained from my work as being ascetic and denying of pleasure, which is of course not the spirit I have at all and I didn't make my work out of the spirit of denial or pleasure at all...Quite the opposite.

CUT

CA

Now in the lense I can see my own reflection which now begins to be more terrifying. I suppose the...

VD

We could set up a mirror here.

CA

That would be grotesque...

VD

You don't care for a mirror...

CA

No, no that's not the point. That would be perhaps even more disturbing.

VD

But that's what I mean. Otherwise you were kind of saying maybe you are not putting yourself through enough and maybe you're not getting enough feedback and that you really are intense... and we could redouble it by in a mirror.

CA

Well, I've been feeling very indolent of late, just to sit here and sip champagne and converse, has been very much in the range of my activities. I have not been feeling very energetic.

VD

I think a lot of people in the States ...

CA

It's a kind of dreary age. I suppose my recollection is false but I think it's even more dreary than the Fifties. I think it's a more reactionary and less inspiring time than even the Fifties were, because the Fifties still had its delusions. I'm just thinking in terms of education. There was still in the 50's the ideal of liberal education for everyone.

CA

To be oriented sufficiently in terms of history, in terms of classics of the culture ... that the individual system, a citizen, would have standards by which to judge the performance of politicians or the latest books or things and the individual system, um citizen, would be capable of making judgements themselves and that ideal is completely gone! The idea that the citizen should be critical of the institutions around him or her or what is offered on television and so forth, that's considered to be elitism: you submit to what is the nature of the culture around you and if don't submit you are going against the great popular will. Of course it's not the popular will at all but that's the difference, nobody speaks of liberal education anymore in terms of equipping the individual citizen to live a responsible and critical public life.

VD

Well, I think that's coming back, right?

CA

I've seen no evidence of it, at all!

VD

Well, what about showing the debates?

CA

Yes, but those debates were kind of game shows, where they, the two awkward contestants are competing for a four year job. There was nothing of substance discussed in those

debates at all. As far as I could see. But that was true of the Kennedy-Nixon debates, did you see the re-runs of the Kennedy-Nixon debates?

VD

In part. I couldn't watch the whole thing.

CA

Well, Kennedy and Nixon discussed none of the issues that were to dominate the American life of the next ten years. They discussed things like Matsu, tiny islands off the coast of China, they discussed American prestige abroad in terms of, as if America was a movie star or a pop tune, whether it was in the top 40 or what people thought about it and so forth. And it was entirely irrelevant issues, the swearing of Harry Truman or things like that.

CUT

CA

The person in public life that was most like Nixon was Jack Benning. They were running late night programs on one of the minor channels, channel 5 I think, Jack Benning programs from the 1950s. Jack Benning has exactly the same kind of ... they are not so much feminist prissy motions that have absolutely no conviction behind them at all, like standing with one leg rigid and the other leg slightly bent. It just conveys a sense of no, what can one say, veracity whatsoever.

VD

Well, I was struck by Carter's lack of compassion and for some part ironically an overlap between the use, the way he uses his mouth, smiling and so forth, and Nixon.

CA

Do you think that Nixon and Carter are similar in that ?

VD

Yeah. They somehow have the conviction that if they act sweet and give a sweet and genuine smile, both, people will all love them. I am thinking about Nixon, the early Nixon.

CA

Right, right. The whole business of the obviously unfelt smile. Smiling when there's nothing that's funny. Nixon was capable of incredible amounts of inappropriate behavior, some of the things he said... I remember he was going to a veteran's hospital during the Vietnam war and he came on to a soldier who had one leg amputated and Nixon padded him on the shoulder and said: "That's alright, most people don't need two, anyway." It was the kind of witticism, which was not a witticism at all, but was just an absolute inappropriate thing. And it seems that Carter occasionally seems to be injecting his, I am sure, heartfelt religious beliefs in completely inappropriate occasion, like the Playboy interview.

VD

But they seem about as heartfelt as a kid that's just come back with a Sunday school about Jesus and what a good God he was, you know? They don't seem to incorporate any kind of mature passion.

CA

Well, in a certain sense they do. Carter was the first politician I know of, in my lifetime, who is a Christian in terms of Redemption, that essentially, there is no way to escape sin in this world, and the only way to have salvation after death is to believe in Jesus Christ, which is one great strain of Christianity and Carter really evidently believes that. That's why he could say in an interview that he could not feel, although he had always been faithful to his wife, he had to admit that he had committed adultery in his heart. Well, who

could deny this has ever happened, like being tempted, in a sense, that he was being tempted?

VD

But how naïve to underline something because after all pretty much anyone has a certain reputation. To underline something which was recognized, as you say, by anybody and everybody anyway. The minute you underline you give additional importance to it.

CA

Well, yes, but I think the kind of official religion America has is a religion that assumes that, for our own convenience, that everyone is virtuous. And we approve of virtue and we disapprove of sin and we cast at the sinner. But that religion is not Christianity at all. Because the Christian religion, I think, in its deepest aspect and its most classical tradition aspect, both in the Catholic tradition and the Protestant tradition, states that we are not virtuous. I mean, we cannot be virtuous, we can strive for virtue. We can never achieve virtue, that we are all sinners. And that the only way we can be redeemed is through faith actually, which seems to be the essence of it. And that is not the Christian religion that's practiced in America's day officially. I mean, that's not prayer breakfast Christianity.

VD

Do you think that you are a Christian?

CA

No! I know certainly I am not and I was raised in a liberal denominational protestanism and this aspect of the redeem. I mean I am ... a baptized Congregationalist, but, uh...

VD

Why are you not a Christian?

CA

I am not Christian because I am not a Christian by faith.

VD

I mean, why don't you believe in Christ?

CA

Ah well, I could not say I believed or disbelieved in... in historical... But I do not believe in Jesus Christ as my redeemer, exactly. I think I could not say...

VD

Where did he let you down?

CA

He didn't let me down at all! I think there was a stage in my life just around puberty, where I really began to take religion quite seriously in a personal way, it was no longer something we were being taught. I suppose in an act of spiritual pride I found that other people did not take religion as serious as I wanted to take it at that time. And that would be embarrassing if one did take religion that seriously, as seriously as Jimmy Carter does, I suppose.

VD

Socially embarrassing?

CA

Well, true believers are always embarrassing.

VD

Then what applies as a social response?

CA

Yes, but it's... it'd be rather like believing in the necessity of revolution and then joining the Communist party and finding out that the people didn't want a revolution at all, that they were very happy the way things were. It's like any condition of faith like that. So... of course it's a matter of spiritual pride for me to claim that the religious practice or the religious belief that I discovered as I began the beginning of

adulthood, that that level of belief was simply not as great as I thought was necessary in terms of beliefs involved... I think now that a truly spiritual religion has disappeared almost entirely from American life. I think American life now is almost utterly secularized, except for this official contentless Billy Graham prayer breakfast...

VD

Which is a form of secularization.

CA

Absolutely! Now that America has reached the point of almost wholesome secularization we found that we have produced nothing to take the place of religion in the many things that religion did. If for nothing...

VD

Do you feel, let me repeat this, do you feel that art takes the place of religion?

CA

No, I don't think that art can take the place of religion at all, because very obviously at times of great religious faith and great religious vitality there has been at some times great art vitality, too, and sometimes not. They are really about different aspects of human experience but they are not at all contradictory. They need not be contradictory. I think the protestant tradition, the Anglosaxon, sort of iconoclastic tradition, stemming from the breaking of the monasteries and the smashing of the virgins and so forth that occurred in England at the time of the initiation of the reformation there has led to a kind of protestant hangover, which is anti-art, it's not anti-music however.

VD

What if you define art as a form of iconoclasm? Of smashing and restructuring?

CA

Well, I don't feel that art - I mean, that's something that can happen in art, but I don't think it is, it isn't the essence of art, that's a technique of art. Smashing and rebuilding is a technique of art, but I don't think it's what art essentially is.

VD

Well, what do you do?

CA

What do I do?

VD

You started with structures that went up into space, right? Then you brought them back down. Now, in the bringing the structure back down onto the floor, is there any element of smashing and restructuring?

CA

Well, I think my own work, really I just I began carving in wood and when I carved in wood, the wood was always horizontal anyway when I was carving and I never carved the wood standing up.

VD

Oh, that's interesting...

CA

Never. Because you can't. If you have a timber standing up you can't knock against it, it has to be down on the floor. So I always sat on my timbers and chiseled them... And... So I carved and then I built structures up but I found that, in terms of attempting seizing a hold of space most efficiently, to put timbers or plates or whatever side by side achieved a much greater efficiency of... what word can we use? Much greater efficiency... The word that keeps on occurring to me, which I don't know if anyone uses it, much greater domination of the space, but let's say that. Much greater

domination and more efficient domination of the space by putting the plates or the timbers side by side than by stacking them straight up. By stacking them, one on top of each other, you had a column perhaps at most, but if you put them side by side, you had an area, a more extensive area. So in a certain way my work and ethics, and although clastic means broken into parts, it was not an act of breaking but an act of disassembling, you might say. Disassembling and...

VD

No, that's you disassembling a vertical image which is the expectation of the art viewer. And you're describing that as if that were purely a matter of—your former expression would imply it were a matter of expediency. You felt more comfortable and it kind of worked out better.

CA

Absolutely, the cause of my development as a sculptor has been definitely a course of increasing pleasure. The carving into the wood I got to the point, where, as I've said, I found I wasn't really improving the wood by carving into it. So then I wanted to keep the wood, the timber, in its form without carving into it. Then I wanted to combine, instead of cutting into the timber, I wanted to use the timber as a cut in space. I've never been able to use one element as a cut in space. That's never been convincing to me, I've done it occasionally or maybe once or twice. Two begins to be more convincing, three, a whole set, becomes convincing to me and in the beginning I did absolutely combine these units, these timbers, in vertical structures because that, indeed, was the way you built, you built up. But that was not finally to me the most satisfactory way. When I really was confronted with a set of timbers and a space, the vertical structure would dominate perhaps one quarter of the space. But if you put the thing down flat side by side you can dominate the whole space or, not so much dominate—I wish I—dominate, cultivate, and as I feel it's much more like cultivating, much more... And it's not creating... Why can I not find this word that describes what it is that art does? Because it is not transformation—of course, in a general sense it is the transformation of space.