“I Think We Can Make Some Trouble There”: Seth Siegelaub in Conversation with Robert Horvitz and Thomas Levin, Bagnolet, France, March 23, 1987

Excerpts from a new transcript of an audio recording in the archive of Robert Horvitz

I don’t remember how or when I met Seth but it must have been in the 1980s—probably through mutual friends who saw that we were driven by similar concerns. We could have met earlier since I was friends with some of the artists he represented. However, that didn’t happen. Our movements were out of phase: he was at the center of the New York art scene when I got to the suburbs, and by the time I reached the center, he had left. But after he moved to Amsterdam and I moved to Prague, we saw each other regularly.

This interview was recorded on March 23, 1987 at Seth’s house in Bagnolet. I had stopped in Paris to visit him and invited a friend along, Thomas Levin, to meet him. Seth was just getting involved with the history of textiles and starting to question his leftist militancy, so the interview’s timing was good: he was far enough from his art dealing days to look back at that period objectively, yet immersed enough in research and collecting to discuss these newer activities in depth.

I wanted to interview him because his journey through and beyond the art world illuminated developments of historic interest. The “de-materialization of art”—a notion associated with the artists Seth promoted—marked a shift from objects and images to ideas and information. In one generation—from the 1960s to the 1980s—the center of “cultural gravity” in the US moved from handmade pictures and things to electronic networks, data files, and mediated relationships. Traditional formats and distribution channels for contemporary art were increasingly marginalized, while challenging questions of freedom, power, privacy, and identity came from the thickening web of communication links around us. Many people were aware of these changes, but Seth’s insights, and his responses, were especially apt.

Our conversation was essentially unstructured—we were eager to cover a wide range of subjects as we shared so many interests. When Sara Martinetti asked for a complete transcript, I looked through my files and found the original cassette, which was then used to establish this new version. Some subjects have been deleted to make the transcript shorter and more clearly focused. In a few places, remarks at different moments are spliced together to make a more coherent flow.

ROBERT HORVITZ

ROBERT HORVITZ. I'm curious, going all the way back to the beginning, why did you start your gallery? You started a gallery in '66, '67, '65 . . .

SETH SIEGELAUB. Oh, that's a very funny story! Basically, when I went to school in New York—Stuyvesant High School—in order to make some money I worked at a hardware store in Harlem . . . I didn't do very well in high school and so when I got out, I didn't know what to do with myself. Obviously, in my milieu, there was a tendency to think one should go on to college . . . I think I went to Hunter College for half a year, a year, or something like this, and I really didn't like it. Not only wasn't I a good student . . .

ROBERT HORVITZ. When did you graduate from high school?

SETH SIEGELAUB. It must have been '59 or '58 . . . about '59, I'm not sure, '60 something. Well anyhow, I got involved—from this hardware store thing—with being a plumber in Harlem. And that led me to work with some real estate entrepreneur—a wheeler and dealer, actually . . . "slum lord" is probably the word. . . Anyhow, this guy had a funny schedule of work, which meant that a good part of the year I had time to myself. Eventually I started to work for him, not as a plumber but also as a, you know, gofer or something. So I had a certain amount of time to myself. At a certain point I was interested in doing some sculpture, and there was something called the SculptureCenter on Sixty-Ninth Street, between Lexington and Park. I walked in there to do some sculpture. And eventually I got involved with the

foundation. I got involved with their gallery downstairs—selling garden sculpture, basically. . . They had a school upstairs and they had a gallery downstairs. They represented professional artists and they also took up students, rich old ladies, young people, even Hunter College students sometimes. I worked in the gallery and I was quite good at it, it turned out. I worked there for a while and at a certain point some collector suggested, why don't you open a gallery? And I said, why not? So a few years later, about '65, I found a loft on Fifty-Sixth off Fifth and I opened a gallery. I sort of lived there. [*Inaudible*] It really wasn't very successful. . . But in hindsight, what it did teach me, if anything at all, was that I never wanted to be a shopkeeper. It was really, really bad news. In the first place no one would come in. I mean, it's boring enough even if you have the best gallery in the world, in terms of people coming in. You're trapped there . . . Well, if you're a young gallery and you have nobody coming in, it's even that much worse.

ROBERT HORVITZ. So it wasn't that you had in mind to provide a showcase for the kind of art associated with you later . . .

SETH SIEGELAUB. Oh, no, no, that happened somewhat later. . . At that time I would have met Lawrence Weiner. I started to meet Bob Barry, Carl Andre, and then things began to change. But when I was at that gallery I would just show a variety of things, none of which stayed with me in later periods—except Larry. . . Except Larry. Then the gallery closed, or I closed it. Obviously it wasn't making any money, but that's no surprise. Very few galleries make money. This is really a rich person's business. [*Inaudible*] So I got involved little by little with these artists—Larry, Kosuth, Barry, Huebler, Andre—and I started to deal privately. I moved up to Madison Avenue and then I started to do exhibitions. I made an analysis which pertains now to publishing too: one of the problems with the gallery there always seems to be is that you don't run the gallery, the gallery runs you. You have certain kinds of overheads, mostly schedules and rhythm of work, which means that you have to fill these places. At first it starts out like you're excited to do all this but what happens is that the gallery begins to run you. And so because you have these overheads and these responsibilities, you have to put

something in there. [. . .] And it became clear to me it was really not possible to fill up a space on that kind of rhythm, that kind of regular way. Which led me to think about running a gallery in another way, without those kinds of responsibilities and overheads—a more leisurely thing which will allow you much more flexibility. Particularly as was the case with me—then and as it is now in publishing—you don't have much money. . . This led, along with the work that the artists were doing around this time—this wasn't something I invented, but . . . in collaboration, contiguous with, or contemporary with, or along with the kind of work they were producing—led to types of exhibitions in catalogues, types of exhibitions in outdoor spaces, in rented spaces, in post-office boxes and a whole series of things, which later formed the corpus of work that we did for a relatively short period of time. I was only really active from '66, '67, '68 through '70. I was very taken by the Vietnam War. That turned my head around. [*Inaudible*] It politicized, if you like, my activity, little by little beginning to question the whole machinery of the art world. Leading to two things: one was working with the United States Servicemen's Fund, which was involved with financing GI newspapers. [. . .] I would fundraise for them. I built them a collection, we sold art for their benefit. And then later, a more art-oriented project—which has become very much in the air at the moment—was this *Artist's Reserved Rights Contract*. (Senator Kennedy is now trying to produce a bill to protect artists' rights – his effort points in a similar direction.) I underwrote that project. [But] little by little I got bored with the business of art. [. . .] Which is to say, you had less and less to do with art, and more and more to do with business, more and more to do with kinds of people you'd never known. I mean, rich people or collectors, museum people, who really had nothing to do with art whatsoever but happened to be there with their money or their means or something. And gradually I got disenchanted with it. This led to an interest in doing a newspaper. There was a number of groups in the late sixties, again stimulated by the war—journalist groups, one of which was sort of critical journalists in and around New York producing something called *Pac-O-Lies*. I don't know if you remember this?

ROBERT HORVITZ. *Pac-O-Lies*?

SETH SIEGELAUB. *Pac-O-Lies*, that's right. It was a journalist group, journalists at the [*New York*] *Times*, all over—we still have copies in the library and it's even in the bibliography. They were producing criticisms of the newspaper—not behind-the-scenes labor stuff, but how the news was pitched, in a very conservative way. This led me to think, perhaps it would be interesting to do what I'd called *The New York Daily Newspaper Rider*, which would be like a weekly, or even a daily, or twice-weekly, sort of a criticism of the newspapers, of what was coming out of the newspapers. [. . .] The idea for a left newspaper was in the air. I was just one of the people [thinking along those lines]. But little by little it became clear to me—although I probably had a certain access to people with a certain amount of money who could, for one reason or another, underwrite such a thing—that it was really completely contrary to my sensibility. A newspaper, I mean, a regular rhythm of production was actually what I . . .

ROBERT HORVITZ. The same responsibility as a gallery . . .

SETH SIEGELAUB. Well, the rhythm. I mean, the regularity. I always thought it was an incredible job just to produce a newspaper—even a fascist newspaper. Like, they would have to come together, you know, to produce something in a hustle, at ten thirty at night. I mean, the idea of doing this every day is just staggering. [. . .] Finding out what a left newspaper should be, or has been, led me to the research thing. Little by little, I slipped away from the actual production of a newspaper into the research. This was coupled with meeting a woman [Rosalind Fay] with whom I live now, *mais* with whom I will not be living in the next few months because we're separating. But I met her at that time and she lived here [in Paris], so at that time it coincided with my moving here. . . *Libération* was just starting up, and Sartre, and what's his name, Maurice Clavel. [*Inaudible*]. I was in touch with those people. I started to do something—in fact, I still have copies in the archive. It's called the Public Press + News Network, PPNN, with which I was trying to do something like *Libération* news service. . .

ROBERT HORVITZ. Was that news analysis or . . .

SETH SIEGELAUB. Well, it never got off the ground. It was this attempt to do something . . . a leftwing news agency. And that led me to doing research on the newspaper, I mean, on the

medium. And once I moved here, that's basically what I started to do. Little by little I began to do a bibliography, which later evolved into looking for books, evolved into the bibliography you see there. And then also a library, as I tried to actually collect the books themselves. Then later, through Lee Baxandall, who edited *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art,* we started publishing. The last few years I've gotten involved with another thing which comes out of both the art and the media, cultural questions in general. It has the concern of—I wouldn't call it popular culture, I'd call it sort of questions of work and esthetics, of popular creativity. And I've become very interested in the history of textiles: both industrial and domestic, women's—the whole history of textiles [. . .] which links a certain art interest as well as mass-cultural interests, a lot of things . . . So I've been doing a bibliography on that subject.

ROBERT HORVITZ. What, textile history?

SETH SIEGELAUB. Textile history. I have a library, a very important library of textile history, and to pay for that I deal in rare books on the history of textiles and Islamic art.

ROBERT HORVITZ. Very interesting. And Islamic art too?

SETH SIEGELAUB. Yes, Islamic art too. So I deal in those subjects but I also have a library to pay for those things. It's a very expensive hobby. But anyhow, in the future—to get back to the publishing—we'll be publishing critical books on the history of textiles. It's a relatively conservative literature.

ROBERT HORVITZ. But the idea would be to apply a more Marxist critique?

SETH SIEGELAUB. Oh, yeah, certainly, to the question of textile production, etc. There are very specific problems related to that kind of literature. But anyhow I've started working on a bibliography on the subject of the history of textiles. It won't be a left bibliography. Unlike mass media there's no great amount of books that are left-leaning, even if there are progressive books on the history of textiles. On the other hand, there is no bibliography at all on this subject . . . so we'll be putting that into context as part of the publishing project. [. . .]

I'm not so much concerned about labor policies. I'm really concerned about textile production up until the early nineteenth century. In other words, until the heavy industrialization.

THOMAS LEVIN. Why that particular period?

SETH SIEGELAUB. Because then the creative process drops out and you have essentially an industrial process, well into the eighteenth century.

ROBERT HORVITZ. So is it the transition from handicraft to machine craft that interests you?

SETH SIEGELAUB. It's not the transition, it's the relationship between work and esthetics as manifest, as articulated in the textiles. In other words, once you get into the late nineteenth century—I'm speaking specifically in industrial capitalist countries. . . the esthetic quality drops out and it becomes mechanical reproduction. [*Inaudible*]

ROBERT HORVITZ. But you also have the interaction between the two economies . . .

SETH SIEGELAUB. Oh yeah, there is the question of domestic economy. But that's something that exists well into the early medieval age—the difference between domestic work and factory work.

ROBERT HORVITZ. I'm thinking of the specific case of the Kashmir shawl, which you may well know, which was a very expensive handicraft until the French figured out they could mass-produce them on mechanical looms—which bankrupted Kashmir.

SETH SIEGELAUB. There's a lot of other relationships like that. What I'm concerned about is not just the relationship between domestic and industrial crafts, which existed alongside one another well before the nineteenth century—there's still very strong competition between them, and there's also the country/city differences. . . I'm also concerned with esthetic quality. In other words this industrialized country France, in the case of the shawls, having the means or having reached a certain stage of industrialization, which made it possible to put out, to produce more cheaply, but at lesser quality than a handmade product produced in India, or anywhere else. . . So you're not just talking about two different types of production, but also two different qualities, really, because the French industrialized shawls, when you see

them, have very little in common with actual hand-produced textiles [from] India or anywhere else. . .

ROBERT HORVITZ. But you're aware also of the connection between the Jacquard loom and the development of the computer, as well as the whole principle of programmable machines?

SETH SIEGELAUB. Babbage, yeah . . . Textiles are doubly interesting. One, because it was always a great industry. Fully one third or one quarter of medieval economy was textile production—not just textiles for use. It always was highly organized [with] a very high division of labor. Even in the twelfth, thirteenth century, there were very clear processes of production. So in this sense, fine textiles as well as less-fine textiles—what we call "figured textiles" as opposed to crafted textiles—were always a very highly industrial process. [. . .]

ROBERT HORVITZ. How did you hit on this interest in textiles?

SETH SIEGELAUB. I was interested in rugs in New York around 1960. I bought some books on this subject. I had a friend [Robert Gaile] who was buying and selling them, and I was very interested in them. I never could buy them, never had the means, but I did buy a certain amount of books, which I still have. The idea of esthetic labor, the relationship between class and design, between industrial process and design—particularly textile design—just came together out of this and out of that. And I'm still doing a lot of research to understand those articulations. And on a practical matter, I'm also publishing in that area too. There's a number of people I'm in contact with, and we'll be producing a book next year—which is very interesting in its own right—on the subject of the medieval cloth industry in Ghent…, an unpublished manuscript from 1909 by a man who was the head of the Belgian working class movement, who was a friend of Liebknecht and Luxembourg—a man named De Man.

THOMAS LEVIN. Heinrich de Man?

SETH SIEGELAUB. Hendrik de Man, who later became unfortunately. . .

THOMAS LEVIN. I studied with his nephew, Paul de Man. [*Inaudible*] He died a few years ago . . .

SETH SIEGELAUB. One of his other sons has translated the book for us. His family is in Belgium . . . And this guy [de Man] wrote a book on the class point of view, Marxist economic point of view, 1909, on the cloth industry, the division of labor, but it was never published A friend of mine . . . who did his thesis criticizing Althusser . . . about ten years ago came here to research—this is a funny story—and got this manuscript [*inaudible*]. And he ordered some books and I wrote him a letter and said, "What are you doing, Detlef [Borchers]?" It turns out this guy, last year—to show how it kind of converged—had been doing research on De Man. Particularly, what he's interested in is the history of intellectuals.

THOMAS LEVIN. I just found in a Geneva bookshop a dissertation submitted at the University of Geneva, eight hundred pages on Heinrich de Man.

SETH SIEGELAUB. Really? Do you have the . . .

THOMAS LEVIN. I have the exact biographics.

SETH SIEGELAUB. Okay. Because this guy was interested in De Man and the history of intellectuals.

THOMAS LEVIN. *Henri de Man. Une autre idée du socialisme*. Thèse Michel Brélaz, Université . . .

SETH SIEGELAUB. Let me take this down and pass it on to him, because it's important. It could be important for him. For me, it doesn't have the same value, but for him I'm sure it would. . . So he'd come here for Althusser, a critical study of Althusser, for his doctoral dissertation, in Dortmund or something like this. I wrote him a letter, "What are you're doing bla-bla-bla?" He ran through a list of four projects, all of which were of interest to me. The first, he was doing a history of the movement of intellectuals from the left to the right, particularly from the beginning of the century.

ROBERT HORVITZ. Specifically in the Netherlands?

SETH SIEGELAUB. No, no, all over. And he's doing a bibliography for the International Sociological Association on intellectuals. Which is something that I'm interested in

publishing in the *Marxism and Mass Media* series. That's the first thing. The second thing, in this context, is a case study—because De Man made a ride from the extreme left to [being] a more or less royalist collaborator. . . [*inaudible*] And there was something else he [Borchers] was doing, too . . . Oh yes, his profession now: he's into computers, he translates programs, so he knows all about the computer thing. Which is something that interests me, because eventually I'm going to have to do that, I'm going to have to make my move into the golden screen or something like this. [. . .]

THOMAS LEVIN. You're still not using a computer to produce your bibliographies?

SETH SIEGELAUB. No, the next step is the computer.

THOMAS LEVIN. Clearly it's imperative that you computerize.

SETH SIEGELAUB. I know, I know. It doesn't matter for the mass media bibliographies anymore, it's more for my textile research, because there we're talking about tens of thousands of entries. *Ça déborde.* That's for next year. The problem is changing over. Moving everything to computer will take a lot of time, probably 3 to 6 months, and I never want to stop my research and give up that much time to do it.

[. . .]

ROBERT HORVITZ. I see the interest in the subject, and I'm not saying otherwise, but it strikes me that your art gallery and the mass media thing were subjects of general import [while] textile history is more specialized.

SETH SIEGELAUB. Yeah, it probably is now, but textiles . . . [*inaudible*] Textiles and its literature is a very specialized—is an unnecessarily specialized area. In other words, it is like what I would call "the minor art of the minor arts"—if it's mentioned at all. . . Textiles occupies a very small part of it and yet it's a very industrial . . . There's a lot to do with reevaluating the literature . . . Because in a certain way the people who built up the literature—you know, textile conservators, textile collectors, textile buyers—[are] very, very conservative. Basically the literature is about buying things and cataloguing them—certain

aspects of which I do myself because I'm a collector. And I think we can make some trouble there. I think we're going to make some trouble there—that's the intention.

[. . .]

ROBERT HORVITZ. What areas of the world do you collect textiles from?

SETH SIEGELAUB. Mostly from Europe, [*inaudible*] mostly fifteenth- to seventeenth-, eighteenth-century damask, velvets, and things like that. That's basically what I can find if I look.

ROBERT HORVITZ. I collect ikat.

SETH SIEGELAUB. Ikat, oh, really?

ROBERT HORVITZ. I love ikat, double ikat . . . Mainly Guatemalan—I can't afford the Indonesian stuff.

[. . .]

THOMAS LEVIN. Maybe you can talk a little bit about the history and development of International General?

SETH SIEGELAUB. Well, the history of International General is the history of me.

ROBERT HORVITZ. But you've spun a community around yourself.

SETH SIEGELAUB. Well, not really. [*Inaudible*] I just go about doing my shtick, doing my thing. I mean, I do it with other people, obviously, whenever it's possible. But the kernel of the work is still me. I mean, I have twenty-five projects sitting in the room there. Different people are working on those projects, and certain [ones] move forward and are ready to be published, and certain [ones] don't reach fruition. . .

[. . .]

ROBERT HORVITZ. What is it that you're actually trying to do?

SETH SIEGELAUB. I'm trying to bring a sort of a political consciousness to the different areas in which I work. I've been specialized in the area of media to a certain degree, addressing myself to the question of popular creativity, textiles, and things like this. . . My work really consists of doing research in areas that interest me, areas for which I've made an analysis and feel the world can use my two cents.

ROBERT HORVITZ. For the purpose of changing the way people think?

SETH SIEGELAUB. Yes, contributing to change. And the way I pay for this is through publishing. It's really very simple. And the analysis I made. . . in the running of a gallery is very similar to this. I mean, I produce very irregularly. In fact I'm not really a publisher, I'm really a research center, bibliographer, who pays for his existence through the sale of books. So it's not like I'm publishing. . .

THOMAS LEVIN. Wait, wait. You support yourself through the sales of the International General books?

SETH SIEGELAUB. Yeah.

———— [?]. How's business?

SETH SIEGELAUB. Good.

ROBERT HORVITZ. I'm sure it took a long time before you could say that…

SETH SIEGELAUB. Well, it's been ten years, but little by little…

[. . .]

ROBERT HORVITZ. Was it your analysis of the art world that led you to show the kind of work that you were showing in your gallery?

SETH SIEGELAUB. No, I couldn't say that, because the work that I was showing, or my relationship to it, grew out of the nature of the work being produced. Although I had an economic analysis—at least I think I had an economic analysis—of the art world, it was based on my particular economic status, which was someone relatively poor in a very rich world,

basically—as far as the dealer goes, that is, not as far as artists go. And this manifested itself only as a function of the work of those artists I was dealing with. Obviously there was a symbiosis, one reinforced the other. But I didn't come up with . . . I mean, if we were showing Jackson Pollock paintings, obviously, the problem would be back to square one in terms of looking for big walls in permanent spaces and protection and insurance and things like this. It was a function of the work that was being produced and in terms of my economic possibilities, which were very modest—still are very modest.

ROBERT HORVITZ. Yeah, but Seth, the quality of the work and the coherence of [that group of] artists was so significant that I can't believe it was just a passive reaction to not having the money to show Jackson Pollock.

SETH SIEGELAUB. No, no, I didn't say I did that because I didn't have the money to show Jackson Pollock. I made an analysis in function of my material situation, which obviously was in symbiosis with the work that I was dealing with. If I was dealing with six painters, the problem of doing an exhibition by mail was not posed. In other words, it was the interrelationship of the two. I mean, I didn't make it up, in the sense that it was an original idea that I somehow had. It obviously evolved in connection with the work that I was showing, which lent itself to producing catalogues. So I produced catalogues. Now, obviously, if I was, again, to use Jackson Pollock—not as a negative symbol, a negative value, but another kind of work—the problem wouldn't be posed that way. I'd just be producing catalogues to sell work, as opposed to catalogues which were the work, or had another relationship to the work.

ROBERT HORVITZ. One common element of all those artists in your gallery,they were in one way or another trying to subvert the whole notion of art as a collectible.

SETH SIEGELAUB. Right, and they still do . . . They still *fait peur à beaucoup de monde*. A lot of people still find it very difficult to digest the work that they did then—or are probably even doing now, from what I understand. Still a large part of the community feels that it was very threatening to stable art values, the stable capitalist values represented by art. And even today,

most of the artists have a very difficult time—relatively, in proportion to their notoriety, if you like—earning a living. And the value of the work is not that great compared to, you know, young smartass figure painters or something like this. An Expressionist gets ten times [more] for his first exhibition than a lot of the people I dealt with get after twenty, thirty years.

ROBERT HORVITZ. Do you pay attention to what's going on in the art world now?

SETH SIEGELAUB. No, very, very little. Only by way of friends and their comments. . . The whole style of the art world has changed. [. . .] I've gotten the impression from talking to people that it's really become like a very overheated—it's become closer to the fashion world, the designers' world, fashion and things. I mean, the kind of money that's involved, the kind of people involved, the kind of rhythm, the hype . . .

ROBERT HORVITZ. The lack of ideas.

SETH SIEGELAUB. . . . the lack of ideas. It's a whole other world. I mean it's hard to believe it's only twenty years ago, or eighteen years ago, or seventeen years ago but it seems it's dramatically changed. The money involved has become astronomically important. The kind of people that are involved with it are an entirely different breed of cat…

——— [?]. Are you talking about New York?

SETH SIEGELAUB. Well, particularly in New York, but also a little bit all over Europe too. . . There's a melding of advertising, film stars, pop stars—I mean, that kind of thing only the barest outlines were perceptible when I was around. And even what's interesting—I mentioned this to somebody who [wanted] me to talk about the Artists' Contract—is that they're now considering some Senate bill to give artists rights, residuals and things like this . . . It's very curious that should be happening now. I mean, it's good if they do this but it's happening for the wrong reasons. The reasons why it's happening is that it's become more business now. When I started out to—I wouldn't say to right the wrongs, but at least to try to put the finger on the problem, as it were—you know, it was relatively chicken shit. I mean,

people earning a living and trying to get a little bit more money, or people not ripping off work. And now the problem has become much more, um . . .

ROBERT HORVITZ. . . . assets management.

SETH SIEGELAUB. . . . yeah, right. In other words, now it's become big business. And the reason why they're interested in protecting artists is not that poor artists don't get their just fruits. [. . .] Twenty years ago, when I was involved, when I began the project that I started, it was mostly about poor artists—I mean, any artists—although even then there were a certain amount of people, like Rauschenberg, who weren't poor. But now there's obviously a much greater impetus and interest in these [issues] because there's more money involved. So if there is a law enacted to benefit the artists it's in the context of an art world that's become all business, or more business than it ever was before. Although I'm not against it, even under those circumstances. Because then the artist becomes another businessman—or businesswoman as the case may be—among others. So I'm not against it in that sense. It's just very important to understand that we're no longer talking about protecting artists from . . .

ROBERT HORVITZ. From starvation.

SETH SIEGELAUB. . . . yeah, starvation, or possible [lack of social] insurance. Those were the kind of things that we were concerned about: healthcare, artists' old age and things like that. Now we're concerned about artists protecting their interests the way a film mogul protects his interests. So the context has changed absolutely dramatically, although, as I say, I'm not against it.

ROBERT HORVITZ. It does seem in conflict, though, with some of the values of the artwork that you showed, which subverts collectability.

SETH SIEGELAUB. Yes, there's a lot of questions like that. But that doesn't bother me because I wasn't particularly concerned in doing that to protect the interests of particular kinds of artists. I was concerned that anyone has a right to live from the fruit of their work… The concern was more to protect their interests, moral as well as economic, in what they produce .

. . I really wasn't much influenced in the Artists' Contract by the art I was dealing with. . . I was more affected by the Vietnam thing,and political considerations that went far beyond the specific artists I was working with.

ROBERT HORVITZ. So your decision to move to Paris was really just a personal decision?

SETH SIEGELAUB. A personal decision. . . Nothing to do with the government.

THOMAS LEVIN. That's what Bob wondered about.

SETH SIEGELAUB. No, no, it wasn't about the draft.

——— [?]. Has it been easier [in Europe] to do the work you're doing?

SETH SIEGELAUB. Probably . . . Certainly . . . Yes! Yes, it's easier to live well in Europe than it is in the United States. I'd have to have much more money to live as well as I do in the United States as I do here.

ROBERT HORVITZ. Certainly that's true of New York.

SETH SIEGELAUB. Well, particularly in New York. But it's also true for the quality of life, what you eat, how you eat, the rhythm of work. I'm really into a certain kind of research—I mean, people don't understand it that way. I work most of the time by myself. I receive a certain amount of people, I go into Paris from time to time, but I'm really interested in doing my research. I have my room, I have my papers, I send out orders. I came back from London, processing the orders I saw in bookstores in central London last week, accumulated mail, etc. etc. So a lot of it is like very routine kind of business work. A lot of it is a certain amount of research work, projects, checking translations, doing the final pages on a whole book, to be sure there's not too many typos. . .

[. . .]

ROBERT HORVITZ. Could we back up for one final subject, then we'll wrap it up because it's been very interesting and I want to have a chance to look through your stockpile of

memorabilia here. But you mentioned just in passing "the crisis of the left." I'm a little bit surprised to hear you say that. Do you have a sense that there is a crisis of left thought?

SETH SIEGELAUB. Oh, sure. Yeah, absolutely. There's very little doubt about it. Just the relative disarray of left thought in France and elsewhere. A lot of [it is] what we were talking about before, I suspect: the question of what you'd call daily life, looking at reality as it is.

ROBERT HORVITZ. [*Inaudible*] analysis no longer conforms with the streets?

SETH SIEGELAUB. . . . no longer conforms. The question of alliances, the question of domination, the idea of a ruling party, a directing party who's going to take everyone off into the smiling sunset or the *lendemains qui chantent*—these are concepts which, on the left, have not been rethought, or are in the process of being rethought. A lot of questions about the relationships between people, different kinds of exploitation which go well beyond the workplace, etc., are the kind of things that the left—in a very large sense of the word—is only beginning to rethink. Also the question of long-term goals versus here and now, the idea of sacrifice today so tomorrow things would be better. What kind of society do we want to work for? What do we want life to be? Do we want a strong centralized state, which is obviously still a dogma, [a defining] image for the left, etc., etc. All these kinds of things need a very thorough re-evaluation. . .

ROBERT HORVITZ. You're describing it as being primarily a failure of analysis within the Western left. How much of it has to do with the developments in the Eastern countries?

SETH SIEGELAUB. Obviously, what I would call the failure to produce a critical society, or a critical human being, or a *liberated* human being—perhaps that's a better word—in the Eastern European countries puts into question all the values which we've been supporting. . . And that's part of the crisis, part of the questioning of these kinds of models. It would appear to me that the insuccess—to put it mildly—of the Eastern European countries is something which we are partly responsible for—at least our predecessors are responsible for—and the ideas that we're carrying with us obviously in part have to be rethought . . . I mean, it's

impossible today to think—unlike it may have been ten years ago—that [with] a strong centralized school system, or postal system, or Minitel system or whatever, you're going to produce *le bonheur du peuple*—or socialism, for lack of a better word. It's very difficult to make those kinds of arguments where a strong leading party is going to direct us […] towards a liberated future. Even what exactly means "a liberated future"? "Liberated future" meant exploiting your wife so you can go out with the revolution or something, while she's doing the dishes, etc. [*Inaudible*] Also the question of alliances, groups of people coming together in a more amorphous, less formalized way, grassroots activities, local communities instead of just being directed by parties. [. . .] Political directionism, political leadership are all things that have to be very seriously rethought if the left is going to produce a vision of society which is compatible with someone who can think for themselves—someone who doesn't have to be told, doesn't have to read the party paper [to know what to believe].