

Illogical as an Instructive Process: an Interview with Ray Johnson

The interview took place on December 2, 1977, at the Mid-York Library System, Utica, New York, the day following Ray Johnson's performance of Barry White Ecstasy, at the Root Art Center, Hamilton College, Clinton, New York, where his work was on display.

John Held, Jr: Do you think think people are becoming more appreciative of chance these days? Do you find that people are breaking down their logical thinking and accepting chaos?

Ray Johnson: By people, we were discussing the student body at Hamilton College, but people also encompasses the people who were in the restaurant I just came from, so one would have to apply the question of chance situation in the restaurant, or the streets that I just drove through, in making a left turn instead of a right turn. Going in a wrong direction was a very chance element, but I was a singular person in that case, although I had many quick encounters with other drivers of vehicles. That's what driving is all about. There are just endless chance encounters with people involving decisions, turns, and estimates as to what other people are going to do. In car driving you are on a very different operation than you are with students in a lecture. So there is no such thing as chance elements. There are chance elements here, chance elements there, here and there. Which is the interesting point that I liked before the tape began in your asking me about community, replying that the correspondence network is logically a global situation involving the possibility of people everywhere and anywhere. There's a very interesting...can I be heard all right? I guess I can.

JH: I imagine so.

RJ: You don't want to play it back just to make sure?

JH: Sure. You want to play it back?

(The videotape is stopped, replayed, and found operational, resumes.)

RJ...they said, "We're having program difficulties," and they played some cruddy music. Finally they decided to play the sound, but they had no image. Something happened.

JH: Something always happens when machines are involved.

RJ: But it was very interesting not having the image. I was talking about a global...I wanted to mention Terry Reid in New Zealand and Australia, as places of interest where Mail Art, Correspondence Art, activities are taking place. Terry Reid is a Canadian. There's a whole group of people down there like the Helicopter Art Group. Whoever they are.

JH: There's a lot of activity in Vancouver.

RJ: Vancouver and Toronto are lively. There are many groups in Italy. Germany, of course, Paris, London.

JH: I've met Peter Van Beveren in Holland.

RJ: That was in your first letter to me. Yes, he uses rubber stamps.

JH: He's active with rubber stamps. You use rubber stamps. Do you have a philosophy concerning them?

RJ: I don't use them visually. I use them as verbal information. I was explaining my oldest rubber

stamp reading "Collage by Ray Johnson" as to how and where and why I use and stamp it, which in the collage process, or ceremony, after I apply tape or glue to a surface, which technically makes it a collage. I then stamp it rather than signing my name, although I might sign my name after it. But the stamping is rather like the stamping of an envelope. Final. A letter is licked and stamped before it's cancelled. It's then dropped into a box, and so forth. Process involving the Post Office Department.

JH: Which is a chance operation.

RJ: Yes. I was describing an 8"x10" envelope that was postmarked October 31, which was finally delivered to me, one hour away from New York, one month later. The envelope had been sitting somewhere for that amount of time. It should have reached me the next day, but it was delivered one month later.

JH: Do you relate to the Dada and Fluxus movements?

RJ: I relate to any movement if there's some interest or necessity for a relationship.

JH: You're familiar with George Maciunas?

RJ: Yes.

JH: I met him on a visit to Jean Brown. He has a place nearby.

RJ: Jean Brown is right across in Massachusetts?

JH: It's about two hours from here.

RJ: I've always wanted to visit her.

JH: Her archive is designed by Maciunas.

RJ: I didn't know that. Is it a large loaf of bread ? (laughs)

JH: No. It's a Shaker seed house.

RJ: He's an excellent designer. I've never seen his use of wood, but I have seen his typography and posters, and things like that.

JH: You're probably more in touch with art world celebrities than anyone else. Let me throw some at you. Arakawa.

RJ: Arakawa is his last name. His wife's name is Madeline Gins.

JH: I'm very interested in her work since reading Wordrain.

RJ: Yes. A philosophical investigation of Greta Garbo. I spoke to her on the telephone a week and a half ago, and she has endlessly promised to send me her translation of a Mallarmé swan poem, which was to be mailed to me so that...as another example, that letter may be slowly on its way... Back to Jean Brown. Where she lives in her Shaker house. I saw from my car an interesting license plate, it was either from New Hampshire or Massachusetts. And the car had the licence plate LHOOQ, and I wanted to write to the State

License Bureau who the owner of the car was so I could begin a communication. Two: I found in my file recently a letter addressed to a golf ball, in someplace like Hollywood, and it contained an advertisement reading something about, "The golf ball you like to be in touch with." So I knew that if I wrote a letter to Golf Ball, Hollywood, California, the letter would come back to me, which was the point of the letter. And Three:...there was something else I forgot which came before two, before one and two, and now I've forgotten three.

JH: Jean Brown.

RJ: I'm glad her name came up, because I really should go and see her. Also around that area is Al Souza, who's organizing a show of postage stamps, who sent me a pleading letter, "Please," underlined, "contribute a stamp design," something. I had recently another plea from E. F. Higgins of Doo Dah Company, who does postage stamp design, and asked me to design a stamp, which I wasn't able to do. And he telephoned. He likes very much to talk on the phone, and he talked me into it. So I stayed up very late and designed a one cent Dumb Bunnyland postage stamp for him. And he's into colored xeroxing, and has rented a store in Soho, which I was hoping to get to tomorrow to see his exhibition of stamp designs.

JH: There's been a flurry of activity.

RJ: Yes, as I said-global. You mentioned your friend in Holland. At times I'm unable to respond at the time of receiving requests. I put in a full workday everyday in keeping the correspondence network functioning.

JH: What's the average amount of letters that you send out a day?

RJ: It's very minimal. You'd think there would be hundreds, but each postcard, envelope, and enclosure is slowly organized, thought about, and I'd say that there are less than ten items per day. The Truman Gallery, which is run by Jock Truman on 57th Street, who for many years was associated with the Betty Parsons Gallery, and now has his own gallery, is having an opening on December 17th a Correspondence Art Exhibition, and is holding a New York Correspondance School of Art Meeting. I've designed a printed page inviting people to attend this, and I have two-hundred copies on my desk, which have to be mailed out, which means very simply folding, inserting, addressing, stamping, posting, which takes x number of time per day, since I'm a one person operation.

JH: I'd like to attend.

RJ: Yes, that's why I mentioned it. So that... click click click...

JH: New York, I guess, is still the center of art.

RJ: Well, it is a great concentration. But, I think any singular artist is a great concentration. Mark Toby, who I mentioned in my talk last night, living in Switzerland, was himself a great concentration of what he happened to do. Any singular artist is a great concentration, and New York just has an accumulation of concentrations.

JH: You mentioned to me earlier that you don't consider yourself a poet, but on looking at your letters, they suggest certain things, and a main metaphor you use is fame.

RJ: Oh, really? I do? You find it so?

JH: I sense the names are not used to brag, but to suggest.

RJ: When Richard Craven organized this catalog (referring to the 1976 North Carolina Museum of Art exhibition of Johnson's letters, which lay on a table before us), he remarked that my papers were an incredible documentation of New York bar life, and thought I was an alcoholic, because there are endless stories about who was seen in what bar. But that was his interest in the letters, because of his remote North Carolina life.

JH: I find that interesting too, but I feel the names suggest things, and one is able to bring their own associations to the names. Modern literature. Do you read writers like Thomas Pynchon, William Gaddis...

RJ: No. I mostly watch television. I get most of my information listening to television. Sometimes I look at it, but I have it going constantly. I listen to every talk show from eight or nine in the morning

until 1 or 2 at night.

JH: Dinah? Merv?

RJ: Tom Synder. Beverly Dunston. Merv. I'd like to appear on the Merv Griffin show.

JH: I saw a Ray Johnson advertised to appear on the Johnny Carson Show one evening.

RJ: Yes. Now my ideal is to go on the Johnny Carson show with Ray Johnson. You'd think it was a typographical error in the newspaper. Ray Johnson, comma Ray Johnson, comma Charo. Whoever.

JH: I'd love to see that show.

RJ: I think New York Correspondance School talk shows are a definite possibility in the future.

JH: You like a lot of people. You interact well with people. I think you'd do well hosting a talk show.

RJ: No. I don't think I could be a host, but I think I'd be a terrific floor roller.

JH: What does a floor roller do on a talk show?

RJ: You were at my lecture last night, which involved floor rolling. But by mentioning floor rolling, I think I'm referring to an experience I had in Southern Illinois. I forget which city. Springfield, possibly. I was offered at eleven o'clock one evening a complete television studio to do a half-hour tape of anything I wanted to present. I was very excited because there were cameras and cameramen, and sets, and lights, and dials. I'd never been in such a place before.

JH: Was this at a university?

RJ: No. It was a commercial television studio. I immediately began, since I had been asked to do something, a performance, the point of which was that it was not static, as they thought it would be. They thought I wanted to sit and talk and present, and they set up the camera and the background, and so forth. But what I was doing was action in the outer edges, and I began moving, physically moving everything, which is like a recurring theme of my lectures, which is to set everything in motion. The furniture is lifted and carried, drapes were closed and opened, and the cameraman then caught on he should follow the action, so then began a sort of dance of the camera following me. One of the people who was there was an actor, who by chance spontaneously decided that he wanted to perform with me, which was unplanned. So what happened was rather passive action on his part. He appeared, and I began piling up furniture on him and doing various arrangements. There was nothing verbal in our exchange. The people back in the control room were doing very flashy things with those spiral dissolves, and fading and fade outs, and all the flashy technical things. The interesting thing about the experience was that I never saw the result. They were going to send me a tape, which never appeared, that was viewed that evening. People saw it. I never saw it. It just went off into the void in some marvelous fashion. Which was quite alright with me.

JH: I would think so, because your letters just go off into the void.

RJ: Yes. I thought that perhaps someday this would come back at some unknown point and I would see it.

JH: With correspondence it seems that what you give is what you get.

RJ: It's a giving, but it's also a distribution and a planting and a seeding, and it takes time. I love materials that come back to me in unpredicted ways over the years.

JH: I'm reminded of E. M. Plunkett. You know him, of course.

RJ: He gave the New York Correspondance School historically its name, and he wrote an excellent essay in the Spring 1977 issue of The College Art Journal.

JH: It's an excellent issue. Do you think it's the most comprehensive reportage about your work written to date? There were many essays on you...

RJ: John Russell, Lawrence Alloway, Robert Pincus-Witten, Lucy Lippard, David Bourdan, Robert Rosenblum. It was very interesting how most of the people, being art critics, did not use their usual art criticism style to write about the New York Correspondance School. Lucy Lippard's message was very folksy, newsy. It was in the manner of somebody handwriting on a letterpad. A letter rather than a formal essay.

JH: I guess you bring out the dada in people. It's often quoted that you are "the most famous unknown artist." And of course, you've been doing this for a number of years. When did you start?

RJ: The North Carolina catalog had postcards from Arthur Secunda from the nineteen-forties. So the Correspondance School had its beginnings in the nineteen-forties, and it was a self-conscious activity in the fifties, and very self-conscious in the sixties, and, of course, now in the seventies it has been... we were discussing last night, there have been many people who say, "Oh, I've been doing Correspondance Art for years." And many people have. They have written letters, and sent things in the mail of a visual poetic nature. Everybody has done this. But art critics in describing my activity, Dore Ashton, for instance, very many years back stated that I have so obsessively done this for so many years, everyday as an activity, that I have achieved seniority in the action, and I love it. I love it, because I have demonically pursued the subject. I have written and distributed thousands and thousands of letters with no logic in the reasoning. There's an incredible loss and waste. When I mentioned distribution, and seeding, and planting before, it is a natural kind of phenomena. Of all the leaves on a tree very few of them actually... or fish in the sea, as a germination. Things flourish, grow, wilt, die. A correspondence will reassert itself. Each person has a different reason to communicate. Some people have a necessity, as Edwin Golacoff of Denver, Colorado, has to distribute large bulk garbage, junk mail bundles, and one receives, as Ed Plunkett is into, packages and bulky things. Jim Bohn, of the Spam Radio Club, distributes very slight tiny messages, and the messages are always very soft. Some people...someone from Montana, Mr. Sludge, sends me Montana license plates, and I received a beautiful blob of plaster wrapped in foam rubber with tape and string. And it was the most outstanding object I think I probably ever received, because in cutting the string and tape and the sponge rubber and the emergence of this plastic...

(Tape ends. A second is inserted.)

...he told me he was Canadian, and that my art was so American, which of course goes without saying, since I'm an American. I can't imagine myself working in some kind of French or English idiom since I am an American. But he seemed very impressed by the Americanization of what I do, and we discussed history and community. I have a lot of projects going involving history and documentations of specific communities through portraiture, historical documents, photography, drawings, collage, writings...

JH: About communal groups?

RJ: Yes. I began by doing an exhibition, which was the documentation of the Betty Parson Gallery history and the art world, which stemmed out of my Bunny Lists and Name Droppings of celebrities.

JH: Another name for you. Arthur Craven.

RJ: Yes. The boxer. In the Motherwell Dada anthology. How about the Baroness Freytag-Loringhoven?

JH: You've got me there. But tell me the story.

RJ: The Baroness Freytag-Loringhoven was a friend of Duchamp, and she was kind of a mad lady who

wrote poetry. She's in one of the Little Review anthologies as a poet, and she did dadaistic things like shaving her head, painting it green, walking down the street dragging a bedpan, and was a crazy shocking punk lady of her time.

JH: Do you play chess?

RJ: No.

JH: You never played with Duchamp, then.

RJ: Arturo Schwartz, my ex-dealer, once asked me if I played chess, and I replied, "No." The Baroness Freytag-Loringhoven. She's not as well known as Mina Loy.

JH: Who was married to Arthur Craven?

RJ: She was married to Herbert Marshall, I think (laughs)...Do you ever hear from Claude Pelieu? He's a French poet, who's married to Mary Beach, who's the daughter of Sylvia Beach of Shakespeare and Company, and he's presently living in Mill Valley and sends me a lot of his poems, and he sort of writes in a Ginsburg, Burrough's type of vein.

JH: Have you ever been to Shakespeare and Company?

RJ: No. I've never been to Europe.

JH: Is that a conscious decision?

RJ: I'm not a traveler. I'm a dreamer. I was in China last night.

JH: So you have no desire to physically travel?

RJ: Well, I have now, because of the projects I was beginning to describe of historical community documentation, which began with the Betty Parson history. And I have been doing silhouette portiture in the last year and a half, and did a exhibition of fifty East Hampton artists and writers, Rosenquist, DeKooning, Sally Quinn of the Washington Post, very pretty. She hated my portrait I did of her. Sort of like an Egyptian mummy, not pretty. I didn't finish the Harold Rosenberg portrait, nor did I finish the Edwin Albee portrait, but people like Chuck Close. Paloma Picasso is in that show. I've done about one-hundred and fifty drawings in the last year and a half. They're not completed. It's a work in process.

JH: Is this being done on a grant?

RJ: Well, this year under my NEA grant in painting. I'm painting on masonite.

JH: You're a painter also?

RJ: I'm trained in painting. The East Hampton show is interesting because of my use of masonite, and scuffed, scumbled paint surfaces, which suddenly some people noticed were very, in a subtle way, painterly. But that was because of the references to DeKooning and Pollack, and so forth. As a community, in that case, the references were to painting. I'm now trying to document Nassau County, which is the other Long Island county. There are fifty portraits in Bridgehampton of the East Hampton people, and I showed them last month in Old Westbury at the SUNY campus, which has a two year old, very modern gallery, gigantic thirty by thirty-six foot vast space. Lawrence Alloway wants to show my portraits in Stony Brook, in his gallery, which is also beautifully spacious and huge. So when I went to Philadelphia and Detroit recently, I did drawings of people there. In Philadelphia I tried to draw the Mayor.

I began listing unusual people in either politics, sports, theater. That's where Merv Griffin...is it Merv

Griffin? I'd like to do Andrea McArdle of Annie, the little actress, as a portrait. In Detroit, I was going to track down historic Henry Ford. I remember that from my childhood textbooks. I think the Ford automobile has a silhouette of Henry Ford. I've done some beautiful portraits of Emily Dickinson based on her historic silhouette with a big lump. Samuel Beckett. I work from photographs. So that in documenting communities and historical situations-just being in this area I'd like to do a portrait of Charles Burchfield. Mr. Root, where my artworks are displayed. So it means my doing research in libraries to find books, photographs, papers, and doing exhibitions, which would include writings, documents. Now I'm involved in the Archive of American Art, the phenomenology. Lucy Lippard and Samuel Wagstaff have given their papers, which include all my letters to them. Mr. Wagstaff, I was told, had one-hundred Ray Johnson letters. I was very impressed that I sent him one-hundred letters over the years, which are now all on microfilm.

JH: Do you keep a copy of each letter you send out?

RJ: No. Oh, no I don't. I forget about them. I never see them again. Although I'm about to purchase my Minolta copy machine, which I have rented under my CAPS and NEA grants to document papers. I have a whole new archive of things I've selected to xerox copy, and the Minolta machine happens to do photographs and offset printings. It has a dial that you set from one to five. I don't know the Minolta machine, but it's more interesting than the Xerox machine, which just makes a print, and this can be adjusted for tonalities. And the most beautiful thing it does of all, when I do my Yoko Ono Ono Tapir, t.a.p.i.r, drawings on very cheap paper, like cheap newsprint, I would put cigarette burns in the paper, and the Minolta, which has this very fine Japanese... it reproduces the tiniest little things very, very... And the best thing it does is cigarette burns. It has something to do with the sight relief. It does things with holes in them. And things also, a quarter of an inch things in relief, which cast shadows. It's very photographic, and it's in the process in the way it makes a quick instant print. Except that the paper is not as collagable as Xerox paper stock, and someone said that I needed some...

JH: It's shinier?

RJ: It's a photographic emulsion paper, which wilts when you apply liquid glue to it. So someone said simply use a glue that it would adhere to. But that is a sensuous exploration I haven't had the time for.

JH: Book mending glue is good.

RJ: Oh! When I was in China the other night, of all things, in my dream, I had this experience, because I worked in the Orientalia Bookstore in New York and did book cataloging, packing, and I was instructed on how to repair a Chinese book, which years later appeared in my dream. The page had a slight tear, and I was about to mend it with some kind of tape, when someone instructed me to look in the margin, and it seems that in the binding of Chinese books there is a whole way of stitching and binding, which is different from the European tradition. But to my amazement, the way to repair, and it was illogical to turn the page, there was a perforation and a kind of tab and then the spine, and the page...It was contradictory, because to repair it, the whole thing had to be removed, but there was no way put it back. So as a symbol, it was a very interesting occurrence in a dream, because it was completely illogical as an instructive process, because the repair created a destruction. So maybe it should not have been repaired, although that was the intention in the dream.

JH: Have you ever been to Talas, the book supply company in New York? They have a lot of interesting things, including a large collection of marbled paper.

RJ: Well, I would probably be intrigued, but I don't go out of my way to be involved with craft techniques. I'm very well schooled and trained, you know, many years ago, in many art techniques, and as an artist I simply now do what I do in the way I want to do it. I don't go out of my way to find new techniques. I have a long list of things I hate. Like I hate plastic frames. I hate graphics and prints. I can probably think of a third item, because I said there were many. I have one framer that I've used consistently since 1965, but they're now so expensive that I...They do the most absolute beautiful framings.

JH: Who's that?

RJ: Bernard Walsh. And they make a beautiful cabinet custom-made walnut frame for me, which is all built up and has braces. It's a perfect...

JH: Ray we're just about done here. May I me as presumptuous, as I'm sure I am, to have you draw my silhouette on this blackboard?

RJ: No. I can't do it, because my drawing of a silhouette has consistently been done on paper. I don't draw on blackboards. I draw only on paper. I have a special light that I use. I've used many lights, but now I have a specific light. And the reason I have the light, it creates a very diffused shadow. The light is shown on your head, which casts a shadow, and in drawing it, I somehow can't see what I'm drawing. It's very deliberately obscure. It's difficult, and I'm dealing with your nervous energy, whether you shake or are static. My inability to actually see what I'm drawing, because the tonality of the pencil line is the same tone as the shadow because of my light. So if I were to do this on the blackboard, it's too definite. Because in doing a portrait, it's a very concentrated deliberate concentrated one and a half, two minute, energy thing between you and myself, and your asking me to do it is very different from my asking you to do it.

JH: I said it was presumptuous.

RJ: No, it's not presumptuous, but it would be something else.

RJ: I think our tape is about done. As much as I enjoy writing letters to you, it's been even nicer talking with you.

RJ: If I didn't enjoy it, I would have said the ten minutes are up.

JH: You've been kind.

RJ: I have my watch with me. What is this? (referring to the Hervé Fischer book, *Art et Communication Marginale*, on the table before him)

JH: Haven't you seen this before?

RJ: No.

JH: I believe this is one of the early works on Mail Art and rubber stamps.

RJ: What year was this?

JH: 1974.

RJ: Is there an index?

JH: Each participant is given a section. I bought it in New York.

RJ: Jaap Reitman?

JH: Yes.

RJ: I probably haven't seen this book because I'm not in it.

JH: It's mostly European.

RJ: I had a recent communication from Germany from someone George Brecht put on to me who does books and publications. His name is Peter Below. He sent me a big bundle of things that were

marvelous to receive. I love looking at this (the Fisher book), but it's somehow final. It doesn't really turn me on. It's not like looking at People magazine. I look at People magazine, and click click click. I have connections with that aspect of the world. When I look at this, since I'm so specialized and involved with this kind of thing...The reality of that hundred dollar bill (in the book) turns me on as an image. And I do have my favorites. Seeing Anna Banana, who telephoned me to wish me a happy Thanksgiving the other night, with Dadaland, Polyester Nations, and Buster Cleveland.

JH: Not Opal Nations?

RJ: No, Polyester Nations. Opal Nations is a man. Polyester Nations is a woman who just had a baby.

JH: Did you have a nice Thanksgiving?

RJ: I had turkey dinner with some friends. And some friends of my friend, who turned out were alcoholics, who drank when they got there, drank before they got there, ate dinner, and then went out somewhere to drink some more. They were falling apart. And then I went to a second Thanksgiving spectacular that a friend of mine gives every year for eighty to one-hundred people. It's in Garrison, New York, near Stony Point, where John Cage, Jasper Johns, Louise Nevelson, many people live. They are generally there, as they were this year. It was a different crowd of people, very pleasant.

JH: John Cage has had such an influence on people. I was interested to read that Nam June Paik learned Zen from John Cage.

RJ: You should discuss, either write or telephone, John Cage and Zen with Arakawa. Arakawa has a hostility about John's Zen-ness.

JH: I'd like to talk to you about Black Mountain.

RJ: Oh, no! Oh, no! I went through that last night, and I went through that conversation this morning.

JH: Have you read the book about Black Mountain by Duberman?

RJ: Yes, I did.

JH: Did you find it interesting? Reliable?

RJ: I read it very objectively, and I thought he did very good job of doing a lot of research finding out about a very difficult subject. And I think that everyone who was at Black Mountain, depending on the amount of time, or what year they were there, had a very different experience in dealing with it, because it involved so much of each person's individual participation intuiting what the place was.

JH: Black Mountain has accrued mythic status on par with Paris earlier in the century.

RJ: Duberman has a great interest in the Creely-Olson years, which was a time I was not there. I was there earlier during the Albers-Cage-Erik Satie Festival times. There was a slow disintegration that took place at Black Mountain in the management and administration. I don't know if it's in Fielding Dawson's book or a different book, but I think it was Fielding Dawson, who wrote about sitting around freezing to death, because no one was tending the furnaces, and how cold it was, and there was nothing to eat. It was the time of the Beat Generation. It was very in keeping with the time. When I was there, it was Albers and the Bauhaus expression. I can't imagine Walter Gropius being there with Charles Olson. It was just a very different set-up. We were so idealistic and attempted to be constructive. It was after the war, and we were so involved with carpentry, building. I spent a great deal of time there doing house plastering. I plastered a seven-room farm house. My education consisted of working with a hillbilly house-plasterer and slagging lime, and doing corners with a trowel, and ceilings, building windows, and putting roofs on a farm house, which is what I wanted to do at that time. I learned a great deal from doing that. I was dreadful, and I tried to study chemistry. I just couldn't understand chemistry. I was trying to read Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, and I couldn't read. I really didn't know how to read a novel.

JH: Do you now?

RJ: Probably not. I have read a great deal, but I tend to just read, and read, and read. I think I'm incapable of understanding or analyzing what I read. Because of going to a place like Black Mountain, I had a strange type of education. Whereas, I'm very well trained in art techniques and perspective. I can't write, but I can sure hand-letter. Certain craft things interest me

JH: What's the interest in the mirror-writing?

RJ: You mean writing Barry White backwards? (referring to the previous evening's "lecture")

JH: And your own name.

RJ: Probably just amusement. I was visiting an art collector in Detroit, who's also a businessman involved with plumbing pipes. And he showed me his art collection, which is near his pipe factory next to the railroad yards. And as I was leaving, he asked me to sign his guest book, so I signed my name backwards, and I saw his registry, when he looked to see my name. He did a kind of Andy Warholesque double-take. So I think I succeeded in a mild startling effect.

JH: It comes natural? Can you write any name quickly like that?

RJ: No. There's some letters that are difficult. It's just a show-off sort of thing. I thought the Barry White and Barry anilow...everyone was convinced I was going to write Barry White a second time. It was inevitable that the second word was going to be White, as a repetition, and then it was Manilow. In one of my lectures, I was trying to figure out how to do a childish magic act, which was...
(tape ends)