A Special Time

The ’60s, You Had to Be There

by Richard Kostelanetz

The measure of history arises in the uncovering of relationships. That is why the writing of history has less to do with facts as such than with their relations. Every true historical image is based on relationships appearing in the historian’s choice from among the fullness of events, a choice that varies with the century and often with the decade.

— Siegfried Giedion
Mechanization Takes Command (1948)

A Special Time began, curiously, with my friend Donald Porter’s challenge to me to write a conventional novel. Since that posed a question not of style but subject, I thought first of the 1960s, not as a chronological period but as a cultural concept, and of writing a panoramic novel, roughly in the manner of Dos Passos, about the experiences of a variety of people at that time. However, once I made notes about the experiences I wanted in my novel, I began to hear voices telling particular stories; and since I have recently been doing so much radio, I decided it would be best for me to work initially with authentic voices. When American Public Radio asked me to propose a pilot project to its Program Fund, I chose this, which was funded from a grant it had received from the Ford Foundation.

My initial themes were two: the 1960s was a special time as other decades were not, and it was special in more ways than we commonly understand. While I did not want to neglect the political protests commonly associated with the period, my principal interest was episodes of “anonymous history,” to use Siegfried Giedion’s phrase, which is to say dimensions of experience that remain invisible or forgotten, even though, in this case, they occurred only three decades ago. So in selecting subjects to interview, I looked first of all for individuals who had either personal experience or expert knowledge of some specialness in this period. Thus, I got a pharmacology professor to talk about the last age of drug optimism, during which, in his most prominent example, Valium sales peaked at 75 million prescriptions, only to become by now half of what they were; the manager of an investment fund to talk about the stock market boom of the middle sixties and then about how, because of values predominant in the period, he felt more comfortable in not displaying his wealth, again unlike now; a fashion writer to talk about the radical changes in female dress and the current persistence of these changes. And so on.

In selecting interviewees, I also looked for another quality — voices so authoritative that they need not be reintroduced. This was necessary because I wanted to make not a conventional radio feature, with an announcer (probably a celebrity)

identifying speakers and making connections, but an informal symposium in which the remarks of various individuals would be interwoven as though they were participating in a continuous conversation. My assumption was that the speakers would establish their authority not through identification of their current positions (or even their names) but solely through the authenticity of their articulated memories and perceptions, and then that this authority could be extended, in a reader's mind, to their subsequent appearances in the book.

For *A Special Time,* I conducted over three dozen interviews, initially with old friends, and then with new friends. I gave the interviewees my essential questions on a card and then, when I interrupted them, asked that they incorporate my further question into their answers. On the card were five questions, the first four of which overlap on their edges:

1. What was special about the 1960s?
2. What do the 1960s mean to you/your area of expertise now?
3. What was possible then that wasn't possible before and hasn't been possible since?
4. How did the experience of the 1960s change your life/your business?
5. What events/experiences marked the end of the period for you?

Some interviewees answered these questions so well that there was no need for me to interrupt them. My impression was that most had thought about these questions long before I asked them.

The following text, drawn from the opening program, becomes the beginning of the initial chapter of my book. Among the topics I hope to treat in individual chapters are 1) Manners (which includes sex, recreational drugs, language, social discrimination); 2) Learning-Education-Research (which would include the academic boom, educational experiments); 3) Values; 4) Literature & Culture; 5) Art and Its Scenes; 6) Politics; 7) Enterprise; 8) The War; 9) International Analogues, in which individuals who spent the 1960s outside the U.S. will answer these questions with reference to their own experience. The concluding chapter will include a grand survey of over two dozen answers to my fifth question about the participants' perceptions of the end of the period.

To make this symposium into a book, I gave each voice his or her own typeface that would reappear whenever he or she spoke. The innovation is that each typeface would become a character, while the fictitious suggestion is that the participants are in the same room responding to one another. I think I have reworked the material into the novel-length fiction/faction that my friend Donald Porter challenged me to write.

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The sixties — what was special about it? I think, I could say shortly, that there was this sudden feeling that enormous change was possible, because so many people were waking up, thinking new thoughts, because the smugness and complacency of the period before was lifted. People were skeptical about things they've never been skeptical about before. They began to see positive things in whole groups of people, like black people, poor people, Vietnamese peasants — whole groups of people who were seen to have qualities to admire; so a whole lot of learning went on in the sixties, and a spirit of learning.

The early sixties actually for me were a continuation of the fifties — that is, the fifties and late forties was a period of very intense repression and a kind of feeling of everything being confined, of the options being confined, not only the broader social options, that is for everyone in the culture, but specifically of certain kinds of options for political action, for change, for advocacy, etc.

I was raised on a farm and cut off in a lot of ways from standard American culture. There was something about the Eisenhower years. Everyone was kind of lock-stepped into some sort of very safe lawyer/doctor path. And it seemed terribly boring to me at the time. The world seemed to have a limited number of possibilities. So many of my classmates happily plunged forward into medical school and internships, surgery. By the time they were thirty they would have a wife and kids, settling down and working at their

careers. But I seemed to balk at entering this kind of safe harbor.

It's hard to talk about the sixties without going back to the fifties, because the fifties were the formative years for me. I was born in 1940, so my teen years were spent in the fifties, and that means I was formed by the McCarthy era. I was formed by the era of apathy, as it was called, and it probably was apathetic, as apathetic as they say, and spent the fifties being repressed, a virgin. I was growing up in the fifties, when virginity was something that you lost if you were richer or poorer than I was. The image of the wonderful fifties in **Grease** or **Happy Days** really is not anything like my memory of the time, and I don't really remember being happy until 1960, in fact the day I arrived in London.

I left college in 1960, went to work for a year in my dad's business, was tremendously bored by the business and, in a sense, by America. I felt that the U.S. had failed me. I had graduated from a good college with honors, and yet there was nothing I wanted to do. I just wanted out of America. I didn't know why. It was a very inarticulate kind of longing. To me, there was something wrong with the waters I was in. I wanted other waters. I wanted to go overseas, to see if things were as boring everywhere as they were here.

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So that in the early sixties, I think particularly with both the things happening in the arts and with certain political events, most particularly I think the growth of the peace movement and the freedom rides, the integration movement, that a sense that it was in fact possible to put your body on the line in some way to effect change through action, through direct action, through speech, through writing, and that it was possible to do this without the fear of a kind of terrorizing reprisal. That is, there might be immediate penalties to pay, you might get beaten up on a picket line, you might get jailed for civil disobedience, but the idea that someone might be haunting your life forever and that you'd be socially disqualified on a permanent basis because someone had named you a Communist or affiliated you with Communist movements or whatever, that began to dissipate, and I think generally, a sense that almost anything was possible if there was the <u>will</u> for it in sufficient people to make it happen seemed for me to be endemic to that time.

What was special about the nineteen sixties, essentially, was that it was an opening up of the political and intellectual and artistic climate, coming after the fifties, which was a rather dull and restrictive climate.

So there was almost a sense of optimism and potential for, as I say, some kind of change, some kind of movement within the culture, and a sense really of a "ferment" and I use that word very advisedly. I don't just mean a sense of something shifting in a glacial sense, but I mean of a lot of elements semiconsciously interacting with each other toward change, so that there seemed to be that kind of conscious synergy between what was going on in the arts, what was going on in politics, what was going on in the social arena, etc.

The sixties for me had a sense of something being at stake. It seemed that things somehow were important, that whatever you did counted for something; or as the expression went at the time, "Not to decide is to decide." And so if you didn't do something, that counted too. So that the sixties for me meant that whatever you decided in your life was important, not just for yourself, but for society as a whole — people you knew and the people you didn't know.

There was some kind of feeling of being part of a community, feeling that the world was open and anything was possible, and that with **will** there could be enormous changes. It isn't that it was so but it was a feeling that you felt — that if you wanted something it was possible to get it. I honestly believed that sexism, for example, would change, that racism would change and perhaps the capitalist system would change — if enough people got together and engaged in the activities that I was engaged in, there would be enormous change. I no longer think this is possible. Some of it might be just getting a little older.

Very briefly, what wasn't possible before was a sense of openness that's absolutely true — a sense of possibility, a sense of people given a chance. It was very American, it was a kind of a frontier mentality of what could be done. What I fear about the aftermath is what hasn't been possible since, is the initial trust for a new initiative, the initial trust for a new idea, the initial trust for a new gesture, that initial trust for an exploratory mentality. And the fact is it was a period where people said what they thought, no matter how stupid. Now we have a time in which, people are deeply full of self-censorship.

Suddenly, in the late fifties, early sixties, the jet age came, which meant that one could go from New York to London, to Paris or Frankfurt very, very quickly, and quite easily in contrast to previous times.

What made this possible for me is a sense of expanded horizons and a sort of lifting of the cloud of political terror that had seemed to hang over my head, over my family's head during the forties and fifties — a sense that you could almost make your own future, you could make your own career, you could decide to be anything that you wanted to be and once again, if you simply put your energy into it, you could do it, you could go from being a graduate student in literature to being a rock 'n roll musician, which I did for a time, to then going to be a theater critic and journalist to then going into photography criticism without any credentials, without any real training, without any sense that somehow you had to pass through a certification process to do things.

There was more love in the sixties. The shorthand term **Love** denoted what we were, and they were against. Remember the Festival of Life vs. the Society of Death. Perhaps this is more archetypally presented in the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine*. The "Blue Meanies" are the ones that try to kill. Once the Blue Meanies are dealt with in *Yellow Submarine*, of course, "All You Need Is Love." What was meant by that, and what was one of the subcultural understandings, was that once the physical needs were taken care of, once you had a society that could produce the wealth to sustain itself, and once you got rid of those people who had a vital interest in inequitable distribution and oppression, you could move to a society based on love. And that was part of the vision of the sixties. And love was meant in every way, from physical, sexual love to a kind of agape, a love of humanity. That's not possible now.

A big change from the fifties to sixties is that I was suddenly defending clients whom I believed in, whom I liked. I liked the person who was arrested for smoking pot, the civil rights workers in the deep south. I thought these people were the "good guys." In the fifties, I represented corporate swindlers.

To me the sixties had to do with rebellion, with throwing everything over, ripping out everything I had grown up with and trying to change it.

Another important factor was the human potential movement as it came to be known in California — Esalen, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers. This experience formulated an attitude on my part of directness and honesty in expression and putting a great value on direct human, honest communication, throwing caution to the wind, saying what was on your mind, saying the truth. The sixties gave me a license to be a so-called radical in the courts, although I was being conservative in the tradition of preserving the legal system. I was interested in revolutionizing the court room — courtroom decorum, courtroom behavior, the relationship between the judge and the lawyer. The obsequious model was anathema to me — the conception of the lawyer was a thirties B-movie lawyer: bald-headed, pot-bellied, bookwormish, thick glasses. I wanted him to be John Wayne; I wanted to be Cowboy Clarence Darrow in the courtroom.

The heroes who emerged out of the sixties were people who took realistic and very difficult stands during their being popular culture figures, whether Muhammed Ali or Angela Davis, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, or people like that. They were militant and literally put their lives on the line in being in opposition to the establishment.

In the courtroom I used vulgar and obscene language and ended up in the Supreme Court in a case called *Rosen* v. *California* for disturbing the peace.

This was annulled by the Supreme Court. I was convicted in that case for using vulgar and profane language in front of women and children. In the first trial I was my own lawyer and got an eleven-one hung jury. For my second trial I had a woman lawyer and was convicted. She appealed the case to the United States Supreme Court. Ultimately the California law, under which I was convicted, was held unconstitutional. I was able to knock out a speech-inhibition law. The sixties were a cultural complex that filtered through me and caused me to act the way I did. I couldn't have behaved that way in the fifties.

It was a unique event certainly in the history of the United States, if not the history of the world. When you think about it, there were a set of uprisings over a set of issues that were really world-wide. I think partly that had been made possible by the development of an international culture, so to speak. You look at the people that you met in the sixties, especially younger people, and you saw that in some way, no matter if they were French, or German or British, they all seemed to look alike in a certain way, had the same hair style, they wore the same clothes, so that was unique already, an international culture had been in the making.

Another aspect of the sixties worth noting is that it was a very international period, much more so than the fifties and much more so than nowadays. In the fifties, when I went to Europe, it was, in some respects, burdensome going by a propeller airplane that had to make two stops on the way. Suddenly, in the late fifties, early sixties, the jet age came, which meant that one could go from New York to London, to Paris or Frankfurt very, very quickly, and quite easily in contrast to previous times. And suddenly people arrived in New York from Europe and other parts of the world on a regular, frequent basis. New Yorkers were in Europe all the time; the exchanges were quite remarkable.

The pressure to know, to understand, became absolutely gripping when the academic community, the young of our nation, in school began to question the whole meaning of the United States' participation in the war in Vietnam.

I think the culmination of that really began to take place; '68 expressed it: the uprising not only at Columbia University, then to be repeated around the country, especially in the elite schools, but the uprisings that were taking place in Europe. And we forget, for example, even in Japan, they mounted demonstrations that would make ours, you know, look paltry. They would field twenty, thirty, fifty thousand, a hundred thousand students and go up against the police with clubs and with discipline. I don't know if you will remember, for example, '68 was also the time of the Olympics in Mexico. Well, not only did the Olympics have some manifestations of this protest, but, in fact, the student uprising just before the Olympics in which a lot of Mexican students were shot and tortured and killed. The magnitude of it — even in China — stuns the mind.

The sixties were the time which, in effect, really made it clear to America that it was not the only answer to the world's problems, because it had its own problems.

Patriotism was defined in the sixties in a way very noble: dissent was the essence of patriotism, and the truth is no longer is that the case.

I left the south in the early '60s, and there was no racial question then. Blacks were inferior, and that was the long and the short of it. As a southerner I didn't like what I saw happening with blacks, but on the other hand as a southerner I found myself accepting it. I was not about to make any great stand for blacks. I think that was probably typical of folks of my generation. There was an enormous change when I came back in 1966. I remember my most interesting assignment as a reporter was to interview the black head of the New Orleans school system. I was amazed I had come back a mere six years later and New Orleans would have a black Ph.D. heading the school system. I remember I expected him to be uneducated. I

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felt he probably got the job through Uncle Tom tokenism. I was staggered to find a person as fully intelligent as I was, who immediately understood exactly what I was going through. He pierced this immediately and without my really acknowledging he sort of had me in tears in a half hour.

But I came back periodically throughout the sixties, throughout the later sixties, to visit parents and friends. I remember going into a department store and there were no longer two sets of drinking fountains and two sets of stairs, as there used to be when I was growing up. And the change in the use of words, no more **colored**, but **black**; and that took many people a long time to change. Many people kept a bridle on their tongues, whereas formerly there was an attempt, at any rate, to be real in their tolerance and not just theoretical about it — partly law, partly conscience.

And I found myself as a southerner going through a huge change in how I viewed black people. It had been one thing to encounter Africans in Europe; they seemed to be a race apart. It was another to encounter someone who had pride without arrogance, who knew what he was up to. He was slowly changing the school system; and he knew about education — a Harvard degree — nothing so fancy as to appear stupid, but thorough and well-grounded. That was my first inkling that the South was in for a major shift.

There were a lot of doors opened to blacks in the sixties. There was a concern in terms of government policies of providing equal opportunities for minorities to come within society. This was a direct result of the agitation movements, the movements of black and white students in the south had an effect on American society. There was an optimism about blacks and whites working together. In the eighties, this might seem ridiculous, but in the sixties it was a functioning reality.

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So many things came together in the sixties — everybody's dreams — whether it was religion's dreams of a better world. The sixties was a time of Protestant hope that the world could be saved, not by making people believe in our dogma, but by loving the world. That was happening with Protestants. It was post-Vatican II for Catholics. So that there was the fire from John XXIII and the hope that if the Scriptures were heard in the native language, it would waken the hearts of Catholics. There was much optimism and confusion that was going on in religion. In the political life we really believed that we could win the war on poverty. We believed that with everything being thrown up in the air it was going to come down in a creative pattern that could lead to real change.

Well the optimism came simply because of the demographic shift. If you look at the demography of a nation and see that the bulge of its population is young and there is a stream of new energy and new young people and a dominant field of economic consumer growth in children's toys and children's books and especially in a society that prizes education — at least the acquisition of certificates of education, diplomas. Then you're dealing with the impression of expanding possibilities, increasing labor pool, more schools, more education. Well, it seems to me that it was before unemployment that the sixties began, before these young baby-boom children came of employable age; and there was the view that there would be an ever-expanding economy and that that ever-expanding economy would be fueled by a fair amount of optimism about technology. The sixties is the era of space travel — I mean John Glenn. It's the era of people going to moon. It is also the era of DNA. This is the first time that the revolution in biology took popular fascination.

My father was a beer salesman; my mother was a waitress. If it hadn't been for the nineteen sixties, I'd probably be a beer salesman or a waiter today. Instead, I'm a college professor and somewhat of an intellectual. How can that be? Very simple, back in the nineteen sixties, suddenly everybody and their brother was in graduate school. I was in graduate school, and my brother was in graduate school.

And I remember I was a graduate student at Columbia in 1960, and about 1962 or so they decided to reorganize the curriculum. There were no texts, and we wrote up some notes. We

gave freshmen material that nowadays is only taught in graduate courses — really advanced mathematics. That wasn't just happening at Columbia; Princeton was doing it. Most places, I think, were doing that. We were really going to teach properly. We were going to tell them the real dope — no more fooling around with sort of low-level calculus and fudging the proofs. They were going to get everything.

Certainly everybody was very enthusiastic about it. They thought it was going to change mathematics; there was going to be a whole new generation of people who were going to be mathematically literate. Of course, what it did was just blow the minds of the freshmen. People flunked right and left. Actually nobody seemed to care very much. Neither the faculty nor the students were terribly upset about that; that seemed to be the kind of thing that just happened. That, of course, has since been dropped. That lasted, what, 1962 to maybe the late sixties and began to fade out. Now it's just the way it was in the fifties.

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I wanted to talk about the interesting period of the financial market in the sixties, and why people like myself came into it, and why we succeeded at it. I think you got to start at the beginning. After the depression, very few people came into it, and there was a tremendous void. In the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties, it was not considered an area of opportunity, very low volume on the stock exchange, very few people wanted to come into it — certainly not the people who were motivated, and certainly not, shall we say, the creative types who were willing to take the plunge. There was a huge void, I guess you would say. And then came the people who were long on confidence, long on guts and balls, but short on experience — people like myself who saw it as an opportunity to make a lot of money. You became a millionaire. We became millionaires our first year out, net after taxes — beyond our wildest expectations. And money was coming in through the transepts. You couldn't stop the money coming in. People would call you, whom you'd never even heard of before, and say, "Will you take my million dollars, please? I'll fly in from Iowa to see you; I'll fly from Wisconsin to see you. Please take my money." It was a different era.

What was special about the sixties for fashion was that it was the first time that the fashion pyramid was turned upside-down. In other words, ever since there were fashion designers, they were at the top of this special pyramid, and they were copied by each successive, cheaper kind of manufacturer or seamstress or strata of society. For the first time in the sixties, the ideas began to come from the street, rather than from the top.

And the influence went exactly the other way than it had been. The arrows were going up instead of down. For example, Yves St. Laurent showed a pea-jacket on his runway in Paris. It was in the sixties that for the first time college students, or we should say students, went to thrift stores. That was the beginning of something that is new, the very fancy vintage clothing business, where the prices are almost the same as new clothes and those displayed in beautiful shops on the very best streets. But that was something that really started in the sixties.

Poor people, poor students, went to thrift stores and Salvation Armies to find warm, wearable clothes and to find things that looked interesting to them — to look different than what was for sale in the bourgeois department stores. The point is fashion is about style, about looking in some special way; so for them the special way to look was to not look the same they would look if they'd been dressed by their mothers.

I remember one time that I was real shocked. I had shipped a T-shirt, this was about 1967, to about four hundred stores; and it didn't particularly sell very well. It was a long sleeve, what at the time people called it a Wallace Beery neck, a round neck with a half placket and buttons, and it was in funky colors. And I had it shipped to four hundred stores, and it didn't mean much. It just sat in the stores for four or five weeks. Then, one day, John Lennon, when he was with the Beatles, wore it on the Ed Sullivan Show. Two days after, I never had seen so many reorders. Of the three hundred stores that bought it, probably 260 wanted more. I was completely shocked. I didn't know why people suddenly wanted this shirt. Then someone told me it was on the Ed Sullivan Show.

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For me, the word "funky," which I took from the Black community and brought it to the fashion world, had to do with a sense of color. It was a dusty, muted color, and many of these colors were not typical colors. There was dusty plum, corset pink, which was the color of your grandmother's corset that had been washed about thirty times and kept on fading over the years to a color that was so washed out it was no longer pink. I used to use colors like this. We had something we called unisex. Unisex was just one set of sizes, very different from what we call "androgynous" today. Unisex meant there were five sizes. There was extra small, small, medium, large, extra large. The first three sizes were worn predominantly by women. The medium, the equivalent of a 36 man's size, was worn by very thin guys, and the large and extra large by normal guys.

Women started wearing men's jeans in '67, I think because the men's jeans companies more reflected the tone of the time. They were more sensitive and quicker, and also because it was known that men's clothes were made better. I still think that's true. I used to sell them a lot of short midriff tops, where in those days women would expose parts of their stomach. This was considered sexy. Even the men were wearing real tight and form-fitting clothes. Some were later on even see-through. We had a lot of tops that were sheer. This was part of the feeling of outrageousness of the times. People were no longer afraid to expose parts of their bodies. They wanted to show it. Of course, later on you have women not wearing bras.

When I started off, I had this dream of making a million dollars before I was thirty, and then becoming reasonably rich from that point forward. I thought it would take me a while. But luckily it didn't. Or unfortunately, on one level, it didn't, because I soon came to realize that once you had enough money, the making more of it only involved a desire for more power, more glory, and that wasn't what motivated me. To me it was just chips; it was a wonderful game, a lot of fun. It required being on top of every event that was happening in the world. It wasn't just making money, not that I have a distaste for money, because I don't; but money for me meant independence — the ability to do anything I wanted to do. Once I had enough, I didn't know why I was making more, so I tried to pull back.

Many of my friends during the sixties looked askance at me because I was so successful. Some of the friendships I had before my success passed a little bit, didn't want to be friends with someone with as much money as I had. It was a value a lot of friends I went to college with shared. It certainly made me not want to do anything ostentatious.

Now when you're successful, people don't hesitate to have a chauffeur-driven car, to buy a fantastic house, or a townhouse in the city, and really spend money. In that era, people didn't spent money. They made it, saved it, and were proud of what they accomplished. You weren't respected for showing off your money. You were respected for achieving something, but money, in and of itself, was not a quality which engendered respect.

I haven't got the exact numbers, but I remember in the fifties that there would have been a dozen galleries one would have gone to as a matter of course. In the sixties, it becomes three dozen. Today, it's probably up to about six dozen. There's just been this jump in — that's the way I would measure it — the amount of time it would take me to stay up with the art world, and it took a lot longer in the sixties. You had to give it almost a whole day. Today, it's like racing in and out of galleries. Of course, there was an equally large growth in the number of artists. Clement Greenberg once said that in 1948 the whole modern art world consisted of fifty people — everybody, I mean, artists, critics, curators, collectors, you know, the whole thing. I think it was probably closer to a hundred. But no more. I once did a count of artists around 1958, '59, counted every artist that was part of, say, "the New York School," and the number was about 250. What you get in the sixties is an enormous growth of the number of artists, particularly artists who go to college, go to university, take BFA's, then MFA's, you know the idea that one could have a career in art was a fantasy in the fifties; the thought of

success was just out of reach. In the sixties, it becomes possible; the attitude becomes possible.

It was a period of social movement, and a certain hope. Granted, this was a post-war generation. We had a sense of optimism. We thought that things could be resolved by using a placard to demonstrate, that at that point penicillin could cure everything.

A lot of consumer technology came of age in the sixties — domestic technology, appliances of various kinds and their broad distribution. It is the first generation really to be brought up on television. It is the real development of high-fidelity. This is really the first time that sound-reproduction came of age — the illusion of plausibility. So it seems to me there are lots of reasons one can look to in the social structure and the economic structure of the sixties to say that it really was a period of growth.

The sixties were the last time of drug optimism in the U.S., and I thought that with both kinds of drug use, licit and illicit, or therapeutic and recreational, or whatever. The first tranquilizers were introduced in the nineteen fifties — Thorazine or Chlorpromazine, which is given credit for removing many people from mental institutions, but also the first of the minor tranquilizers, Miltown (Meprobamate), was introduced in the fifties. They both made their mark, but neither of them had achieved really widespread use. Meprobamate had achieved some use, but during the early nineteen sixties Leo Sternbach and Hoffman LaRoche Co. began giving us Benzodiazepines, the two important tranquilizers that characterized the sixties. Librium was introduced in 1961 or '62, and Valium was introduced in 1965. For a time Librium was the widest selling drug in the world, and then Valium took over and became the widest selling drug in the world. People really were optimistic. These were drugs that made folks feel better, calmed them down, made them in some ways more functional, made people optimistic; and people were optimistic about them. I think the period of optimism was relatively short, though, because the American ethic says you can't take drugs to get well; you're supposed to do that on your own, you're supposed to have strength and character and will power. So the tenor began to turn against them, at least in the popular media, and later for the docs, but from '63 until '73, Valium sales went up, up, up, up. 1973 peaked at about 75 million prescriptions, and then it turned down. So the '60s time of drug optimism in Valium lasted until 1973, when the sales of Valium began to turn down markedly; and it has been going down every year since, until they're half of what they were, because people are afraid of Valium and Valium is criticized.

I remember being in high school in 1964, in the eleventh grade, and wondering how I was going to lead my life. It was clear to me that, in order to survive in this society, to have any kind of career, or anything like that, you had to follow the rules. You had to get married, you had to have children, you had to not have sex. You had to appear as virginal as possible until you got married, and then you weren't supposed to like it very much, and all this sort of thing. I was a person who read aloud from the book **Love without Fear** every morning in the homeroom to the girls, much to great delight. You know that book, **Love without Fear**? It's a sort of how-to sex book from the nineteen fifties — fascinating book. Those who ever saw **Love without Fear** will know it well; it's very nasty. The parts that were the most fun to us, of course, were the parts about the young man who goes to the prostitute and the bad thing happens to him. He can never have sex again and, you know, stuff like that. Anyway, it was basically a "how to be a virgin" kind of a book — tips for teens. So I used to wonder how I was going to survive, and then I got to college.

I think that people were ready to reject the kind of lives that they saw their parents having. I certainly looked at my family, and I thought that that kind of monogamous structure might be interesting down the road, but certainly in the short term it was not anything that I had an interest in at all and I wasn't even sure about down the road, in fact. When I was in high school, I used to go around and say, "Oh, I'm not going to get married; I'm just going to go around and have affairs." I kind of said that lightly and blithely, almost as a joke; and here I am doing exactly that.

When I was in high school, I used to go around say, "Oh, I'm not going to get married; I'm just going to go around and have affairs." I kind of said that lightly and blithely, almost as a joke; and here I am doing exactly that.

That era had all the qualities of a good smoke, a good lay, a good drink.

And, in fact, it's extraordinary, when you think now, what changes in terms of permissiveness and understanding have happened. But in those days, no writer could sit down at a typewriter and write, literally write, a love scene which involved lovemaking. He couldn't permit himself to think about the actual moments of lovemaking, because he knew he couldn't write something that would be published. It wasn't even a question of language to begin with. Even if he had found some way around the problem of describing it, it wasn't possible. Henry Miller was the first man who actually did this, very deliberately; and, of course, he wasn't permitted in the end. When we finally published that, there was a great deal of literary censorship.

I remember people trying to talk about sex openly for the first time, and people discussing sex openly. You know how nice it was to actually talk about it, as opposed to never talking about it, because, of course, if you mentioned it, anything about it, you lost caste, and nice women didn't do that. And so there were a lot of articles about how to have sex, how to have orgasm, what an orgasm was, whether there were two, whether there were three, whatever it was; and then it was permissible to actually talk to men about sex. And I must say that I think that's something that will never come again. In the sixties, people talked about sex to each other with great ease, which is odd, since they had never talked about sex. But once the cat was out of the bag, it was perfectly natural and easy to turn to somebody that you were having sex with and say, "You know, this is not going well. And I'm not really enjoying it so much. So what can we do to fix it up and . . ." You know that was, all of a sudden, a kind of cultural thing, you were allowed to do that, and people did it. There was also no reluctance to tell a man right at the beginning what you preferred in sex. In fact, it was almost the way that you did it, because we were all so open, supposedly, that you could just come right out and say, "I'd like you to do this, you know," and then if he got upset, he was a jerk; he was not one of you; he was not a fulfilled man. People had conversations about their intimate sex lives with each other, and with others all the time. Then, it's funny, because those ranks closed about 1975. Suddenly you didn't do that anymore. I mean, if you turned to somebody and said, "You know, you're not giving me enough orgasms," it's suddenly grounds for vendetta forever from the other person.

What happened to me in the sixties was women got together and had consciousness-raising sessions. I was in several of those, and they were all wonderful. We talked about our lives, and we talked about sex and men and marriages and so on. At that point I had just separated from my second husband, and I was very eager not to be involved in a group with a majority of married women, because, at all costs, I wanted to avoid getting married again. I was terrified of being contaminated if I were around too many married people.

It turned out that one of the women in my group was a lesbian, which absolutely fascinated me, it turned out, because I was eager to find out what the whole experience was like, which I did, and then lived with her for about six years. What was significant was that there was an atmosphere of acceptance at the time. I was already rebelling by being part of all these political groups, and I was rebelling against male sexism by being part of the women's movement. Consequently, getting sexually involved with women at that time didn't seem like a rebellion. It didn't feel like a defiance, like a lot of other things I was doing did. Of course, it was. It's just that it didn't have that quality for me. It felt comfortable for me. Everybody knew about it. It was no secret; it wasn't anything I was trying too hide. I was never a flag-waving lesbian either. There was a whole sexual permissiveness at the time that made that permissible also.

When you were talking about "consciousness-raising groups," you were talking about people who were just trying to get themselves to say things for the first time, who needed the help of other women. I mean they had probably never talked to other women. My grandmother, for example, says that she never made any other girl friends. She was in retail, and you just didn't make friends, especially girl friends. Why would you want to? Every woman was with her man, and that was it. So the idea of getting a bunch of women together to talk was just an amazing idea. No one had ever considered this possibility before — to talk about problems. But I always think that in the beginning consciousness-raising was

really about being able to talk at all. It was really so exciting to go sit down with a bunch of women and go, "So, did you get laid last night?" Everybody would just be so **excited** that they were talking about it.

The sixties for me was a very portable time, a time filled with a spiritual force which sustains itself. Whenever you ask who you are, or try to place yourself in American culture, you always have to go back to the sixties for a reference, because, I think, at that point the society was more desperate for definitions. There was more of an edge for the possibilities not only of change, but of self-discovery. I think people were fortunate to be part of that era, because it was mad, reckless. It had all the qualities of a good smoke, a good lay, a good drink.

Today, I write novels. One of the ways the sixties mean a lot to me as a writer is I think of them as the same as the eighteen forties, fifties, in Russia and Europe. That was a time that opened up possibilities for Russians and Europeans; it was as if a new democracy, a new age, a new social order came into the world. It gave enormous hope to make a new society. The same thing happened to my generation.

The young people in the sixties thought they would change the world much more than they did and thus now feel disappointed. They now think they were wrong, and they laugh a little at themselves when they were younger. Now I feel they underestimate what they did.

When I look back at the sixties and meet anyone from my generation I feel a special bond. I think of it as the "hip head" — the ability to look at a situation from any one of a dozen angles and have them all be true. There are a dozen ways of looking at each thing. The great thing about the fifties was there was only one way to do things.

I think a great contribution to the language was a term mentioned earlier, which is consciousness-raising. It speaks directly to the idea that your level of awareness can be lifted. I think once your consciousness is raised, it can't be possibly lowered, except for something like brain damage, maybe. You can't forget things. That was something that I think happened to all of us in the sixties was our level of consciousness about a whole variety of issues was raised.

I think it's important not to render the sixties nostalgic. What I fear terribly is that the sixties have become a kind of exaggerated. . . . They were a terrible time in many ways. People got hurt terribly. People believed a lot of nonsense, which hurt themselves. It was a period of chaos and dismemberment with a lot of hope, with very little constructive residue. People who lived in it, somehow, as they grow older should really discipline themselves from talking about it as a significant historical entity. I refer back to people who were active in the thirties, who have romanticized the politics of the thirties, are insufferable to us; and I think there's a danger that that can be repeated.

What is truly special about the sixties was that, to those involved in it, it suddenly seemed that anything was possible, that history was not a millstone around your neck. It was extraordinary to discover, in fact, that many people didn't even care about history, that history could be discarded, or so it seemed that way. There was this heady moment when anything could seem possible of achievement, that all the rules and laws of the past as to how history is composed could really be thrown overboard. It was an insane moment, but fascinating. It lasted for perhaps three years, four years, and then it turned sour, gradually sour. There was a great deal of infighting among the people who were creating the changes. Is that what really happened, as I remember it? It was a long time ago, twenty years.

I don't think the sixties actually have stopped. I think the reason I would say that is that the only chance we have now, if we have a chance at all, in our national life and our international existence, is because what happened in the sixties happened in the sixties.

Roz Baxandall

Leon Botstein

A. D. Coleman

Maureen Connor

Elizabeth Diggs

Finvola Drury

Maria Irene Fornes

Ray Gallon

Sorrel Hays

Joe Johnson

Fred Jordan

Jeremiah Kaplan

Jerome Klinkowitz

Margaret Sipsey Kornfield

Richard Kostelanetz

Ralph Larkin

Leonard Lopate

John P. Morgan

Mary Peacock

Donald Porter

Emily Prager

Alan Rosanes

Gerald Rosen

Irving Sandler

Z

Myles Tierney

Mr.X.

Sol Yurick