

Interview Transcript

Bill Judson – Curator of Film & Video, Carnegie Museum of Art 1976-2003

Interview conducted 9/15/2018

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BILL JUDSON: I really grew up on a farm in Western Massachusetts, that was a big property. My grandfather bought it for hunting and fishing, and my parents...lived there. They actually lived in a little one-room cabin by the creek. And I have shots of myself in that environment that was very primitive. But my grandfather bought a farmhouse, which eventually was fixed up, and we- it became the family home for many, many decades. And it was a farm. It was a working farm. There were cows and pigs and so forth, that were the domain of a family that rented it, farmers that rented it. So I was, in a sense, maybe a second- second-hand a farmer as I grew up, and ended up going to school in Western Massachusetts as well. I went to Williams College. At that point, skiing was the primary activity of the family. My dad, when he got out of the Army- was in the 10th Mountain Division in Italy. And like a lot of his 10th Mountain Division colleagues, when he came back to the U.S., they went into the ski industry. Many of them were heads of ski schools, some of them were head skiers. He, on this property my grandfather had bought, started a ski area, a little ski area called Otis Ridge, and he and my mom started a ski camp for kids. And my mom ran in the camp, a hundred kids every weekend, and he ran the ski area. And so I had a lot of- a lot of experience in working with my hands because I worked- I worked on the ski area. I- Eventually I went to college in Western Massachusetts at Williams, partly for the skiing I will say. We did fairly well at it as a- as a team from a small college. And majored in art history. And after a couple of years working for my parents for the ski area, and a couple of years of teaching at a private school in New Hampshire, I ended up going back to college for- for studies in art history. I was at Oberlin College working on a- on an M.A., interested in the French painters of the early-early 20th century. And when I finished that

program, I went to-I went to New Haven, to Yale, for a Ph.D. in that same area. And as I was doing that, I learned that, first of all, when Cubism was evolving it was the period when films were beginning to be more and more commonplace. They had been around for about 10 or 12 years at that point. And Cubism was-was-was born. And...Picasso and his friend, the poet Max Jacob, every Sunday, they were going a little theater on the Rue de Douai in Paris, and I thought, "Hmm, I wonder what they were looking at." So I thought, "Well, I better look at these early primitive films, so that I know what these Cubists are looking at." And I began looking at them, and I began looking at them some more. And I became intrigued by all these early primitive moving images. And it sparked that first moment, I guess, in my expansion into-into the moving image. Also at Yale, Stan Lauder was teaching there, was bringing in people like Ken Jacobs and Stan Brakhage and a lot of the so-called experimental American or "underground," as they were sometimes called, American filmmakers. And I became...interested in their work as well. So I ended up eventually transferring my studies from-from painting the still image to the-to the moving image. Did a Fulbright Fellowship in-in Paris, working on early French film, spent a year there in the library and at the Cinematheque and, you know, looking at all sorts of things that- old magazines and things of that sort. So then when I got back to the States and got that- to that point where I had to teach I was looking at various options. And the University of Pittsburgh had an interesting situation where a modernist, somebody who taught Cubism, was going to be away for a year, perhaps two years. "Would I come and teach?" And I said, "Well, what do you want me to teach?" And they said, "Well, we want- while this person is gone, we want there to be film courses. So we want to teach film courses." I said, "You want me to teach art history?" They said, "Well, there is a Cubism course that we've been teaching that we'd like you to teach, if you want to, but you don't have to." I said, "Sure." So I taught Cubism to grad students and undergraduates alike. It was a great big class that everybody in it and it was a lot of fun, and various film courses. And so that was how I got to Pittsburgh. I've been hired to for a year or two, which then grew into three. And it was at that point that the position at the Museum of Art, Carnegie Museum of Art, opened up when Sally Dixon told me that she was leaving, and they were going to be hiring somebody.

MEETING SALLY DIXON

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BILL JUDSON: When I first came to Pittsburgh to teach at the University of Pittsburgh, there were a number of people who told me, "Oh, you have to meet Sally Dixon, you have to see- she's doing all these wonderful things over there at the museum with all sorts of films and so forth, and you must meet her." And I did early on, and it was just, you know, it was wonderful. I went, of course, to all of her events. She did a...history film series, which was a very...funky selection of-of things that she thought were interesting. And every year it would be a chronological presentation of, you know, a couple dozen interesting international films. She was not an historian, she was somebody who liked films. And they were- they were good films, and films that she was attracted to. I had lunch with Sally every week in the- in the cafeteria at the Museum of Art. And we'd talk about the filmmakers she was bringing in and her programs and so forth. She would also tell me about some of the difficulties that would-were involved in presenting what she was doing within the context of the museum, the-the economics of it, fundraising, politics, that sort of stuff, which goes with any such-any of those sorts of programs. So I was aware that there were, you know, sometimes strained situations. When I had been in Pittsburgh about three years on one of those lunches, Sally said, "I'm through. I just handed in my resignation this morning," and I said, "No, Sally, you're kidding." She said, "No, that's it." Sally- she resigned over, as I understand it, the issue of the salary for her assistant, Jeannie Rollins. I think that there were issues about what the museum was willing to pay the people that were, you know, were working to support this program. It was my understanding that that was-that was the reason. But in any case, she filled me in on some of the issues, battles that she had- she had had. And then she said to me, "So, Bill, wouldn't you like a job?" and I said, "You-you've got to be kidding, Sally! You've- We have had lunch every week for how many? You know, a couple of years now, we've been sitting here doing this, and you've described, you know, lots of difficulties dealing with this institution. And now you're saying, why don't you do this? I don't think so. You know, not-not-not in this life!" And so that was that. That was the end of- That was the end of our lunch.

TAKING OVER AT CMOA

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BILL JUDSON: But over the next few months, I realized they did- the museum was interested in continuing the film program. And I became aware of a couple of people who were Pittsburgh-based that they were interviewing for the job, and realized that one in particular, who was a teacher at a local university, would shape that program into a really dry academic set of events, and I got worried about that, and I rethought the whole process, and ended up-ended up applying for the job.

DIXON'S CONNECTIONS AT CMOA

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BILL JUDSON: Sally was in the ideal position, in a sense, to start the film program at the Carnegie Museum of Art. She had this interest in experimental film, however you want to term that kind of filmmaking, personal filmmaking, just exploded for her, and she became absolutely fascinated with this, and decided that she needed to have a museum program so that those people, and film in general, could be represented within the context of the visual arts. And she was in a strong position to do that. Her dad was a trustee at the museum, and Sally herself was a member of the Women's Committee. The Women's Committee is a group of well-placed women who have an interest in the visual arts, who have the time and interest to work in support of the museum and do a variety of events. They might do auctions, that sort of thing, to raise money for the museum. And in many cases, the Women's Committee money that was raised for the-for the museum would then be dedicated to a certain activity of some sort within the museum. And over the years, that Women's Committee money, in fact, helped to support the film program. I believe that Sally may have used that as a match for some of her-some of her fundraising. I know that the Women's Committee money helped to buy some of the experimental films that Sally began buying 16 millimeter prints of. So Sally's...not just connection with, but really participation in the Women's Committee provided a- both a political leverage and a financial leverage that-that made-made a big difference in getting the film program going. And keeping it going. When Sally would invite filmmakers, she would go out of her way to feed them, often with a bunch of guests at her house. She would often put them up. They would stay at her house. It was a way for her to

learn more about them. But also it was frankly an economic move because it was not easy to raise money to pay for a hotel room for your visiting filmmaker. So she was doing that partly as a way of paying the bills

THE PITTSBURGH FILM COMMUNITY

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BILL JUDSON: When I took a job at the University of Pittsburgh and moved to the city of Pittsburgh, my- I had never visited this town. I was interviewed in New York, and so I loaded up my car, my wife and kids were still back in New Haven, loaded up the car and drove out to try and find a place to live, expecting to drive into all of the smog and horrors that I understood Pittsburgh to represent. It was a clean city, when I moved here in the-in the mid- mid-seventies and I was frankly stunned by that. But of course it was that period when in part it was- yes, it was because of pollution, anti-pollution moves that had been taken, but in part because already the steel industry was-was declining. And so I was surprised by that. But I was also surprised by the fact that once I got here, became involved, largely through Sally, in the film community, discovered this group of young men, and a couple of women who had a particular interest in making films themselves. I mean, this was a curious, grassroots movement of people-of people. It wasn't even clear whether they wanted to make documentary films or experimental films, but they wanted to make their own movies. And they weren't talking about Hollywood narratives. They were talking about alternative forms. And they had somehow gathered around Sally, and what the exact dynamic of that was at the very beginning, I don't know, but I know that when I got to Pittsburgh, there were these young people who would be at Sally's house for dinners, who would show up for the screenings, and with whom, I will say, I had a lot of wonderful conversations either before or after a movie, or in some other similar circumstance. And these young people formed the core of what became Pittsburgh Filmmakers. There was enough interest among the young people in the city of Pittsburgh to make movies. So that Sally and others, there was a man named Chuck Glassman in particular, who helped write proposals and so forth for there to be a Pittsburgh Filmmakers. So it wasn't Sally alone, but Sally in concert with this group of young people, made the proposal that there should be a center so that these people could get

access to equipment...inexpensively. Buy the equipment, loan it at a very reasonable cost. And that equipment access motivation was in fact the beginning of a lot of media centers around the United States, in the-in the late sixties. The very first thing was "We've got to have a camera and then we've got to have something, you know, a Steenbeck or some kind of flatbed to edit on." And then, of course, you have the next problem, which is, "Well, how do you use this camera?" So then you get into a teaching situation, and the next thing you know, you've got classes going on, and that's all well and good. "But what are we going to do with this? We know how to use it. We know how to edit it, but what are we going to make?" It's then important to know what other people have made because you don't want to reinvent the wheel. And, as in any artform, the work of artists become the kind of fodder for the next work, the next generation, so forth. It's all kind of conversation. It's a discourse. So then you've got a screening program! And that kind of ecology, which Pittsburgh Filmmakers followed, for sure, right, it was the equipment, then the classes, then the screening programs. And in the case of screening programs, in Pittsburgh, and a lot of others, a central part was bringing in experimental filmmakers to talk about their work, why they did it, how they did it, what their experiences were, what their motivations were. And those are a really important component of the exhibition programs at Pittsburgh Filmmakers, and at the other media centers around the world- or the country, in Boston and St. Paul, Minneapolis and Houston and so forth. Sally interacted with these-with these young people. And it was because initially she made the museum available, had the resources, the kind of political clout to make the museum available as the 501(c)(3), that was the kind of parent or conduit for funding for Pittsburgh Filmmakers, before they themselves were incorporated as a 501(c)(3). So Pittsburgh Filmmakers as a media arts center was initially an offshoot of Carnegie Museum of Art because of Sally, and because of Sally's interest in film. And in response to all of this activity in the-in the city's young people saying, "Oh, we're going to make movies and, you know, where are we going to get this equipment and how are we going to do this?" And Sally was responding to that, in support of that. So Pittsburgh Filmmakers eventually got its own space, became a viable 501(c)(3), and moved on, grew, has its own- its own history. But it was really Sally there at the beginning who understood the importance of it and was sympathetic to the kind of energy and urgency of these young people saying, "We've got to make movies!" You know? And part of the reason I think she took pleasure out of showing movies was precisely because you wanted these young people to see different kinds of things that had been made in Japan, or in Latin

America, or the United States, or wherever. And she really wanted to respond to those, you know, those young people who are so eager to do their- do their thing.

DIXON & EXPERIMENTAL FILM

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BILL JUDSON: It was interesting to me when I got to Pittsburgh that a significant part of Sally's programming involved bringing in visiting filmmakers and many of them, not all of them, but many of them were what one might term experimental or underground filmmakers. And that surprised me. Those were the filmmakers that I had myself encountered in New Haven, and had been a part of my initial interest in film. So I was very pleased when I saw what Sally was doing.

DIXON'S CONNECTION TO FILMMAKERS

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There was something very proper about Sally. She was...socially connected. She was, in a sense, a kind of part of the establishment. Her dad was a trustee and so forth. So with that in particular, I wouldn't expect the kind of, you know, underground filmmakers to show up in the-in the program. But I think that a couple of things are operative. I think- I'm guessing that, if I might speculate, that there was an element of Sally that was a rebel. There was something about experimental filmmakers that presented them as outsiders. They were the other, as it were, the- the alternative to the-to the norm. And I think there was something about that difference, that otherness that was of interest to Sally. I think she, for whatever reason, had a kind of empathy or sympathy with that otherness and wanted to support that. There was something of the mother in Sally. And I think that Sally was a mother to Pittsburgh Filmmakers. I think that she was, in a sense, too, a kind of mother to some of the experimental filmmakers. Maybe they didn't see it that way, but I think that she somehow had this this urgency to be supportive, be protective, be encouraging in what one might, albeit politically incorrect, describe as a motherly instinct. And

I- it seems to me that there was some personal satisfaction that she got out of the support of these- of these people. That was very important for her personally. She also, I think, really was tremendously engaged in the films themselves. I mean, I can remember her, for example, on occasions describing the work of, a particular example, of a Stan Brakhage film and describing what was going to be seen, what was going to appear on the screen. She was talking about one of the birth films. I don't think it was Window Water Baby Moving, which was the first and the most famous. I think it was Thigh Line Lyre Triangular. But she was describing the creatures that would seem to appear. Their...And now I don't recall exactly what they were, but there might have been a Flamingo or, you know, various things that would appear either because that's indeed what they were when Stan filmed them or what they seemed to be, even though they weren't, because of what he did in his editing. And in the kind of superimposition of-of images, and the way in which Sally described those evoked that visual experience. I mean, I've been in a lot of classes where people have described what's going-what's in the film and so forth. But rarely have I heard somebody describe a film with that kind of intensity, a directness where having heard the description, I knew what it was I was going to see. Yes, indeed, it was a-it was a revelation to then see the film. But there was something in the-in the way she described it that had a kind of engagement that was very strong and very personal. So I think she had that kind of involvement in particularly the experimental films. It was an art form that she really responded to on a personal, personal level.

DIXON & BRAKHAGE

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BILL JUDSON: I think that Sally's relationship with Stan Brakhage is particularly indicative of what I'm saying about the intensity of her need to support the independent movement, because she was so visually and artistically engaged in him. It meant so much to her and I think that Stan Brakhage was a-was a filmmaker with whom she was particularly close. And I think that the reason for that is-is a part of the larger engagement that she had. Stan Brakhage was an orphan. Stan Brakhage was somebody who kicked around as a kid with, you know, Joseph Cornell and Maya Deren and- He was just, you know, in the arts here and there, went to college, bounced

out, just sort of knocked about. And it was a part of that sort of fifties beat generation environment as well, one has to recall. And so he was frankly a kid without roots, in a sense. And I don't want to get into kind of psychoanalyzing artists here. That's a- that's a dangerous game. But...I do think that Sally recognized in Stan a particular need for support, for a certain kind of emotional focus in some-in some sense. And I think Stan responded to that. And I think that Sally-Sally's involvement with Stan had a kind of double feedback for her. On the one hand, she could see that by supporting him, by-by encouraging him, she could see that it meant something to him, that his work was better, stronger, or whatever for it. And as a person, he was, you know, more comfortable or whatever. And...At the same time, I think that her involvement with the films, in particular the kind of arrangement to make it possible for Stan to film the *Pittsburgh Trilogy*, which are a special little body of work in his-in his overall oeuvre, she could then see the results on film and see that it made a difference.

BRAKHAGE'S WORK

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BILL JUDSON: Stan's films are really unique. They are a different way of seeing...than certainly the filmmakers of the late fifties, early sixties, when his signature style evolved. Stan was the subject of an edition, an issue of Art Forum magazine, edited by Annette Michelson, really, I think, as any artist, had that many articles in Art Forum dedicated to them, and Annette herself in one of the articles in that late seventies issue, if I remember correctly, she described Stan's films as hypnagogic, and by doing so invokes the viewer. What she's saying, in effect, is that watching Stan's film you are always in very engaged in the immediate, the now. Because when we watch movies we tend to be aware of what's gone past, especially if it's a narrative film, you know, so-and-so said something or other, did something rather, and maybe something is going to happen from that. And we're looking into the future in the movie. But with Stan's films, it's always immediate, what's going on right now. And if you can't focus on that screen right now as things change so rapidly, you lose the movie, it's gone, you have to do it. It's part of modern art. It's, you know, the 20th century, what happened with Duchamp and so forth, is that the audience became a crucial part of the art experience. And so Stan's work is just one instance of that-of that

process. But it happens-It happens in Stan's work because of the velocity and energy of his camerawork, his editing, his mix of colors, his mix of onscreen rhythms, velocities, as they- as things move from left to right and up and down and layer over each other, and it's like continuous, dense, abstract or quasi-abstract imagery, which is unlike any-anything else really that happened in film. Stan's work has been compared to Abstract Expressionism. It was a moment with Hans Hofmann teaching in New York and the whole kind of New York school where the-where the painting, the center of world painting moved from Paris to New York in some sense. And Abstract Expressionism is defined in part by painters like Jackson Pollock, whose movement, whose bodily movement in relationship to the canvas was a part of the creative process and part of what's inscribed in the final object. You know, the painting somehow reflects all of that kind of bodily energy by the filmmaker, by the painter that went into it. And Stan's use of the camera and his use of editing, has-has been described as a kind of analog in film to that. But there was no other filmmaking that was going on that was like that, in the late fifties and early sixties. There was a lot that grew out of it for sure, by a lot of people, but Stan was very seminal in that-in that sense.

THE PITTSBURGH TRILOGY

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BILL JUDSON: The *Pittsburgh Trilogy* by Stan Brakhage is a very interesting group of films. It's three films. They're documentaries, I suppose you would say. Silent, as was characteristic of almost all of Stan's work. Each about half an hour long, and each about a Pittsburgh institution, one about a hospital, one about the police, and one about the morgue. The famous...coroner, Cyril Wecht, was then the head of the Pittsburgh morgue. And in fact, parenthetically, Stan made a little two minute portrait of Cyril, which he gave to Sally. It's a film off the record, so to speak. It's not listed as a part of his films. But there is a wonderful little portrait of Cyril, who was an interesting man in his own right. But Sally's involvement with the Pittsburgh Trilogy was to make arrangements so that he could get into these institutions, into the-the morgue, you know, in the West Bend hospital, to connect with the police department so that he could follow the policemen as they went about in their-in their squad cars and encounter what they encounter.

And they're interesting films in that they are more documentary than Stan's other work. And by that I mean they are more about the subject that we're looking at and less about the kinds of emotional turmoils that are going on in Stan as he's looking at something, because Stan is an emotional dude and there's a lot of stuff going on when he makes a film. There's all kinds of things that have to do with motherhood. If it's with Jane or- his wife Jane. I mean, there are all of these things, the kids, and all of those things kind of somehow feed back into his own kind of emotional dynamic. And the *Pittsburgh Trilogy* is exceptional, and it's more- less about Stan's...life and being, and more about the other, those three institutions. And the way they're edited also, giving each image a little more strength, a little more time, a little less-less manipulation. And in that sense, too, they're more documentary. So they really stand out in his- in his body of work. And I don't really know whether Sally had a role or- in that directly or not. I suspect that Stan might have had a sense that it was his obligation, since these institutions made available to him, that it was his obligation to really honor the police, the morgue, and so forth, to, you know, give us a portrait of what they are about. But in any case, it was Sally that made the *Pittsburgh Trilogy* possible. And I think somehow that the shape of it, the difference from those three films and Stan's other work has to do in part with Sally's patronage, whatever you might call it, in making those films happen. My recollection of one of his films after the *Pittsburgh Trilogy*, called *A Text of Light* is also a little more like the *Pittsburgh Trilogy*. It is a film about an individual, a man who was, I believe...governor of Colorado, if I recall correctly, shot in primarily in his office through an ashtray on his desk. But my recollection of *Text of Light* is that it has less of the velocity of the earlier works, and more of the kind of, if you will, documentary mode, even though it was very abstract, more of the documentary mode of the *Pittsburgh Trilogy*.

CARNEGIE'S FILM THEATER

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BILL JUDSON: In the early 1970s, Carnegie Institute built a new wing, which was to house the Museum of Art. Carnegie Institute is a combination of the Museum of Art, the Museum of Natural History, and then recently the Warhol Museum. And they felt the need to expand the

spaces available for the exhibition of art, and with the support of the Skay Foundation, they built this whole building, designed by Edward Barnes. And a key part of that on the ground floor was a theater of- a wonderful intimate theater, just under 200 seats, that, yes, was going to serve for talks and so forth. But a large reason for the Museum of Art Theater was so that Sally could show the films that she was showing. It was a space for her. She had been using a large 600 seat theater that was over by the library, which is also in that same building, The Carnegie Library. And it was a...very steep amphitheater kind of situation that was not really amenable to screen...film screening. It worked, she did it, she packed the house and it was great. But this new intimate theater was really intended, in large part, for Sally's films, and she...played a real part in designing it. I mean, she was- I remember when that was being built, she would say, "Oh, they were going to do this, and we had to change that- Oh no, no, that- we can't have that!" You know, we need whatever it was that she wanted, I can't recall exactly the specifics. But she wanted to make sure that that theater was exactly what she needed to show the films, and in particular, the kind of intimacy that she needed for personal screenings by independent filmmakers. The *Text of Light* was the film that Sally invited Stan to show in the Carnegie Museum of Art Theater for the very first event, the inaugural event in the new theater at Carnegie Museum of Art was Brakhage's *Text of Light*.

DIXON'S LEADERSHIP

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BILL JUDSON: Sally was somebody who was really known all over the country, and I did a lot of panel work, for example, for the NEA and so forth. And Sally had, you know, previously done. And wherever I went, to-to Chicago or wherever I went, people would want to know how Sally was doing and what, you know, what she was up to and that sort of thing. I mean, there was a sense of her importance in the kind of evolution, the growth of this whole media arts field. She was a figure that went a whole lot further afield than just Pittsburgh. She was really a national force. When I first came to Pittsburgh, I actually was teaching right across the street from Sally's office in the old part of the- of the Carnegie Institute, right across the door to the theater and in the library that she used, the big amphitheater. And I would go across and visit sometimes in her

office when her first assistant, Jen, whom she adored, was very supportive of, Jen was then still working for her. And then...a wonderful woman, Jeannie Rollins, that went to work for her for a long time. I was just, you know, I love to go over there and just chat with those folks because it was always such a nice environment. You know, and the way Sally supported the people she worked with was-was really exemplary, I thought, you know? Like I got a sense of-of a kind of mini-community in that office that then reached out into all of the things that they did. So when you went to an event, you got a- somehow a sense that this event began in that office with, you know, with those people doing their-doing their-their thing back there. Sally was really supportive of so many of these young people with their- with film interests and so forth.

DIXON & ROBERT HALLER

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BILL JUDSON: And one of the really interesting people that I met early on through Sally, who was one of these younger film-oriented folks, was a guy named Robert Haller. And Haller had been a student at Notre Dame. and I believe that he was involved in their film program there. I think that he was involved in showing, you know, some kind of student exhibition program. I'm not sure exactly what. But he came back to Pittsburgh- graduated, came back with this film interest, and obviously was a part of a circle of people, film interested people around Sally. And I got to know him. And then while I was teaching at Pitt and Sally was the head of the film program, somebody who was the director of Pittsburgh Filmmakers left, or whatever. And there was a position to be filled. And Sally turned to me one lunch, at one of our lunches, said "Don't you think Bob Haller would be just the person- Robert Haller would be just the person for this?" And I said, "Huh, that makes a lot of sense, you know, looking at the various options. Sure." So she said, "Okay, well, tomorrow night we'll have dinner at my place, you and me and Bob- you and me and Robert, and we'll talk about it." And we did. We sat Robert down on a big sofa between us, and we hammered him, and we said- and he, you know, didn't really want to do it well. He had various other plans. And so forth. And we really put the pressure on him. And he eventually, maybe not that evening, but within a couple of days, agreed to do it. And that was the beginning of a particularly active period of time for Pittsburgh Filmmakers. I mean, Haller was a

bundle of energy, always had stuff going, sometimes probably too many things going. And sometimes things sort of fell through the cracks because of that, but it didn't matter. Robert was just full tilt, and his agenda for the organization wasn't always necessarily in perfect sync with some of the people who were teaching there or some of the people or filmmaker members there. But that was all part of the dynamics that was going to be at issue anyway. And Robert just charged ahead. And it made for a very strong and active organization, I think, at Pittsburgh Filmmakers, one of the patterns that began to emerge, as Haller was working at Pittsburgh Filmmakers, was this strengthening of collaboration between filmmakers and the museum. So that a visiting filmmaker, Robert Breer, for example, would come in and do a screening at the museum, show his work, and- his famous animated work going back to the fifties, and...then Breer would do a workshop at Pittsburgh Filmmakers with a group of young people who were- some of them interested in animation, some of them more generally interested in film. And they were just- it was an extraordinary kind of symbiosis between the screening programs at the museum and the- and the workshop programs that- at Pittsburgh Filmmakers. And that was one of the things that I particularly enjoyed when I became head of the program, the film program at the Museum of Art. One of the aspects that I most enjoyed was the kind of collaborative programming with Pittsburgh Filmmakers, knowing that I could invite, you know, David Rimmer in, and he would do a wonderful workshop at Pittsburgh Filmmakers, and we would constantly do these things, and we would share promotional costs, we would share publicity costs, poster costs, that sort of thing. And it helped strengthen, I think, the educational program, and give a certain additional validity to the educational program at the Pittsburgh Filmmakers that this person had just had a screening at the Museum of Art. And conversely, I think that we enhanced our audience at the Museum of Art, because a larger group of young film-interested people knew about it, and that was a collaborative process that started with- with Sally, and especially when Robert Haller was director of Pittsburgh Filmmakers, which I continued very happily when I was director of the film program at the Carnegie.

THE TRAVEL SHEET

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BILL JUDSON: One of the things that Sally had initiated, as a part of the film program, that was really important, I think, on the national level was something that she called the Film and Video Makers Travel Sheet. And the travel sheet was a monthly publication, really cheap, mimeographed, stapled together with a cover. And it was essentially a listing of which filmmakers were going to be where to share their films. So that if we had, for example, Michael Snow coming to Pittsburgh to show, you know, whatever he's going to show, Central Region, then that date would go into the travel sheet and then somebody in Buffalo might see that and say, "Oh, look at that. Michael Snow is going to be in Pittsburgh in two months, three months. We could just spend a few bucks and, you know, drive him up to Buffalo!" and then somebody in Albany or maybe Boston or whatever would see that. And they would- the filmmakers would construct tours out of the information from the travel sheet. And those tours would expand because of that information. And programmers would say, "Oh, we could do this on that month, because we could save a lot of money because that person is going to be just down the road. Let's do that." And so Sally raised the money, it was a National Endowment for the Arts Grant, with a match. And filmmakers would send, you know, send in their information. And that, to me, was one of the most important things that the film department was doing. Again, I modified it. What I did was to take the cover of it, which was a heavier paper, which was folded over and stapled, and I designed it in such a way that the filmmaker could rip that cover off, fill out the information and send it back. And we knew who it was from because their address was a part of the back side of what they were sending in, so they could never forget to say who they were. I knew who they were! Because their label was on there. The mailing label was filled out. So we did- We played with it in ways of that sort, but...It was a really important activity. The Film and Video Makers Travel Sheet eventually died, under my watch, because the program got to a point where the money for the travel sheet was prohibiting money that could be used for a particular screening series. And I had the decision, "Do I continue the travel sheet or do I show this film program in the city of Pittsburgh on an ongoing basis?" It was really an either-or situation, and not without certain difficulty. I said, "Okay, we've got to stop this thing, you know, the travel sheet." That was one of those wonderful things that Sally had initiated, and that I had the pleasure of continuing, because I think the travel sheet was extremely important.

BUILDING NATIONAL NETWORKS

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BILL JUDSON: The National Endowment for the Arts Media Arts Program began in the late sixties, and it was important for several reasons. One, because it was a potential source of funding, but it was also a model for states arts organizations, and it was also a support, a kind of validation for some foundation funding. The National Endowment for the Arts, certainly in the Media Arts program, was a very knowledgeable organization. And when they had a grants program that needed to be- applications that needed to be decided on, they would put together really strong panels, diverse groups of people who could make knowledgeable assessments of the strength and quality and importance of what was being submitted. Sally Dixon was on a number of those panels. I was myself also. One of the things that came out of the panels, for example, for the National Endowment for the Arts, was that the panelists would get to know each other, and it would strengthen the kind of ties that would go on across the country. When I took my position at the museum, we had a kind of established relationship, for example, with Camille Cooke in Chicago. There was a kind of awareness of what was going on in different organizations, in part through the travel sheet. You could see what was going on, but in part through the kind of contact that would occur here and there, now and then, through the panel work at the National Endowment for the Arts, it- by chance, this was not the original intention, but by chance, the composition of those panels instituted a kind of network situation that was going on. And certainly I can remember a number of occasions sitting on a panel with Gerry O'Grady from SUNY-Buffalo, the center of independent filmmaking, and having conversations with Gerry about variety of wonderful things. But among other things, what he was thinking about doing and what might be coming up, and we would share that kind of information. So it was a networking process sitting in D.C. around a table talking about, you know, what we were doing back in, you know, whatever it might happen to be, whether it was the Bay Area or Houston or Huey up there in Maine or, you know, wherever it might happen to be.

DIXON'S IMPACT ON CMOA

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BILL JUDSON: I think that Sally's activities at the Carnegie Museum of Art were really enhanced, in a sense, going back to her initiation of the whole film program. By her connections, by the fact that her dad was a trustee, and she was a member of the Women's Committee. I think that she had a political clout that was really important to making that happen, and I don't think it would have happened probably without that. And when Sally ran the film program, I was occasionally aware of bureaucratic issues that she would be engaged in that I suspect were probably impacted by her clout, that she could resolve things, she could talk to the president of the Carnegie Institute in ways that other people perhaps could not because she was a part of that, if I may, patrician part of the populace that was, you know, involved in the-in the board structure and-and the management of the museum. From my own experience, I think that there were a few people in the governing boards and in the management positions that had a sense of the importance and impact of the film program. I think there were a lot that did not. The Carnegie is an institution of many different activities. You've got the natural history people over there dealing with their issues. You've got the Museum of Art folks over here. Administratively, you have the library as well, because they shared certain kinds of activities, although it was a separate entity in itself. There was a real fragmentation within the institution of agendas and interests and focus, and part of the difficulties I think that Sally faced, and certainly that I faced, was trying to get the kind of focus and decision making process that would be necessary within that kind of multi-, not bifurcated, it was a multi-created structure that- that structure that had so many components to it and so many bodies of interest. One of the most important aspects of art exhibition at the Carnegie Museum of Art, a part of Carnegie that was the Carnegie International, and every few years, I mean, the duration has varied over the-over the decades, but the Carnegie International is one of the oldest ongoing international exhibitions of of art in the United States. And that was an occasion where artists would come to Pittsburgh for events circulating around the exhibition process. I don't- I'm not aware that they were giving talks and lectures and that sort of thing. But there was a kind of interaction with the population, in part, I think, with the expectation that their work could be purchased. I think that was a patronage issue. So far as I'm aware, the current Museum of Art did not have an artist's lecture series in place, when Sally started her film program, so that when Sally began her program of bringing in experimental filmmakers to show and talk about their work, to have that kind of direct face to face interaction

with the audience, that was a new precedent for the museum. It was later my experience that the museum seemed to increasingly present lectures by artists. They would bring in artists, and they would do a show in what they refer to as the Forum Gallery, that sort of thing, and begin to bring in artists and so forth. But that was a museum program of paintings and sculptures and so forth, presenting their work in person to the audience, that Sally really had initiated with this filmmaker- visiting filmmaker series.

DIXON & THE WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

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BILL JUDSON: One of the- one of the interesting aspects of Sally's...background, her position as a member of the Women's Committee, which is a very active group of women who have the time and interest and energy to support the museum through fundraising activities and so forth. And Sally came from that context, and that Women's Committee supported Sally's work, including on occasion helping to fund the purchase of the work, films, by independent experimental filmmakers. And one of the interesting instances of that was the work of Carolee Schneemann, who is- has been for decades one of the most important women artists in the American scene. As a painter, as a filmmaker, as a performance artist, and a very, you know, highly significant figure. And Sally bought a film called Fuses, which is about a 45 minute or so film. It's a film essentially about a weekend spent with Carolee's lover, James Tenney, who was a musician, and Stan Brakhage and Brakhage's- I think then wife-to-be, Jane. It is a film that includes very specific sexual activity, specifically between Carolee and her boyfriend, James Tenney. It's somewhat abstract in the matter of Brakhage, with camera movement and editing and so forth, but it is certainly sexually clear what's going on. And Sally, understanding the importance of that film as a object of art and the importance of Carolee as a figure in the American art movement in general, not just film, wanted to purchase a print of Fuses, which she did with Women's Committee money. And it's my understanding that Sally then at some point felt an obligation to show the Women's Committee what she had purchased with their money and showed them the film Fuses. And the response to that was probably not as positive and enthusiastic as Sally might have expected. I was not at that- not at that occasion. But it's my

understanding that there was some...concern might be the polite term at the content of the film, and that it put Sally in a- in a curious situation because on the one hand, she was a member of the Women's Committee. This was the kind of context within the culture of the city from which she came, and part of her leverage, frankly, to do what she did at the at the museum. But on the other hand, it was a part of the institutional state of mind that she was trying to expand, and she ran smack- smack into that with that- with that screening. And it was, I believe, a period of time before some of that got sorted out. But it was indicative of the ground- the groundbreaking aspect of what Sally was doing. I mean, she was bringing in important filmmakers. And, yes, from time to time, it may have, you know, run smack into a conservative, normal case of, you know, what a painting should look like. Or what a film should look like and so forth. So...she was groundbreaking in that sense, too. Not without its difficulties.

DIXON & JAMES BROUGHTON

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BILL JUDSON: Broughton, James Broughton was one of the filmmakers that Sally brought to Pittsburgh, and...I remember a wonderful workshop that was took place at Pittsburgh Filmmakers. It was one of those situations where Sally brought James Broughton in to show his films at the museum. And on that occasion she bought a print of a Broughton film called *The Bed*, which is a wonderful film in which a brass house bed becomes a kind of center of all kinds of activity, intercultural, interracial, nothing sexually explicit. But it's a kind of metaphor for the meetings of all sorts of different forces and people. And she bought a print of *The Bed*, and then on that occasion, it was one of those moments when Pittsburgh Filmmakers then did a workshop using- taking advantage of the presence of James in-in Pittsburgh, because Sally had invited him in. And I remember Sally taking a part- taking a role in that I remember her- It was a kind of a mush of people. And James was filming a project, and there were students involved, and Sally was in the midst of it all. And I can't remember whether she was being filmed or was being part of the film, filmmaking process. But...it was as if...for that moment, as if Sally were like 20 or 30 years younger, or just one of these kids, sort of in this mush of activity that was going on. And Broughton was-was shooting a film. And James had a kind of- James Broughton had a kind of

juiciness to him that I think Sally really appreciated. One of the workshops that I remember happening at Pittsburgh Filmmakers that was particularly wonderful was when Sally had invited James Broughton, and he was doing a project, and she was sort of in the midst of it. She was just like some kid, like a bunch of these students sort of doing their thing as a part of the the scene that Broughton was-was shooting. And Sally had that kind of energy, and that kind of interest in the process that really brought her into a number of occasions where she was a part of the filmmaking.

DIXON & ROGER JACOBY

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BILL JUDSON: Roger Jacoby was a very interesting Pittsburgh filmmaker. He- his interest was in making films that had sound on film when it was recorded so that you couldn't edit the sound. Whatever sound was-was wedded to the image was the way it was. And he was also very interested in developing his own film. And he did that in his bathtub. I mean, we're not talking some fancy development. We're talking a very crude kitchen-like developing process. And often the image would deteriorate, would be destroyed or manipulated, or would appear, disappear on the screen as you viewed it. And Roger liked that. He liked the kind of elusiveness that he could get, that evocativeness that he could get by developing his own image, wedded to the sound that went with it. And there were a number of films that Roger made about Pittsburgh, subjects of one sort of another. Roger was somebody with a strong interest in music. He was, in fact, a self-taught pianist who did the music, accompanying music with silent films for Sally, and for me also, I hired him. Roger would improvise music, and any professional musician would, I'm sure, take exception to what Roger...The chords and pieces of melody, kind of, that Roger would put together, but they really were wonderful...sound accompaniments to silent films. Roger made a film called *Dream Sphinx Opera* and...it had to do in part with Roger's interest in music. But Sally was a key figure in that, a kind of-a kind of mythic presence floating through that. I think in part for Roger, it was because Sally represented a position of power. And-and she was, she was a kind of goddess, in a sense. And she appears, as I recall, as a kind of goddess in *Dream Sphinx Opera*, although I haven't seen that film in quite a while. And part of that, I think, was

shot at the piano in the lecture hall where Sally showed her films, and where Roger played the piano. I think that pieces of Sally that sort of appear on the film were shot in that-in that situation.

DIXON & JONAS MEKAS

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BILL JUDSON: I think that Jonas Mekas, for Sally, was a really important figure. Jonas as film critic for *The Village Voice*, And then "The Snooze" - *The SoHo News*. But Jonas was a recognized major figure in the emerging new experimental- personal cinema, I guess we should call it. And Jonas was an important figure for his role also as an editor of *Film Culture*, which was a monthly or whenever they had the money to get it out, which was a strong source of explanation and presentation of the work of Ken Jacobs, Kenneth Anger, and Stan Brakhage, and so on. And Sally asked Jonas early on to come to Pittsburgh and show his own work, because he and his brother Adolfas had, as Lithuanian immigrants, had made films that were diary-like films. And Jonas was really an important figure in the early stages of that kind of personal diary-like personal cinema. But he was also, as I say, an important advocate for the field. And Sally invited him early on, and Jonas came to present and talk about his own films, which he did with the public. But I think that he probably had an important role in informing Sally about other things that were going on that Jonas would know about that Sally would find useful in her programming activities. And I think probably, too, that Jonas's recognition and enthusiasm for what Sally was doing here was important. It was important as a support for her, a kind of validation. And it was also a way in which Sally's activities reached out into the broader national scene, because Jonas then said, "Oh, yes, Sally Dixon's doing these really interesting things." And in his conversation with-with his fellow critics and with filmmakers and so forth, would mention Sally, talk about what it was she was doing, and it was a way also of support for Sally, but a way in which her programming and her activities reached across the country through Jonas.

DIXON & RICHARD LEACOCK

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Richard Leacock, I believe, was one of the filmmakers that Sally brought. He's a famous documentarian, started his career actually as an apprentice of Robert Flaherty back in the- back in the fifties, but teaching at MIT, very important, very important figure. And one of the things that Ricky was doing was to work with Super 8 millimeter, because he believed in the importance of the smallness of that equipment. I mean, in now our digital age, we don't even understand what that issue is, but it's a big difference. The Super 8 camera from a large 16 eclair, flex, or whatever. And I'm imagining that Ricky would always have a Super 8 camera with him, and that when he came, I suspect that that camera got passed around a bit. I can imagine...Sally, who was not a filmmaker per se, but she was in the films of Roger Jacoby. She's, you know, in the- in this workshop with Broughton. I can't imagine that that camera didn't get passed around, knowing Ricky. Right? "Here!" You know, he's a teacher as well as a documentarian. And I can easily imagine Sally's getting her hands on that. I'm not at all surprised that she would reach for the camera when she was talking with you.

DIXON & MICHAEL CHIKIRIS

00:57:44:23

BILL JUDSON: Mike Chikiris was an interesting part of Sally's life. Michael Chikiris was a photographer for the Pittsburgh Press, which back in that day- it's now collapsed, it's gone. But in that day was the evening paper...and that was- paid Mike's-paid Mike's rent, actually paid his mortgage, because he bought a wonderful house and fixed it up in the north- on the Mexican Wall Street, on the North Side. But Mike Chikiris was interested in more than just his job as a press photographer. He was interested in the technology of photography. He was a collector of stereoscopic equipment and shot stereoscopic film, still images, himself. I have a wonderful picture by Mike Chikiris that he took of me and of Jonas Mekas. And we were standing side by side, and Jonas, being a savvy guy, took one look at Chikiris about to snap a photo, and realized...that it was stereoscopic and points his finger at Chikiris, so that when you look at the finished photograph, here's this hand that projects stereoscopically into space. Jonas knew exactly what was going on. So Mike had an interest in this kind of, you know, other aspects,

nontraditional aspects of photography. And he, through Sally, became very interested in experimental film, and in particular Stan Brakhage, and...accompanied Stan on some of his shoots for the *Pittsburgh Trilogy*. And I don't know that he took an active role, but he was there as a kind of support process and probably helped in whatever ways. The photographs that we see of the *Pittsburgh Trilogy* are still photographs that document that occasion are, I think in most cases, Mike Chikiris's photos. I mean, that was one of the things that he did when he followed Brakhage around for the *Pittsburgh Trilogy* was to take documenting photographs of that situation.