

# **Peter Cott**

An Oral History Interview  
Conducted for the GVSHP Westbeth Oral History Project

By  
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## ABSTRACT

Peter Cott served as the Executive Director of the artist's community Westbeth from 1970 to 1973.

Cott briefly discusses his background in the arts, including his career as an actor, director, and producer, and as Director of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for thirteen years. He describes meeting with Joan Davidson, Chair of the Westbeth Board of Directors, and accepting the position as director of Westbeth.

Cott touches on how the design of the Westbeth offices allowed him to set up meetings with museum directors, gallery owners for the artists, as well as other services he provided for the residents. He explains his subsequent departure from Westbeth as Executive Director, a position the Federal Housing Administration felt was irrelevant for a housing project. Cott describes the vision of Westbeth and its dynamic within the 1960s. While describing the community, he mentions some of the tenants, including Muriel Rukeyser, the Theater for the New City, and Murlot Graphics. He also acknowledges some of the more infamous events that happened while he was there, such as the suicide of photographer Diane Arbus.

Cott discusses the difficulties in retaining staff and needing to take over many jobs, including janitorial work. He describes the huge responsibility Joan Davidson felt towards Westbeth and her work for the complex. He speculates that most of the funds for building improvements came from the Kaplan Fund and points out the impact the Fund had on the arts in New York.

Cott recounts growing up on Long Island and returning back to the city after WWII. He then describes the financial difficulties facing New York in the early 70's and his understanding of the initial ideas for Westbeth. He continues by describing a fabulous apartment on the top floor of Westbeth where visiting artists such as South African novelist Nadine Gordimer stayed.

Finally, Cott reflects on his idea for a Westbeth theater company, which was never fulfilled. He mentions a few more notable residents, painter Peter Ruta and jazz musician Gil Evans before ending on the legacy of Westbeth.

Q: It's March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007. I'm Jeanne Houck, and we're interviewing Peter Cott at his home in New York City. And we're here today to discuss Mr. Cott's role in the early years of Westbeth Artist Housing Project in Greenwich Village. What were you about to say?

A: Oh, you want to do background on me?

Q: Oh, yes, I think before we start, could you go over a little on what your career has been like, and especially maybe backtracking to the 1960s and what you were doing at that time.

A: I was educated both in business and in theater. I have a B.S. in Business Administration from New York University, and then I went to the Dramatic Workshop of the New School for Social Research after the War on the G.I. Bill, as a matter of fact. And I did some acting for several years. Actually I spent three years at America's only ever pure repertoire theater, The Hedgerow Theater outside of Philadelphia, where we performed a different play every evening out of a repertory of about twenty five plays – just like an opera company. Then I came back to New York, did some producing, directing, and ultimately kind of fell into a position as a public relations director for the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, the Emmy Award organization. Ultimately I became the Executive Director of the National Academy, and in that guise spent a year in Los Angeles at the behest of the then president of the Academy. And I was with the Academy for thirteen years. In addition to doing Emmy Awards, I was responsible for developing about ten chapters around the country, and developing programs which I perceived and hoped would in fact advance the arts and sciences of television, which was the whole purpose. In 1969, I resigned as Executive Director of the National Academy, sated with the job and feeling that I had fulfilled my role. And I spent, because I had been the only one in that role, I was asked to stay on until a successor was found, and I helped in that search. And I used that six months to explore what my future would be. And I spoke to a lot of very bright people, and was a little ego tripping I suspect because it was, "If you were me, what would you do with the rest of your life" kind of thing. And it was fun. And a man named Roger Englander, who used to produce the Leonard Bernstein's Children's Programs and was a friend suggested that I meet with a woman named Joan Kaplan Davidson<sup>1</sup> because he said Mrs. Davidson not only is a great philanthropist but has her finger on the pulse of New York. And she could probably be very helpful to you.

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<sup>1</sup> Joan K. Davidson was the chair of Westbeth and was president of the J.M. Kaplan Fund in 1977 and served in that capacity until 1993.

So, as was my wont, I invited Mrs. Davidson to a very fancy restaurant for lunch. And we were chatting. And I was enjoying – she’s a very, very bright woman and I was enjoying being with her – but I came to realize that the ground was shifting, and it was shifting from “what would you do if you were me” to “I think (haha) I think you would like to be at Westbeth”. And in fact we kind of rushed through the rest of lunch, and she sort of grabbed me by the hand and shoved me into a taxi and took me down to Wespeth. Of which I had never heard, needless to say.

Q: That was your first introduction to Westbeth?

A: That was my first introduction to Westbeth. The tenants had just moved in, or were in the process of moving in. The basement was covered with water. The place was physically not really finished. And there I was.

Q: And they were still working, as I understand it they were still working...

A: Working on the building. Oh yes. Very much so. They needed to drain the basement, among other things.

Q: So you had your first tour that very day, after your lunch.

A: Yes.

Q: So tell me a little more about your tour.

A: The idea of it so excited me. I had never heard of it, but the very idea of the mix of art people – painters, poets, writers, musicians – of all calibers and all skills was very exciting to me. And Mrs. Davidson made it very clear to me that I was not there to be, to run the building, or to be janitor – which I became, incidentally (haha) at one point – but rather to maximize this incredible mix of artists under one roof, one *huge* roof: seven hundred and fifty artists and their families. And that was such a challenge I couldn’t say no. It was really a very exciting possibility to me.

Q: What actually was the job position she was talking about?

A: The title was Executive Director.

Q: Executive Director of Westbeth?

A: Of Westbeth, the Artist's community. I think her intention – and it certainly became my intention – was to maximize for the artists their living in one community; to explore what kinds of interaction there could be among the artists, which was very challenging and very exciting to me, because of my background as an actor, a producer, a director; so I had a sense of all of the mixes that could happen in the arts. And Westbeth seemed to present the ultimate challenge because there was such a variety of poets, writers, pianists, dancers, actors, directors. It had every element of the arts present.

Q: It was this ideal of cross pollination for Westbeth that I have read about.

A: And I hoped that I would act as a catalyst in that interaction. And in some respects I think I did. I hope I did.

Q: Before we go into the kinds of activities that you witnessed and what you were involved in and how you facilitated, were you, as the Executive Director, were you Executive Director of the Board of Westbeth? Or were they separate?

A: They were separate.

Q: They were separate, yes. So...

A: I had very little contact with the board, although I was their employee presumably. My principle contact was Mrs. Davidson on the management level. And of course it was all beginning at that time, so there were lots of wrinkles that needed to be ironed out.

Q: At the time, who was, I'm just trying to get the layout, because it's a little unclear actually in the history, how were things managed. So you are the Executive Director of Westbeth. And that means overseeing the community and facilitating the community.

A: Yes.

Q: And giving them support.

A: I was to some extent involved in the 'management', i.e. the financial running of Westbeth and stuff like that, but predominantly I saw my role as the servant of the residents.

Q: You were offered this position. And you said, did you say 'yes' that day?

A: I said 'yes' that day. I really did. I had been looking and I had been talking to a lot of people about what to do, because I had been with the Academy of Television of Arts and Sciences for so long, I felt as if I wanted some kind of a dynamic change. I even thought about going back to college and getting a law degree and entering politics, which appealed to me a lot, and still does. But this, this fell into my lap and was just right at the time.

Q: It was the right timing for you then?

A: Yeah.

Q: Had you just moved back to New York? New York was your home town, though?

A: Yes. I had spent a year in Los Angeles, and in fact it was at poolside in Beverly Hills that I resigned my role as executive of the Television Academy. But essentially my home was here. When I came back from Los Angeles (with my partner) I moved into the Vermeer at Seventh Avenue and 14<sup>th</sup> Street. And then ultimately we bought this townhouse in 1970 that we're sitting in at the moment. And that coincided exactly, and was within visual view of Westbeth.

Q: Oh, that's great. So the year we're talking about then is 19...

A: '70

Q: Is when you came on. So did you set up offices down there?

A: Yes. Richard Meier, our architect, had in fact built very beautiful offices. I often wondered, I never asked Richard what possessed him to make such generous, lavish offices, but whatever motivated it, it was fine by me! And I guess I can say it now, I was going to allude to it later, because the offices were so splendid, it occurred to me after I'd been there about six months or so that we had an ideal situation wherein I could get slides of their work from all of the visual artists and, because of the generosity and the beauty of the offices, invite museum directors and gallery owners to come to Westbeth to look at my slide show of the work that's upstairs, and if they get turned on to any of it, all they had to do was take an elevator and visit the artist themselves. And it worked, it worked very well.

Q: Oh, that's great. What a great idea.

A: Yeah. You should be doing it [at Westbeth].

Q: Yes. So these beautiful offices were very welcoming to gallery owners, and people came in. So how long about were you able to do this?

A: I did that for the rest of the time that I was there. I also, because the ostensible floor galleries in the courtyard were vacant, we made them available to the artists at my suggestion. And they did shows.

Q: So I'm getting a sense that there are probably a lot of activities that we can cover here that happened.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: So there's the visual artists, and they had shows in the courtyard. And you also had the slides. What other activities were there?

A: We had a theater company that started there at the time, Theater for the New City, which has since become a fixture in the Off Broadway scene in New York. I can't think of their names at the moment. And Muriel Rukeyser, one of America's foremost poets, was in residence and was a power to be reckoned with. She was a wonderful woman. I found her very exciting. And the photographers had been promised dark rooms in the adjacent building. Not in the main building, but in the one story buildings that face on West Street. And we were able to honor that commitment to them. And things began to grow. Everything seemed to be working very well.

Q: So how long were you in that position in those offices?

A: I was there for three years.

Q: You were there between 1970 and '73.

A: To '73. The reason I left is because of the Federal Housing Administration, which owned the three percent mortgage on Westbeth, and was not being paid either the interest or the part of the principle that we were supposed to be paying because Westbeth simply wasn't generating enough income, and they went over the books and said, "What's an executive director of a housing project at that salary doing here?" And it was explained that I was there to make it work for the residents. And they said, "You don't

understand. This is a housing project from our perspective, and he is irrelevant.” And so he left. (haha)

Q: What’s your perspective on that decision in terms of Westbeth?

A: Well the residents absolutely need a representative. It’s not just a building, it’s a remarkable place! They are not simply *tenants*; they are in fact artists who happen to be living under one vast roof that used to be the Bell Telephone Laboratories.

Q: Well it was such a social experiment

A: Yes.

Q: And so the vision of Westbeth was not just housing is what I’m hearing. And so it had this wider vision. How would you describe that vision and how it fit into the 1960s actually?

A: Well the 1960s of course were a time of dynamic upheaval and change. I suspect that we all would have wished that more dynamism happened out of the Westbeth experiment, out of the fact that artists of such diverse disciplines were living under one roof, that that would have generated a lot of creative stuff. I don’t think that has happened. Or at least, if it has, I’m not aware of it. I think it still could and should. In fact I think Jeanne one of your roles could be to explore with the residents how in fact more creativity, creative interaction could happen there.

Q: I think it sounds like the first three years can serve as a role model in a lot of ways.

A: Uh huh. Yeah.

Q: You had the offices turned into a place to invite people to see artwork and then go up and see the artists, which was a creative use of the situation.

A: Right.

Q: Do you remember some of the people that came into your gallery? Some of the types of people? Not your gallery, but into your offices?

A: I don’t remember specifically, but I know they were gallery directors and gallery owners.



Q: And then would they actually just go upstairs and knock on doors.

A: Yes. Yes. Well I would call up and say they were coming.

Q: You would say they're coming up.

A: 'Mr. Marlboro would like to look at your work. Is that all right?' And they would say, "Wow! Yes." (haha)

Q: And then the New City Theater group was there. And what kinds of other things did the tenants do, and you worked with the tenants to accomplish in those three years.

A: Well, I remember there were musicians that I worked with, and made sure that they were somehow comfortable. And of course the photographers were given their own space. That's all I can think of at the moment.

Q: Did people put on events and poetry readings? Did tenants do that kind of thing? Did they organize with each other to put events on?

A: They didn't while I was there. I hope that they have since, or if they haven't they should. We also of course had the Mourlot Printers who were on the second floor in the vast space subsidized again by the Kaplan Foundation. They were a great attribute. They didn't stay, but they had huge presses up there.

Q: How would you describe the Westbeth community? How would you describe the people there? Were they characters, strong personalities?

A: Well not to me, because I don't think of artists as being characters. I would say they were not of the top echelon of the arts. Ms. Rukeyser was probably the most famous person there. No, wait. That's not true. We had some other, and I'm trying to think of the names. They're eluding me at the moment. We had some important writers, and others there. The children were a challenge.

Q: Why is that?

A: Because they were a bloody unruly lot! (haha) I decided that the children of artists should be restrained. (haha) They were everywhere.

Q: They were running through the hallways?

A: Yes. Are they still?

Q: They must be. Were there, with such a large group of people living together, there must have been some tensions at times between people.

A: Yes, I'm sure there were. There were also some terrible sadness that happened there. There were three suicides in the two years that I was there. One, a very famous person, Diane Arbus,<sup>2</sup> whose body I discovered in her apartment after... and then two people jumped off the roof into the courtyard, which was ghastly.

Q: That must have been really difficult.

A: It was awful.

Q: You were the one to find Diane Arbus first?

A: Yes.

Q: I didn't realize that.

A: It must have been her daughter who called and said, "I can't reach my mother. Would you check and see if she's all right?"

Q: And so you did.

A: Yes, and she wasn't.

Q: So there were some tragedies in those three years.

A: Yes.

Q: And then also there were lively children running in the hallways, and then artists putting on events. What was your sense of how they used the space? Each of them had their own spaces. It must have been very creative.

A: Well I remember, I can't think of his name, but there was a concert pianist living there at the time. And I reveled in hearing his music. And the theater people were very active, you know, for New City. I guess it was

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<sup>2</sup> Diane Arbus was a New York photographer known for her black and white portraits of eccentrics.

because it was the first three years, there was something of a limit on what we could accomplish in that period of time, but we did expose the visual artists to a broader public, which was a plus. And the theater company still thrives. Happily.

Q: Were there, I read that there were requests and sometimes gentle complaints about at the time needing floors better or windows bigger or, you know, everything that any normal apartment dweller complains about and would like improvements. Do you recall any of those?

A: Yes. We had sound problems.

Q: Oh yes?

A: A lot of complaints about noise, that the windows were not sufficiently noise resistant. I don't know whether that has been addressed or not. It wasn't during my tenure. The concept, which I guess was a combination of Corbusier's and Richard's of dividing the living from the creative parts with duplex apartments was a brilliant concept in my judgment, and should work very well. It probably still does. One has to understand that the Bell Telephone Laboratory was not a single building. It was buildings built over many, many, many years – I think three decades, actually. The transistor was developed at what was then the Bell Telephone Laboratory. Some other breakthrough inventions in sound, sound motion pictures actually were also developed there. So it's got a noble history in communications and the arts. How does it, I don't know how it's working these days.

Q: Yes, well people are still living there and doing their work. A lot of people are the original residents. At one time, there had been discussion that the ideal of Westbeth would be that people would just stay for maybe five years. And then move on in their careers. And some people did that, and some people stayed, because it was a great deal.

A: There was a Black visual artist, a painter, I can't think of her name at the moment, but I had seen last year she had a major exhibition at a major gallery. Do you know who I'm thinking of?

Q: I don't but I can look it up.

A: Yes.

Q: And she's ...

A: She's obviously hugely successful.

Q: And she was at Westbeth?

A: She was at Westbeth.

Q: Yeah, well that's great.

A: Her name may come back to me. I don't know.

Q: I know there was a story about a composer, the composer Stefan Wolpe.<sup>3</sup>

A: Who unfortunately had Muscular Dystrophy.<sup>4</sup> And was quite ill while he was at Westbeth. I presume he's passed on. But he was immensely successful. Highly regarded.

Q: There's a story that there was a fire in his apartment? Do you recall that story? And that it destroyed some of his compositions?

A: No.

Q: It might have been right before you came I suspect.

A: Yes, I was not aware of that.

Q: But it's a story that's used to illustrate how people were cooperative and helpful with each other as neighbors.

A: Oh.

Q: And they all pulled together to help him with that situation with the fire, and they helped him with clothes and helped clean up. Were people excited about being at Westbeth?

A: Yes, very much so. Certainly there was an unusual degree of empathy among the residents that you would not find in a normal, in a regular apartment building. They obviously thrived on sharing their artistic endeavors.

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<sup>3</sup> Stefan Wolpe was a German-born composer who wrote several operas and a number of pieces for unions and communist theater groups.

<sup>4</sup> Stefan Wolpe suffered from Parkinson's disease.

Q: It must have been very exciting.

A: It was.

Q: When you were working in your offices was it everyday? Nine to five? Or beyond?

A: Oh, yes. And beyond! (haha)

Q: Did you have someone working with you in the offices? An assistant?

A: Yes. I had an assistant and a secretary.

Q: And a secretary. So there was a three-person staff?

A: Yes.

Q: And you said, you alluded earlier to the fact that sometimes you even became a janitor, even though that wasn't the original intention?

A: In the early days, it was very difficult to keep staff there. We had a lot of wonderfully industrious porters from Haiti. And they were lovely people, gentle people. But they would go on to other things, and we went from about three supers, and at one point we just didn't have one, and guess who? (haha)

Q: So as you were looking for another one, you took up the duties.

A: Yes. Somebody had to, and I was there. And that was, I considered it the norm. It wasn't extraordinary from my perspective.

Q: You said periodically you would meet with Joan. How often do you think you would meet?

A: At least once a week.

Q: And what would you discuss?

A: She was there.

Q: She was there a lot?

A: Yes, she was there a lot. She felt a huge responsibility for Westbeth and for the people.

Q: When she came on site, what kinds of things did she do, she met with you I imagine?

A: Yes.

Q: And what else, would she look around?

A: My office was her office.

Q: Yes. (haha)

A: She would talk to the residents. Yes. Oh yes.

Q: She described this to me. So I think it's an interesting story.

A: Yes, I always go back to the darkrooms, because darkrooms are expensive to develop. And they had been promised to the photographers. And Westbeth was simply not fulfilling its needs financially, but I felt such a strong need to honor that commitment to the artists that finally we agreed that it would be done, for the photographers.

Q: That there would be darkrooms.

A: Yes.

Q: And they were built during your time there?

A: Yeah.

Q: And so where did the funds come from?

A: I became something of a hero.

Q: Yes, oh, absolutely! Where did the funds come from to do improvements?

A: Probably out of the Kaplan Fund (haha).

Q: Yes?

A: The Kaplan Fund and Joan really have had a remarkable impact on my home town, on New York, with a relatively small foundation. I think the foundation when I knew it had probably an endowment of seventy million dollars or something like that, which is peanuts by today's standards. But when you explore New York and realize how much influence the Kaplan Fund and Joan had on making it work and making it better for the arts. There is the Kaplan Room up at Lincoln Center, for example, and many other examples of the efficacy of their philanthropy. And when I say 'their', I mean 'her'. Basically. Although Jack,<sup>5</sup> her dad, was essentially the one responsible for committing to Westbeth, with Roger Stevens of the National Endowment for the Arts.

Q: Had you met Mr. Kaplan at any point?

A: Oh yeah, sure.

Q: Yes?

A: Oh, he was a feisty little man. (haha)

Q: Do you remember when you first met him? By any chance?

A: No, I guess Joan introduced me to her father, and Joan has several siblings who I met over the years, too. They're a splendid family.

Q: So when Westbeth was underway, it really was, as I understand it, Joan had just moved back to New York. And so it really was the beginning of her influence, or work, in New York City.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: How would you describe New York City overall. This is a huge question, but I just would be curious of your impressions of what's going on in New York 1967, '68, '69, '70?

A: Well first I have to explain, I was born less than a mile from where we're sitting right now. I was born at what was then called the Lying In Hospital, which is now a nurse's residence for Beth Israel Hospital at Second Avenue and Eighteenth Street. And I spent the first ten years of my life living in Brooklyn, in Flatbush. And then, because it was the Depression, and I was

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<sup>5</sup> Jacob Merrill Kaplan established The J. M. Kaplan Fund in 1945 and was its president until 1977.

one of four children, we, my folks, decided to move to Long Island so that we would have summers right at hand instead of having to send my brothers off to camp, which they had been doing. And so I grew up on Long Island, and then left Long Island to fly in World War II. When I came back, I came right to New York. And I've never left. New York is, and I've been pretty much around the world, I guess. New York is the most dynamic city in the whole world. It has more substantial art and cultural and entertainment offerings than any city in the world. And I relish it, and happily can afford to partake of it fully. We are out at theater and ballet almost every night. We subscribe to the New York City Ballet, the New York City Opera, the New York Philharmonic, Lincoln Center Theater, Primary Stages, and that doesn't leave too many nights vacant. (haha)

Q: In 1970, New York was beginning to approach some hard financial times.

A: Oh yes.

Q: And what's your, do you have a sense of what the arts were faced with during that time?

A: I know it was hard for them because there was no support forthcoming from the city, the state or the feds, for that matter. But that's all changed dramatically.

Q: The Westbeth community very much was about artist housing, and so do you recall, was it difficult to find housing in New York?

A: Yes, my understanding was, and I may, this is rather hearsay, my understanding was that Roger Stevens perceived that artists were not being able to make it in New York City. That it was just priced out of their capacity to afford, and that by leaving the city and going to the suburbs or rural America, the art would change, and that troubled him. How he, or why he came to, what the relationship was to Jack Kaplan and the Kaplan Fund I don't know, but obviously he felt that it would matter to Jack Kaplan. And it did. And they decided they would acquire the Bell Telephone Laboratories. And so they, the Federal Housing Administration, came up with the funding, and they hired he who has become a very important international architect, but at that time was a relatively unknown architect – Richard Meier – to do the conversion, and he borrowed copiously from Corbusier, who had done this kind of thing before to create Westbeth's housing, living and art studios space. And it worked.



Q: So you were there for three years. And you were there everyday.

A: Yes, and nights.

Q: And nights. Are there any players, important people that you worked with that we haven't mentioned yet?

A: I can't think of any at the moment. But that's my memory.

Q: What I've learned is it was not a huge organization that was able to build Westbeth. It was Joan, working with a very dynamic small group, and then it sounds like it continued that way where it just was a group of very dedicated people like you.

A: Yes, you mentioned the Board before. I had no contact with the Board, nor was it a very functioning board.

Q: Did you feel like they weren't involved with what you were doing.

A: Yes.

Q: Yes. Do you recall who they were?

A: No.

Q: You described HUD as finally deciding it was time to cancel your position, and that they didn't see how you fit into what they thought Westbeth was.

A: Well they were who held the mortgage on the building.

Q: Yes. So that must have been very disappointing. Joan must have been very disappointed and you as well, because there was this vision that this facilitator was important.

A: Yes and I had a role to play. I really did have a role to play. And I would have probably been there to this day had it not changed. However I moved on to a very exciting new role.

Q: Yes. I'm going to pause one second. .... Now you were just describing a gorgeous apartment at Westbeth...

A: There was a gorgeous apartment on the top floor of Westbeth, and Joan had this sense that she should invite, that it would serve to invite world famous artists to Westbeth to do master classes, possibly, and certainly to stimulate the whole creative environment. And while I was there, she invited Nadine Gordimer, the great South African novelist, to come, and she did. And she stayed with us for, oh, I think a couple of months, maybe. And I don't know to what extent she interacted with the residents. Very possibly she did. I know we were terribly proud that she was there.

Q: So she served as sort of an artist in residence for a while.

A: Yes.

Q: And probably she, I'd like to look into that to find out what kind of activities she did.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you recall..?

A: Mrs. Davidson would know. I didn't.

Q: Are there any other people like that that came to that apartment?

A: Nobody that I can remember. There may be others.

Q: Were there any other ideas you wanted to try out but didn't get a chance to? Are there a few that you wish you could have tried out?

A: Oh, sure. (haha) Sure. My sense, because of my theater background, was that we should really create a theater company and all the actors and directors, scenic designers, would all be Westbeth residents. And that should still happen, shouldn't it?

Q: Is that something that you or someone else tried to organize at the time? Or it was just an idea that was circulated?

A: Yes, the latter.

Q: Right. It was an idea that was circulated within Westbeth...

A: The Village has not to my knowledge embraced Westbeth as fully as it might have. And maybe that's a two way street.

Q: Tell me a little more about your sense of that. Of the relationship of Westbeth to all of Greenwich Village; where it fits in. You were just describing that.

A: Well, from my perspective, Westbeth should be a Mecca for all of the artists who live and work in the Village. And that's something that should be worked on. Maybe I'll go back to work there, go back to Westbeth.

Q: Are there any other tenants that come to mind now that we're talking more and more about it. I think Peter Ruta<sup>6</sup> was there. I'm trying to think, Gil Evans the jazz musician.<sup>7</sup>

A: Yes

Q: They are a part of a great roster of names, of people. Is there anyone that comes to mind that you remember talking with?

A: Well I remember him. And Stefan. And Muriel Rukeyser.<sup>8</sup>

Q: What a great, exciting place.

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: Just now, we talked a little bit off tape about the controversy over the rent strike. Were you there at that time?

A: It must have been after I left.

Q: What do you recall about working with Dixon Bain who had managed the construction of Westbeth? Or did he leave before you came?

A: Dixon and I worked together when I first arrived. He was, after all, physically responsible, responsible for the physical plant. And he was very pleasant to work with. But he left probably within six months of my arrival.

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Ruta is a landscape and cityscape painter, whose work has shown at the Museum of the City of New York and the Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Leipzig.

<sup>7</sup> Gil Evans was a jazz pianist, arranger, composer, and bandleader.

<sup>8</sup> Muriel Rukeyser was an American poet and political activist, best known for her poems about equality, feminism, social justice, and Judaism.

Q: So it was a transition time, because he probably knew a lot of things he needed to tell you about the building?

A: Yes.

Q: So what would you say is the legacy of Westbeth, in a nutshell?

A: I would say I guess that Westbeth has yet to fulfill its potential. And I think it would take an outside producer to generate the kinds of interaction I suggested, and I had hoped would happen. I do see a theater company whose components are residents of Westbeth happening there. I see visual artists moving into a new realm, becoming scenic designers. Those kinds of transitions among people in terms of their art, happening because of the various influences that could take place there.

Q: Thank you so much for meeting with me.

A: My pleasure. Truly.

Q: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW