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ARLO GUTHRIE'S MOTORCYCLE SONG



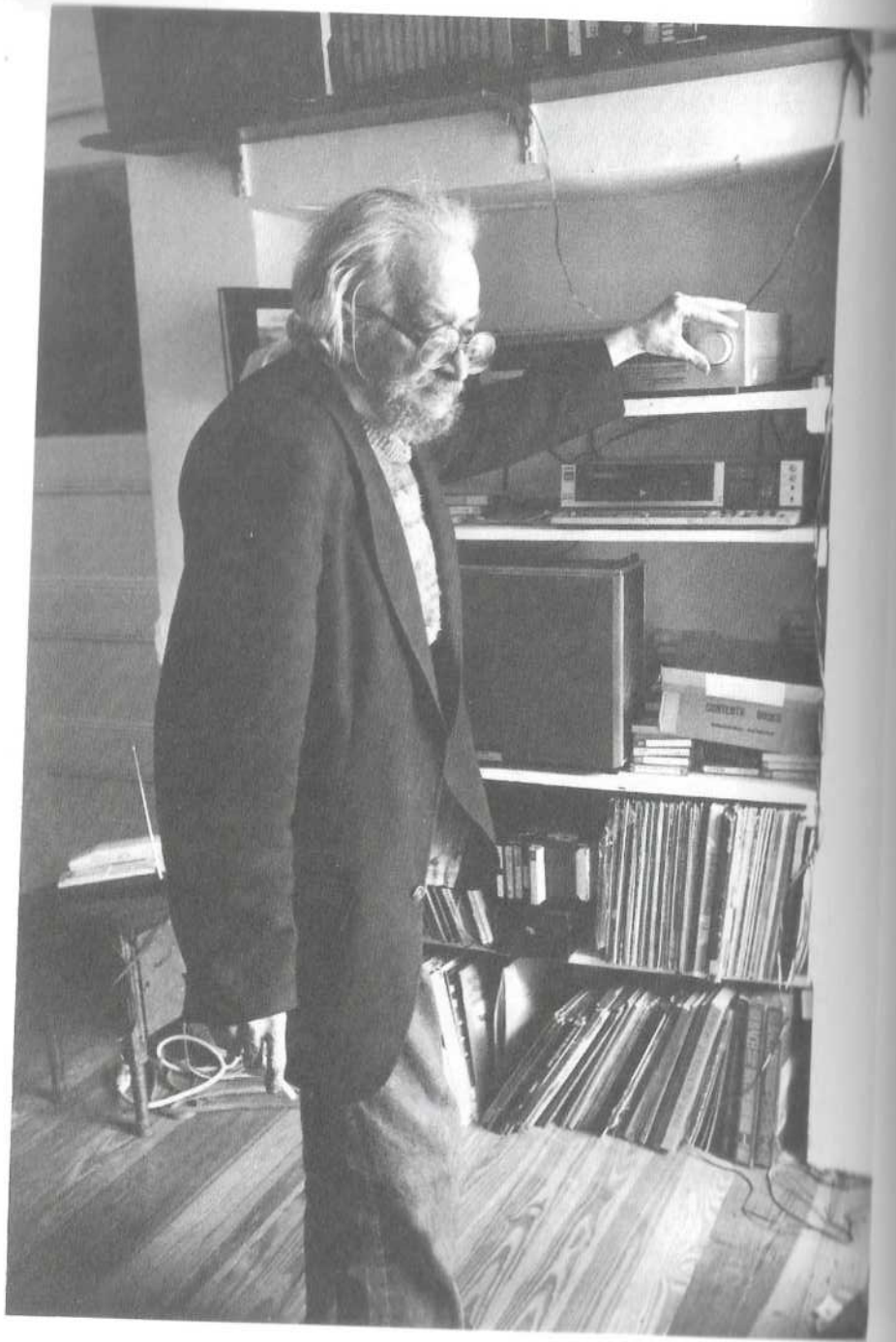


Photo by Brian Graham, 1986

John Cohen—Chelsea Hotel, NYC

Every cultural movement has its dynamic personalities, its popularizers, aestheticians, financiers, historians, and academicians. Despite himself, Harry Smith has emerged as the unheralded genius behind the scenes of the folk music movement in America. He is also greatly respected as an avant-garde filmmaker by avant-garde filmmakers, and his works have been shown at the Museum of Modern Art.

A visit to his room is a somewhat mystifying experience, for what appears on first impression as orderly piles of books and objects is actually a storehouse for cross-disciplinary investigations of visual, anthropological, and musical phenomena. The closet is filled with women's dresses from the Florida Seminole Indians. One corner of the room, marked with a "Keep Off" sign, is filled with Ukrainian Easter eggs; on the bureau are stacks of mounted string figures; behind the table is a movie camera alongside portfolios of his paintings and graphic work. In another corner is a clay model of an imaginary landscape which is re-created from a dream. On the walls hang empty frames from which the pictures have been ripped out. Under the desk lamp is the only other living thing besides Harry—a solitary goldfish in an orange clay bowl. A 19th century Pennsylvania Jacquard woven spread covers the bed. At other times there

have been piles of beautiful quilts and other weavings from that area, as well as a collection of paper airplanes from the streets of New York. Small file cabinets of index cards are distributed between the stacks of research books. Each book becomes more exotic by its juxtaposition with other such books—Mayan codices beside Eskimo anthropology studies, under a collection of Peyote ceremonial paintings, et cetera, et cetera.

In the notes to the Folkways *Anthology*, Harry included this quote: “Civilized Man Thinks Out His Difficulties, At Least He Thinks He Does, Primitive Man Dances Out His Difficulties,” along with a quote from Aleister Crowley: “Do As Thy Wilt Shall Be The Whole Of The Law.”

—John Cohen

[John Cohen discovered the original tapes from this interview, and generously offered them to us in 1997. This has led to an expanded version of the original Sing Out! interview, shedding additional information on the incredible mind of Harry Smith. Cohen's interview of thirty years ago has helped, from one generation to another, keep the spirit of Harry Smith alive and served as a bridge for the folk revival of the '60s.]

JC: If the readers of *Sing Out!* know of you at all, it would be from the Folkways *Anthology of American Folk Music*, which was issued a long time ago [1952]. That is just a part of what a total picture of you might be. Perhaps we could start and talk about the *Anthology* in context with everything else that you do.

HS: This whole thing is typed up...it's corrected later. You didn't bring enough tape. I don't know what the purpose of doing this would be. Perhaps if we talk a long time, my brain will begin operating better. It doesn't sound like a good thing to do; start at the beginning and work forward. You don't want to work backwards?

JC: How was it that you first went to see Moe Asch?

HS: Somehow I went to sell him records, and soon he said; “Why not issue some?” I was selling him records for a dollar or thirty-five cents apiece. I hadn't thought of putting an album together at that point. Perhaps Pete Kauffman told me to go see Moe.

JC: To unload the ones that you had.

HS: They were good records. He issued a lot of them, common things like Bukka White. I sold him things that were not quite up to what I wanted to keep.

JC: Were these rejects from what became the *Anthology*?

HS: I had either hundreds or thousands of records when I first came here. They're at Lincoln Center now. The *Anthology* was not an attempt to get all the best records (there are other collections where everything is supposed to be beautiful), but a lot of these were selected because they were odd—an important version of the song, or one which came from some particular place. For example, there were things from Texas included that weren't very good. There was a Child ballad, “Henry Lee” [Child 68]. It's not a good record, but it was the lowest-numbered Child ballad. Then there were other things put in simply because they were good performances, like “Brilliancy Medley” occurs to me. You couldn't get a representative cross-section of music into such a small number of records [six LPs]. Instead, they were selected to be ones that would be popular among musicologists, or possibly with people who would want to

sing them and maybe would improve the version. They were basically picked out from an epistemological, musicological selection of reasons.

JC: In its own way, that selection told me where traditional American music came from, and predicted everything that followed in popular music. It was the first opportunity many of us had to hear the country blues, early hillbilly, and Cajun music.

HS: Similar things like Cajun music were available from the Library of Congress before the *Anthology*, and there were current Cajun 45s from Louisiana, but most people hadn't heard them. The first I heard Uncle Dave Macon was somebody playing old records in the basement of a funeral home that had been converted into a Salvation Army shop in Seattle. During the war they bought up all the records to melt them down or something, so there were masses of records everywhere. There were masses of Japanese records. The Japanese were moved away from there very quickly and they had to sell everything, so I got a lot of good Japanese records, some of them recorded as early as 1895. I collected old Chinese records from about the same period. They'd be as early as any phonograph records made. So I heard an Uncle Dave Macon record in this shop in Vancouver. I'd never heard anything like that. It was "Fox and Hounds," and I couldn't imagine what it was. Bertrand Bronson at the University of California played one Buell Kazee record for me. He had a collection of records, and he'd bought some Kazees when they first came out because they had Child ballads on them. It was the "Wagoner's Lad" and whatever is on the other side. Maybe that's where I first heard Buell Kazee? It was on Brunswick Records. Brunswick records were hard to get.

JC: You'd not heard of Eck Robertson before you bought his records, had you?

HS: No, but you could tell they were of top quality. The first records I bought were in Bellingham when I was in high school, around 1940.

JC: Were you still in high school in 1940?

HS: Sure. It was a Tommy McClellan record that had somehow got into this town by mistake. It sounded strange and I looked for others and found Memphis Minnie. I started looking in other towns and found Yank Rachell records in Mt. Vernon, Washington. Then during the record drive—I then arranged for other people to look for old records.

JC: You arranged for it?

HS: People collected records because you could sell them for scrap. There were big piles of 78s—enormous groaning masses of them. Someone found a Washington Phillips record. In looking through books like those by Odum and Johnson, there were lists of records. In Jean Thomas's book *The Lost Fiddler* they mentioned Jilson Setters, so I started looking for those. There was a book from the 1920s published by Howard University, where I first heard about Blind Lemon Jefferson and Blind Willie Johnson.

JC: In other words, you didn't just buy records in response to a voice. You knew something beforehand.

HS: I was looking for exotic records.

JC: Exotic in what terms? Lemon Jefferson wouldn't have been exotic in Mississippi.

HS: Exotic in relation to what was considered to be the world culture of high class music. I'm sure you can find places in Mississippi where they listen to Paul Whiteman. There was a certain type of music that everyone was exposed to in the 1920s: the Charleston, Blackbottom, et cetera. The babysitters I had were doing those things. I was carried along, I presume. You're really more interested in the hillbilly records, aren't you?

JC: No, I'm interested in all...

HS: I didn't find any real hillbilly records for much longer after I had been collecting blues records.

JC: The blues records were first?

HS: It was fortuitous that the records I got had this harmonica player, Yank Rachell, and Sleepy John Estes playing the mandolin, I believe. It was exotic in the same way that Turkish music is. I don't

remember who the first hillbilly singers were I heard. I think I got into it through Irish music, in that same store where I was trying to get Romanian bagpipe records. You could get a lot of that sort of record in Oakland, California, by then. I went there for something else. At a party for Woody Guthrie...

JC: You knew him back then?

HS: Someone had taken me to hear him. The person who invited me was connected with Harry Bridges. In the hall I suddenly met a lot of people who had interest in records and stuff. Being naive, I didn't realize they were revolutionaries trying to blow up the state capitol or something. It could have been at some longshoreman's hall in 1942. I'm sure it was like Communists. But I didn't like his singing. It was too sophisticated and too involved with social problems, I felt. It wasn't the sort of stuff I was interested in.

JC: But that might have been part of what got you hearing the first hillbilly records?

HS: No, I must have had a few by then. As a matter of fact, I had. Someone at a place called Central Store, on Long Island, sent a letter to James McKuen, who was a record collector who used to collect blues records. It was a typed list of Paramount records that he'd found in this store—all brand new records. They were something like a dollar a piece. McKuen sent me the list and said that I could get what I wanted. Everybody was stupid that they didn't buy the whole thing. We didn't know. It was luck—hundreds of people we hadn't heard. I got interested in the Child ballads from seeing Carl Sandburg's *American Songbag*. I was living in a small town in Washington, and my father would bring me books from the library. I don't know why he brought that home, but he had been a cowboy himself and knew a lot of the songs. Now this sounds horrible and ruins my reputation, but one of the first people I heard was John Jacob Niles. He gave a concert at the University of Washington. I found records of his and naturally threw them out as soon as I found out that there was something better. But looking for those songs, maybe "Wild Bill Jones," I found versions on Champion—repressings from Gennett. It was a commercial version of the song, a

curiosity, because something that had survived orally for a long time suddenly turned into something that Sears, Roebuck sold, and you could order it from Pakistan or wherever you might be. I would presume that my interest in the quality of the music went back to my mother and father. My mother sang Irish songs all the time, and my father sang cowboy songs. But they were naive of the implications of it.

JC: My mother knew a version of "The Butcher's Boy" from the sidewalks of New York early in this century.

HS: It was recorded very early. A lot of those things came out on pressings that Elvridge Johnson made. They are eight-inch records, all autographed by whoever made them. I think they are all preceding 1888. They were made to be sold through New England and they are of higher quality than what came later. Things like "Frog Went A-Courting," plus really amazing Victorian ballads, super-dilly things like they imitate in movies when they show the Gay Nineties. Well, there are actual records of that stuff out. It's amazing subject matter, all connected with children freezing to death. I would presume, a realistic picture of life at that point, which has been suppressed because they don't like it to get out that children starved to death then. It was the big period of orphanages, just like it's the big period of broken homes now. A great many of these songs on the records were in a snowstorm, the poor kid peddling the papers at the ferry slip in order to get medicine for the father who is at home dying of Asiatic cholera or something. Now how did I get onto that? Well, a variety of these things converged.

JC: Where did you first hear of the Carter Family?

HS: I would think from that mimeographed list that the Library of Congress issued around 1937, *American Folksongs on Commercially Available Records*. Shortly after that, two Carter Family records, "Worried Man Blues" and "East Virginia Blues" were reissued on the album *Smokey Mountain Ballads*. That album would come to stores that wouldn't ordinarily have Carter Family records.

JC: In that album John and Alan Lomax made hillbilly music respectable enough to have it sold along with art music and symphonies.

HS: Sort of. There was no market for hillbilly records where I was living. I can't imagine there being a market for anything when I reconstitute their musical taste. But there were several groups of Southern country people like the Carter Family in the hills south of Seattle. I bought several dulcimers there. My mother found the best one in a Salvation Army. It had been made in those hills south of Seattle. Somebody wrote a doctoral thesis on those people. They were immigrants that came in 1890 from the Southern mountains. Later I had found Carter Family records in a store in Tacoma, Washington. There was no place in Seattle that sold them.

JC: You must have been interested enough in the Carter Family to go see Sara Carter.

HS: That was much later.

JC: How much later?

HS: As soon as I found out about the Carter Family, it was either from the records—I think John Lomax has something to do with it, somehow. Either from the mimeographed list, which may be 1937, or from the record, which I assume was issued about 1939 or '40. I remember I was somewhat disappointed in the music in it, because it sounded mechanical and watered down from the real thing.

JC: Where did you hear the real thing?

HS: Well, on records, you see. I located a few good records. Paramount had a very good hillbilly series. I think it was a 3000 series. As soon as I discovered how to look for records—which was to find a store that had gone bankrupt—I found places like that in Port Townsend where the Brunswick records were. The Victor ones were in a place north of San Francisco. But there were boxes, unbroken boxes that the records had been shipped in, of just about everything.

JC: This would be records from the late '20s early '30s and you were buying them unopened in the '40s?

HS: Yeah, sure. The hillbilly stuff naturally was not touched. There were thousands of records. After all there were masses of other stuff. Green-label Mexican records. Ones made in Trinidad and Barbados. It must have been a complete supplying place. Probably a hundred thousand records—I don't know how many. I rapidly amassed many thousands of records. It became like a problem.

JC: Was it an obsession, or a hobby, or an investigation?

HS: It was an obsessive, investigative hobby or something.

JC: How were you paying for it?

HS: I can't remember how I paid for those first ones, because I went back to Seattle and left the Paramount records there. Naturally, it got to the point that I had to weed the worst things out. I met Griff Borgeson, the one who later found Sara Carter. He and his wife went in out of a thunderstorm to an auto court in the Gold Rush mountain country of California. We had become interested in the Carter Family by then, and Griff just casually mentioned, "Oh yes, we've been seeing Sara Carter lately." For a while I couldn't believe it. I couldn't live until I found out where. They wanted me to guess where it was. So after I found out, I went up there and stayed a few days, a couple of times.

JC: When would that have been, and what would you do for a day with Sara Carter? What year would that have been?

HS: Would it have been 1945? She was making patchwork quilts, and I photographed them in color.

JC: Why?

HS: You have to realize that I'd been studying anthropology at the University of Washington, so I had an interest in that sort of thing. I didn't know what I was going to do with them. They were like very nice abstract designs. I tried to get her to name certain designs which she thought resembled certain songs. She didn't understand me or what I was trying to say. It was some kind of a Rorschach response like thing. She'd say, "Well that one is called 'Field of Diamonds,' I guess that's like 'Diamonds in the Rough.'" That was about as close as she came. I always took 5 x 7 pictures. We discussed songs.

JC: What was your intended use for these correlations between song titles and quilt designs?

HS: Oh, that would be some kind of compulsive activity. I don't know what the source of it would be. If you interpret things by some kind of neo-Freudian interpretation, it can be said to be a compulsive act, like a development out of making mud pies. They're a development of something worse, or better, whatever it is. I don't believe I liked the Carter Family singing too well until later. For some reason I didn't take any records. I thought it would be ostentatious. She was upset that I hadn't brought records. She only had one record of hers, which was a worn-out white-label Bluebird. Of their recordings, I liked the first session they made the best. The room tone is more natural. Like, "John Hardy" and "Single Girl." She gave me a bunch of pictures of different things, like posing in Dr. Brinkley's garden with huge plaster fountains or with different groups that she had played with. They seem to have recorded every single song they made for Dr. Brinkley's ads. They had a program that advertised his, whatever it was—monkey gland emporium. It had several stations, XERA and XERB. I don't know whether collectors have located them or not.

JC: I'm interested in why you would inflict this kind of test on Sara Carter.

HS: It was like a way of investigating something. It was just what I might have been doing with the Indians at the same time. Before I got interested in record collecting, I got interested in the Indians. When I was in the fourth or fifth grade, somebody in class said they'd been to an Indian reservation. This was in Anacortes, Washington, on an island. It was only settled during the 1890s. My grandparents were there when there were hardly any white people—if you want to classify people according to color. So, in school they said they saw someone doing a dance, swinging a skull around. They gave their report on this in class. So I thought I had to go to that, and it was really impressive. It was a very good time to see Indian dances. And I made a lot of recordings there, which unfortunately

disappeared with everything else I had. But they may be somewhere. By the time I was in high school, being as the school bus went to take people back to the Indian reservation, I would usually ride out there after school every day. So that was a continuous project over a long period of time.

JC: You were studying their visual patterns as well?

HS: Everything I could think of. I took photographs and made recordings, collected string figures—anything I'd seen in the standard anthropology books about what was liable to be the culture elements in that area. It was something to do. I presume it was because I was leading an isolated life. I mean, we were considered some kind of a "low" family, despite my mother's feeling that she was the Czarina of Russia. We were living down by the railroad tracks, and I only realized a month ago that probably the rest of the people in town looked down on us. There were other odd types who lived along this railroad line. My parents came from good families. My great-grandfather was the [Lieutenant] Governor of Illinois. My mother came from a long line of school teachers in Alaska.

JC: Someone once told me that you were thinking for a while that your father might have been some English mystic who was traveling through.

HS: That was Aleister Crowley, and as a matter of fact, my mother did know Crowley at about that time. She saw him running naked down the beach, perhaps in 1913 or 1915. I wish I had gone more into the chronology of my antecedents.

JC: But he's not your father.

HS: I don't know.

JC: Oh, you mean there's a possibility?

HS: Sure. I suppose there's a possibility that President Coolidge was. Because of my father's and grandfather's interest in mysticism, the basement was full of books on whether Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays, alchemy, and so forth. I had a whole blacksmith shop. I spent a lot of time trying to transmute lead into gold. My father was in the salmon fishing business, and during the war

they fished the Fraser and Columbia rivers dry, so the canneries closed, and that was my playground as a child.

JC: Was it your interest in the color patterns of the Indians which you transferred to Sara Carter?

HS: Well, I made films at that point, the earliest abstract color films, which preceded meeting Sara Carter.

JC: Had you seen abstract color films before? Why do you think you made them?

HS: I didn't have a camera and I wanted to make a movie, so somebody said why not draw on the film. It seemed like a good idea. I believe it was trying to find out about those designs. I wanted to find out if there was any correspondence between certain color patterns and certain sounds. It's a natural obsession not only with me, but with Sir Isaac Newton or Ostwald. They all try that business. It turns out to be a complete fantasy. There is no one-for-one correspondence between color and sound. I was looking for rhythmic designs to put into the films, which at that point were based on the heartbeat—the speed of the heart, which is about seventy-two beats per minute, and the respiration, which is about thirteen. Then when I saw patchwork quilts, they looked like hand-drawn films, and I wondered if they could be transferred. There are a lot of reasons why I did that. It was partly because we were in the Mother Lode country. There wasn't much to do to occupy the day.

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HS: I don't recall the exact number of records I had. I think it was 2,000 records, which had been cut down from 20,000, at one point. They were so piled around that it was impossible. There was no way of listening to them, but you didn't want to skip anything that might be good.

JC: What was the condition of your housing in California? Was it then as it is now? Working with movies, Indian art, and anthropology all at the same time?

HS: It's all the same thing. I gave a few lectures on jazz at the University of California, but I never went to school there. I intended to go to school there. There were two apartments upstairs in the building. My door was 5 1/2 Panoramic Way. I was living in Berkeley. I went to Berkeley the day after the war ended. I had been working at Boeing aircraft company. Everybody suddenly lost their jobs.

JC: What were you doing with Boeing? Factory work?

HS: Mechanic. A spy actually, but I posed as a mechanic. I was trying to work my way through the University of Washington, but it was impossible. I couldn't work all night and go to school all day. Eventually somebody said, "You want to go to Berkeley?" I did the work in the yard, like mow the lawn. It looked worse after I was through with it. Then I ruined the room making movies in there. I got ink and paint on everything. I was trying to record jazz bands there. Someone sat on the wash basin and ripped it off the wall and caused a flood. Upstairs lived Doctor Bronson, who had some good records. He tried to be nice to me. I didn't realize he was a great thing at that point. He tried to play the violin to illustrate some obscure point, and I was sort of eeegh—I didn't know what to think. But he did have these few records—like Buell Kazee. I waited until he was out of town lecturing, and traded his wife some other records for them. He really hit the ceiling when he got back. But I did give him some good stuff. He eventually liked it. See, I had two copies of B. F. Shelton's "Pretty Polly." It was scarce, and he sings better than Buell Kazee, so I thought, "Why doesn't he take it?" Now I'm sorry I didn't find out more about Bronson's theories of whatever it is. Something like glottal-chronology, only applied to music.

JC: Somewhere along the line you were a painter. Did you study art?

HS: With the local artist in Anacortes, Washington, where I was raised for a long time, from the time I was in the third grade till my last year in high school. I didn't even leave the town. My constant desire was to get to Seattle, which is about a hundred miles away.

My parents would only go twenty m.p.h. for fear of being killed. The nearest we could get, occasionally, was Bellingham.

JC: Let's see if we can return to the *Anthology*. The story that I thought about was that you walked into Folkways and asked for Moe Asch and said to him, "I know more about folk music than you do."

HS: I easily could have said that. I was a snotty little thing, you know. Well, it was apparent that I did. Asch knows a lot about world folk music at this point. I'm not really interested in things on that level anymore.

JC: Were you interested in folk music as such, or folk music as part of something else?

HS: As part of something else, but I wouldn't know what, though. It has something to do with the desire to communicate in some way, the collection of objects. Now I like to have something around that has a lot of information in it, and since then, it seems to me that books are an especially bad way of recording information. They are really an outmoded thing. Books aren't very old anyhow—Gutenberg wasn't that long ago. Now everybody is tossing paper in such masses that it's all over the street. So I've been interested in other things that gave a heightened experience in relation to the environment. Some people are nature lovers, some become export bankers; however, I presume that all these are methods to communicate according to the cultural background that they have. So I'm interested in getting series of objects of different sorts. It's a convenient way of finding information, for whatever use. It does seem apparent, since I started collecting records, that there are definite correlations between different artistic expressions in one particular social situation, like a consistency in small lines in aboriginal Australian art. And the music is the same thing, short words. It may be connected with language. My recent interest has been much more in linguistics than it has been in music, because it's something that can be satisfactorily transcribed, whereas I haven't seen satisfactory transcriptions of music.

JC: The means of measuring folk music are inadequate?

HS: There is no interest in it. The needs of folk music are met by nothing more than reprints of earlier books on the subject. Occasionally there is a good book with good transcriptions from American Indians or Africa. It depends on the cultural contact, the reason for doing the thing. By the time that phonemics had been developed to the point that it would have been possible to transcribe folk songs, there was no money-making reason to do it, for after all, the purpose of making books on folk songs is to make money. Everybody has to eat. We're all trapped in a social system where you have to do something to provide food and shelter. I thought for a while that drinking got me out of food and shelter, but it's a way of living that is pushed underground. Thousands and thousands of derelicts.

JC: I've heard people accuse you of living off others—trying to disregard that whole concept of doing things that would earn your living. You've bothered me, my friends, and others in the sense that you don't accept the fact that you have to earn money to be a fruitful part of society. Now that's a hard thing for me to say.

HS: Certainly, I said it just before you did. Naturally, that situation exists. There are certain ways you can evade that responsibility, but it's like, the wages of sin is death. I try not to do that. I've reformed, but the strain on the poor fevered brain of adjusting to capitalism after years of being a sort of Robin Hood type.

JC: I'm trying to translate your analogy now in terms of your own work. Of what value is your work to society, Harry?

HS: It's provided tunes that people made things off of. Now at this point, there is a whole school of filmmakers that imitate some of my double-exposure films. They phone me constantly to say they're making a film like that. They want to thank me. That type of film is a good idea—so you don't care what happens really, you just shoot anything on top of anything—that solves problems. I haven't wanted to do anything that would be injurious. It's very difficult working out a personal philosophy in relation to the environment. Consistently I have tried different methods to give out the maximum. Some Czechoslovakians who visited recently looked on my films as outstanding, while nobody here thinks very much of them.

Or what's his name, Godard, asked especially for me when he visited town, et cetera, et cetera. So one of the things I've done is films, and I believe I added pleasure to people's lives through that. When I was interested in music, the simple fact of collecting new copies of a lot of records that will be important in the future is as valuable as anything. After I assembled the *Anthology* and sold the remaining records to the Public Library in 1951, that was the end of that project. Then I devoted a great deal of time to painting, but through mischance I destroyed all of my paintings, and I abandoned my films somewhere in a theater because I didn't want to see them again. Somebody got ahold of them and made copies—and when I wanted better copies I got interested again. I try to bring people together.

JC: There were clues about yourself on the *Anthology*, which have eventually been deleted. For instance, today the album cover shows a Depression photo of a Southern farmer, whereas the cover of the original presented a list of the material printed over a background in subtle colors which was...

HS: It's Theodore DeBry drawing out of Robert Fludd books. The whole *Anthology* was a collage. I thought of it as an art object. It took a long time to do. Naturally it gets cut up. I don't think that the *Anthology* has much effect anymore, frankly. I'm glad that it was well received.

JC: A hand coming from the clouds tuning this dulcimer...

HS: Monochord—like something or other tuning the Celestial Monochord. It's forming earth, air, fire, and water and the different astrological signs.

JC: You picked these out as the background for the *Anthology*?

HS: There were to be four of them, and four volumes to the first series. Red, Blue, and Green were issued, so that the element that was left out was earth. The type of thinking that I applied to records, I still apply to other things, like Seminole patchwork or to Ukrainian Easter eggs. The whole purpose is to have some kind of a series of things. Information as drawing and graphic designs can be located more quickly than it can be in books. The fact that I have all the

Seminole designs permits anything that falls into the canon of that technological procedure to be found there. It's like flipping quickly through. It's a way of programming the mind, like a punch card of a sort. Being as it goes in through the vision, it is more immediately assimilated than if you have to listen to a two-minute record. Besides, you can pretty much find the records a person would like on radio. There is a sort of correspondence between what is popular and what is immediately satisfying.

JC: The Beatles were playing on your radio when I walked in.

HS: I'm tired of all of them. By the time "Hey Jude" has been played so many times, it makes one nauseous. It sounded alright for the first five times, but when it got into the hundreds.... There was some Simon and Garfunkel record, *Bookends*. It makes you ill when you hear it so many times. It sounded alright yesterday because I hadn't heard it in months. I feel it's ghastly. You don't want my opinion on The Beatles? Their future?

JC: Yes. Tell me their future? We know their past.

HS: We'll look in the crystal ball. I should think that it will be pretty good. If they can stand up under the strain.

JC: On one hand, listening to you talk about series of things, understanding the phenomena, it would lead one to think that you're a very scientific person. But to another degree you're not.

HS: I don't think so. Intuition is employed in determining, in what category, information can be got out of. I intuitively decided I wanted to collect records. After that had been determined, what was then decided to be good or bad was based on a comparison of that record to other records. Or the perfection of the performance. To a great degree, it seems like a conditioned reflex. What is considered good? Practically anything can be good. Consciousness can only take in so much. You can only think of something as *so* good. When you get up among, say, top musicians or top painters—which one is the best? Either things are enjoyable or they are unenjoyable. I determined what the norms were. You can tell if you hear a few fiddle records, when one is the most removed [exceptional] violin playing of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. If that seemed to be

consistent within itself, that would be the good record; if it was a good performance of what it was. Now, it was merely my interest in looking for exotic music. The things that were the most exotic—whether it happened to be the words or melodies or the timbre of the instruments—that really was what selected those things. Before the *Anthology* there had been a tendency in which records were lumped into blues catalogs or hillbilly catalogs. That was one thing the *Anthology* was for...and everybody was having blindfold tests to prove they could tell which was which. That's why there's no such indications of that sort [color/racial] in the albums. I wanted to see how well certain jazz critics did on the blindfold test. They all did horribly. It took years before anybody discovered that Mississippi John Hurt wasn't a hillbilly.

JC: To my mind, the *Anthology* anticipated the popular rock and roll music which followed. Many rock musicians are returning to those sounds. To me, today's music seems like an extension of the music on the *Anthology*.

HS: That's what I was trying to do, because I thought that is what this type of folk music would lead to. I felt social changes would result from it. I'd been reading from Plato's *Republic*. He's jabbering on about music, how you have to be careful about changing the music because it might upset or destroy the government. Everybody gets out of step. You are not to arbitrarily change it, because you may undermine the Empire State Building without knowing it. Of course, I thought it would do that. I thought it would develop into something more spectacular than it did, though. I had the feeling that the essence that was heard in those types of music, would become something that was really large and fantastic. In a sense, it did in rock and roll. I imagine it having some kind of a social force for good. I used to think about this a lot while I listened to the jukebox in Oakland, California—exactly what was going to lead into something else. You could certainly predict the outcome of musical ideas. It is very hard to say why those things happened, because the sources I derived my material from had been already analyzed by the Library of Congress checklists and a few other books that I'd found.

JC: You once told me of your many new plans for Volume Four of the *Anthology*.

HS: The real reason that it didn't come out was that I didn't have sufficient interest in it. I wanted to make more of a content analysis. I made phonetic transcriptions of all the words in the songs, but those notebooks got lost. The content analysis was like how many times the word *railroad* was used during the Depression and how many times during the war. The proportions of different words that might have some significant meaning beyond their exterior, certain ideas becoming popular. The word *food* was used increasingly in the record catalogs during the Depression. I finally analyzed the catalogs rather than the records, because you can't do anything with such a small sample as there are in that set.

JC: To me the *Anthology* was more of a statement of interrelationships than a sampling.

HS: Well, the problems that were involved in those interrelationships have been solved since then, so there is no particular reason to bring those records out. They aren't as relevant—there isn't as great a possibility of them doing good, as certain other things might. Like I have all these recordings of the peyote ritual, Kiowa Indian music that I recorded in Oklahoma. Its release has been held up for years, because I haven't completed the cover. Mr. Asch has spoken about bringing out that final album. It requires a totally different type of notes.

JC: Lots of it has already been reissued. The germs planted in the original *Anthology* have been taken over by one small company which specializes in reissuing hillbilly records or another which specializes in early folk music.

HS: Well, because it went with the others and was planned at the same time that the others were, they were picked out to be in a certain order. The thing that would be the most interesting at this point would be a historical statement as to why it was issued so late. I think it would still have some value as a thing to listen to.

JC: Besides the films, your recent projects and recordings have all been with American Indians.

HS: Consistently. When I was in Oklahoma I realized that it was possible to perform some kind of saturated study of something. It just happened that it was with recordings, although I went there to make films. It just happened that the people were much more musical than the situations were photogenic. The Seminole project grew out of that, but I didn't record their music. Then the egg business grew out of the Seminole stuff. These are technological processes of some sort. The problems that I'd set myself on have to do with correlating music into some kind of a visual thing, into some kind of a diagram. It was much simpler to skip the music entirely and study diagrams that had already been made. Being as my essential interest in music was the patterning that occurred in it—intuition or taste only being a guide to directions where this patterning might occur—it was just as well to collect some other object. I'm sure that if you could collect sufficient patchwork quilts from the same people who made the records, like Uncle Dave Macon or Sara Carter's houses, you could figure out just about anything you can from the music. Everything could be figured out regarding their judgment in relation to certain intellectual processes. Like certain things sound good to a person in music, certain things look good to the eye. And at some level those two things are interconnected. One thing is to try and compress data, whatever it happens to be, into a small area and study that thing, for the same reason an archaeologist studies pot shards, because you can sit down in trenches and determine stylistic trends. At the end of gathering all this data, whether it's music or whatever, it has to be correlated with other fields of knowledge.

JC: Looking at the various projects you've been working on, with their visually bright-colored patterns, I see a progression of geometric designs, from bold patchwork quilts to Seminole designs with small patterns, and even more intensely so in the Ukrainian eggs. My mind makes an associative jump to what has become psychedelic posters.

HS: I've drawn things like that, but so have others.

JC: In some ways your drawings remind me of drawings done by young men and women on drugs. They were from Paris, shortly after the war. They had the same attention to details.

HS: Oh, those were like psychedelic paintings. Those people had taken mescaline or something. Precision art—I suppose it's like amphetamine art. Basically, it's like staring at little tiny things. You can make millions of circles. I don't particularly like that effect because it takes too much time to get something meaningful. You probably think I'm precise, but it tricks the eye.

JC: I remember in a printed catalog accompanying an evening of your films, it mentioned different drugs that were involved in the production of each film.

HS: At different points of my life I've taken some kind of drug or other. Naturally, I've taken them many, many years ago. The first one of those that became available was peyote. I first took it on the road just outside Sara Carter's auto court. I wasn't sure if the top of my head wasn't going to fly off. Someone had bought the proper type of cactus in the floral department of a department store in San Francisco, so we ate it. Anything that changes the consciousness to a degree, I think, is useful. I presume it's a schizophrenic thing on my part, but it is helpful to be able to look at something that you have made as if you hadn't made it. By the time a person makes a drawing or anything, so much time has been devoted to it that you're conscious of what's involved in it. Probably any drugs are helpful, even alcohol.

JC: Peyote gets one involved with the colors. What about some of the other subtleties of the states of mind that are available?

HS: I've tried different drugs as they became available. The results have been well investigated and they fall into a few categories. Some, like peyote, cause visual hallucinations. LSD, which is similar in many ways, causes hallucinations of destruction.

JC: Did you ever work on a film under LSD?

HS: I made films after that, and naturally I used any information that had been gained. But if you were taking LSD, you'd probably get your fingers caught in the gears. That sort of drug is really to

gather data, possibly freeing the mind or for euphoric effects, or expanding it. Recently someone [Ed Sanders] said that what is needed is a consciousness-contracting drug. The mind is too expanded. I don't particularly like the effects of LSD. I wouldn't take any willfully. Psilocybin from mushrooms is interesting, because it's described in transcripts from the Aztecs a few hundred years ago. It would be interesting to see if it still produces the same effects. It would make you think, I would say. I don't like drugs that put me to sleep.

JC: I'm curious as to how many different ways there are of seeing things.

HS: Well, all those things tend to some sort of euphoric effect, but certain cases, like nitrous oxide, are notorious for giving people the feeling that they've solved the problems of the universe and boiled it down to one word. In fact, the person who invented it, Humphry Davy, thought it did that for years. It was only discovered much later that it was an anesthetic. The varieties of experience—I don't think any serious research has been done. Just teams of scientists converging on San Francisco. But most cultures seem to use some sort of a mood-changing thing. I don't think there are any new inventions along that line. You know, they were constantly baking LSD in France in the bread by mistake. Ergot gets in it and the whole town goes crazy. For thousands of years it's been inherent in the baking of bread that it gets ergot, and panic sweeps over the place. I saw an article where they tie up the fact that revolutionary movements or peasant revolts in Central Asia and Russia since 1400 have occurred during a shortage or famine.

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HS: It seems that all human types occur everywhere and the releases are about the same. There's usually something that acts as a hypnotic, like alcohol or opium. Other things produce visions. Actually, the two opposites are right in peyote: it's a strychnine and mescaline. I do think drugs are an important aspect of research into

whatever I'm doing research into. It's like a way of greasing the mental processes, to a degree. Now, some of these things are supposed to be bad for you. I should say, though, that most drugs taken over a period of a few hundred years in any culture probably aren't harmful. And that would include things of all categories, because things like kava from the Pacific, and pituri from Australia, datura in this country [Jimsonweed—a hypnotic formerly used by the California Indians] are all hallucinogens. Depending on the social atmosphere of a particular time, they're either considered good or bad.

JC: I've noticed that hypnotic dancing often occurs in association with a musical drone. This seems to be part of the trance that one sees in both White and Negro Holiness churches.

HS: Is that what the doctor is trying to cure me of, breaking into dance and speaking in tongues? I don't think it's particularly valuable to investigate that. The thing that's interesting in those places is the personality of the individual, because the major message that has to be brought across to people is that everybody is thinking the same, although the stuff that is passed down or inherited determines the things that are thought about. The thought processes are all the same. The study of local trance dances doesn't really fit the existing situation as far as music exists in different parts of the world. It's more important to let other people here know that Africans can produce good music than it is to study the history of these things. These problems are eminent to the survival of humanity. Soon they'll be fighting about who owns the moon. A selection has to be made—at least in the field of the humanities, which I assume things like art and music are in—of things that seem to be productive in a period when the population is seemingly expanding to the point where the food supply is difficult to shuttle around. A direction has to be given to types of studies. What was this in connection with?

JC: Do you think that an effect similar to drugs could be found in trance dancing throughout the world?

HS: I don't think there is such a connection. I think all of these cultures would use some sort of drug, the major types. The hallucinating types are more widespread than the hypnotic types. But because of the power of Europe, the hypnotic drugs, mainly alcohol, have been dragged all over. I don't know how it is determined that a person is advancing in a trance anyhow, for there aren't any stable criteria for that. It's socially acceptable in Holiness churches, but it's a very strict thing. I mean, if they start stripping off their clothes in their trance, they are going to be in possible trouble. I don't see that much connection between people in different parts of the world going into trances. It all depends on the upbringing of the anthropologist, how deeply imbued he is with the puritanical background of the societies that produce anthropologists, which are pretty limited. It's a very specialized thing to study trances. It's astounding that people can be supported to do that.

JC: Are you supported to do what you do?

HS: Pretty much. People keep giving me money. Foundations would, but they don't give enough. They are always dissatisfied with me for not doing enough. That with the amount of labor to get a few thousand dollars from a foundation, it's simpler to get it from somebody who will deduct it from their income tax.

JC: Izzy Young once explained to me how you'll go to him to borrow a dollar to get to where you can borrow ten dollars, to get to a train to Philadelphia to borrow a hundred thousand dollars.

HS: Yes, the chain usually breaks down with Izzy. He refuses the dollar, so the whole two hundred thousand is lost. That's typical. I'm supported well for what I want. I want a limited amount of things. It all depends on my mood.

JC: That fella who made that film *Chappaqua*. There was some connection?

HS: Rooks. The poet Philip Lamantia sent Mr. Rooks. I was instrumental in getting him interested in films. I don't want to say anything about *Chappaqua*.

JC: Robert Frank was brought in to *Chappaqua* on your recommendation.

HS: Sure.

JC: An involvement of yours which we haven't yet discussed is the string games.

HS: Every few years I get interested in string games, but I don't have all the apparatus for doing it.

JC: Don't you just need a piece of string?

HS: No, no. You need the instructions. I'm writing a book on the subject. Thousands of pages of it are written, but it has to have the references corrected, et cetera.

JC: What is it that you saw in the strings?

HS: Oh, it was some universal thing that seemed to be more widely distributed than anything else in places that didn't have so-called "civilization." It was the only thing that I could isolate off hand that was produced by all primitive societies and by no "cultured" societies. For example, string figures are found everywhere in the world except Europe and Asia, except for a few peripheral areas like the hills in the Philippines and Scotland. None of these places like France, Russia, Japan, China, Turkey have string figures, despite a great interest in games. It is a bit difficult to understand how the same thing is done in Patagonia as is done within the Arctic Circle or the Kalahari Desert without leaving some evidence in Europe and Asia. I've had various theories for that. Possibly it has to do with the parts of the brain that memorize letters (which usually seem to be around thirty or fifty—the things you have to learn to write a language), because string figures don't occur in a place where writing is done. It's a way of tying together a lot of diffuse areas. Unfortunately, there aren't that many good collections. There may be pictures printed, but you have to have the instructions as well.

JC: What do you see in a figure?

HS: It depends on where it's from. Some places make realistic figures. Like the Eskimos make complicated, realistic, asymmetrical figures, whereas most of Micronesia and the Australian figures would be geometrical and are consequently named after flowers and stars and things. The techniques developed in these pieces are

suitable for such geometric figures, while those of the Eskimos are for realistic animals, birds, and people.

JC: I remember that some of the Eskimo strings act out little dramas, like a house falling down and the man running away.

HS: That occurs everywhere. The reason that there is a lot of drama in the ones from the Eskimos is that it was a carefully made collection. Anywhere that a careful collection is made—which would take a number of years to do in any place—there would always be moving figures. The other oddity is that the string is always the same length, no matter where it is, and that only one person does the string figures. Something similar to the string figure, but not in any way connected, is the cat's cradle, which is done all over Europe and Asia. The cat's cradle is a game, while the string figures are essentially pictures of something. They do have many other uses in the cultures concerned. My interest in them was merely as something that a lot of people did who are usually lumped together as being primitive. The distribution of anything else isn't the same—the bow and arrow, pottery, basketry, or clothing—any kind of conceptions. As far as I know, the string figures are the only universal thing other than singing. But singing may exist universally for the same reason: that a lot of experiences are lumped together as songs which probably aren't. Like tonal languages, as in Yoruba, lots of things that were identified as songs turned out to be poetry that is at a certain pitch. Or a Seneca book I have here, which is spoken, but because it's transcribed from a tape recorder, it is possible to indicate what tone each word is sounded on. Because of this possibility of transcriptions from tape recordings it becomes very difficult to determine where speech ended and singing began. It is an artifact of the technical productions of people's vocal chords that classifies certain things as songs, and it may be the same way with string figures. They may have derived from many different sources.

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JC: Another large area of interest to you is occult and magic. You said your parents were involved.

HS: I'm not so interested in that any more. Those things were current during the 1890s. Different types of occult, like supposed secret knowledge handed down, seems to occur only at the end of every hundred years. There is an interest in those things now, but it isn't anything like it was in 1890, and it will probably be bad again until the year 2000. By then, I presume, people will become exhausted attempting to find happiness out of technological means. Then they move on to some other methods, like superstitious and metaphysical means. It's a kind of pendulum that swings. It basically has to do with the contact of large land masses between Europe and Asia, where there is an habitual interest in mechanics and such, probably even prehistorically. In Asia—at least looking from the European standpoint—there is more mystical interest. So it swings back and forth, and the people in between are crushed in the ensuing crusades, flower power riots, or something.

JC: Yes. How do you view what's going on in popular culture the past few years?

HS: I think it would be a good thing if it were to operate. It's the only salvation for society. You see, things still exist where individuals can produce enough food. The population situation hasn't got entirely out of kilter yet. It would seem that the world is going through a kind of disillusionment with machinery, which obviously doesn't work very well. I think that turning back towards individual food production is about necessary. You probably don't believe that, for it is counter to the idea of having a city of the future with rocket ships all over the place and everybody with their own helicopter and taking injections to teach them mathematics. I would prefer to see this technological thing knocked out, because all the things I'm interested in, like singing, poetry, painting, and stuff, can all be done just as well without this large number of can openers, egg beaters, Empire State Buildings, and things. I would like to see

smaller communities that are self-supporting spring up. There was a movement towards that in popular culture—like the Diggers. It seemed to be holding out some hope for the future: a generation growing up disillusioned with the possibility of the hernia cure being universally distributed. It may be healthier to live a life less concentrated—like this terrible problem of living in the city and having to get money to live in the city. I'm trying to found new sciences, to entirely overhaul anthropology and turn it into something else. I have to depend on psychopaths to pay for that kind of research. Unfortunately, the movements like the Diggers have been defeated. What is happening seems bad.

JC: Is it related to what happened in politics last summer? [1968]

HS: Partially. That brought the ideas home a little, although it was also disillusioning that so many apparently intelligent people could have any faith in politics. Yet there was some protest against the general notion of politics. I don't know whether Presidents are elected on the basis of popularity or whether social processes put them in, for the same cycles seem to be gone through for a long time. For a while it seemed to be due to increased communication, and especially getting off the earth seemed to make it possible to have some kind of a worldview. Just the mere fact that you can open *Life* magazine, which I wouldn't advise—though I'd rather look at *Life* than *Sing Out!*—and there's a picture of the Earth taken from the sky. It makes the Amazon and the Congo seem closer. It makes it simpler to think of something like string figures, or, what I'm now interested in—linguistics, mythology—to see those things as units, simply because the Earth literally became smaller. Positive values can be seen in more agrarian-type societies, or whether they are anarchies. Those self-supporting societies have a lot of advantages: diseases don't spread easily from one to the other, et cetera. But I would say that things are probably going to get more strict and anti-those ideas for a while now, until the whole thing blows up.

JC: Can you tell me something about that collection of decorated eggs which occupies a corner of your room?

HS: The eggs are very interesting. There are certain reasons that people make them, but which I don't know precisely.

JC: Do you think it's related to the Seminole patchwork quilts?

HS: No. It's naturally different because the designs are painted on something, whereas the quilts are cut and have other structural possibilities. Something about an egg leads to certain types of thought, evidently, and the same type of eggs have survived for very many years. By chance these thirty people who make them in America were displaced from the Hutzle Hills to camps in Poland, then sent to Germany, and a lot of them came to Canada and this country. These eggs were originally given only to a certain type of dance to help the husband determine which girl he wants to marry. I suppose the people who make them now lost their husbands. It's a psychopathic activity, where a great deal of effort is put into something that can't be sold for anything. Each egg is different—absolutely no two alike—though there are certain basic types. I've been working on the egg thing intently for three years now.

JC: Behind me I see a movie?

HS: I was making a movie of *Mahagonny*.

JC: What is *Mahagonny*?

HS: It is an opera by Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht. I had an hour already of it. You're in it. It's at the Jewish Museum next Tuesday. Also, it's going on a tour of Iran. It's playing in Tokyo.

JC: I see colored dyes over there.

HS: I paint. Well, I'm a painter. I've gone through about twenty thousand eggs and have kept notes on each one. A rotten egg is about the most transient medium. It is about the most difficult thing to paint on. The whole thing is liable to explode violently in your hand at any second. Some of the best ones are made by a lady and her daughter who make about four dozen a year, and it requires all of their time to do that. The eggs and the subject matter on them are connected with the shamanistic religion. I got one that had the rainbows woven into ladders separating the underworld from the upperworld. The number of these eggs that are made keep certain monsters chained up somewhere. This has nothing to do with their function here, which has changed.

JC: Do you find any of those superstitious qualities in the designs from the Seminole?

HS: There are a limited number of Seminoles, and a limited number of ways a piece of cloth can be ripped and put back together, if it is ripped by Seminole measuring methods. Also, the sewing method can only produce certain angles. This type of design—turned at an angle and made of stripes—only developed about 1942, and being that everybody who made this stuff was saving samples—in case they wanted to make the same one again—it was possible to do an archaeology by going through a barrel of stuff one lady had. Without too much effort, it was possible to collect all of the Seminole designs. It is different with the Easter eggs, because they are done in secret, and for sale. Originally they were done by farmers' wives—they probably still are—but now they're made to sell, so the price has gone up, the quality has gone down, and nobody is learning to make them. What I've been interested in are unconscious developments of cosmographic notions that appear on the eggs, so I haven't had to know the people who made them, though I do have a general idea of where they live. One man I did know wasn't very good. He tried to make some because he rented himself out to demonstrate Ukrainian folk art. His eggs were interesting mainly because he classified them. He told me things and gave certain ideas, but he died.

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JC: I'm curious as to why you feel that your recent peyote ceremony recordings from Oklahoma are more important today than the *Anthology of American Folk Music* albums.

HS: Because of the fact that the method of commenting on music has improved. Somehow, the performance of music has to be removed from phonographs and radios and such, because those require a technological development of a high order, and consequently cannot help but suppress somebody. It's better to have people singing, and get more people singing, than to have more radios, as far as music is concerned. Naturally, for information, you

have to get it over the radio or telephone. I wanted to clear that up, why the *Anthology* is outdated.

Generally speaking, philosophy has progressed farther. Everybody knows more regarding the evaluation of abstract ideas, so as much can be got out of listening to radio now as could formerly be got out of listening to records, because it's possible to appreciate things that are closer to you. Previously, the *Anthology* was appreciated as a curiosity. Now people can get involved with a great variety of music. The peyote record is important because it represents some kind of a comparable breakthrough, in that someone was willing to pay for such an elaborate exposition of a very obscure subject. I didn't go to Oklahoma to record the music. I went to make a movie, but got separated—I wanted to collect some kind of data, there was so much around. Most physical objects were too expensive or too large to handle, so it occurred to me to make records, because everyone was singing anyhow.

JC: This was when you were in jail in Anadarko?

HS: No, in the months succeeding that, although the first descriptions that I heard of the peyote ceremony or the signs of it were in the jail. There were many paintings on the jail walls, all over it, even Hopi drawings, certain scenes from the peyote ritual, pictures of the altar. The people in there described it to me. I met a social class that I wasn't familiar with. I never found out exactly the original reason for arresting me. The method of commenting on music is what is important on the peyote album. All the business of reference to books is outdated. I hope the project leads to some sort of understanding of cross-cultural phenomena or something.

JC: How about the whole new inclination of the hippie kids towards Indians and peyote, et cetera.

HS: I hope they buy the records.

JC: Why are they looking in that direction now? You've been doing it for years. Do you feel any connection there?

HS: I saw a picture of Dr. Boas taken in 1880 or '90. He looked exactly like a hippie. He had a pea-coat and a beard. He was twenty-four or twenty-five when he first visited the Kwakiutl. I thought

there might be a connection but there isn't. There always seems to be a recurrent romanticism regarding the Indians. It's due now to the shortage of Buddhist headdresses. I've only occasionally run into any hippies who had much to say about the Indians. For a while they were naming cars after Indians—Pontiac, et cetera—and then there were Indian songs—Buell Kazee singing "Little Mohee." I assume that most people who hold this interest will change, just as at any other time there's a great number of bohemian types interested in art. Fortunately, they don't continue on that form of life, or the government would not have survived as long as it has. I'm designing record covers for The Beatles' new record company. All my projects are only attempts to build up a series of objects that allow some sort of generalizations to be made regarding popularity of visual or auditory themes.

JC: In other words, you're just presenting the material from which someone else can draw their own conclusions?

HS: I hope to live long enough—if I survive this interview—to devote my declining years to writing about these things. I want to make sure of some points. It doesn't look like I'll make it, though. I'm leaving it to the future to figure out the exact purpose of having all these rotten eggs, the blankets, the Seminole patchwork I never look at, and records that I never listen to. However, it's as justifiable as anything that can be done, as any other type of research, and is probably more justifiable than more violent types, like fighting with somebody or becoming an export banker. It is a way of fooling away the time, harmlessly, as much as possible. It's like a nonviolent thing. If somebody comes in and wants to become violent, I warn them about the five thousand dollars worth of rotten eggs which are liable to explode. There's to be no violence around here.

JC: To me, your movies fall in the realm of art, while the records are concerned with things between popular and folk culture.

HS: Movies are a different thing. They're a technological thing, more than music is. Anybody who listens to music can buy a guitar for eight dollars and learn to play it and sing with the thing, at least sufficiently to please themselves and a few friends; whereas, to

make movies of the same subject is ridiculous, nobody would do it. So naturally my movies are made as a kind of final gesture towards film. They've just about run their course. There's no reason to have movies any more, life is much more horrible and adventurous and everything. Movies are sort of a sin. It's connected with graven images, looking at films or any type of art. My films are more or less educational. I've never done much with them as far as elucidating what the subject matter is, but they are like the basic rhythms that are in music. It's also a way of making money, more than Folkways Anthologies, which are a financial loss. I spend millions on these things, and though they never pay for themselves, the films do give a little money. I don't want to make those things to entertain other people unless it is fairly costly. Some of my films are the most expensive ever made. One that is on the floor is eight minutes long, and it cost over a million dollars. Of course, a lot of money was misappropriated by my partner.

JC: You have said that popular trends are immediately satisfying.

HS: Any kind of popular trend is infinitely more wholesome than listening to old records and trying to institute changes. It's more important that people know that some kind of pleasure can be derived from things that are around them, rather than to catalog more stuff. You can do that forever, and if people aren't going to have a reason to change, they're never going to change. Any kind of evidence can be presented. It's like a political move—that's important. These little things like studying history or ancient stones also have to go, along with the phonograph, radio, and television, if there is going to be any real development of music or human happiness, probably. It's a mistake that Herbert Hoover made—that notion that you can manufacture things forever and that there's always an endless market, because there isn't. It's a crucial point in history, the last chance where the population can have an agrarian base to it. They won't be able to do that in a hundred years. I don't think people should spend too much time fiddling with old records. It's better to switch on the radio. I don't think that you can say that folk culture was doing such and such, and that in popular culture

these things became disseminated, although I used to think that that was the case. I now believe that the dissemination of music affects the quality. As you increase the critical audience of any music, the level goes up.

JC: Doesn't it also go down, because it has to appeal to a more divergent range of people?

HS: I don't think they're that divergent. There isn't that much difference between one person and another.

JC: This represents a change in attitudes in yourself over the years since the *Anthology*.

HS: Certainly. I was just fiddling with those ideas then, but they were current at that time. Everything is computerized now. You wouldn't dare bring out such a thing as the *Anthology* now, for it first has to be analyzed for how many C-sharps there are, et cetera.

JC: Then how do you feel about art?

HS: That's such a specialized technique of the so-called West that I don't think it's very relevant. If people were sufficiently busy, they wouldn't have any time for it. Painting—it's a ridiculous thing. It's a bad habit, like too many laxatives. There are a lot of bad things in European civilization, and that's one of them. The idea of easel painting—I've been driven to it by adversity. I couldn't be a railroad section hand, so I took up easel painting. I'm pretty sure there have always been things like people dressing up in Indian clothes. It's a romanticism of a sort to be followed by something else when this dies down. I would say it hasn't much association with the Indians, other than that everybody is now more sympathetic to the Indians. After all, their grandparents were murdering millions of them. I suppose that children dressed up like Saracens during the Crusades, and when Genghis Khan was coming, they all dressed up in Genghis Khan suits. It's all the same—Marie Antoinette was sitting around in a stable built out of solid gold. It's the same as they do now. It's a way of evading the catastrophe that overtook the Indians, and an attempt to irritate parents, relieve guilt, and other things all at once. Probably that particular concatenation occurs in every society periodically, unless they get too smart and blow it up—no more

Indians or nothing. Already through the tobacco they have given everybody lung cancer. They're killing people off rapidly with that. A few more of these beads slung around heads—no way to tell what effect it's really having. And when my records come out—like, curtains!

JC: What do you mean—"like, curtains?"

HS: I'm just trying to be funny for the sake of the readers. I wish I'd stuck on the business about Engels pointing out the relation between machine and thought. The reason for looking at objects is to perfect the self. It's a kind of selfish thing.