

ALTERNATIVE PROJECTIONS

Experimental film in Los Angeles, 1945 - 1980

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUBJECT: Michael Fles (aka John Fles)

Biography:

John Fles was born in London in 1936. His father George Fles, a Dutch translator, died three years later in a Russian Prison despite his loyalty to the Communist Party. Fles arrived in Los Angeles in 1943 with his mother Pearl and enrolled at the Ojai Valley School in Ojai, CA. During his childhood he often attended plays and films including westerns at the Hitching Post in Santa Monica.

After completing his studies in Ojai he began to attend Hollywood High. Along with the sweetheart that would become his wife, Fles became part of a progressive, liberal social network and began attending film screenings at the Coronet Theatre and rhythm and blues concerts in East Los Angeles.

In 1956 he married and began studying philosophy at Los Angeles Community College. After finishing at LACC Fles attended the University of Chicago and became managing editor of the Chicago Review. As editor, Fles published the work of beat poets including Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs. In 1959 he began to live part-time in New York City's lower east side and attend programs by Jonas Mekas.

From 1959 until 1963 he traveled between New York and Los Angeles and worked at the Unicorn Book Shop on the Sunset Strip while touring a small experimental film series to local coffee shops. A network of local support developed with Wallace Berman designing the postcards, Lawrence Lipton lending the projector and Bob Alexander doing the printing.

In 1963 he met Mike Getz, the 24 year old manager of the Cinema Theater, and it was 'love at first sight.' The two men presented the inaugural screening of their new series Movies 'Round Midnight on Columbus Day 1963. The series invited viewers to 'Discover the New American Cinema' through experimental films by Stan Brakhage, Jack Smith and Gregory Markopoulos.

In conjunction with this film series Fles authored a curatorial manifesto entitled SEEING IS BELIEVING. Building upon D.W. Griffith's statement that 'The task I'm trying to achieve is above all to make you see' Fles described the potential for cinematic discovery and described himself as a film editor. Inspired by soviet montage, he believed in a curatorial strategy entitled 'dynamic programming' that juxtaposed strong film elements. Fles attended the Movies 'Round Midnight screenings each week and often greeted guests at the door as they filed into the large auditorium.

Fles left Movies 'Round Midnight in 1965 to pursue collaborative performance in light shows, a project that eventually brought him to Israel. He currently lives in Northern California.

LOS ANGELES FILMFORUM

PROJECT TITLE:.. ALTERNATIVE PROJECTIONS: ORAL HISTORIES

PRODUCER:.....STEPHANIE SAPIENZA

INTERVIEWER:ADAM HYMAN

**INTERVIEWEES:
MICHAEL FLES**

TAPES: TAPE 1 THROUGH TAPE 3 (3)

INTERVIEW DATE:..... JUNE 27, 2009

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- [TAPE1] 00:00:21** **MICHAEL FLES**
And it's okay, I worked something out but it's a little bit much for me because I live really in the country and I, I don't know, it's a big city for me. You know?
- [TAPE1] 00:00:29** **ADAM HYMAN**
And, uh, so how long, what brought you down to this island?
- [TAPE1] 00:00:34** **MICHAEL FLES**
I'm going to, I'm going to the Grand Canyon. I'm really going to go see an old friend of mine that just moved to Flagstaff and so I thought, oh, Flagstaff, it's right near Grand Canyon and I've never seen it. So and we have a mutual friend who I'm staying with and he's driving me. We're going in his car and he's a geographer and we're going to camp here and camp there, so.
- [TAPE1] 00:00:57** **ADAM HYMAN**
Oh, that's great to really see it.
- [TAPE1] 00:00:59** **MICHAEL FLES**
Yeah.
- [TAPE1] 00:01:00** **ADAM HYMAN**
Going to the north rim and so forth?
- [TAPE1] 00:01:01** **MICHAEL FLES**
Exactly. We're going to go to the south rim I think, yup. The south rim. Yup. So we'll have some adventures, that's for sure.
- [TAPE1] 00:01:13** **STEPHANIE SAPIENZA**
(TECHNICAL)
- [TAPE1] 00:02:43** **ADAM HYMAN**
Uh, yeah. For the transcriber, it's June 27th, 2009. And can you start just for the transcriber please say and spell your name?
- [TAPE1] 00:02:55** **MICHAEL FLES**
Michael Fles, M-i-c-h-a-e-l F-l-e-s.
- [TAPE1] 00:03:04** **ADAM HYMAN**
Excellent. That's the hardest question of the day.
- [TAPE1] 00:03:06** **MICHAEL FLES**
(LAUGH) Oh, good. I had to think for a minute about how to spell Michael. (LAUGH)
- [TAPE1] 00:03:12** **ADAM HYMAN**
That's pretty good. So again, we're going to come to the Los Angeles in a bit, but first I want to start with what got you there. So from the beginning, can you tell me about where and when you were born and what sort of family were your parents that you knew about and so forth?

[TAPE1] 00:03:28

MICHAEL FLES

I was born in London in 1936, and my mother and I were Jews caught in Amsterdam after the Germans came in but she worked for the American consulate. England was already at war with Germany but the Americans weren't and the Germans didn't want them to come in yet. So the American council said we'll take you out with us because the Germans were doing a sealed training out of Amsterdam into Switzerland. And we got to Switzerland and some journalist friends of my mothers sent her a telegram that said come and stay in our castle.

[TAPE1] 00:04:18

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

The reason was they weren't letting you into Portugal and it was the only place you could leave Europe at that time unless you had a place to stay. In those days, a telegram was a kind of a document and she, she did get across the border with that and when we got to the port, this is one of my earliest memories, all the people sitting on the pavement trying to get out. When we got there, the ship had already been pulled out by the tug boat.

[TAPE1] 00:04:51

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

These guys, these journalist guys, they were like the Marx Brothers. Now I don't remember, I was just a kid, three years old so I heard stuff. They looked around and they saw a speed boat with keys in it or they knew how to hot-wire it and the other memory was looking through and seeing the water under the boat as we, we got out to the boat that was still sitting there. We started yelling up (LAUGH) and the purser comes by and he says what's happening, you know?

[TAPE1] 00:05:19

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And we say, my mother says she wants to get on the boat. He says you've got to be kidding, there's 500 people that wanted to get on this boat. And at that moment, this woman walks by, and she looks down and she says Pearl, what are you doing there? And the purser says well, if your, if your friend will take you into her state room, you can go on and get on the boat. So they took us up this rope ladder, that was the last commercial vehicle, I mean commercial vessel to leave Europe.

[TAPE1] 00:05:56

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

So anyway, we came to the states and arrived in Los Angeles in [19]43 and yeah, that was how I got here. (LAUGH)

[TAPE1] 00:06:05

ADAM HYMAN

And tell me briefly as possible, tell me briefly about what happened to your father?

[TAPE1] 00:06:12

MICHAEL FLES

My father was arrested in the Soviet Union for counter revolutionary activity but basically it was a, Stalin had decided he didn't want any foreigners in the country because the Russians could talk to them and find out how bad their life really was. The story was he had some magazines sitting or that his father had sent him about Trotsky. And an actor friend borrowed one of those magazines and that was enough of a little thing so they could arrest him.

[TAPE1] 00:06:55

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

My cousin is a Dutch, was a Dutch newspaper, TV reporter in Moscow. About 15 years ago, he called me in Trinidad and asked me if he could investigate into my father's life and write a book about it and I said sure because I never knew what happened to him. We, we didn't know what happened to him. And so he went down into **Tbilisi** which is where I was conceived and got the archives and they only would let him copy it if he brought his own copier in.

[TAPE1] 00:07:36 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

He copied a lot of the interrogation of the KGB of my father who still couldn't understand what was going on. He said listen, I, I'm sympathetic to you guys. My mother and father have been married in Moscow and worked on the Moscow Daily News and he said, you know, I worked in customs and everything. They had already decided what they were going to do, you know. And he died of starvation in jail. You know, they don't feed you much in the jails, you know?

[TAPE1] 00:08:13 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

And so this book which is published in Holland was a, a mixture of my cousin's adventures in getting the material and these transcripts that he got. And the Dutch Secretary of Health and Human Resources, the government federal guy, he gave a talk the night the book came out called ideology and illusion about my father as a kind of archetypal left wing guy who believed in I don't know, utopia maybe is the right word and then the illusion was what was really going on.

[TAPE1] 00:09:00 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

So that's a little bit, you know, about my father.

[TAPE1] 00:09:04 **ADAM HYMAN**

What's the title of the book and the name of the author?

[TAPE1] 00:09:07 **MICHAEL FLES**

The name of the author is Thijs Berman and I think it's spelled T-h-a-i-s. and I can't remember the title because it's in Dutch [*Op zoek naar George Fles, het einde van een Hollandse revolutionair in de Sovjetunie*] but it does have the word Fles in the title. It was translated for me by a family member into English rough, roughly just so I could, you know, read it. But I don't remember the title. I think it's something like "*The Case of George Fles*" or something like this, you know.

[TAPE1] 00:09:42 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

So and he's in Wikipedia and there's a thing about my father in there and my grandfather. So.

[TAPE1] 00:09:52 **ADAM HYMAN**

So you never knew your father?

[TAPE1] 00:09:52 **MICHAEL FLES**

I never knew my father, yeah. My mother left Tbilisi to give birth to me in London because of, she didn't feel the Russian hospitals were very hygienic. So you know, and he was supposed to wait there, he was translator, he was a Polyglot. He was supposed to wait there, he said the revolution isn't happening here any more, it's happening in China. You go, have the baby and I'll wait here because we're halfway to China already. Bring the baby back and then we'll go on and that's when he got arrested.

[TAPE1] 00:10:29 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

So. But he was translating for, there's still the astronomical observatory there translating scientific papers into Russian for them and their work into English and French and he knew several languages so yeah. My, my grandfather was, had quite a bit of money, he went to Moscow and tried to, he said to the party people I'll be happy to contribute to the party if you let me take my son home. And they said we've never heard of him because that's the way they did in those days.

[TAPE1] 00:11:08 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

They just, you know, they just let it go, so.

[TAPE1] 00:11:12
(UNINTELLIGIBLE)

ADAM HYMAN

[TAPE1] 00:11:14

MICHAEL FLES

He was in jail though, he wasn't in Gulag, he was just in a regular prison, you know, like you would have your state prison. Yeah. His last, I don't know if these are exactly his last words, but he wrote to the guards. He said could you please give me a fresh pair of underpants? They hadn't given him any, I guess he had a place to wash them but that had been, already he was two years in jail, you know? So.

[TAPE1] 00:11:47

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

Any way, interesting story. I think about it a lot. (LAUGH)

[TAPE1] 00:11:50

ADAM HYMAN

Have your parents met there or elsewhere or then and moved to Russia?

[TAPE1] 00:11:58

MICHAEL FLES

Yeah, they met at rambler's clubs they had in Europe which was left wing youth that like to hike together. You ever seen Brecht's 's film "*Kuhle Wampe*?"

[TAPE1] 00:12:09

ADAM HYMAN

No.

[TAPE1] 00:12:11

MICHAEL FLES

Do you know what "*Kuhle Wampe*?" It's a park in Berlin. You see that film, it's a hippie scene all over again, you know? In fact, when Hitler screened that film, a friend of Brecht's called him up as they were leaving screening room. And he said pack your bags, don't wait for anything, get out of here. Because Hitler saw it and didn't like it a lot and so, you know. Any rate, they were in rambler's clubs and they met hiking, you know. There was a lot of that going on.

[TAPE1] 00:12:55

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

You know, people from the continent, people from England, you know, hiking.

[TAPE1] 00:12:57

ADAM HYMAN

So they had met in England?

[TAPE1] 00:13:00

MICHAEL FLES

I don't know where they met in Holland or in, in England. But quite likely my dad came over because he, you know, he's English speaker and so forth, yeah.

[TAPE1] 00:13:10

ADAM HYMAN

When did they move to Russia?

[TAPE1] 00:13:13

MICHAEL FLES

In the [19]30s I would say early [19]30s. I, the vague memory I have is maybe they got married around [19]32 or something like that. In those days, the, it was still a little bit revolutionary. You got married and it was experimental for a year. After a year, if you didn't want to do it, you just signed off and that was it. So and it wasn't, I don't think the marriage in Moscow was recognized in other countries in the world, yeah.

[TAPE1] 00:13:51

ADAM HYMAN

Describe your mother then for me.

[TAPE1] 00:13:54

MICHAEL FLES

She was working-class east side of London, didn't pass those crucial tests in those days that you took. Maybe David remembers, 11 or 15 or something like that. You either went to trade school or ready for university type thing. She didn't pass those but she educated herself through reading and the whole family was cultural. And my, my mother's family were charter founders of the British communist parties.

[TAPE1] 00:14:31

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

We used all of our clout we could to find out about my dad but those guys in Moscow, I mean the British communist guy was nothing to them, you know? Like but and then she came to the states, worked for Lockheed. She had this amazing moment where they were going to promote her. She was doing far Eastern sales. Promote her into military sales at a greater higher salary and she didn't want to do the war thing.

[TAPE1] 00:15:01

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

There weren't many people doing that in those days and for one year, she was out of work. Then she started at UCLA doing the cultural department. There were putting on the cultural programs, Royce Hall, all of that and then that guy moved to Cal Tech and my mother went with him and then she ran that whole program because he was such a hot shot, he traveled around and made agreements between different universities but she ran that Cal Tech program for years and, you know, they supported a lot of people like Stravinsky and Henry Miller and all these guys.

[TAPE1] 00:15:43

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And she, for somebody who was completely uneducated, she could hire plays and stuff. She could go into any theater in London for free and say well listen, maybe we'll have you in Pasadena, you know, like that kind of thing and, and we, we, the trajectory of our careers crossed at a certain point because she went to all these openings and stuff, films and other things in town and I was telling David I was doing a film criticism program on KPFK in those days.

[TAPE1] 00:16:22

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And doing other film stuff maybe. Any rate, so I was at the openings too and we would always say hi to one another. So she, you know, she, and then after she retired, she did a lot at KCET is it up here? The educational thing, she reorganized the whole thing and I don't know whatever. When she died, they had some special programs on for her, you know.

[TAPE1] 00:16:48

ADAM HYMAN

And what was her name please?

[TAPE1] 00:16:50

MICHAEL FLES

Pearl Fles or Pearl Rimmel was her maiden name. Yeah.

[TAPE1] 00:16:54

ADAM HYMAN (CONTINUED)

Um, and did you have siblings?

[TAPE1] 00:16:57

MICHAEL FLES

Huh-uh. Nope. Just me and her, that's what it was.

[TAPE1] 00:17:02

ADAM HYMAN

The River Twin brought her to Los Angeles?

[TAPE1] 00:17:08

MICHAEL FLES

To Los Angeles because she had contacts. IBM bought out my dad's, my grandfather's, he had a primitive, I don't know if you remember from the 50s, it was an early version of, they were cards that were punched out. He had a primitive version of this which IBM bought from him cheap because the Jews were all being smashed and they knew. But they were still gracious enough to meet us in New York when we arrived on that boat I told you about. And through those contacts, people helping her, she was working for Lockheed.

[TAPE1] 00:17:57

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And she worked on the east coast a bit and then the big scene was here on the west coast and so she came out and did that for 20 years she worked for Lockheed. So.

[TAPE1] 00:18:05

ADAM HYMAN

Was her cultural work then in addition to her work there?

[TAPE1] 00:18:08

MICHAEL FLES

No, no. That was afterwards.

[TAPE1] 00:18:09

ADAM HYMAN

Oh, so she started the cultural work at what years was that then?

[TAPE1] 00:18:15

MICHAEL FLES

She would have been maybe, I don't know, in her late 40s, 50s, you know. But what years, this I wouldn't know. You could maybe figure it out somehow or another. Not worth the time, but,

[TAPE1] 00:18:31

ADAM HYMAN

Were you already involved though or interested in these sort of cultural things prior to her getting involved and that sort of thing?

[TAPE1] 00:18:41

MICHAEL FLES

You know, I was telling one of your friends here about how I went to Ojai and then my vacations were different from the kids around here. My mother took me to plays almost every single week we were around, that was one of the things that we did and she knew a lot of people in theater and she also had connections with the expatriate artists here. Some of the hangers-on, you know, or even some of the regular people.

[TAPE1] 00:19:12

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And yeah. She just had a natural affinity for the arts. And yeah. Yeah, so that was, I'm sure that, really I have never thought of it that way but I'm sure seeing all those shows and stuff. I had, this is a kind of a funny story to tell, but there was a theater right in the middle of Hollywood called the Circle Theatre. It was kind of an experimental theater and we were seeing, what was it? Moliere's ...about the doctor. I forget the name of it but it's a parody about how the doctors were crooks and stuff like that.

[TAPE1] 00:19:59

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

We're sitting there and everybody is whispering Chaplin is coming, Chaplin is coming. They brought out some easy chairs and he was with Gladys Cooper. He sat right on the stage, that was the other only room there was and then the play begins and this doctor is running around and everybody is angry at him and hitting him with payments because he's messing up and then he comes and sits on my lap and I was maybe 15 years old a part of the, you know, modern theater thing, you know?

[TAPE1] 00:20:31 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

And I was like this and Chaplin looked over at me and winked and I, I think the wiuk said you're part of the show and I, later in life, I always took that as a, oh, you know, he's transmitting something to me, it's cool, you know? So any rate, that's, yeah. And we went to a lot of different things. I hung out a lot down at Sunset and Vine going to free radio shows. That's how I amused myself.

[TAPE1] 00:21:05 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

Contests and Dinah Shore. And there was no other kids around and my mother was working, you know? And she would also give me 50 cents, we lived right near Hollywood and Vine. We lived at Vista Del Mar. Give me 50 cents. For 50 cents, I could see two double features and then by then, she might be out of work, you know, out of, you know what I mean? Her work was over type thing.

[TAPE1] 00:21:36 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

So keep you amused during the day. I used to go to the Hitching Post at, just a little past Vine on Hollywood. All only western films and as you came in, the cashier's office said park your guns at the door. The reason was we'd go in with cap guns and when everyone was having the battles, we'd bring out our cap guns and start firing along with the hero or even the bad guy, you know? So yeah.

[TAPE1] 00:22:04 **ADAM HYMAN**

Do you remember be, so do you remember what schools you went to along the way when you were brought up in Los Angeles, public I'm saying?

[TAPE1] 00:22:18 **MICHAEL FLES**

Absolutely. Hollywood High. I was, and I feel really good about Hollywood High. I mean I liked it, it was a terrific school for me. I, I came down from Ojai. I was for sure a country hick. I mean I looked, Hollywood High, we had 1800 people there in my day. I don't know, maybe it's bigger or smaller but it was a lot of people on that campus and it was some of the movie stars kids and stuff still going there.

[TAPE1] 00:22:46 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

I don't know, Ricky Nelson you know from Ozzie and Harriet type thing. And any rate, I met a guy there who turned me on to black music down in east L.A. We used to go down there. We were both like had some ambitions to, to play jazz, you know? I, I was playing baritone sax and he was playing tenor sax so we started dressing like those guys, you know, black peggers and Mr. B collars, that's Billy Eckstine, you know.

[TAPE1] 00:23:21 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

And just a tremendous sense of freedom going to Hollywood. Oh, the other thing which gave me a tremendous sense of confidence. I bought a four-door Ford convertible, kind of like a touring car and somebody said to me when you get it repainted, get it repainted a light color because you'll have to put two coats on the color of the black, that was the original. And I found this Watusi guy who was like 7 feet tall who had a non union paint shop.

[TAPE1] 00:23:58 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

And he painted it canary yellow and I went on the street car that went right down Hollywood Boulevard and down Fountain, and I just looked out the window and there he was, this guy in my convertible for the first time I saw it canary yellow driving this car. So I had this great hot rod to take to Hollywood High. And I, it was for sure a status symbol, you know, for me, it made me feel good, you know? Yeah. That was where I went Hollywood High and Los Angeles City College also. And that's it.

[TAPE1] 00:24:31 **ADAM HYMAN**

Over on Vermont?

[TAPE1] 00:24:33

MICHAEL FLES

Yeah, yeah.

[TAPE1] 00:24:33

ADAM HYMAN

What sort of things did you, well let's back up a bit to Ojai briefly. So what years were you going to school at Ojai and what do you ...

[TAPE1] 00:24:39

MICHAEL FLES

1943 to 1950 for seven years I went there, boarding school, right? And it was a really great school. I mean it had all the latest whatever it is, the most far out thoughts about how to bring kids up. There was only 80 of us and it was the most expensive kind of school in California for that age group at the time. \$2,000 a year which was in those days was I don't know, like 20,000 or whatever, I don't know. But it was, you know, and my mother (LAUGH) just went in and asked for a scholarship. She said oh, I'm just a secretary but I've heard about this school.

[TAPE1] 00:25:21

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And they took about a quarter of the kids were scholarships. They made the wealthy kids pay for, you know, these other kids. And we went the first week in May, the whole school went by horseback to the fishing season for a whole week up in the mountains. We had a black cowboy that ran the stables there. The classes were just unbelievably small like 7 or 8 people in class like that, you know? And just a beautiful place and yeah. That's where I went.

[TAPE1] 00:26:00

ADAM HYMAN

Do you remember anything particular that you studied in Ojai or then at Hollywood High that you felt really formed your later interests?

[TAPE1] 00:26:10

MICHAEL FLES

The guy who, somebody, I guess one of the people here was it, the guy who I felt kind of discovered me in a way when I was about 9 years old was the drama director at Ojai Valley School who came really from Happy Valley, Krishnamurti's school. And he got it in his mind that I was an actor and he, I had a very good ability for memorizing lines. But he, he treated all of us kids like professional actors.

[TAPE1] 00:26:48

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

In fact, he ran a professional children's actor's group. But he had a vision of his, we did a lot of Shakespeare and things like that. More classic theater, you know? But he had a vision of how each play was and he knew just what you could do. Now this is going to sound bad but if you didn't come up to what he thought you could do, he'd whack you. Not too, he didn't mean it mean, he was just like okay, you know? Like I know you can take it up to this next level, you know?

[TAPE1] 00:27:23

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And it was the first time somebody, you know, really saw something in me that he was going to cultivate, you know? And he, he could have gotten me a scholarship to Happy Valley, the Krishnamurti school. By the time I got to ninth grade, I was interested in Marxism and I decided not, or maybe I didn't think of exactly these words. Not an elite school, I want to go down and be with the people. And even though I was just 14, in retrospect, I think it was a great decision.

[TAPE1] 00:28:00

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

I mean I, it was such a great mix of people at Hollywood High. I mean, it was a little bit overwhelming at first but it was, you know, I'm glad I went there.

[TAPE1] 00:28:13

ADAM HYMAN

(TECHNICAL)

[TAPE1] 00:29:54

ADAM HYMAN (CONTINUED)

What was the name of your drama teacher at Ojai?

[TAPE1] 00:30:02

MICHAEL FLES

His name was Ronald Bennett. And he later became a drama coach at MGM. Yup.

[TAPE1] 00:30:11

ADAM HYMAN

What was the name of the person or people that you remember that you hung out with when you were at Hollywood High?

[TAPE1] 00:30:17

MICHAEL FLES

His name is Michael Frimkiss. He's still around and he's a sculptor. Yeah. He really gave me an idea of freedom and his parents spent some of the, one of the first modern houses around Hollywood and Vine up in the hills near the Vedanta Society. And it was such a nice, open space, you know? And they were creative people and, you know, so he's still around. I always feel bad that I don't look him up but, you know, you have to follow your intuitions.

[TAPE1] 00:31:01

ADAM HYMAN

So were you just in what, did you just find yourself naturally going toward the art scene? Do you remember the way in which you discovered it or entered into it?

[TAPE1] 00:31:12

MICHAEL FLES

At Hollywood High, there was about six of us who considered ourselves bohemians. The way we dressed, we went to the Jean Cocteau movies, that was one thing that was really important. We all loved Gandhi and we, I say Hollywood High was great. I met my wife there but this is hard to imagine but she was one of the first people before Leslie Caron to cut her hair really short and that outraged some people or I don't know what. But they threw garbage at her and ... but we had a kind of a cohesiveness.

[TAPE1] 00:31:53

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

You know, we thought oh, those guys, they don't know anything. We know the secrets, you know? Like and any rate, that was my wife that I met there, she was a painter and we thought we were poets or whatever, you know. Like yeah.

[TAPE1] 00:32:17

ADAM HYMAN

So what certain places, what are the years in question here and then what sort of places did you hang out then? Where did you meet other bohemians?

[TAPE1] 00:32:27

MICHAEL FLES

At Hollywood High on the campus we would sit and meet together. The years I graduated from Hollywood High and I think 1955 and I did a little bit of extra time there but in those days, I don't know how it is now but it started in tenth grade, yeah, that's right, 10 grade. So maybe it was even ninth grade. No, no, any rate, I spent three years there at Hollywood High and I graduated in [19]55, yeah.

[TAPE1] 00:32:59

ADAM HYMAN

Let's start with the places in Los Angeles were you going to hang out?

[TAPE1] 00:33:03

MICHAEL FLES

That's a good question. I'm trying to, now it's hard to, there was a little bit of a scene as I remember vaguely on Sunset Boulevard down near Silver Lake. You know where the old Vista Theater used to be? Further down there, there was a few galleries and maybe coffee house type places. You know? But I was saying to David, we used to go to the Coronet Theater to see so called avant-garde films he was showing there.

[TAPE1] 00:33:46

ADAM HYMAN

I'm going to ask you more about that. Vista Theater is still there.

[TAPE1] 00:33:50

MICHAEL FLES

Vista Theater.

[TAPE1] 00:33:52

ADAM HYMAN

So the Coronet, what years do you remember going to the Coronet? Tell me about the scene and the people at Coronet.

[TAPE1] 00:33:57

MICHAEL FLES

That was let's say [19]56, maybe in there, [19]55. And I would say it was kind of the cream of the cream. The more far out Hollywood people went there. It, a lot of us went with a lot of sense of humor because some of the films he showed were just so out there, you couldn't believe it. I was telling him about he showed these actual documentary footage of Pavlov and his salivating dogs and there's even one scene in there where it's just the head of the dog that they somehow got hooked up to this and that.

[TAPE1] 00:34:48

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

It still salivates when the bell goes. But any rate, as we were lining up to go in to the Coronet and I was telling David, there was a lot of other stuff on the side, there was the Turnabout Theatre and that's another place my mother took me quite a bit and that was puppets at one end of the theater and then you do your seats, they were street car seats and you change and were facing the other way which was a live theater with real human beings and all of that. But,

[TAPE1] 00:35:19

ADAM HYMAN

Where was that?

[TAPE1] 00:35:20

MICHAEL FLES

In the Coronet. But not in the theater in the back but on the side as you come in.

[TAPE1] 00:35:25

ADAM HYMAN

So it was right next door?

[TAPE1] 00:35:27

MICHAEL FLES

There was little things that you came into it, you know? And, and that's where Wallace Berman met his wife for example and but the thing for me, the real (MAKES NOISE) was Gerald Heard, do you know who he is? Aldous Huxley's mentor and friend. He was a great story. He was a popular science radio guy for BBC. Came out here because he was the trustee of Roger Fry's estate. Do you know who Roger Fry is? A great English aesthetician, you know.

[TAPE1] 00:36:10

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

Philosophy of art. And he, that was down in Laguna. And Huxley came out around about the same time. They were really good buddies and had done things. And Gerald Heard gave these talks every other Sunday there and they were just riveting and again, to use that phrase, the cream of the Hollywood crowd,

you know, would come. He just, he was about 80 at that time and I, in a certain sense became his student, you know?

[TAPE1] 00:36:50 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

He, (LAUGH) He and Huxley, before anybody knew what was going on, they gave 250 graduates at UCLA, LSD. They didn't really know what they were doing, you know, but they were, I think they meant well. You know, fortunately nothing untoward happened but I mean that was in a classroom situation that they do did that or at least everybody stayed in the same place. I don't know too many of the details of it. But he was a great teacher, he's written many books and at any rate, so that was another one of the scenes going on there at the Coronet.

[TAPE1] 00:37:30 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

It was a bit of an art scene on La Cienega there also. The beginnings of the Ferris Theater and all of that. I mean gallery. Yeah.

[TAPE1] 00:37:41 **ADAM HYMAN**

Um, just a second. (TECHNICAL) so tell me who else was hanging out. Do you remember which people in particular in name did you see at the Coronet when you were at scenes there?

[TAPE1] 00:38:08 **MICHAEL FLES**

I don't know if you know who Ben Talbert is. He was one guy there. Do you know who he is? Ben Talbert, huh?

[TAPE1] 00:38:14 **ADAM HYMAN**

I know the name, but you could tell me a bit about him.

[TAPE1] 00:38:18 **MICHAEL FLES**

He was the Michelangelo of, I can't exactly know what to call it. Erotic art I guess you could call it. Big canvas. They weren't pornographic, they were just more like I remember one of his paintings something like a man and two women in bed and they're just all smiling, lying there. Like smiling at the camera type thing. He, yeah, he came to the talk I was telling David about that I gave at UCLA for Jack Hirshman called *the Utopia of the Orgasm*.

[TAPE1] 00:38:57 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

And when I was giving this talk which was based on Wilhelm Reich's work. I noticed the kids all kind of sliding down in their seats out of embarrassment. It was meant to be that kind of thing but Ben Talbot and Jack Hirshman out of that 250 kids, they were not embarrassed at all. They were the two guys I could see sitting up straight, you know? At any rate.

[TAPE1] 00:39:26 **ADAM HYMAN**

Who else do you remember? Anybody else you remember? Did you ever get to know Rohauer in any way? (UNINTELLIGIBLE)

[TAPE1] 00:39:30 **MICHAEL FLES**

No, no. I, you know, I would see him because he would often be at the door as you came in and stuff but I didn't know anything about him. I just know gossip about him.

[TAPE1] 00:39:40 **ADAM HYMAN**

Oh, could you describe him though what you knew of him? What you saw of him? What he seemed like?

[TAPE1] 00:39:46

MICHAEL FLES

Let's see. For sure he seemed European but I forget what country he was from, maybe Germany. People said he, he did stuff like making films of other people's stuff he didn't have permission to and, you know. You know, I think he was providing a service and he was trying to keep it going in the best way he could so to speak, you know? So those were the kinds of things. Yeah, that's about it.

[TAPE1] 00:40:25

ADAM HYMAN

How long did you remember the movie screenings of the Coronet lasting? How long did you attend or did they,

[TAPE1] 00:40:31

MICHAEL FLES

(OVERLAPPING) you mean like how many years and stuff like that? You know, I probably didn't come in at the beginning of it but I would say it lasted at least three years. Have you ever seen any of the brochures from that? They're quite, they unfolded and they were black and white and were quite strong. Yeah.

[TAPE1] 00:40:56

ADAM HYMAN

And what else, do you have any other recollections of any particular screenings of the Coronet that affected you in any way?

[TAPE1] 00:41:02

MICHAEL FLES

Films, the film screening? I think I did see Battleship Potempkin there and oh yeah I think, you know, I've seen so many films but I think I saw the "Trans-Siberian Railroad. You know that film that they made? What a fantastic film. It was shot in the Soviet Union and they were building that railroad that goes from Moscow all the way to the east of Russia and they made this great documentary film of the guys getting the rails ready and everything. It was, took a long time, you know?

[TAPE1] 00:41:47

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

I can't remember other stuff. Oh, oh, "The Cabinet of Dr Caligari see? That's the reason I came to do this thing with you is because I'm remembering stuff, you know? That's, yeah. Any rate, those were some of the few memories I have of that.

[TAPE1] 00:42:11

ADAM HYMAN

Do you remember anything else about the crowd? Who else attended and how many people might be at shows? Anything like that.

[TAPE1] 00:42:16

MICHAEL FLES

50 I would say. It was a pretty, is the theater still there? Oh, it is? What's happening there?

[TAPE1] 00:42:23

ADAM HYMAN

It's been taken over now as a music thing for an organization called Largo that used to be like night club music (UNINTELLIGIBLE) it used to be (UNINTELLIGIBLE)

[TAPE1] 00:42:34

MICHAEL FLES

Yeah. So about I would say about 50 people as I remember. I actually, later on, when I had the success of the Movies 'Round Midnight, I produced one of the Michael McClure's plays there in the Coronet. I think it was called "The Beard." No. What was it? It was "The Ghost Tantras," a very famous publicity that Wallace Berman did of that. Of Michael, do you know who Michael McClure is? Yeah. All done as a lion.

[TAPE1] 00:43:13 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

Beautifully made up, took hours to do. He didn't, he didn't read like that. "The Ghost Tantras," they're kind of sound meditations. But the point of the story was the cops were convinced it was going to be a pornographic something or other that they wanted to bust. And so when they came, they were coming on, coming on and I said look, I tell you what, why don't we all just sit in the back row and watch it, if it's pornographic, bust me and if it isn't, then we're cool, you know?

[TAPE1] 00:43:58 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

But the damn thing is so esoteric, five minutes, ten minutes these guys were just nodding their heads and they said oh, we'll see you later. Because it really has to, it's a Yogic breath thing that he's doing, you know? And like I don't know what it would mean to those guys. I think they thought he was going to do the whole thing naked because he's naked from the waist up with this picture, you know? So kind of like, yup. So I, yeah.

[TAPE1] 00:44:34 **ADAM HYMAN**

During the years of Rohauer was doing movies at the Coronet, was there live theater going on there as well? Tell me about the live theater.

[TAPE1] 00:44:44 **MICHAEL FLES**

Anybody, anybody could rent that theater and do things. Yes, there was live things going on there. Especially European stuff, little cabaret type stuff, Lottie Gosler was a Viennese mime or something. She shows there. Yeah, I don't know too much else about that time.

[TAPE1] 00:45:11 **ADAM HYMAN**

You didn't happen to attend Brecht's Galileo when it was there?

[TAPE1] 00:45:16 **MICHAEL FLES**

No. I didn't. Charles Laughton in it, yup, no, I didn't.

[TAPE1] 00:45:22 **ADAM HYMAN**

And can you describe for me just physically what it was like to attend in the evening at the Coronet? Where would you park, what was it like when you walked in, what would you see?

[TAPE1] 00:45:34 **MICHAEL FLES**

The parking was easy on La Cienega. There was no problem, you could park anywhere, I mean there weren't that many people going to it and then what I think a lot of us liked about it was it was, if I remember it correctly, it was a small theater so you kind of felt like you were all together. It was like a little bigger than a screening room. I don't know how many seats in there, you know, you remember what you remember but that was the feeling that I had.

[TAPE1] 00:46:01 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

You know, we were all kind of, you could wave down the aisle and see your friends and like that, you know. That's about all I remember of that.

[TAPE1] 00:46:11 **ADAM HYMAN**

Do you remember when in here along the way you discovered or when in your life you discovered experimental films and how that came about?

[TAPE1] 00:46:20 **MICHAEL FLES**

Sure. I was going to the University of Chicago and I was managing editor of the Chicago Review and I started, I talked my editor into publishing some of the very early beat generation stuff of San Francisco

poets and especially the San Francisco Zen issue. Which was quite early mixing people like Gary Snyder with the traditional guys and stuff like that. Anyway, Allen Ginsberg talked us into or gave us "Naked Lunch" and said you guys should publish, this you know?

[TAPE1] 00:47:17 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

And my editor Irving Rosenthal he saw what it was. He saw what a breakthrough it was. He was, he was and is, he's still alive, he was a great editor and we started moving toward publishing it and we think I even had it all set up. Basically, the first 60 pages of "Naked Lunch" which he edited and he got this stuff from Burroughs and, you know, put it together in a way that was cohesive.

[TAPE1] 00:47:49 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

And there was Edward Dahlberg a piece by Kerouac and to make a long story short, the university banned the magazine. Now I'm working on a book with a guy right now about that moment in history and we went, all of us on the magazine resigned from the university. And we took the main script to New York and were met there by about 35 people and we went to Chinatown and Carol Watt got drunk and started dancing on the table.

[TAPE1] 00:48:34 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

We had this big semi circular table. He sang "Chicago, Chicago, that wonderful town." Tap dancing he was doing, pretty good actually. All the Chinese waiters peering around the corner. And then they said to us because they were kind of our hosts. They said, we can't take you to where you're going to sleep yet, we're shooting a film tonight and then we'll take you. Is that good with you and we said sure. We were pretty tired but we went and we got to see them shooting "Pull My Daisy".

[TAPE1] 00:49:09 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

Not all of it, but those scenes they were shooting that night, I mean I remember the scenes and everything because I showed the films many times myself and um, any rate, I was in New York, I was on the scene as a poet, editor, blah, blah, blah and then, now this I don't remember exactly how it happened but I got attracted to Jonas Mekas' screenings and I started going to those and then at one point, he shifted them over to Avenue B Theater on the Lower East Side which was real near where I lived.

[TAPE1] 00:49:51 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

And that's how I first became. I don't know if I would call it exactly experimental theater but let's say underground theater, something like that. That's how I first got interested. I mean aside from Rohauer, that was, wasn't exactly the same kind of thing because he was showing, oh, he did show Maya Deren there at the Rohauer did. He showed a lot of her films which I think kind of biased me later in life but any rate, you know, so that's how I first got interested in films, seeing what Jonas Mekas was doing.

[TAPE1] 00:50:28 **ADAM HYMAN**

Strictly what years were you in Chicago and then when did you move to New York?

[TAPE1] 00:50:33 **MICHAEL FLES**

I was, I was about 57 when I was in, I mean for the last time in Chicago because I had left and gone back to L.A., I started a book shop on the strip, a Unicorn Book Shop. First all-paperback book shop in the city in those days. That was [19]57 and it was inspired by "City Lights" for sure and we had really great seminars and all kinds of discussions in the backyard of that coffee house. My book shop was upstairs so then he called me from Chicago, my editor and he says they're suppressing the magazine, come and help us, you know.

[TAPE1] 00:51:20 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

And I had already been doing that a year. I opened another one right off Hollywood Boulevard opposite Cosmo Alley. The guy I was working with was Herbie Cohen and he owned the Unicorn and he owned Cosmo Alley and I was actually at that time a chef at the Awarian and he came in and he said do you want to open a book shop? And I said yeah, but I got to make as much money as I'm making here. At that time I had a kid and maybe even a house.

[TAPE1] 00:51:58 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

And he said oh, no problem. I'm going to give you the whole business. He said you run it however you want. The way he looked at it, it brought people into the coffee shop. He said you go, I don't want to bother with it. He just gave me a bank account and (MAKES NOISE) go ahead man. Any rate, so that's, went to New York, got in touch with Jonas Mekas like that, yeah. Went to a lot of the films, got to meet some of the people.

[TAPE1] 00:52:26 **ADAM HYMAN**

So fill in a couple of those things here. Just first like a real brief chronology like when did you have the child and when did you open the book shop and was this after you left the University of Chicago?

[TAPE1] 00:52:39 **MICHAEL FLES**

This book shop was 1957, it was after, must have been after, yes. After I left the University of Chicago. That's right. And what was the other question? I, that was [19]57.

[TAPE1] 00:52:58 **ADAM HYMAN**

Tell me about when, when you were married and had a child.

[TAPE1] 00:53:03 **MICHAEL FLES**

Oh. Oh that, let's see. That would be [19]56 I guess. Yeah. [19]56, something like that [CORRECTION: Actual year was 1954]. Yeah. And yeah, like that. And that's when I had my oldest son, yeah.

[TAPE1] 00:53:20 **ADAM HYMAN**

And when you were you in New York and saw Pull My Daisy and so forth?

[TAPE1] 00:53:26 **MICHAEL FLES**

I arrived in the winter of 1959 and I had such a cheap apartment on the Lower East Side, I kept it for five or six years. I would come back here and go back and forth, yup, a bit. But mainly, I was there. I loved the Lower East Side. So many people doing so many things. I always used to say you'd leave your apartment in the morning to just go out and get some milk or something for breakfast and you'd see a friend on the street and they'd say oh, listen, come over and check this and this out at my house or, you know, whatever.

[TAPE1] 00:54:15 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

And then you'd meet somebody else and this, and this, and you hadn't even brushed your teeth, right? And then two or three months later having made it to maybe a couple of countries in between. You'd come back to your house and all the dust would be on everything and you'd say God, I can't believe I just walked out of my door, you know? And I mean, it was, I wouldn't say it was literally like that because to leave the country, you'd have to have a passport and everything.

[TAPE1] 00:54:40 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

But I, that was the impression, you know, this and that was happening and oh man I could wax eloquent about the New York scene in those days. I, I gave a talk at HSU supposedly about Andy Warhol because

that's what they were interested in studying but mainly about the art scene in those days and how you pushed yourself because everybody was doing so damn much. You know? Everybody was partying hard but then this book would come out or a big expedition.

[TAPE1] 00:55:21 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

I never could, well, it was the same for me, figure out where, how anybody would get any work done the social life we were all leading, you know? But I would come and I'd say in a certain way, I mean this is putting it comically. I'd say well, those, those guys, man, they're already doing this and this and this and I've got to push myself and stay awake and keep working on my poems or whatever it was, you know, that I was working on.

[TAPE1] 00:55:46 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

But any rate, I hope you can have enough time to talk about movies at midnight because I feel that's the,

[TAPE1] 00:55:53 **ADAM HYMAN**

It is. We're going to get there but I want to get a couple more things in here.

[TAPE1] 00:55:55 **MICHAEL FLES**

Sure, sure, fine.

[TAPE1] 00:55:59 **ADAM HYMAN (CONTINUED)**

I'm trying to get an understanding of, of sort of where else the L.A. experience came from. So over the years, you were working primarily in New York?

[TAPE1] 00:56:06 **MICHAEL FLES**

[19]59 On, yeah. [19]59 and on I would come back, you know, and visit my mother and things like that. And well, we opened Movies 'Round Midnight in [19]63 so, you know, and I didn't, I didn't go back after that. I always had these fantasies about one thing drew me back one time. I wanted to do a script of "Day of the Locust", you know? And I worked with a guy on that, you know Any rate, so those were the years.

[TAPE1] 00:56:43 **ADAM HYMAN**

So 59 to 63?

[TAPE1] 00:56:46 **MICHAEL FLES**

[19]59 to [19]63. It might have, I must have gotten out a little bit before we opened that because before I met Mike and we were at the Cinema Theater, I was going around to coffee houses with a 16mm projector in the back of my car building a mailing list. I got this golden mailing list. The reason we were successful, I had 2,000 people on that mailing list. So you put out a mailing like that in those days to that kind of targeted audience, you knew you were going to, you know, people were hungry for something, you know?

[TAPE1] 00:57:23 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

And so I wanted to say there was a guy called Larry Lipton down in Venice, he leant me that projector and I'm always grateful. He wrote that book "The Holy Barbarians". I was always grateful for him. He was like, kind of reminded me of H. L. Menkins, cigar and suspenders, but, you know, absolutely cool guy and always so supportive. And the other guy that really helped me a lot was Wallace Berman. Because I'd be showing Canadian Film Board films.

[TAPE1] 00:58:00 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

I would go to the consulates and get free films. I didn't, I didn't want to, I didn't have money to pay for films. Of course the Canadian Film Board, they had, who's the great animator from the Canadian film board? Oh damn, I can't remember. Huh?

[TAPE1] 00:58:17 **ADAM HYMAN**

Norman McLaren.

[TAPE1] 00:58:17 **MICHAEL FLES**

Exactly. And so they were great films for people to see, you know? And so it took some time doing that, going around to coffee houses. And this guy, Bob Alexander was my printer if you want to call it that. I sent out these beautiful postcards, Wallace Berman did some, he did some, announcing what coffee house it was going to be at and what the films were going to be but I'm sure they're collector items now, those postcards that he did.

[TAPE1] 00:58:49 **ADAM HYMAN**

Do you have any?

[TAPE1] 00:58:51 **MICHAEL FLES**

No.

[TAPE1] 00:58:52 **ADAM HYMAN**

Oh. (TECHNICAL)

[TAPE1] 00:58:54 **MICHAEL FLES**

Yeah. No. I don't have any (LAUGH) .

[TAPE1] 00:58:57 **ADAM HYMAN**

Now we're going to get to all of these L.A. shows.

TAPE NUMBER: TAPE 2

[BARS: [TAPE 2] 00:00:06]

[TAPE 2] 00:01:33

ADAM HYMAN

What was your relationship with Jonas Mekas?

[TAPE 2] 00:01:42

MICHAEL FLES

Oh, man, what a cool guy. He... (TECHNICAL)

[TAPE 2] 00:01:57

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

I don't know if you know Jonas or have you met him or anything like that. To me, he's kind of like a Zen guy. I mean, everything is cool. He trusted you and, you know, the world was the limit. And he was, I think what he and I had in common was we, David mentions it a bit in the book, we relished the revolution part of it. I mean, for me, the thing at the Cinema Theater was, for the first time, these guys could be seen in the real theater with a real screen, not these movie house things, you know?

[TAPE 2] 00:02:43

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

But Jonas, you know, when we, when I started doing things here with Movies 'Round Midnight, I mean, gosh, we just had such a great relationship. He sent me anything I wanted. He helped me. And I mean, it was just all good vibes all the way. And it's hard for me to think of more personal things about him, but we always seem to agree (LAUGH) on everything. I don't know, you know?

[TAPE 2] 00:03:14

ADAM HYMAN

In those years when you were in New York, (UNINTELLIGIBLE) talking about Jonas, what were the places that he was doing screenings and what do you remember about who did you meet at those screenings and so on?

[TAPE 2] 00:03:26

MICHAEL FLES

Oh, man. I can't, as I say, the place I remember the theater was the Avenue B, but that was late. He already had some, it was some unbelievably small place where he started. I think it was just called the Film-Makers Coop, but where it was I can't remember. But my first memory of those screenings is Andy Warhol and his entourage. You know, Andy would come in and they'd take up the first two rows. (LAUGH) And it would be like, you know, but a lot of the other people there were filmmakers. They weren't, I wouldn't say they were big audiences, the ones I saw, you know? So, yeah, I don't remember which, there were more on the west side of Manhattan, those theaters as I remember, yeah.

[TAPE 2] 00:04:38

ADAM HYMAN

Were the writers you were interacting with attending screenings of that sort, was there communication between those scenes?

[TAPE 2] 00:04:46

MICHAEL FLES

Absolutely. Absolutely. Everybody was going to everything. It was all one thing. And one of the real hot spots was The Living Theatre 'cause it was, they were really, they are revolutionaries in my mind. And aside from the place themselves, there was some formal element of what they were doing. They were just taking it out to the end somehow, you know, and, but, yes, everybody would go everywhere, so I guess more people, some people were more interested in some things than the others.

[TAPE 2] 00:05:21 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

But, and, of course, there was the Cedar Bar. That's where we all met, Franz Kline, De Kooning, and, you know, all of the different people. I mean, it was so great just, especially if you, if I had worked hard during the evening and then I just go there to relax and I'd always see my friends. We were talking about LeRoi Jones earlier. Oh, there's a picture of, one of the pictures in that photo book I was just mentioning is in the Cedar Bar, I think, with me and LeRoi and Irving, my editor from Chicago Review, and what became Big Table, that was the name of our magazine.

[TAPE 2] 00:06:04 ADAM HYMAN

Who would you say were your closest friends during your New York period?

[TAPE 2] 00:06:08 MICHAEL FLES

LeRoi was definitely one of them. I don't know if he would feel the same way. I was telling David, he mentions me in his autobiography in a literary way, 'cause I had this magazine came out one issue, "The Trembling Lamb." And I published the first third of LeRoi's novels, "System of Dante's Hell," which was about his buddies in New Jersey growing up. And yet, I wanted to be remembered as, I was his full-time babysitter for his little baby girl, eight hours a day, five days a week. His wife needed to work. He was working or doing whatever he did out there. I had decided, when I came to New York, I don't want to work. I don't want to deal with people, was my main thing.

[TAPE 2] 00:07:04 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

But I thought, well, a kid, you know, you change her, you feed her, you know, blah, blah, blah, like that. And I, so any rate, I, LeRoi was one of my good friends. A.B. Spellman, another black guy who lived with me for quite a while. I knew Ray Bremser pretty well. He's a guy who, I let him and his girlfriend stay in my place for a while and he took a candle and wrote in my ceiling, just above my bed, there is salvation just with the smoke from the candle. But Irving, I was close, too, there. Allen, I was pretty close to. I would go over there, Ginsberg .

[TAPE 2] 00:07:47 MICHAEL FLES

I was, I live pretty close to him, and he was a teacher of mine. I mean, he, you know, he was kind of a rabbi. He would tell me which poets to read and this to do and that to do. And this story that I'm working on with this guy, when, to raise money for Big Table, I drove Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky and Gregory Corso to Chicago for Allen's first public reading of Kaddish. And I tell you, (LAUGH) we, I was just the driver, really. That's what I offered to do. We're sitting there at this table facing about a thousand people. This is before a rock and roll, right?

[TAPE 2] 00:08:38 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

This was a big audience in the middle of winter, in the basement of a fancy hotel in Chicago sponsored by the Shaw Society. And because it was the first time Allen had read the poem, he was very emotional. But these guys, they built the whole evening. It started out, relaxed, and then they started getting more and more out there, and his was the climax. And as he read that poem, the whole audience started crying and he was crying. He felt very difficult to go on, you know? And, so that was like a moment for me. Both Peter and Gregory had certain psychological problems and they weren't used to a crowd like that.

[TAPE 2] 00:09:44 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And especially that, what they, the energy they gave us. And I could see by the end that both of them were in real trouble, you know, and unbelievably there was no, there was only one way out of that theater. There was no backstage. And I said to Allen, we're getting out of here. Gregory and Pete were kind of, I wouldn't say catatonic, but they were not responding to outside reality, you know. Listen, Allen, I'm gonna go in front. We're getting out of here single file. And I said, don't stop for anybody. And I went out

like a football player, sorry, sorry, and all the people were coming up wanting to touch him or saying something to him, you know?

[TAPE 2] 00:10:33 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

And then, we get out on the streets in the middle of winter in Chicago (LAUGH) and there's a cab with the door open. So I looked in and there's a guy in there and he said, oh, come in, come in. So we all get in and, of course, it's a reporter from *Time* magazine. So, listen, you know, Allen said, listen, man. I'm not talking about anything. But since you were so cool to get us a cab here when we needed to get out of here, call me tomorrow. But, anyway, so that was the scene in Chicago with Allen. And, yep, I can't think of other people that, I knew Andy Warhol quite a bit.

[TAPE 2] 00:11:26 **MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)**

I mean, I wouldn't say I was a friend of his but, let's say, more the poets, Gilbert Sorrentino. We all hang out at LeRoi's place. That was, LeRoi had a party, it was every Saturday and, you know, smoking this and that and whatever we were doing, you know? Yeah.

[TAPE 2] 00:11:52 **ADAM HYMAN**

Where you, was your family with you in New York? Did you, what was your family situation at that point?

[TAPE 2] 00:11:58 **MICHAEL FLES**

No. After three years, my wife and I separated and she stayed with the child and I left for New York. And, yeah, I had a house in Laurel Canyon in those days and I gave her the house and left, you know? That's just, yeah.

[TAPE 2] 00:12:31 **ADAM HYMAN**

Do you remember the address where you lived, where, your house in Laurel Canyon?

[TAPE 2] 00:12:37 **MICHAEL FLES**

I could find it. Wonderland, I think.

[TAPE 2] 00:12:41 **ADAM HYMAN**

Do you remember the address where you lived in New York City?

[TAPE 2] 00:12:43 **MICHAEL FLES**

626 East 9th Street.

[TAPE 2] 00:12:46 **ADAM HYMAN**

Is it, what was that?

[TAPE 2] 00:12:47 **MICHAEL FLES**

626 East 9th Street between B and C right off Tompkins Square.

[TAPE 2] 00:12:55 **ADAM HYMAN**

And when you returned to L.A. in '63, you remember where you lived there at the time?

[TAPE 2] 00:12:59 **MICHAEL FLES**

Yeah. Sure. Beverly Glen, mainly Beverly Glen. Yeah. Great place I had there, two places. And I actually brought a lot of film scripts up there in that place. They were mainstream stuff in...

[TAPE 2] 00:13:16

ADAM HYMAN

Is that how you earned a living when you returned to LA?

[TAPE 2] 00:13:18

MICHAEL FLES

No. (LAUGH) I wish. I had a dozen film scripts. We, well, I'm talking about the whole length of the thing. We sold one while I was here, supposedly sold one. And then, the other one, years later, BBC took a, an option on, and it's a whole story why it didn't happen, but out of all those, no, no, I didn't make a living out of it. I had an agent, a friend of my mother's and he got me rights to the Richard Wright's "The Man Who Lived Underground." I did a script of that. And, yeah, like I said, there were...

[TAPE 2] 00:14:02

ADAM HYMAN

How did you, well, you've mentioned a lot of interaction with African-American writers, poets and so on culture. What do you think brought you to such involvement or identification with that culture?

[TAPE 2] 00:14:19

MICHAEL FLES

You know, from Hollywood High, when we used to go to East L.A., the question came up about where did we see the jazz down there? Interesting. Those guys, it was rhythm and blues. Those guys, they rented the movie theaters at midnight when the films were over and that's where they would have their sessions. Often, Michael and I would be the only white guys in the audience and they really took good care of us. If anything happened, (MAKES NOISE) we were so damned young. I mean, we were 14 down there. And I just, I don't know exactly the right word, but I like the hipness of the Black people. They seem to get rid of the bullshit, so to speak, and do the thing itself, you know?

[TAPE 2] 00:15:10

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

You know, LeRoi was a very natty dresser and he was always kind of impeccable, you know, like Nick Charles in the, you know? And even like Fred Astaire. That kind of dapper, you know, guy. I like that. There's something about that that turned me on, you know. And of course, the jazz. I mean, I felt like uh, I had some really strong experiences. I went to a lot of clubs, black clubs, Michael and I did. And we...

[TAPE 2] 00:15:44

ADAM HYMAN

That's Michael...

[TAPE 2] 00:15:45

MICHAEL FLES

Frimkiss. The one I mentioned to you, my buddy from Hollywood High. Yeah.

[TAPE 2] 00:15:48

ADAM HYMAN

Do you remember what's the name of the clubs that you went to?

[TAPE 2] 00:15:53

MICHAEL FLES

Well, what a scene it was in those days. Vaguely remember. Maybe the Tiffany Club, Normandie and something below Olympic, maybe, I forget. And there were, (LAUGH) yeah, I can't remember any of the names of the clubs from the black musicians.

[TAPE 2] 00:16:18

ADAM HYMAN

Was that after Central Avenue scene had been, had gone into decline?

[TAPE 2] 00:16:24

MICHAEL FLES

After the...

[TAPE 2] 00:16:24

ADAM HYMAN

Central Avenue scene had gone into decline?

[TAPE 2] 00:16:27 **MICHAEL FLES**

I don't know what the Central Avenue scene was.

[TAPE 2] 00:16:29 **ADAM HYMAN**

Okay. (UNINTELLIGIBLE)

[TAPE 2] 00:16:29 **MICHAEL FLES**

Yeah.

[TAPE 2] 00:16:30 **ADAM HYMAN**

And in that period, so we're still talking in the mid '50s here as well. When did you attend LACC?

[TAPE 2] 00:16:42 **MICHAEL FLES**

(LAUGH) That must have been pretty soon after I got married. And so, it's got to be, I would say '56, right in there.

[TAPE 2] 00:16:59 **ADAM HYMAN**

Why did you study at LACC? Was there any continued investigation in arts and film and so forth as well?

[TAPE 2] 00:17:05 **MICHAEL FLES**

I was, I studied in philosophy. I got a scholarship to the University of Chicago because I was Outstanding Philosophy Student of the Year, some piece of paper that they signed said that. That's what I was studying in there. It was a great campus in those days. I mean, the teachers really were there. They wanted to teach rather than do research and they just were like, making contact with you, you know. It's a little bit of a scene there, art scene on campus. But, yeah. I brought Gerald Heard to LACC to my philosophy class. Really great. Yeah.

[TAPE 2] 00:17:45 **ADAM HYMAN**

Who else did you, who was, do you remember any teachers there and so forth?

[TAPE 2] 00:17:51 **MICHAEL FLES**

Not by name. No. No.

[TAPE 2] 00:17:56 **ADAM HYMAN**

Okay. It was still at, it was at Vermont and Melrose?

[TAPE 2] 00:17:57 **MICHAEL FLES**

Yeah.

[TAPE 2] 00:17:59 **ADAM HYMAN**

So, and then, so, when you were doing the, taking your projector around to various coffeehouses, what period was that? And then, what was, what were the coffeehouses? Do you remember their names, what was the coffeehouse circuit in Bel Air, how did that work?

[TAPE 2] 00:18:22 **MICHAEL FLES**

The Unicorn was the first coffeehouse. It was on the Sunset Strip right down from Whiskey A-Go-Go, maybe two doors down. And that was a tremendous success. And now, I may be a exaggerating but I think there was, let's say, at least a dozen coffeehouses opened up within the next six months. That...

[TAPE 2] 00:18:52 **ADAM HYMAN**

What year was that?

[TAPE 2] 00:18:53

MICHAEL FLES

[19]57. And, but, yeah. So that's, that was the coffeehouse. I can't remember. But they, for a moment, I was President of the Coffeehouse Association because the cops were bothering us a lot so we all got together, what's our strategy here, you know? And people came from as far away as Long Beach and, you know, it was because it was a meeting place for the kids with no alcohol and it was hip. It, there was some element of French Existentialism, like the Unicorn was all black. And it was like a, it was tremendous cultural, Charlie Haden would come there.

[TAPE 2] 00:19:49

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

We had Monday nights closed, so it was an open music jam session. Les McCann was there. Les, of course, played the piano, but he wore cowboy pistols with caps and he loved to (LAUGH) shoot people in the head with it. I mean, he couldn't get away with it nowadays, but, Lenore Kandel was a waitress there. Herbie...

[TAPE 2] 00:20:14

ADAM HYMAN

Who's that? Who is that?

[TAPE 2] 00:20:16

MICHAEL FLES

Lenore Kandel was a "beat poet" in the San Francisco area, a lot of erotic poetry. Herbie [Cohen], who ran that whole thing, he was Lenny Bruce's agent for a while. We worked with Theo Bikel. And he later became Frank Zappa's manager. And Victor Maymudes, who helped set that thing up, he was Dylan's personal manager for many years. And so, there was a lot of action there, you know, especially in that back garden thing, you know?

[TAPE 2] 00:20:57

ADAM HYMAN

Right.

[TAPE 2] 00:20:58

MICHAEL FLES

Discussion groups, and I would bring in Buddhist monks and, you know, just, and it was just before, with kids just like hungry for, and that's when we started doing some beat generation stuff to, you know, poets would pass through and read this certain act, you know?

[TAPE 2] 00:21:21

ADAM HYMAN

Was it like UCLA, who was attending?

[TAPE 2] 00:21:26

MICHAEL FLES

Who was attending? That's great, that was the beginning, now I use my own words, beginning of the freak scene in L.A., you know, people who are really isolated, doing all kinds of far-out things, health food, setting up something in Joshua Tree to get ready for the aliens who are coming from outer space, but it was an artwork. They said, well, they want to know where to land. We'll make a beautiful thing here for them. They'll see this is beautiful and come here. I'm making fun of it.

[TAPE 2] 00:22:01

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

But people who were painting and completely, you know, lonely and isolated, I'm just throwing out some type of things. And a lot of middle-class kids who didn't dig the scene and heard something was going on and wanted to see what was going on there, you know? I mean, that was like, that was the... (TECHNICAL)

[TAPE 2] 00:22:37

ADAM HYMAN

So what sort of films would you screen there?

[TAPE 2] 00:22:40

MICHAEL FLES

Well, as I mentioned, the Canadian Film Board , but I got from all of the consulates. They had a lot of free films 'cause it was all publicity for their country. Where else would I get films? Maybe from the library, I forget, but I scrounged any films I could get for free. But I wasn't showing people who are making films here [Los Angeles] yet. It was just sort of, yeah.

[TAPE 2] 00:23:12

ADAM HYMAN

Did you know any of the local filmmakers at that time?

[TAPE 2] 00:23:15

MICHAEL FLES

No, no. I didn't know of any local filmmakers. That was the generation, I think I would say, roughly speaking, that was the generation of Maya Deren, yeah. I mean, when I opened Movies 'Round Midnight then, people from that, like I think Curtis Harrington has that kind of thing where you see people going in and out of doorways, dressed in gauzy outfits or, you know? I mean, I'm sorry, that's just my take on it, but, you know? No, we were just trying to see what was going on in film, whatever we could get for free, so to speak, you know? And, yeah.

[TAPE 2] 00:23:58

ADAM HYMAN

What else was being, was available to be seen in Los Angeles at that time? Were there any other alternative and kind of possibilities?

[TAPE 2] 00:24:05

MICHAEL FLES

Yeah, there was art films and especially Cocteau , I mean, like I said, in Hollywood, how you weren't hip if you weren't seeing the Jean Cocteau films 'cause they were far-out and, how could, what's the right word was I saying, I've gone back and seen him again and I still appreciate what he was doing, you know? I mean, most people weren't thinking about things like that, like brothers and sisters being in love or, you know, whatever it was he was dealing with. And particularly I'm impressed with "Beauty and the Beast," but, yeah, any rate.

[TAPE 2] 00:24:48

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And there was much more of art theaters here in town which would only show European films. Maybe the most popular ones, but still, and maybe they'd show two films and one would be real popular and one would be, you know, not so popular. But that was, I would say that would be about it, yeah.

[TAPE 2] 00:25:11

ADAM HYMAN

Do you remember the names of the theaters?

[TAPE 2] 00:25:16

MICHAEL FLES

Good question. I could maybe remember geographically where some of them were, but that's a long time ago, you know?

[TAPE 2] 00:25:26

ADAM HYMAN

Mm hmm.

[TAPE 2] 00:25:28

MICHAEL FLES

I can't really remember. I would say maybe even the Vista was one of those, in those days. But I can't remember, I can't remember other theaters off hand now.

[TAPE 2] 00:25:43

ADAM HYMAN

Okay. And Seeing Is Believing, you mentioned a screening you did at the Westside Jewish Community Center of Curtis Harrington films?

[TAPE 2] 00:25:51

MICHAEL FLES

I screened, I worked for the Jewish Centers quite a bit doing a program of avant-garde films, but I don't think I showed his film. I mean, maybe I said that in the book and maybe I did do it. But I showed the "Un Chien Andalou" and "Blood Of A Poet" and, yeah, the classical European avant-garde films, and I gave a little bit of a talk about these films, you know? Yeah, yeah, I did.

[TAPE 2] 00:26:23

ADAM HYMAN

How did that come about? How did that as a venue come about?

[TAPE 2] 00:26:28

MICHAEL FLES

As I remember, I just went in and said, would you like to see some avant-garde films? I was trying to make a little money, you know? And I forget how I even got the films. I mean, I rented them from somewhere, but any rate, and they would say, oh, yeah, that sounds like a good thing to do. I did a few at different Jewish Centers around. So...

[TAPE 2] 00:26:57

ADAM HYMAN

Who attended those?

[TAPE 2] 00:26:59

MICHAEL FLES

Middle-class Jewish people who wanted to get in touch with the arts and mainly older people, I would say. Mainly, yeah.

[TAPE 2] 00:27:10

ADAM HYMAN

Was there still at this point, in the attendance of community, was there a leftist or Socialist or Marxist and how did that come into play?

[TAPE 2] 00:27:24

MICHAEL FLES

Well, I would say with a bias toward things European and for sure maybe even things Russian and, I don't know, working class. Yeah, that's about all I can think of.

[TAPE 2] 00:27:49

ADAM HYMAN

After what happened to your father in the Soviet Union, I was curious about how or why you would continue to, say, be interested in Marxist ideals, or did you become disenchanted with elements of that or did it come into play?

[TAPE 2] 00:28:10

MICHAEL FLES

You know, that's a good question. We didn't really know what happened to my father. My cousin and that book, that was the first we ever really knew. And like most people, it wasn't until I read "Darkness At Noon" and George Orwell's thing about the Spanish Civil War, I said, wait a minute, I mean, Stalin did a great PR job, (LAUGH) you know? And when I was in London, when I was around 18, I went to the Communist Party study groups, you know, to study Marxism.

[TAPE 2] 00:28:48

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And I also went to the British Film Institute and saw films there and even did a little bit of studying of editing there. It was great in those days. You got five people together, you could see any film they had, which was something in those days. You know, it was hard to have that access. So, yeah, you know, we were sympathetic to, "Peekskill USA," that was that thing with Pete Seeger and Paul Robeson and American Legion guys throwing rocks at the bus with the kids, you know, like that was important for us, you know?

[TAPE 2] 00:29:33

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And my family in London was close to Paul Robeson, my aunt in particular. And, you know, we thought that was happening, you know? The capitalists cheating the workers and, yeah, that kind of thing, you know? So...

[TAPE 2] 00:29:58

ADAM HYMAN

Was there a point where you came, disaffected with it?

[TAPE 2] 00:30:02

MICHAEL FLES

Oh sure, sure.

[TAPE 2] 00:30:03

ADAM HYMAN

When was that? How?

[TAPE 2] 00:30:06

MICHAEL FLES

Well, I said particularly reading these two books but it took a long time filtering through. But the final, final thing was Solzhenitsyn's "Gulag [Archipelago]" trilogy, which I think is one of the great books of the 20th century. But that is like a document. I mean, you know, it's hard. So maybe has a few facts wrong or whatever, but, I mean, there it is, you know? You can't escape from that. But, of course, I was enamored of the early Russian filmmakers, you know? "Battleship Potemkin." I think Stan Brakhage was the Eisenstein of the underground film movement and particularly because he broke through in terms of editing.

[TAPE 2] 00:30:58

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

He was so interested in form. That famous five minutes in "Battleship Potemkin," you know, like I think Stan was doing that in his own way. One of those pictures in "Battleship Potemkin" in that famous five minutes, the man with the glasses broken, that looks just like my father. I didn't know that until years later. So that also brought me to the Marx's working class things, you know? It's easy to get excited about the workers attacking the White Palace and, you know? It's great romance, you know? And, yeah, you believe it as long as you believe it and then, you know, you're learning so you can call it something else.

(TECHNICAL)

[TAPE 2] 00:32:11

ADAM HYMAN

How did you first meet Mike Getz and get involved with Cinema Theatre?

[TAPE 2] 00:32:20

MICHAEL FLES

That's a really good question. I probably went to a film there, probably. And maybe somebody introduced me but it was just love at first sight. We were just like brothers, you know? I said, I got this terrific mailing list and I got this program of films I want to show. And we, it's like we just shook hands and it went on, you know, I could just, went on from there and he was so into it and still into it. I mean, nowadays, you know, and it was a great relationship. He just backed me all the way and we were out there, you know, it was his theater, his uncle's theater, you know? So I can't remember any more detail about how we met except there's, just like, okay, we'll do it, you know?

[TAPE 2] 00:33:16

ADAM HYMAN

Could you describe them, Getz and his uncle, for me please? (TECHNICAL)

[TAPE 2] 00:33:23

MICHAEL FLES

Mike Getz, when I met him, he was about 24 and he was running that Cinema Theatre. And his uncle specialized in soft porn, I guess you would call it, adultery in the suburbs type thing. And he had 17 theaters across the country. And we showed Movies 'Round Midnight in all those theaters that's why we

could offer money, you know, help people with films and stuff like that. And Mike was a really good businessman and he enjoyed what the films were.

[TAPE 2] 00:34:07 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

He liked the people, you know? It's like a new kind of, he wasn't, to use a bad word square or anything like that. But he just didn't hang around with those kind of people much, you know, the artists and all of that. He just enjoyed knowing everybody and helping out. His uncle was a very shrewd guy who...
(TECHNICAL)

[TAPE 2] 00:34:36 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

Yeah. He was a very shrewd guy who pushed the envelope on the soft port thing as far as you could go and even further and then he would, but he had lawyers and everything. And then he would go to court and win. It was just that time when, you know, they say, well, how can you call that pornographic? And it was Louie [Shear] who backed that court case of "Scorpio Rising". And I didn't know him very well but he was like Mike. First of all, he said, oh, you guys are making money. Anything goes, you know? Just like, whatever you want, you know, it's okay.

[TAPE 2] 00:35:26 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And he trusted Mike completely, of course, you know? I mean, that was good. So, yeah, he was, Michael was and is just a warm person who delights in life, I would say, you know? So, and I think it appeal to a sense of humor to, that some of the films were kind of outrageous, you know? It was the humorous part of that, you know? But the bridge in, maybe this is the answer to your question in a way. The bridge in, I was talking earlier about Bob Alexander and these postcards, and Mike and I met, we decided to do this thing. Jonas Mekas had given us "Flaming Creatures", "Dog Star Man," I think a Gregory Markopoulos film. And, but we didn't know whether it was gonna take.

[TAPE 2] 00:36:27 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

My bookshops, I open at 8:00 at night till 4:00 in the morning. That's why I made, it was at Sunset Strip. A lot of those people on the strip wanted something to read, they were all jacked up from their shows, or you come in and talk. And, this we didn't know, can we do films at midnight, you know, of course, with this kind of content. So Mike and I are going to the theater the first night and we turn the corner and there's a line around the block. And I don't know what exactly I said but it's something on the level of, I said, Mike, (MAKES NOISE) it's happening, man, you know?

[TAPE 2] 00:37:06 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And then we get to the theater and we're standing around, you know, the money is being taken. In the middle of it all comes this ambulance and it comes and stops right in front of the theater, all the sirens going and everything else. These two guys rush out, take this guy out on a stretcher and bring him in to the theater and that was Bob Alexander celebrating the inauguration of Movies 'Round Midnight. And he was all wrapped in bandages, everything. He got out of the stretcher, just pulled all the bandages off of him. I don't know if you know much about him but he was, made himself a minister of the Temple of Man and he wore a dog collar.

[TAPE 2] 00:37:52 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And when the cops would be beating up on, it was like a Superman type of thing. Cops would be beating up on kids in Venice, it was one of his. He would go into the corner, put on his dog collar and go to the cops and say, can I help you with anything, you know? I know these guys and they're okay, you know? That kind of thing. And it worked for a long time. I mean, he was sincere but, you know, it was like one of these, you become a minister through paying some money through the mail or something like that. But any rate, so that was the opening night there and it was amazing. It just went on from that, you know?

[TAPE 2] 00:38:33

ADAM HYMAN

And now, when was that?

[TAPE 2] 00:38:36

MICHAEL FLES

Columbus Day, 1963.

[TAPE 2] 00:38:39

ADAM HYMAN

Do you remember how Columbus Day happens to be the arrangement? I know you used it in your press for that day, I mean, all these thing, your ads.

[TAPE 2] 00:38:50

MICHAEL FLES

Well, I guess the joke was Columbus discovered a new continent, you were discovering a new continent of films. So, you know, we just picked something that had some resonance to it, so to speak, you know? Yeah. And it was pretty personal there, you know? I would talk to the audience on the microphone from the projection booth like a letter from Stan Brakhage and he's working on this and this film and he'll get it to us soon. And, you know, some information like that, you know? So...

[TAPE 2] 00:39:31

ADAM HYMAN

How many people consistently attended Movies 'Round Midnight?

[TAPE 2] 00:39:38

MICHAEL FLES

It seated 500 people and I would say there were some exceptions but we were mostly full. So, you know, maybe 300 people. But it was the first big freak audiences, you know? That, I choose that word, maybe out of Tod Browning's "Freaks" but, any rate, Chet Helms came to see what was going on before he started the Family Dog. Arthur Kunkin came to see us before he started the LA Free Press just, what's the crowd, what's going on here, you know, like that kind of thing. So, yeah.

[TAPE 2] 00:40:24

ADAM HYMAN

Was there any comparable audience scene of that sort anywhere else in Southern California at that time?

[TAPE 2] 00:40:33

MICHAEL FLES

No, for sure not. No. No.

[TAPE 2] 00:40:39

ADAM HYMAN

Can you describe for me just physically, the physical plans and so forth of the Cinema Theater ?

[TAPE 2] 00:40:45

MICHAEL FLES

It was a little bit run-down, you know, 'cause of the kind of theater it was, I guess, but it was quite a beautiful theater. There was a regular slant like you have in all those movie theaters. They were pretty much conventional theater seats, maybe a little hard. I don't even know if they had upholstery on them as I, but they did, yes, they did. And nice big screen. And it was pretty nondescript inside of the theater, I mean, like hundreds of other theaters. But, as I said, for me, the crucial part was, for the first time, these guys are being seen in the real theater, at least on the West Coast. I guess Jonas said, been doing at first at Avenue B Theatre, you know, in New York, but at least on the West Coast, it was the first. Yeah.

[TAPE 2] 00:41:38

ADAM HYMAN

Was it both 35 millimeter and 16 there?

[TAPE 2] 00:41:40

MICHAEL FLES

No. We showed only 16 millimeter. Do you know about Bob Evans?

[TAPE 2] 00:41:46

ADAM HYMAN

Tell me.

[TAPE 2] 00:41:47

MICHAEL FLES

Bob Evans was our projectionist and he created the, as far as I know, the first carbon arc 16-millimeter projector. So, we could be in a real theater, but we could have all that light. And that was just really great. So, we were talking earlier, I'm relating this to Bob Evans, we're talking earlier about Kenneth Anger. I had a benefit for, do you know who Carmen, Cameron is? One of the, yeah. She was in the "Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome". She was also like Kenneth, a Crowley advocate. And she was broke as usual, and I thought, well, why don't we show a bunch of films that she's in? She was in Curtis Harrington's films and et cetera, et cetera, and all of the money that night would go to her.

[TAPE 2] 00:42:46

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And so, I asked Kenneth to show "Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome". He said he would only show it if he could be in the projection booth with the film because he was afraid that somebody would steal it, basically, Cameron. He didn't, you know, any rate, he said then to me, I also want to make some announcements before the film starts. And then, he started, Cameron's dead now, so I guess it's okay. Any rate, he accused her, he said, well, what is the scene? She's had five husbands and all of them have died violent deaths, you know, blah, blah, blah, like this ...

[TAPE 2] 00:43:41

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

One of her husbands was Jet Propulsion Lab guy, and they were, but any rate, and all these other, you know, you know, "Hollywood Babylon", (LAUGH) that kind of gossip. And then he said, because all of you people are supporting Cameron, and I know what she's really like, I'm gonna throw some hydrochloric acid down into the audience. And lo and behold, he, out of the projection booth, he pushes something, some tablets, you know? And I said immediately, Kenneth, you're not leaving this projection booth until way after all of these shows are over. 'Cause I knew Cameron had come with some friends who were her protection.

[TAPE 2] 00:44:35

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

Lo and behold, two minutes later, they're pounding at the door to get him, and there's poor Bob Evans, who's a projection innovator, kind of a shy guy (LAUGH) caught in the middle of all these stuff, you know? And, you know, any rate, that was the scene. But it turned out, either it wasn't hydrochloric acid or the stuff didn't go off on impact like he thought it was supposed to do or something. But I had a, after that I had a very rough relationship with Kenneth. I would say we were pretty good fr-, I didn't care, but he, it was that Crowley crowd, they like to make a drama, you know, of whatever the trip was, yeah.

[TAPE 2] 00:45:28

ADAM HYMAN

Who else was in the Crowley crowd and what else did they do?

[TAPE 2] 00:45:39

MICHAEL FLES

(LAUGH) Man, that's a little bit before my time. I'm trying to remember this guy's name. If you go right up to the top behind Griffith Park, a kind of, it's a hike up there, you'll see a garden that's dedicated to this guy. His name is on the tip of my tongue. But he was one of the early guys in this town. I don't know what all else they did, really, except the bone of contention between Kenneth and Cameron basically was a stolen tarot set that had been hand-done by Crowley himself, and so had some power, you know? It wasn't my scene, you know, I really didn't know much about it. I mean, I like the artistic part that came out of it or, I saw it as being outrageous enough anyway to be good, you know, to look at.

[TAPE 2] 00:46:51

ADAM HYMAN

You know, there's a, Craig Baldwin's latest film there, the filmmaker, is all about Cameron, her husband Jack, and L. Ron Hubbard. Now, in terms of the Cinema Theatre and Movies 'Round Midnight what did you control? What was, I quote, was your thing? What did Mike control on some part?

[TAPE 2] 00:47:19

MICHAEL FLES

I did the programming and all the artistic thing, designing the brochures that went out, and Mike took care of the business, which, you know, it wasn't really that much to take care of. And we would discuss anything that came up, but he was, he never turned me down for anything. He, sometimes, would give suggestions about this or that, but, basically, that's how we split it up. He had no background in that kind of film anyway, you know? So...

[TAPE 2] 00:47:49

ADAM HYMAN

How thorough did you feel that your backing, background was then in that kind of film?

[TAPE 2] 00:47:55

MICHAEL FLES

Pretty good just because I've seen all those films in New York at the Film-makers' Coop. I mean, I was just a little bit ahead of anything that had hit L.A., you know, so that's what I felt. And then, I had the contact with Jonas and, of course, also the Canyon Cinema in Berkeley, I got a lot of stuff from them. So, I felt it was pretty good and, you know, I didn't show just underground films, far from it. I mean, not that I (LAUGH) think it's too much nowadays, but I was always showing Flash Gordon serials, you know, and showing, I was mentioning today of Broken Blossoms for the opium scenes in there, and it's a great film anyway in London, you know?

[TAPE 2] 00:48:43

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

It's a D.W. Griffith. And all kinds of nice mixtures if I, if the underground film was this, maybe this would balance it out, you know, type thing. So, yeah.

[TAPE 2] 00:48:58

ADAM HYMAN

Could you elaborate more on your programming philosophy? In Seeing Is Believing, you went through a variety of programming approaches and I want to see how you came to those views and what you really felt that you did.

[TAPE 2] 00:49:11

MICHAEL FLES

Well, I felt that the underground films were the draw, you know, because there was a lot of Hollywood people coming, Dennis Hopper and Curtis Harrington and different people. I think that was the main draw, so, in my, I don't know, whatever it was, I thought, but still I can turn this audience onto other stuff that they maybe normally wouldn't see, you know? And I would go all over Hollywood seeing films somebody would tell me, directors would come in, the guy who produced "Invasion of the Body Snatchers". (TECHNICAL)

[TAPE 2] 00:50:05

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And... (TECHNICAL)

[TAPE 2] 00:50:30

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

Oh, yeah. So this guy would come in with, he, the producer of...

[TAPE 2] 00:50:37

ADAM HYMAN

Who is that, Don Siege or...

[TAPE 2] 00:50:39

MICHAEL FLES

I don't know if I ever knew his name but it wasn't Robert Wise, the director. It was somebody else high up in the thing and he said, you know, the studio took the film away from Robert Wise after he finished cutting it and added a beginning and an ending, a different frame to it. And he said to me, would you show that in the original way he wanted it to be? And I said, sure. And it really, boy was it strong. I mean, people just kind of jumped out of the audience after it was over. I mean, 'cause they watered it all down by putting that frame around it, you know, to make it a little bit more easy for people to take and have a happy ending, I guess you could call it. I don't know, you know?

[TAPE 2] 00:51:29

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

So there was things like that I like to do and, you know, I was a little bit out there myself in those days. I'd walk by an alley and see some film just laying there and I'd pick it up and I'd say to Bob, show this before we begin the rest of the films. And who knows what it would be but, you know, we'd see it. Oh, and, well, any rate, so that was my, I like to have a variety of stuff, you know, and some of it was a little campy, you know? And I should say it was interesting sitting with an audience like that. Most of us were pretty stoned on something. You see "King Kong" in that state of consciousness. I'm talking about the original one now, you know?

[TAPE 2] 00:52:24

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

That's, and I always remember seeing "The Passion of Joan of Arc" at the Avenue B Theater that Jonas showed on Peyote and I tell you, man, it's quite something, you know? I mean, she's such a great actress and there's so much going on there, you know, emotionally. But any rate, so that was it. And the film festivals that I had there, you know? Like, I was always just sort of, you ask me if I knew Jack Hirschman, Jack was the judge of those film festivals at least twice.

[TAPE 2] 00:53:09

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And I like the idea of just showing anything that anybody brought. We didn't, we didn't even know what it was until we started playing it, you know? And we would start, Mike would make an exception and we could start early in the evening those, for those film festivals. And we go from 7:30 in the evening until 4:30 the next morning. We just saw everything like that. And there was pretty far out stuff there. But it was a great way to do it. I mean, like, you know, everybody could be in it and, you know?

[TAPE 2] 00:53:49

ADAM HYMAN

Was that the L.A. Filmmakers Festivals or is that something else?

[TAPE 2] 00:53:54

MICHAEL FLES

I don't think we, I think that's something else, yeah. Because I, people didn't have to be from L.A. to be in it. I don't think we ever, maybe we called it this Movies 'Round Midnight Festival. I don't remember. Maybe David remembers but I don't remember giving it any name.

[TAPE 2] 00:54:19

ADAM HYMAN

So, what was the Los Angeles Filmmakers Festival you had in '63, '64 or '65, you had judges and so forth?

[TAPE 2] 00:54:25

MICHAEL FLES

That's it what you're talking about.

[TAPE 2] 00:54:26

ADAM HYMAN

But tell me a bit more about that thing. Is that really just these open houses or was it like a programmed film festival like Ann Arbor?

[TAPE 2] 00:54:34

MICHAEL FLES

Just what I was describing to you, it wasn't programmed at all. The films came in. We showed everything that came in. I remember Brakhage was a judge once. It would be usually me and a film, an underground filmmaker like Stan and maybe a poet like Jack Hirschman. And we figured between the three of us, we would pick the right one, you know? But it was an endurance test to sit through that many films. Yeah, it was quite something.

[TAPE 2] 00:55:09

ADAM HYMAN

Do you remember any particular discoveries from those festivals?

[TAPE 2] 00:55:13

MICHAEL FLES

Yes, of course, the most famous one of them all was "Georg", which won the film festival the second year, I think, and that was Stan[ton] Kaye's film. I'm hoping to get back in touch with him. I got his telephone number now. That was definitely outstanding because of the form, you know? He was, Stan was super hip. It was Brechtian, Beckett type of form, you know? He's breaking down the illusion of the film. The guy is gonna kill himself and he's telling you these last things and his wife is filming it and they're in a trailer, corridor, I can't remember it all, you know?

[TAPE 2] 00:55:59

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

But Stan had trouble getting it started. The guy who was gonna be the main guy in the film didn't turn up 'cause he got a paying job somewhere else. And I said to Stan, come on, let's start the film. I'll play the lead. Let's just go and get it started. I won't be the lead in the end but we'll shoot some footage and we'll get rolling with it, you know? And we did, and then he finally found the really good Georg, this old friend of mine, Mark Checka. And we showed the film and it won. And one of the other filmmakers said to me, there were a few guys like this leaning on me, say, listen, you know, if I don't win tonight, I'm gonna tell everybody that you were part of the, working on "Georg."

[TAPE 2] 00:56:58

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

I said, man, you could say what you want. What do I, I'm looking for the best film no matter what happened, you know what I mean? So that was definitely a discovery. I think a lot of people were, you know, it's a kind of sad story. He's kind of Orson Welles story, Stan is 'cause he was brilliant but he just couldn't keep the practical end of it together, you know? If he just found maybe the right person to work with or something, you know? But, so any rate, that was the real outstanding one, I think.

[TAPE 2] 00:57:36

ADAM HYMAN

Did that festival happened just the three years you were there? Do you know?

[TAPE 2] 00:57:41

MICHAEL FLES

As far as I know. I mean, I really don't know what happened after Mike took it over. Except, well, he didn't stay with my format. He went a little bit more toward the format of his uncle's regular theater chain. And he's told me a lot of reasons why he did that but whatever, you know? You have to be doing something you believe in and maybe he didn't know enough about that, you know? He knew everybody but I don't think he felt, maybe he had the artistic judgment to choose this one and that one and, you know, like that. So...

[TAPE 2] 00:58:20

ADAM HYMAN

Were you involved in any way in the, or what other films were you involved in any way in the development or production of it?

[TAPE 2] 00:58:30

MICHAEL FLES

Well, (LAUGH) we gave Kenneth money to finish “Scorpio Rising”. Because we had all those theaters like I say, we knew we could recoup the money and we had first rights. He couldn’t show it anywhere else that we had gone through our thing, you know? And then, I made a few kind of trailers to advertise series. I did a crime series there. And, another thing, my girlfriend did a beautiful animation. She fell in love with The Beatles. She did an animated thing of Money Love that was advertising some series I don’t know that we were doing. And...

[TAPE 2] 00:59:21

ADAM HYMAN

Who was that, the man?

[TAPE 2] 00:59:25

MICHAEL FLES

Carol Booth. And I wasn't really involved in making films that much there. Yeah. I, yeah.

[END OF TAPE: [TAPE 2] 00:59:45]

TAPE: 108615-MICHAEL FLES 3

[TAPE 3] 00:[TAPE 3] 00:52 ADAM HYMAN

Um, so just back on a factual basis a bit more about "Movies 'Round Midnight." How do the economics of it work, how much were you able to pay filmmakers, how, how much did you get paid and so forth.

[TAPE 3] 00:[TAPE 3] 01:05 MICHAEL FLES

Mike [Getz] and I had a common bank account. We put everything in it, and we could take out what we wanted for whatever we needed, and it always worked out fine. I sometimes flew back to New York to meet the filmmakers or, a print up pamphlet or I don't know what, you know. I lived very simply at that time. You know I paid my rent and ate, and you know, a few things that you do but I didn't. It was nice, I mean I basically worked one night a week. I mean I had to prepare in terms of the, finding what films I was going to show. Getting the brochure ready, but that was it. So, and then in terms of paying the filmmakers that was pretty objective because the Film-Makers Coop and Canyon Cinema, they had a price for whatever film they were renting.

[TAPE 3] 00:02:02 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

Sometimes I would get other films from other places, and we would just decide, you know I would say it was pretty close to \$1.00 a minute for those films. Something like that. [laugh] You know, so yeah.

[TAPE 3] 00:02:17 ADAM HYMAN

What was the admission at the theatre?

[TAPE 3] 00:02:19 MICHAEL FLES

Admission? Boy, I would say \$1.25. That's my remembrance of it, but you had to be a member of the Movies 'Round Midnight Club because there were certain films you couldn't show if it was just an admission coming in. You had to have a club, you know, for example the Museum Of Modern Art. You couldn't have commercial, you couldn't show them commercially. So, if you were a club you weren't doing that. So, that was it. So it was all pretty, you know we would rent the films, and they would send us the bill and we would pay them. I mean everybody was friends, and we were having a good time and the whole thing was happening, so you know like that.

[TAPE 3] 00:03:15 ADAM HYMAN

How did in distribution and print traffic, well, we just pretty much went through that it was pretty much through the Coop and Museum Of Modern Art. And do you remember any other particular sources?

[TAPE 3] 00:03:27 MICHAEL FLES

Well, Wallace Berman turned me onto a lot of individuals up in the Bay Area who were making films who didn't necessarily have a distributor. I was thinking maybe Larry Jordan was one of those. I know he's a friend of Wallace's, but sometimes I just hear about private people, and say, look can we show it, and we'll do this, you know, like that. But, it was better to have them in the co-op and in the Canyon Cinema. It was better for them because then anybody could rent at any time, you know.

[TAPE 3] 00:03:59 ADAM HYMAN

Can you describe Wallace Berman and your relationship with him?

[TAPE 3] 00:04:04

MICHAEL FLES

Sure as I said, Wallace was one of the ones who kept me going at that coffee shop thing when I was showing around at different coffee shops. He was a kind of a, also what I would call a Zen character, super laid back, and like I was describing LeRoi Jones, super hip in terms of how he dressed and everything like that. He, you know he was a literary man. His famous publication was "Semina." And uh which he printed himself on his own hand press, kind of inspired by William Blake, I guess. And, he was just in the middle of the whole art scene here, and he had this way of connecting people. He knew all the artists in the Bay area. He'd lived up there in Larkspur. Of course, George Herms and him were really good friends.

[TAPE 3] 00:05:05

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And, Bruce Conner was a friend of Wallace's and so many people up there. So yes, he was what can I say he connected people, and there were a lot of the young movie stars. Dennis Hopper, Dean Stockwell, Russ Tamblyn, is it, yeah, who were all in a sense you could say, disciples of Wallace's in the sense of doing collages. And, people were attracted to him because, you know he was a fashion setter in a certain way, you know. It was completely, it was all a lifestyle thing that he, you know he had been a commercial artist. And then met Shirley at the Coronet Theater and started looking at things a different way, started doing what he really wanted to do, you know, that type thing.

[TAPE 3] 00:06:16

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

But, helped so many people, and of course now he's regarded as a major artist in the West Coast art scene. And, even the postcards these guys sent back and forth are works of art. You know, which they meant them to be all the time, but beautiful collages and so, yeah.

[TAPE 3] 00:06:40

ADAM HYMAN

And, did you have an interaction with the Creative Film Society?

[TAPE 3] 00:06:44

MICHAEL FLES

I did, [laugh] it's funny, it's the first time I, yeah, that guy was out in the Valley, and he had some films, and...

[TAPE 3] 00:06:52

ADAM HYMAN

Can you describe more of the name Robert Pike, but tell me about...

[TAPE 3] 00:06:56

MICHAEL FLES

Was out in the...

[TAPE 3] 00:06:56

ADAM HYMAN

... mention it and include his name and so forth when you're talking, just when you say...

[TAPE 3] 00:07:00

MICHAEL FLES

Bob Pike he was out in the San Fernando Valley, he had a little 16mm catalogue of some avant garde stuff, I mean if you pushed the definition. I guess it would be called avant garde stuff, and, but a lot of other stuff besides. It was just stuff that he could pick up relatively cheaply. And he was a nice guy and we got along, and I rented his films. I can't remember exactly. Maybe he had more stuff like Maya Deren, although that came from another place, Cinema 16 is it in New York City? I think that was the name of it, yeah. Oh any rate.

[TAPE 3] 00:07:42

ADAM HYMAN

Amos Vogel.

[TAPE 3] 00:07:42

MICHAEL FLES

Exactly, Amos Vogel, yeah. So, I can't remember much about, Bob Pike really except we got along. There was films, and I used them and, you know.

[TAPE 3] 00:07:55

ADAM HYMAN

What do you remember about Amos Vogel on Cinema 16?

[TAPE 3] 00:07:57

MICHAEL FLES

I never met him, I rented films from him. He was, like I said, I think he had got, had the more traditional [19]40's avant garde, which I regarded as more of a European-influenced avant garde. It wasn't that, uh, exuberance of the American underground, in my opinion, you know, it was kind of being mysterious, and I don't know, yeah, you know.

[TAPE 3] 00:08:27

ADAM HYMAN

Let's go into that distinction because I know that was one of your points that also brought up in "Seeing is Believing. But for you, how do you see the differences in these earlier some American filmmakers, I mean, Deren and Harrington and so forth. And then what do you see as like the truly innovative American underground film?

[TAPE 3] 00:08:50

MICHAEL FLES

Yes, I think that if you're going to compare the European avant garde with the American avant garde, you know, I say European in quotes because I think. But any rate, I think there was a certain model there, you know, of a "Un Chien Andalou" and "Blood of a Poet." And, what I think, it was a flowering of all the American arts, you know like Jackson Pollock, the Beat Generation guys and these guys would kind of put some energy in film, you know, like well by following their intuitions or doing things that are really personal, you know, like Brakhage's early films. And, yes it was, I'm trying to think of sort of a literary example, but I say that was it.

[TAPE 3] 00:10:04

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

It was an energy and exuberance, and real--everybody sort of realizing well, hey we're into a new lifestyle here. We've crossed over something or other, you know. And, yep, yeah that's what I would say.

[TAPE 3] 00:10:20

ADAM HYMAN

How difficult was it to cross over into that new lifestyle? I want to like investigate, like the police coming and so forth as well, but what were the challenges of this scene?

[TAPE 3] 00:10:34

MICHAEL FLES

Well, let's see. I think the biggest challenge in one way was how isolated people were, you know like, [laugh] I mean I'll put this in a strange way. But, you're off doing your own little thing, and you think I'm probably crazy but, this is what I'm going to be doing, you know and nobody knows what is that I'm doing. And then, when I went into the, be in Elysian Park, which was a little after all this but, I came over the hill and I saw all these hundreds, probably thousands of people there. Even after the Cinema Theater I thought there are so many of us. Now a lot of people, they don't under--I just feel like that's my, those are my people, you know I can just relax and I'm home type thing, you know.

[TAPE 3] 00:11:36

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And, for sure that was passed through the European Bohemian, you know there was for sure a lifestyle there, but yeah, you know I wish, I'm not really a critic, I guess [laugh] in the sense of thinking what the little nuances are there but, yeah.

[TAPE 3] 00:12:03

ADAM HYMAN

How important were drugs in the scene? You refer to it earlier that people at the shows were all mostly stoned on something or another. But how much of that was the allure of the underground film movement?

[TAPE 3] 00:12:14

MICHAEL FLES

Oh, I think people were getting stoned anyway, but the difference was you were all experiencing something together. And, although you know we didn't hit the mark all the time, but you would hit the mark sometimes, and then you were in a higher state of consciousness to receive that, and say, oh yeah okay. You know I got something out of that that really taught me something. It was something that we all did together so that it was a binding. I'm not saying everybody did everything, and peop--all the people were stoned all the time. But, you know, in some way, I know my kids are going to see this. In some way, I felt many times it was my responsibility to go down there, let's say on peyote.

[TAPE 3] 00:13:21

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And, just give something from the bottom of my heart, show some great film, read a letter from somebody, or just make that connection. You know not let it be all abstract and on the screen. But, it would, I think they liked that human, you know stories, or I'm not feeling well tonight but we're gonna do this and that, you know whatever. So, I don't think it was an influence except for the films like Don--Ron Rice's films and stuff where it was actually the content. But, it was something that bound everybody together it was the context, let's say the one of the contexts of it, you know yeah.

[TAPE 3] 00:14:09

ADAM HYMAN

Tell me a bit more about what it was like for you to be the impresario of the Movies 'Round Midnight evenings?

[TAPE 3] 00:14:17

MICHAEL FLES

[laugh] Let's see. It was great, it was like being a maitre'd, you know greeting everybody at the door. And, there was a lot of politics in a sense, you know people who wanted to get in for free, and blah, blah, blah like that, you know, and, but it was just like seeing a whole bunch of friends. I mean I knew so many of the people and everybody was gonna come and have a good time. And, I knew they were gonna like at least something that was going on there, you know. And, it would leave them freer in their own creative work, you know, but yeah I felt it was, I could be a channel for, I felt in a way I was the west coast outlet for the films in New York, you know, so yeah, just like in a sense inviting people into your home, you know.

[TAPE 3] 00:15:16

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

A lot of them were friends. And, there was a lot of straight people coming to see things, and a lot of Hollywood people coming to steal, you know, Stan Brakhage's ideas, or you know, use them in some little thing they had some little thing, you know thing they hadn't thought of before or something. And, some just for the delight of it, you know, too. Yeah, we showed Andy Warhol's "Sleep" which I think was six hours. And, I said anybody who stays for the whole film we'll give you your money back. We had 450 people come and 150 of us stayed for the whole thing. And, it was, I'm not so fond of Andy's later films, but it was a great meditation. I thought I've never seen anybody sleep.

[TAPE 3] 00:16:14 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

Or, never slowed myself down enough to just watch somebody sleep, and then of course, he's just one camera angle, letting the leader run right through, you know like that. And, one of the patrons ran down the aisle of the theater and yelled in the guy's ear, wake up, [laugh] and cracked up the whole theater, so we had a little interaction thing. And, of course the film ends with that great dramatic moment. A fly comes and bothers the guy and he wakes up. And, it's like a jolt, you know like it is drama in a way. So, yeah, there were things like that.

[TAPE 3] 00:16:58 ADAM HYMAN

Wasn't there a, was that screening where there was like this legendary just a lot of protests or anger over it? Or, was that another screening somewhere else, I'm trying to remember.

[TAPE 3] 00:17:09 MICHAEL FLES

Maybe there was, the people were upset by it. But, we gave everybody their money back, whoever wanted. We always had that policy, you could have your money back, I mean, we weren't interested in arguments. I mean the money didn't mean that much to us, if you didn't get your satisfaction, you know. But, for the people who stayed to see the whole thing, well that was I felt like rewarding them because it was quite something to sit through it.

[TAPE 3] 00:17:41 ADAM HYMAN

Was that one that started at midnight and went till, you know, 6:00 a.m. or whenever?

[TAPE 3] 00:17:45 MICHAEL FLES

It must have, yeah 'cause normally we didn't do, yeah, probably it did. I can't remember but probably did.

[TAPE 3] 00:17:53 ADAM HYMAN

Can you tell, describe the New Year's Eve happening you tried to do, you did.

[TAPE 3] 00:18:02 MICHAEL FLES

You're talking about the acid test?

[TAPE 3] 00:18:04 ADAM HYMAN

Uh...

[TAPE 3] 00:18:05 MICHAEL FLES

No, the New Year's Eve happening I don't remember it.

[TAPE 3] 00:18:07 ADAM HYMAN

There's an, oh, well tell me about the acid test.

[TAPE 3] 00:18:09 MICHAEL FLES

Well it was, you know, Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters and, I don't remember all the details of that, or if I was there, or we gave them the theatre, or what, but it was, you know their usual trip, four or five or six projectors, some liquid light projection, some images thrown in the middle of all of that. And, I can't remember whether he did the kool aid with the LSD on it. I think we decided we didn't want to do that. So, but I wasn't enamored of it for whatever reason. But, this other thing you mentioned, I don't know what that refers to.

[TAPE 3] 00:19:00 ADAM HYMAN

Wait, [non-interview dialogue]

[TAPE 3] 00:19:24

MICHAEL FLES

That was that group of people who came in and did that. Well, maybe you say it's a different night.

[TAPE 3] 00:19:35

ADAM HYMAN

Well, there's another night, there was an acid test night in February of '66.

[TAPE 3] 00:19:39

MICHAEL FLES

God, he's the Evening's organizer, Jack Lieberman, uh, huh. But, Kevin Thomas, he was a big supporter of ours, he was good, a good guy.

[TAPE 3] 00:19:50

ADAM HYMAN

[overlapping] So let's...

[TAPE 3] 00:19:50

MICHAEL FLES

And, Gene Youngblood more, he was...

[TAPE 3] 00:19:50

ADAM HYMAN

[overlapping] So, let's hold on a moment.

[TAPE 3] 00:19:51

MICHAEL FLES

Oh, yeah.

[TAPE 3] 00:19:53

ADAM HYMAN

So, tell me about, okay, tell me about your supporters in the press.

[TAPE 3] 00:19:58

MICHAEL FLES

Well, I think you could miss, you know certain nights didn't make it, you could say, but I think as an outlet most of the press was pretty sympathetic. They saw it for what it was, they even saw it was, let's say for younger audiences you know. And, but Gene Youngblood, he actually saw the evolution of a form, I think. He wrote books about it, but he, it was in those days we had the L.A. Examiner, I guess he was writing for that. And, he wrote kind of philosophical pieces about why this movement, if you want to call it that was creating a new paradigm for the visual arts, you know, so yeah.

[TAPE 3] 00:20:54

ADAM HYMAN

Did you agree with that?

[TAPE 3] 00:20:59

MICHAEL FLES

I did, but, I did and then in a certain sense. But, I didn't come to the same conclusion he did. He was actually taking, in a certain sense you could say, what I was doing and making it more sophisticated and nuanced in the sense of his philosophical thing. I never read his books, by the way. But, I fell in love with the light show, the real pure light show that had existed on the west coast in the 50's before rock n' roll. This was an acoustic light show, which I, in some way or other, I saw at least personally, let's say in my evolution. I had seen enough images, you know, and now I just wanted to see the colors moving, and have musician playing with those colors, a great projectionist listening to the musicians that's, and there was even dancers at a certain point.

[TAPE 3] 00:22:14 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And, without going into too much detail, I spent a lot of the rest of my life [laugh] pursuing that thing with the light show, and I did it in Israel. I did it different places, you know, how good it was or whatever, but that's, I, that's what I saw. It was the other part of it was human, it wasn't pieces of plastic being cut up and put into an order. It was human being responding to the audience, the climate, the room, and creating something out of that that everybody was feeding into and, yeah, so that's it, you know.

[TAPE 3] 00:23:03 ADAM HYMAN

How many nights like that did you try to have the Movies 'Round Midnight?

[TAPE 3] 00:23:08 MICHAEL FLES

At that point, there was only the music that we had because the basis of it was spontaneity, and I met this man, Christopher Tree, and we were doing, after Movies 'Round Midnight we were doing his music there at the theater. And, I forget how long we did it, we didn't do it very long there, and then pretty soon. I can't remember all the details, but I finished with the Movies 'Round Midnight, and I started working with him putting music concerts on at other places, yeah.

[TAPE 3] 00:23:54 ADAM HYMAN

We're gonna go into a little bit about your after checking on a couple of other things. Tell me about the "Scorpio Rising" screening and court case.

[TAPE 3] 00:24:03 MICHAEL FLES

The "Scorpio Rising" screening and what was the?

[TAPE 3] 00:24:07 ADAM HYMAN

The court case, trial.

[TAPE 3] 00:24:07 MICHAEL FLES

The court case, oh. [laugh] Well, of course, it was considered pornographic because of the homosexual content in which this supposedly, you saw a man making love to another man. But, Kenneth was pretty shrewd I mean, I think, I don't remember all the details, I wasn't very involved in all of this, but supposedly if you slowed down the film, and you saw it kind of, which they did at the trial saw it frame by frame. There wasn't anything like that in there. And, so he won the case, but anyway his name was Louie, yeah, Louie Shear, was his name? Yeah. He was ready to go all the way with it. And, you know later on I was thinking the gay part of Kenneth's films was pretty revolutionary, because there were, wasn't much theater of that kind.

[TAPE 3] 00:25:18 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

Maybe, I don't know how many few other people were doing it. But, it's interesting how Hollywood he was, I mean he set up each shot in a kind of a old-fashioned way, you know it's pretty static in a certain way, you know. He's kind of the tail end, I think of that Maya Deren, European thing in a way, but I mean he's from Hollywood for sure, you know, so, anyway.

[TAPE 3] 00:25:48 ADAM HYMAN

Why was Mike Getz arrested and not you?

[TAPE 3] 00:25:51 MICHAEL FLES

Because, he was the owner of the theatre, I think, just some lee--oh maybe because also his uncle, it was easier for his uncle to back the whole thing, you know.

[TAPE 3] 00:26:05

ADAM HYMAN

And, then, can you tell me more about you said you helped him finish, Kenneth finish "Scorpio Rising." Do you remember anything about like money or what was involved with "Scorpio Rising" going on in the full circuit and so forth?

[TAPE 3] 00:26:18

MICHAEL FLES

All of this was, all of these things I'm telling you [laugh] during this session I mean as good as I can remember. But, I think Kenneth had "Scorpio Rising" pretty much together. He had to do some post production. You know in those days things were so damn expensive, because you had the A-wheel and the B-wheel and you know had to rent some place. Well, sometimes you could take things home, and do them on those editing machines and stuff. As I remember he wanted \$5,000 to finish the film, so that's, I didn't have anything to do with it, I don't think. I just said it was okay with me, you know, and somehow the money got to him and we had, were able to show it at all those theatres, and I guess we made back, you know, what we paid. I'm not sure if that's true.

[TAPE 3] 00:27:20

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

But, I don't know if it made any difference to us. We did help people, you know, that needed help. That's how I remember it.

[TAPE 3] 00:27:28

ADAM HYMAN

So, that was the American premiere of it?

[TAPE 3] 00:27:31

MICHAEL FLES

Yes, it was the American premiere, yeah, uh huh.

[TAPE 3] 00:27:34

ADAM HYMAN

Now, what other relations, do you remember, what other filmmakers do you remember coming to the Cinema Theater, or and then you would, you know, have some sort of friendships with?

[TAPE 3] 00:27:48

MICHAEL FLES

Well, Brakhage for sure. And, he, I guess he gave a talk there. Also, or maybe it was at one of, anyway he gave a talk somewhere that I arranged for. Maybe it was at UCLA, or I don't know where, but any rate he came, he stayed with me while he was in town. You had to drive him everywhere because of his eyes. And, I said to him why don't you get glasses for driving? And, he said, because I want to keep the purity of my vision, you know, I like that. [laugh] I don't know if it's, but I liked it anyway, you know. A lot of the people I just met briefly, but that's all I can think of offhand.

[TAPE 3] 00:28:52

ADAM HYMAN

Were there music people who came as well, I mean what...

[TAPE 3] 00:28:54

MICHAEL FLES

I'm sure.

[TAPE 3] 00:28:54

ADAM HYMAN

...what was the music scene?

[TAPE 3] 00:28:58

MICHAEL FLES

I'm sure there were music people that came, Frank Zappa probably. I know he came to other things I did there like those music concerts. But, oh and yeah that's right I was gonna say, the Mothers of Invention, those guys, yeah. I, oh and Ray Manzarek from The Doors he came a lot. Yeah, I can't remember all the people that came, but.

[TAPE 3] 00:29:28 ADAM HYMAN

And, how about people from the art scene, [word?]

[TAPE 3] 00:29:31 MICHAEL FLES

Yeah, a lot of the painters and gallery guys and all of that. They wanted to be up on whatever was going on, and it was actually parallel to the painting, the music and everything else, yeah.

[TAPE 3] 00:29:44 ADAM HYMAN

Was there an interaction among those communities in L.A. the same way they'd been in New York or how was it?

[TAPE 3] 00:29:50 MICHAEL FLES

Yes, there was an interaction, but there, of course L.A. had never had any center like New York had, you know that was. And that's why it was so important for us to be able to have at least one place once a week where people could get together a bit, you know. But, yeah, so, for sure there was all of that, and plus a lot of the painters were also filmmakers, and you know, so forth and so on, yeah.

[TAPE 3] 00:30:22 ADAM HYMAN

Let's see there's, let's see if there's any, now do you have any particular recollection about any other shows there?

[TAPE 3] 00:30:31 MICHAEL FLES

Not that I can think of.

[TAPE 3] 00:30:34 ADAM HYMAN

You mentioned, tell me what you thought about when you had Jack Smith related screenings.

[TAPE 3] 00:30:39 MICHAEL FLES

"Flaming Creatures" was our first night. Well, I love the strength that Jack had in his films I mean as a filmmaker. I knew him quite a bit in New York. And, any rate, yes I can't think of anything more to say. He was an innovator, I think, stylistically in the way that Kenneth wasn't. I mean I just say that because there was a similarity in subject matter, you know. I was actually not in the sense that you might think, but I, a couple of times I was at his shootings, you know, where he would just start doing it, and you'd be involved you know, in New York. But, he was really trying to do something else. I mean I'd love to see that maybe, I'm, to really think about it, I have to see the film again is what I'm trying to say, yeah.

[TAPE 3] 00:32:00 ADAM HYMAN

And, do you remember any other traveling filmmakers who came through and were there at the, showed their films?

[TAPE 3] 00:32:08 MICHAEL FLES

Offhand, I don't. Yeah. I'm sure there were plenty, but I don't remember off hand.

[TAPE 3] 00:32:15 ADAM HYMAN

Was Standish Lawder around at that time, or is that before his time?

[TAPE 3] 00:32:21 MICHAEL FLES

Say the name again?

[TAPE 3] 00:32:21 ADAM HYMAN

Standish Lawder?

[TAPE 3] 00:32:23 MICHAEL FLES
I don't remember that.

[TAPE 3] 00:32:24 ADAM HYMAN
Or, do you remember Peter Mays, or David Lebrun?

[TAPE 3] 00:32:27 MICHAEL FLES
No. It may be after my time.

[TAPE 3] 00:32:28 ADAM HYMAN
[overlapping] ...they attended, but I don't know if you had interacted with them. And, anything more about, now the L.A. Free Press, what was it's importance in Los Angeles at that time for you?

[TAPE 3] 00:32:39 MICHAEL FLES
Oh, tremendous importance because, they...

[TAPE 3] 00:32:42 ADAM HYMAN
[overlapping] Could you say what you're talking about?

[TAPE 3] 00:32:43 MICHAEL FLES
Oh, yeah the L.A. Free Press, it was of tremendous importance because it really connected the underground, you know and Art Kunkin was in some, in an even in old time sense was a real revolutionary, I mean he was a, I don't know if he's still alive now. But, he was a Marxist in some sense, you know, left wing, old time. But, he also saw the newness of let's say, if you want to call it, the youth revolution. And, what an idea just to put together a paper where everybody could see what was happening in a particular week. And, the classifieds were important, and, oh yes I think it really connected people, it was great.

[TAPE 3] 00:33:34 ADAM HYMAN
Did you ever, ever write anything for it?

[TAPE 3] 00:33:37 MICHAEL FLES
I don't remember writing anything for it, no?

[TAPE 3] 00:33:40 ADAM HYMAN
[overlapping] You...

[TAPE 3] 00:33:40 MICHAEL FLES
[overlapping] I wrote for "Film Culture," I wrote something. I can't remember any other.

[TAPE 3] 00:33:49 ADAM HYMAN
And, do you recall, did you have any other relationships with any other movie theaters in town? Did you ever do program for any other theaters beyond those that we've mentioned?

[TAPE 3] 00:34:03 MICHAEL FLES
The guy at the Los Feliz kept trying to get me to come over to his thing. And, then at that time it was just being born the L.A. County Art Museum courted me to be the film curator there. But, by that time I had already decided I was leaving film. And, so I let it go, you know. [sounds like] Federici show, that reminds me of one film. Tim [Carey] he was in Kubrick's film "Paths of Glory." Tim, oh a big tall guy in the film. He had a film, he was a Catholic. Do you remember this guy?

[TAPE 3] 00:34:56

ADAM HYMAN

Yeah, it's a tall guy, he's one of the guys who gets executed for the dumb Italian from "Paths of Glory," that's who you're talking about?

[TAPE 3] 00:35:01

MICHAEL FLES

Yeah.

[TAPE 3] 00:35:03

ADAM HYMAN

Uh...

[TAPE 3] 00:35:03

MICHAEL FLES

I never saw it.

[TAPE 3] 00:35:04

ADAM HYMAN

It's not Leary, but...

[TAPE 3] 00:35:05

MICHAEL FLES

No, no [laugh] for sure, not.

[TAPE 3] 00:35:06

ADAM HYMAN

No, but his name is similar to that.

[TAPE 3] 00:35:08

MICHAEL FLES

Tim [Carey]... [non-interview dialogue]

[TAPE 3] 00:35:15

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And, so he was a Catholic, he was the guy who actually introduced me to Frank Zappa when Frank was at still at El Monte High doing an electronic, you know, John Cage type thing. And, he made this film, he was a Catholic and he made this film called "The World's Greatest Sinner." And, it was a fairly straight, I mean the form of it was like a Hollywood film. And, it was about this man who does all these wrong things in his life and then suddenly he finds Christ, and I forget all of the end of it. But, except there's this long trail of blood from maybe he crucifies himself, [laugh] or something like that. And, Federici from the theatre, oh god I forget the name of that theatre, it was just down the road from us, maybe on Melrose. He picked that up. That was great.

[TAPE 3] 00:36:17

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

When I chose something there, not that I thought Tim's films [laugh] was all that great, but show something there and the audience liked it, and it was something another theater could pick up, they'd pick it up. And, then much later there was that guy out on the Sunset strip, Louie, Louis Teague, who tried to, I would say imitate what I was doing which was fine with me. I was finished with it, and you know, I didn't care what he did. I don't know if he, if it was a success or what but, any rate, that's all I remember of different theaters like that doing.

[TAPE 3] 00:37:03

ADAM HYMAN

Okay so why did you decide to leave film and then Los Angeles?

[TAPE 3] 00:37:11

MICHAEL FLES

But, I say in some way I feel like there was something that was cresting, and then it was gonna go like this. I don't have anything against this part of it, but I like to jump off when it's crested, I mean I've done what I needed to do, you know, and let the other people, now they've got the general idea, you know they know where the films are they can make it a little bit personal. It could be a meeting place, whatever. And, I really changed my life in terms of music. It was a complete open thing for me, and as I said I started to feel something about the images. In the middle of this period, [laugh] you know who Arthur Knight is? The liveliest art. He was a kind of a popular film writer in the 50's and 60's pretty straight guy, I knew him and he wrote for one of the L.A. Times.

[TAPE 3] 00:38:21

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

Or, any rate, he called me up and he said hey, listen I had a gig at Gonzaga University up in Washington State. But, now they've gone and asked me to go to the Smithsonian or something that was more. Could you possible take this gig for me, you know, so I can go and do this other thing? And, at this time I was already finished with film and already starting to do this music thing. And, I was broke, and I said, it was \$100 and all expenses paid. So, I was working really hard, was really tired, and I didn't know how I was gonna do this thing. So, I took some very pure LSD 25 to kind of give me something or other. And, I got up there to Seattle, which was the gateway to Vietnam military and got completely spooked out.

[TAPE 3] 00:39:32

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

Then I had to go on a little flight, and the professor met me, and I said to him, well I still got a couple hours, right before the? Oh no, no, it's happening in 20 minutes. I don't know if they changed it or I figured out the, I go, wow man, how am I going to do this? [Gonzaga] University is a Catholic school, and, oh man there was a fantastic wind there, you know. I come into the auditorium, and there was 35 nuns, all I guess film experts, you know. And, I decided, why am I, the talk was, "Why Am I Leaving Film?" I'm feeling what the next thing is, you know, and I said, it, I'm feeling that the festivals is some other new wave that's coming now. We've be human beings together, we can all do different things together in human way.

[TAPE 3] 00:40:39

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

It's not this, like I say, pieces of plastic being cut in certain orders, you know, and, that's what I said to the nuns. And, that was sort of like the, I guess saying goodbye to the whole thing you know. And, I must say I think I was right. Or, at least for myself say I was right at that moment. And, afterwards they all came up afterwards and say oh listen you got to come back and do another. [laugh] I knew it was great, I talked for three hours kind of nonstop, you know thing, it was good. That University is, was backed by Bing Crosby. Great.

[TAPE 3] 00:41:34

ADAM HYMAN

What year was that?

[TAPE 3] 00:41:35

MICHAEL FLES

Oh, [laugh] let's see. 60- '60, '64, '65. I'm just guessing.

[TAPE 3] 00:41:48

ADAM HYMAN

So, you programmed at Cinema Theater for how, till when it was?

[TAPE 3] 00:41:51

MICHAEL FLES

I can't remember. But I think...

[TAPE 3] 00:41:53

ADAM HYMAN

[overlapping] We think it's till '65 or something like that.

[TAPE 3] 00:41:56

MICHAEL FLES

That late huh? Could be yeah.

[TAPE 3] 00:42:02

ADAM HYMAN

And, what sort of, and prior to that, there'd been more, you'd been more in poetry, and for you, how did you, what sort of connection did you see between the poetry and the film?

[TAPE 3] 00:42:16

MICHAEL FLES

Well, first of all I regarded these guys as film poets, you know because they could, they didn't have to stick to narrative. They could go actually with the beauty of the images to carry you along in the film. And, the exuberance, you know, was similar, well like the greatest of the, or maybe even the only Beat Generation film was "Pull My Daisy," and you know, I was there when they were shooting it, and you know it was pretty much improvised, you know, kick back. Jack did the narration, overdubbed it later. But, so and then a lot of the narration and dialogue in the films were poetic. Yeah. "Cosmic Ray," Bruce Conner's film. That's a poem, you know. Yeah.

[TAPE 3] 00:43:27

ADAM HYMAN

And, do you remember anything about, did you ever form any sort of friendship with Robert Frank or Alfred Leslie by the way?

[TAPE 3] 00:43:34

MICHAEL FLES

Just that time we saw "Pull My Daisy" being shot. And, that's all. I went to a few parties where they were both there, but I didn't have anything particularly, you know, in common with them so to speak, you know.

[TAPE 3] 00:43:55

ADAM HYMAN

And, when you left Los Angeles why did you choose to leave Los Angeles? Why did you choose to go where you went?

[TAPE 3] 00:45:312

MICHAEL FLES

To get more involved, so I had been asked to get more involved in this music scene. And, I had decided to go to India, and I told Mike Getz, buy me out now, I'm gonna leave. He said how much do you want? I said, \$650 because I found, I had found this tramp steamer that went from Yugoslavia to India for \$650. He says that's all you want? I said, look in about 20 years, I'm gonna call you up at midnight and say Mike, I need \$1000 because I'm stuck somewhere. [laugh] Don't ask me any questions, just send me the money, you know. And, so I went, I started to go to India but I only got as far as New York. And, I made my own India there in a certain way. And, what was I gonna say? Years later I did get stuck in Germany. And, I called him up, and he said, how much do you want? And I said \$1000. And he said, it'll be there tomorrow for you. [laugh]

[TAPE 3] 00:45:30

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

So, but, so I wanted to see before I joined this guy I wanted to see if I was a musician first. And, so with two other guys, we started this communal apartment where we were selling grass and selling acid, and had a musical nexus. The people who came in to see us were mainly musicians. They could always have a free sample. And, there would often be eight or ten of us sitting around playing music. Some guys came after hours, you know, we were right in the Village. And, so that's what I went through with the music scene there, and it was a great, great scene. I mean we would play all night. I was mainly dancing at that time. We would play all night, oh I mean you know we were dressed like hippies with beautiful clothes and everything. Then we'd go down in the morning where the workers were going off to go to work at the subway, the bus thing.

[TAPE 3] 00:46:45 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And, play music for them and wave and tell them, have a nice day, and blah blah blah like that. And, and so many great people came into that scene you know, and danced and played music. And, then I went back to L.A., I felt okay, I've done it. I stayed there for about a year doing that. And, then I've done it now I'll come back, and get into this other thing, you know.

[TAPE 3] 00:47:07 ADAM HYMAN

What did you play music with throughout?

[TAPE 3] 00:47:10 MICHAEL FLES

[laugh] It was a whole bunch of different ethnic instruments. It was a lot of percussion, and little flutes. And, some string instruments. Yeah, you know we bought a lot of folk, ethnic instruments in the stores around the villages. Any things that we, you know that we felt had a good tone to it. One guy, the, one of my partners had a place there he played twelve string guitar. Just, well I would try, [laugh] I would kind of try to get everybody really stoned into a good groove, and everybody would be dancing like, I mean playing music and then I would dance when everybody got up there, you know. And, I just dance for hours. Yeah. So, that's why I went to New York.

[TAPE 3] 00:48:13 ADAM HYMAN

When did you end up in Trinidad?

[TAPE 3] 00:48:16 MICHAEL FLES

Oh, that was about 17 years ago. I had done a children's light show in Israel for about four and half, almost five years. Then I got stuck in Germany that's when I called Mike Getz. And, then I wrote everybody I'm stuck here, anybody have any ideas about where I should go? And, somebody wrote back, Humboldt County, we got the redwoods, we got the ocean, we got the university, and they had a trailer in their backyard where I could live to begin with. So you know, I didn't have any better place to go, and it just turned out to be a great choice.

[TAPE 3] 00:49:08 ADAM HYMAN

Can I have just a bit more, and then we'll wrap it up.

[TAPE 3] 00:49:10 MICHAEL FLES

Sure.

[TAPE 3] 00:49:12 ADAM HYMAN

Okay, good. Describe a bit more of your light shows, what technologies were you using, what defects came for?

[TAPE 3] 00:49:20 MICHAEL FLES

That guy you asked me about before, Bob Pike? He had some interesting films, early light show history actually. We used overhead projectors with a dish, or a face to a big clock. Usually with sugar water in it to slow it, slow down the colors and you would use, when we had money, we would use inks, we would use food colors. But, the artists had control over those colors and how they moved with straws. They would blow over the top of the thing so you'd get this amazing. Of course the screens were was big as a movie screen. Some of them were, or at least the 16 millimeter screen, we had some big screens. Depending on the, and as a musician, I was playing a lot of gongs. That's what my teacher turned me onto, I just, the resonance, the tones and everything. So, there'd be you know, a beautiful blue thing come in from here, and then it would twist around and come up.

[TAPE 3] 00:50:37 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And, then flare out like this, and you could play the blue, you could play the velocity of the color. And, there could be several musicians who were all playing one thing, you know, and even in Germany we entered a contest that the music educators put up of new ways of music notation. This is what we presented. Have the kids look at these lovely colors, and play music to that, and that's a notation because everybody's in the same, everybody's playing blue and playing how the thing moves, and how they interact, you know. And, for example, as we're fading out here, Tali, my projectionist in Israel and I played 161 institutions for the mentally handicapped in Israel. Every one of the ones that there were twice with the light show, with that light show. And, I wondered if it was gonna be too much for those kids.

[TAPE 3] 00:51:43 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

But, see the beauty of it is there's no context. They don't have to have any literary or visual background. It's just the purity of the color, you know. And, they, it was really important for them, I think. The, many of the people would say to us, we've never seen the kids be so quiet and just watch something. They would, they could feel they were feeding into it, you know. And, so that's what, that was my selfishness. I wanted to feel those people responding to something I was doing, you know. And, then on the technical thing, I feel that- in France we added color, shadow, dance, 'cause it's three I'm talking now dogma, right? There's three aspects to this. Spontaneous sound, spontaneous color and spontaneous dance. So, the technical problem is, how do you see a dancer in a room that's dark so that you can project?

[TAPE 3] 00:52:58 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

So, some of us worked on the innovative part of it, but I was the only one who really took it seriously as a new project. And, we had three lights, red, green and blue. Two like this, and one like this. And, the dancer has to work very close to the screen or else you go out of focus as you get too close to the lights. You could project that while the colors were going, so that, I did this in Humboldt County for seven years. So, that you could play, the dancer could play with the colors. And, see we're all listening to one another, I'm, as a musician I'm facing the screen watching these colors. The color person is listening to me, and the dancer is listening, we're all listening and trying to make this thing happen. And, we're all trying to get from what the audience wants. If it's raining out it's a different show than if it's not, you know and things like that.

[TAPE 3] 00:54:06 MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And it was very, very strong. We entered a contest in Tel Aviv which was a dance contest. And, we were one of four things that won with that color shadow dance, with the light show. That was with the light show, so that's what it was more or less.

[TAPE 3] 00:54:30 ADAM HYMAN

Did you ever present it in Los Angeles?

[TAPE 3] 00:54:34 MICHAEL FLES

The light, the real light show for my teacher's generation was done a lot in La--well, quite a bit in Los Angeles at the Ivar Theatre, at the, I think it was called the Trocadero on the Sunset Strip, other different various places.

[TAPE 3] 00:54:50 ADAM HYMAN

Who did those, yeah do you remember? Names of the people?

[TAPE 3] 00:54:54 MICHAEL FLES

Christopher Tree was the musician. [non-interview dialogue]

[TAPE 3] 00:55:15

ADAM HYMAN

More on the light show in L.A. So, the years that you were seeing them and were previous to you.

[TAPE 3] 00:55:27

MICHAEL FLES

That's right that was a tradition from the 50's, from a bunch of guys that were some years older than me. That acoustic tradition of the light show, like for us, purists, [laugh] what happened was rock n' roll was not the light show. That was the prostitution of the light show. And, this thing I'm talking about started at San Francisco State. I think the guy was head of the art department. Started using this liquid light projection thing, and I'm not sure about this, but I think that's also where the gongs, and timpani, and bamboo flutes came into it as an integral part of it. And, then those guys started traveling up and down the state. This is a very esoteric thing.

[TAPE 3] 00:56:28

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

And, I think very important, because you know the guys who are good at P.R. or whatever they, I'm saying when you Google the light show you're gonna get a lot of people who say they did this and that and the other thing. But, these guys who were doing this in the 50's, some of them they, that aspect is not necessarily important to them. The thing that happened was the important thing. So, the spiritual headquarters of that was Big Sur in the hot tubs there, pre [sounds like] Easalen, it was. And, I saw it and still see it as a complete form, you know that just has so much room to expand, and you know yeah, so.

[TAPE 3] 00:57:21

ADAM HYMAN

Did you remember the names of any of the firsts involved besides Christopher?

[TAPE 3] 00:57:26

MICHAEL FLES

Nick was a trombone player, but I don't know his last name. One guy I'm staying at this guy's house, his uncle Elias Romero was an early projectionist. And, Cameron was a projection for the light show. Well, according to Christopher one of the better ones. That was always the weak spot was the projectionist in that early light show. But, listen you know I would want to make historically a division between what I did, and what that early light show did because I never really, really saw those productions. One time, I walked over to the Renaissance, which was a club on the Sunset Strip. Ben Shapiro, he was later became Ravi Shankar's agent out here. And, they were doing the light show there, and I just thought, oh this is way too far out.

[TAPE 3] 00:58:23

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

Wallace introduced me to Christopher and Christopher was staying just above Wallace's house here in Beverly Glen and I went in to see what was going on. And, that's when I experienced the gongs for the first time. And, you know, I guess it was a turning point in my life, you know in some way.

[TAPE 3] 00:58:49

ADAM HYMAN

And when was that again?

[TAPE 3] 00:58:54

MICHAEL FLES

[19]65 I guess, you know, because we were already working pretty good by that being which I get somebody told me was [19]66, the one in Elysian Park so, say [19]65 you know.

[TAPE 3] 00:59:06

ADAM HYMAN

And one brief thing is, of course, you were, you went by John Fles when you were running the Cinema Theater. Now, you're by Michael. So, I just wanted to clarify the, your name and did you change it, or are you using different elements of it, or how is that at all, can you tell me?

[TAPE 3] 00:59:20

MICHAEL FLES

I think Michael was technically my first name for, yeah, on my birth certificate and stuff. And, I think Michael in Holland in some slang was something like boy. So, she changed it to, my mother changed it to John from the time I was very little everybody knew me as John. And, that whole scene with the music for me was so significant I felt I wanted to make that change of the name. It's a kind of a meditation to get people call you by a different name. There're still old friends of mine around here that can't break that habit of calling me John, but I don't know who they're talking to. I've been Michael for so long. So, that's what, it was a, some kind of marker of some new thing I was into where I had a new name and you know.

[TAPE 3] 01:00:24

MICHAEL FLES (CONTINUED)

I took all of my, that trip I went to New York. I took all of my manuscripts. I gave them to Diane Di Prima who had a little poet's press she was gonna publish them. And, especially the novella had no other copies. I said, Diana, take care of this, and she was moving up to be with Timothy Leary up in Crestline, whatever that place was that wealthy guy, where he was staying, and for some reason, she mailed all of her manuscripts up there for some reason. And, the post office was after Leary, they busted all this stuff, then they went to court, they got everything back except my manuscripts which I'm sure was not on purpose. Because, my stuff wasn't the most radical or whatever they were looking for it was actually, they did lose it. So, that was, I gave all my manuscripts, and then I was taking around my instruments from then on, you know, I any rate, that was the Michael change for me.

[TAPE 3] 01:01:29

ADAM HYMAN

Shall we finish there?

[TAPE 3] 01:01:31

MICHAEL FLES

That's it that's fine.

[TAPE 3] 01:01:32

ADAM HYMAN

Okay, great. It's been marvelous we can continue on with the rest of your life.

[TAPE 3] 01:01:37

MICHAEL FLES

[laugh]

[TAPE 3] 01:[TAPE 3] 01:37

ADAM HYMAN

The next time you're in L.A. We'll keep talking about the rest of it.

[TAPE 3] 01:01:40

MICHAEL FLES

Okay, good. [non-interview dialogue]

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