



COME TO CRUMBLAND

R. CRUMB & ROBERT HUGHES: A CONVERSATION

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Celeste Bartos Forum

The New York Public Library

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PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: (In Progress) his best friend for a few minutes. This event sold out in just a matter of hours, which I think speaks very well about the state of our culture, namely people hungry for substance. They don't only want to be fed, but want to be nourished.

You probably all read the card that announces the event tonight. And you will be hearing Robert Hughes as he is in conversation with R. Crumb. And I think that better than anybody describing why I am so pleased that this is happening at the New York Public Library, is a little insert that was in the *Village Voice* this week, it's called "Voice Voices." And I want to read it, because it just made me very happy. It says, "Headless chicks and well-hung dorks at the public library." (Laugh) R. Crumb once said, 'When I was it five or six, I was sexually attracted to Bugs Bunny.' Obviously, a precocious lad, he was soon creating homemade comic books. In his mid-twenties, Crumb was world-famous for underground comics featuring muscular babes, having contorted gooey sex with his myopic, skinny, though massively endowed alter ego.

"Occasionally, amid the hijinx, the scripts are often uproarious, and ladies literally lose their heads. According to *Time* magazine art critic Robert Hughes, 'When Crumb draws that little monster, Mr. Natural, doing things that you or I would not normally contemplate doing with a headless woman, it is an acknowledgment that these kind of fantasies do dwell in *Homo sapiens*.' Crumb's wife shrugs. 'He depicts his id in its pure form. But he's not like that as a person. He gets it out in his artwork.'" (Laugh) More commentary?

"Despite such graphic exhibitionism, the cartoonist rarely appears in public, so he sits down with a acerbically brilliant Hughes to discuss *The R. Crumb Handbook*, just out from MQ Publications, should animate

the staid halls of the New York Public Library.” That really hurt. But the last sentence made me very, very happy. “Who knew those august marble lions were every bit as cool as Fritz the Cat?” (Laugh, Applause)

I was also very happy to hear that the New York Public Library, you know, that staid, venerable place that we all need to make relevant, actually has now, in its collection, recently bought, *The Captain Is Out To Lunch*. So, we do have some Crumb work, which you can come and see in the Berg Collection. Just be careful of who’s looking over your shoulder. We have Bob Hughes here today. Someone I’ve deeply admired, who uses language in a way, he’s so capacious and so extraordinarily articulate, that I’m not even sad that tonight we don’t have visuals. He will probably graphically describe in his graphic language R. Crumb’s work, which will leave, in a way, much more room for your imagination.

And he is the author of *The Culture of Complaint*, *Shock of the New*, *Goya*, and most excitingly, for me, because he may actually come to the library, to these staid halls, he’s writing a memoir, and I’m very excited to read it. It’s in the process of being written. Books will be sold after the event. We have both *The R. Crumb Handbook*, and also, a limited edition, which you may very well like to purchase.

I encourage you all to join the e-mail list. As you know, some of you are very sad that we have done away with the brochure. But it is simply to inform you in a better way. We will inform you with these wonderful cards we’re doing. But also, we will inform you through our e-mail list, which is growing about three to four hundred people every week. I would like to thank, finally, Mary Dinaburg, and Zaro, from MQ Publications, Paul Morris, Stacey Ashton, and so many other individuals. And to the two Roberts, Crumb and Hughes, as I said, the two very naughty boys, a cartoonist and art critic, I want to extend an extremely warm welcome. (Applause)

ROBERT HUGHES: Oh, goodness gracious.

R. CRUMB: Security, security, get them out of here. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: Thank you very much for that intro, mate.

ROBERT HUGHES: Crumb, perhaps you’d like to borrow my stick. I saw you stumbling a little. (Laugh)

R. CRUMB: The media, I hate those people, God. Thank you. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, you know (Laugh) shortly before coming here, I was thinking about what I was supposed to be doing next, as one does on such terrifying occasions. And I thought of a particularly stupid book which has, you know, been published about, oh, it must be a year ago now, called *The Da Vinci Code*. (Laugh) In which somebody who knew absolutely nothing about Leonardo Da Vinci . . .

R. CRUMB: Oh, you snob. Come on.

ROBERT HUGHES: I'm not just a snob, Bob. I am, as they say in Australia, a fucking elitist. I mean, there are some kinds of popular art, which as we know, we both love.

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: And there are other kinds of art that becomes popular, and it isn't even goddamn art, it's garbage. And anyway, you know, I was thinking, as I was struggling with this memoir, what would I really like to be doing? Well, I think probably, you know, and I thought, well maybe what I'd really like to be doing is a novel, you know, featuring, as *The Da Vinci Code* does, a recasting of Jesus Christ, in which our Savior, at least the Savior for some of us, would appear as a drooling knock-kneed 110-pound terminal lecher, salivating over a small girl somewhere in Detroit. And the two eventually get together, and they produce a savior of the human race.

And this would be cast in code, and it would be called *The Crumb Code*. And it would be a gigantic, enormous, raving bestseller. (Laugh) Unfortunately, however, it turns out that he has already anticipated this stray thought of mine, and I learned in the green room, that he is about to begin work upon Crumb's illustrated Genesis. I hope I'm not giving away any secrets.

R. CRUMB: I don't care. Go ahead, tell them. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: So, given this kind of you know, deep running, what can I say, cultural attachment, that you have to fundamental themes of Western civilization.

R. CRUMB: Western snivelization, yes.

ROBERT HUGHES: I mean, Genesis. You can't . . .

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: I want to know something about where your work begins from.

R. CRUMB: Well, you know, there's the Egyptian hieroglyphs, and there's the cave paintings.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, yeah, but cut to the chase, please. (Laugh) Yeah.

R. CRUMB: And . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: No, no, no. You didn't grow up looking at Egyptian hieroglyphs.

R. CRUMB: No, I didn't, no.

ROBERT HUGHES: So, what did you grow up looking at?

R. CRUMB: A total child of popular culture. That's all I ever saw until I was twenty years old, or . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: And what was that?

R. CRUMB: TV, comic books. That's it. You know? Dick and Jane, you know? That's what I grew up on. (Laugh) (Cough)

ROBERT HUGHES: See, our childhoods were different, because I didn't see a television set actually, until I was twenty. They had rather peculiar arrangements about that in Australia. But . . .

R. CRUMB: That's probably why you have so many brain cells left.

ROBERT HUGHES: No, they got burnt out. I've been in America for thirty-two years.

R. CRUMB: You had a good start, though. I mean, in my family, we had a TV when I was five years old, in 1948. And you know, we started watching it a lot, right away.

ROBERT HUGHES: Did they plug your little mouth into this electronic nipple to shut you up?

R. CRUMB: Well, it was a good babysitter. TV is a very good babysitter. So, I watched *Howdy Doody*, and *The Lone Ranger*, and that's the stuff that most deeply imprinted on me. That's my cultural imprint. And Donald Duck, and Little Lulu, and Felix the Cat.

ROBERT HUGHES: Felix the Cat?

R. CRUMB: Yeah, real basic popular-culture stuff . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Did it . . .

R. CRUMB: . . . that was fed to children and kids. My parents, they had no culture. They were just, you know . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, they had a culture.

R. CRUMB: Well, I mean, not what's considered culture with a capital K. You know. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah. Well, you know, in your drawings, in some of them at any rate, there's this character who's tremendously clean-cut, straight, got a suit made out of rigid cardboard . . .

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . is that your Dad?

R. CRUMB: That's my Dad, yeah. Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: In real life, what did your Dad do?

R. CRUMB: Well, he was in the U.S. Marine Corps for twenty years. He went in in 1936. And my mother made him retire in 1956.

ROBERT HUGHES: With reluctance?

R. CRUMB: Oh, yeah. He *loved* the Marine Corps. Loved it. He would have stayed in it for life, if my mother allowed him to. She made him quit, because she got tired of being transferred around all the time. We lived on tract housing by military bases 'til I was . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: So, you were a base baby.

R. CRUMB: Yeah. I was a base baby.

ROBERT HUGHES: I don't mean in the musical sense. (Laugh) But look, the . . .

R. CRUMB: My father, he was that kind of man. You know, that real, classic, American, John Wayne kind of guy. He was a very intimidating man, my father. He had a deep, booming voice, had a hot temper, you know, when he got angry, you know, he would strike you quite violently.

ROBERT HUGHES: Did he let you know that he loved you when he wasn't striking you?

R. CRUMB: No, he was from very reserved farm people, and you know, when I'd come home to visit after I left home, he'd say, "Oh, it's good to see you Robert," and shake hands. You know.

ROBERT HUGHES: Oh, really. Not, Bob. Robert.

R. CRUMB: Robert, yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: How would he have liked the idea that you would have ended up married to a Jewish girl living in France?

R. CRUMB: I was the first person in the history of the Crumb family ever to marry a Jew.

ROBERT HUGHES: Really?

R. CRUMB: And I married two of them. (Laugh) What'd you say?

ROBERT HUGHES: Simultaneously?

R. CRUMB: My wife says she's the first person in *her* family to marry a goy.

ROBERT HUGHES: Very few people feel unique being a *sheigetz*, he's one of them. (Laugh) But anyway, sorry, go on.

R. CRUMB: What was I saying?

ROBERT HUGHES: You were talking about your father's attitude . . .

R. CRUMB: Oh.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . towards you as a child. And what I was going to ask you was did it ever cross his lamps that you would have ended up as some sort of an artist?

R. CRUMB: Well, I mean, since we were always drawing comics when we were kids, he saw that my brother and I, my brother Charles, who made me draw comics when I was a kid, I was very much under his domination as a child.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: He was actually a much stronger artistic visionary when we were kids than I was. I had to do it to be a worthwhile person. And my father saw this, and he used to say, "Oh, you guys, you'll get over that when you get into your teens, and you get out and play football. You'll give up this comic thing." He just thought it was a child thing that we would get over.

ROBERT HUGHES: But he was wrong about Charles, and obviously, he was wrong about you.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, he was totally bewildered by us. We were just Martians as far as he was concerned. (Laugh) He used to come in our room, and we'd be like laying on our beds in the fetal position reading comics, you know, and he just, and he was a man of action. He was a U.S. Marine. He'd say, "Get off your duffs, and get out there and do something. Youth is a time for action."

ROBERT HUGHES: Do you think he'd sometimes lay on his bed in the fetal position dreaming about shooting Koreans, or . . .

R. CRUMB: (Laugh) He really wanted to go to the Korean War, my mother wouldn't let him. It was a big issue with them. That was it.

ROBERT HUGHES: No, I don't mean to be silly about your father . . .

R. CRUMB: It broke his heart. It broke his heart.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: He had three sons, they all ended up complete defective weirdos. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: None of them ended up as warriors.

R. CRUMB: No, no warriors at all. No, nope, no.

ROBERT HUGHES: (Inaudible).

R. CRUMB: And my younger brother, Max, he ended up the strangest of all. He was my father's last hope to get another, a little Marine out of us. And then, he went weird, and that was it.

ROBERT HUGHES: Maxie was . . .

R. CRUMB: Max, yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: Max.

R. CRUMB: My older brother committed suicide, he's dead.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: But Max is still alive, and he lives in a hotel in the Skid Row area of San Francisco. And he's lived in the same room for twenty-five years.

ROBERT HUGHES: He is more a meditator than a warrior.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, he meditates. He's very strange. He's kind of crazy actually. But he does good art work. He's a very good artist.

ROBERT HUGHES: Is his work ever seen?

R. CRUMB: Not much. You know, so he has some people who buy, that he actually manages to live off his art work, miraculously. It's very strange, very disturbing stuff.

ROBERT HUGHES: So, you started off drawing comic strips.

R. CRUMB: Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: And I guess that necessarily meant you started off copying comic strips, right?

R. CRUMB: Yeah, we tried to copy Donald Duck, and Andy Panda, and you know, this kind of stuff.

ROBERT HUGHES: Andy who? Sorry.

R. CRUMB: Andy Panda. It's an American thing. You probably wouldn't know about it.

ROBERT HUGHES: No. Yeah, I don't know about that.

R. CRUMB: They have comics in Australia? They have their own comics?

ROBERT HUGHES: They certainly did, but I wasn't allowed to read them, you see.

R. CRUMB: Oh, I see. So, you come from the kind of people who didn't let you read comics.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, they disapproved of the idea.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, that's right.

ROBERT HUGHES: And also, there was a very strong prejudice in Australia against American comics.

R. CRUMB: Yeah? Really?

ROBERT HUGHES: There was, as you probably remember, a book by some mad psychotherapist called *Seduction of the Innocent*, by guy called Fred—what was his name?

R. CRUMB: Fredric Wertham.

ROBERT HUGHES: Fredric Wertham.

R. CRUMB: Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: That's right.

R. CRUMB: The Fifties, yeah, it caused a big stir.

ROBERT HUGHES: That was taken with extreme literalness in Australia. And you weren't allowed, therefore, to you know, read, for God's sake, you weren't allowed, well yes, you could go as far as Chester Gould.

R. CRUMB: Yes. Comics were very disreputable. Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: They really were.

R. CRUMB: In the Fifties.

ROBERT HUGHES: All comic strips, in a certain sense, were underground.

R. CRUMB: Well, they weren't underground, but they were low . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: In Australia, I mean.

R. CRUMB: Oh, really?

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: Oh.

ROBERT HUGHES: Except for (Inaudible).

R. CRUMB: That extreme? Really?

ROBERT HUGHES: And there was something about a bunch of stupid teenagers. (Laugh) But . . .

R. CRUMB: Most of the comics were pretty stupid. I mean, it must be admitted. But that was all we had. That was it. You know?

ROBERT HUGHES: See, what I want to get to, or get at, or hear from you about is you know, some notion that I've always had that comic strips were in some degree, intrinsically forbidden fruit, because they

represented, they stood for, a world of slightly anarchic childhood representation. Do you think that's true or false?

R. CRUMB: Actually, I never thought of it that way.

ROBERT HUGHES: I mean, there was something weird and inherently subversive about the idea of the comic strip as against the fully literate discursive text.

R. CRUMB: Well, to us, in the culture that we grew up in, that was something for kids, and it was accepted as a thing. And my mother, when I was really small, would buy us comic books.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: And bring them home and give them to us. So, to me, it was just this thing that we loved. It was a kid thing. And you know, by the Fifties, or even the late Forties, they had all this kid media, cartoons, Disney, comic books. You know, stuff already catering to children.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yes.

R. CRUMB: So, that's what we received. And being a person with I guess, kind of a nerdy, arrested development, or whatever you want to call it, I just stayed stuck in that. I never got past it. I was like still this kid drawing comics. It wasn't a forbidden thing. Of course, when I took LSD and all that stuff, then I kind of bent it to my own crazy perverted fantasies and all that. But . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: But your crazy, perverted fantasies only become capable of being really expressed in this medium, when you think of the idea of comics being not for children, but for adults.

R. CRUMB: Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: But still using a child format.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, I very consciously got that idea, yeah, in my late teens, of making comics something more personal, and not just this kind of stupid mainstream kid thing.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, how did you go about that?

R. CRUMB: Well, I just kept drawing. (Laugh) Just kept drawing and drawing and drawing.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, come on. The . . .

R. CRUMB: That's the best explanation I can think.

ROBERT HUGHES: You know, there have been some great comic artists who just kept drawing and drawing.

R. CRUMB: Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: But they didn't come up with the kind of results that you did. Which . . .

R. CRUMB: I guess.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . sort of, what's that word they love in the universities? Transgressive.

R. CRUMB: Transgressive. What does that mean, transgressive?

ROBERT HUGHES: It means . . .

R. CRUMB: It sounds bad.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . it means . . .

R. CRUMB: Is it a bad thing?

ROBERT HUGHES: It means it would have offended some dumb-ass structuralist . . .

R. CRUMB: Structuralist.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . if he or she had not, you know, been already liberated.

R. CRUMB: Or a post-structuralist or something.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, post-structuralist. Post something, anyway.

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: You know, nobody, you know, I mean, great comical artists like say, Chuck Jones, a sublime man, it didn't really, I think, occur to him to have . . .

R. CRUMB: No, it didn't. It didn't occur to those kind of guys.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . those kinds of situations.

R. CRUMB: Those kind of guys, they just kept doing stuff for the mainstream market. And that's how they always thought of comics, and cartoons. And they didn't think of is something you could do something personal with.

ROBERT HUGHES: I remember there was a famous, because I saw it in the Sixties, I don't know who drew it. But you remember there was a famous drawing of all these Disney characters, you know, Dumbo, and Mickey Mouse, and all the rest . . .

R. CRUMB: Having sex.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . and they're all screwing in this big orgy.

R. CRUMB: Yeah. Wasn't that Wallace Wood that drew that?

R. CRUMB: There's a fan. That was in *The Realist*. It was drawn by Wallace Wood.

ROBERT HUGHES: It was Wallace Wood, was it?

R. CRUMB: Yeah. One of the great, you know, comic technicians of those days. That was great.

ROBERT HUGHES: How did you, let me think. One of the reasons why you've been so popular, and why I would surmise everybody's here tonight including me . . .

R. CRUMB: I'd like to hear this, tell me. (Laugh) I can't figure it out.

ROBERT HUGHES: Because we think of you as fearless and crazy. (Laugh)

R. CRUMB: Or, maybe too crazy to realize I should be more cautious.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, the mad seldom realize the dimensions of their own mania. (Purposefully goofy laugh from R. Crumb) I mean, you're one of the few real honest-to-God Americans I've ever come across, for instance, who seems to be totally unaffected by the notion of political correctness. (Laugh)

R. CRUMB: Yeah. Well, maybe I should be more affected by that notion.

ROBERT HUGHES: Why should you be more?

R. CRUMB: Well . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: You shouldn't be more.

R. CRUMB: It's not nice to you know, draw those pictures of women with no heads, and those you know, jiggaboo images of black people, and stuff like that. I didn't . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Are you still . . .

R. CRUMB: . . . realize how hurtful it was when I did it. I didn't realize it. You know, I was kind of surprised when people didn't love me after that. (Laugh) I want everyone to love me. Please, love me. (Laugh) And then, you know . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, but see, you're the kind of loon that thinks that if he tells the truth about his own inner drives and ultimate fixations, if he exposes that . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: That's right.

R. CRUMB: . . . then people will love you.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah. That they'll see that I'm, you know, this human, like them, and they'll, I wanted acceptance.

R. CRUMB: But you see, you're horribly wrong.

ROBERT HUGHES: You're right. I realize that now. (Laugh) You can't make everybody love you. It's an exercise in futility. And it's probably not even a good idea to try.

ROBERT HUGHES: Thank you very much.

ROBERT HUGHES: All right, all right, don't embarrass me. You love me.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, okay. You love me, okay, all right. You're killing me, you love me so much. It's killing me. Back off. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: You don't want to do that. We merely wish to embarrass you.

R. CRUMB: Right. I'm very easily embarrassed.

ROBERT HUGHES: Listen, if there is some side of your imagery, as it emerged in the late 1960s.

R. CRUMB: Sixties.

ROBERT HUGHES: Is there some side of it you wished you'd stressed more than you did, what would it be?

R. CRUMB: Good drawing, probably.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah?

R. CRUMB: Yeah. It was sloppy. I was taking too much drugs. I wasn't being careful enough with the drawing. I don't know, what else?

ROBERT HUGHES: But let's stay with the drugs for a minute. (Laugh)

R. CRUMB: It's a good question.

ROBERT HUGHES: You started taking acid, I guess, we probably both had our first acid experiences or whatever it might be, at about the same time, round about 1967, would I be right?

R. CRUMB: I took it first in June of '65.

ROBERT HUGHES: Sixty-five, so you were . . .

R. CRUMB: It was still legal, actually. I got it from a psychiatrist. It was good stuff. Sandoz. And it was in a little glass vial, with a blue label (Laugh) . . . that was good. Six hundred micrograms. That was . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: The really pure stuff. Six hundred mics of San—

R. CRUMB: Of Sandoz. Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: That was your first time ever? My God.

R. CRUMB: I was out there in the twilight zone. Man, it was . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Were you with anybody, or were you . . .

R. CRUMB: I was with my first wife, yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: Oh, well.

R. CRUMB: That's the time I threw up in her face without realizing it. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: Now.

R. CRUMB: Really, I didn't realize I was doing it. I didn't even know. She said she felt like she was being born, this warm liquid. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: See, when we were children, you know, heading into this loony territory . . .

R. CRUMB: We weren't children.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . there were no guidebooks.

R. CRUMB: Yes, we were children, and there was no guidebook.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yes.

R. CRUMB: Except Timothy Leary's guidebook, which . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, he was a loon, anyway.

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: Stupid Irishman.

R. CRUMB: Oh, come on. *You're* an Irishman.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yes, that's why I'm entitled to say "stupid Irishman." But did you, I mean, were people telling you, or did anybody give you to understand that drug experiences were somehow going to give you access to greater levels of truth and social understanding?

R. CRUMB: Yeah, they did. They gave me to understand that the people that had already taken LSD, they said, "Yeah, this will give you visions, and have this religious experience." They didn't tell me that it might also be total hell on earth, which it turned out to be for me most of the time. But still, I kept taking it. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: When you kept taking it, and you survived it, because you are the son of a Marine.

R. CRUMB: That's right. Yeah, I could tough it out. Just like my Dad. My Dad, it was World War II, for me, it was taking LSD, you know? It's true. I faced death, and, you know.

ROBERT HUGHES: I mean, this is not a frivolous comparison, in my view.

R. CRUMB: No, it's not. At all.

ROBERT HUGHES: The . . .

R. CRUMB: It was heavy, man, that's all I can say.

ROBERT HUGHES: It *was* heavy, man. (Laugh)

R. CRUMB: You took it twice, you told me.

ROBERT HUGHES: I took it twice.

R. CRUMB: And you had a hard time with it also?

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, I think the first time I took it, I took it basically because my wife took it.

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: And the second time I took it, I took it because I thought that well, shit, I might as well try and find out whether it was really as bad as that.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, you told me that. (Laugh) That's why I kept taking it, to try and find out what happened the last time. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: But see, what I'm curious about is, did you at any time, share that view, that was so prevalent in Haight-Ashbury and other great centers of world learning, that you know, dropping 250 mics was going to somehow or other induct you into a better world, which if everybody else dropped it right along with you . . .

R. CRUMB: Yes, I believed that.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . would turn out to be a kind of utopia. I never believed that.

R. CRUMB: Yes, I believed that for a while.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: I remember telling people that. It's embarrassed to think now. But I remember preaching that to people. If everybody took LSD, you know, it would be a better world.

ROBERT HUGHES: It was a kind of self-congratulation in a way, wasn't it?

R. CRUMB: Well, no. Because all the hippies that took LSD, and felt that you know, in the beginning, with some actual validity, they felt that they had perceived a lot of things that were wrong with the direction that industrial civilization was going. And this was all suddenly revealed very clearly in a way, even though, you know, it got fogged over a bit with all the other crazy stuff that was going on. But you know, in the beginning, when you took LSD, you could see, there's something all wrong with this whole setup here. And quick, we've got to get back to the land, we've got to go back to nature, we've got to get rid of all this polluting chemical nonsense that we've got going here. We've got to get back, we've got to stop this. It's unhealthy for the planet. It all became viscerally clear.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: It all seemed suddenly life threatening, this world with all these cars coming at you.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, it was life threatening, goddamnit, it was.

R. CRUMB: Well, but you know, in a normal state, you kind of adapt to it. But in that state, that's what drove everybody to go to such an extreme view of getting away from modern society, and our parents were all wrong. And the whole like nuclear balance of terror and all that stuff, it just seemed insane. It just seemed so totally insane, as I'm sure you remember, how we felt.

ROBERT HUGHES: I remember it vividly.

R. CRUMB: We were young.

ROBERT HUGHES: One of the things that interests me is you know, the way in which this impacted upon your art. Because in point of fact, you know, Sixties discontent, and Sixties worries, and Sixties despair about the conditions of postindustrial (Inaudible), that left a lot of trace in writing, and of course a great deal in music. But it didn't leave very much trace in the visual arts. And I'm wondering why this should be so. I mean, why it should be that you're not the only person certainly to address this stuff, you're probably the best known and most influential is the wrong word, but . . .

R. CRUMB: Yeah, I don't know.

ROBERT HUGHES: I mean, your work is the most powerful testimony to it.

R. CRUMB: Well, you know, there's some of my colleagues here who also have left similar statements. You know, they went through the same thing I did. And you know, they've turned out some great work, too. But somehow now, the media and the museums are fixated on me. I don't quite get it. But you know, I'm not eating humble pie, okay, I know I'm good and all that. But you know, why me? I'm not sure exactly. It's a little bit bewildering. (Thump.) That's me. I touched my microphone. I touched my microphone.

ROBERT HUGHES: Oh, you're beating your breast.

R. Crumb: I was fumbling with my necktie like Oliver Hardy.

ROBERT HUGHES: Oliver Hardy? Do you know that Mussolini adopted, the reason why Mussolini wore a bowler hat was that Laurel & Hardy did?

R. CRUMB: (Inaudible).

ROBERT HUGHES: It's true. Yeah, he did. (Laugh) However, I digress.

R. CRUMB: Right. Gotta love that.

ROBERT HUGHES: See, what I want to get to is the way in which these images worked on people. I mean, you have been furiously accused of being a racist.

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: Because of your . . .

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . what's the name of the ideal black girl?

R. CRUMB: Angelfood McSpade.

ROBERT HUGHES: Angelfood McSpade.

R. CRUMB: (Inaudible) They didn't like that at all. That was bad.

ROBERT HUGHES: What else did they really not like in that area?

R. CRUMB: Oh, boy.

ROBERT HUGHES: I mean, you had some pretty frightening black street toughs.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, well they were just stereotype traditional like 1920s images of you know, big-lipped black people, which actually, had very little to do with real African Americans. You know, they were just like cartoon stereotypes that I was playing around with. All that stuff I did in the late Sixties was just cartoon stereotypes. Mr. Natural, all of those, that I was just playing around with in this kind of psychedelized way. I don't know. It's hard to explain. It's not my job to explain it.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, let's try and explain it.

R. CRUMB: You explain it. I can't. You're the guy for that.

ROBERT HUGHES: No, no. I'm not the village explainer. I want you to explain yourself. Not in any sense am I trying to put you up against a wall and accuse you of reprehensible acts of racism. Not at all.

R. CRUMB: No, I'm sure that you're not.

ROBERT HUGHES: You know, I'd be the last qualified, I assure you, to do that. But see, why did practically nobody else get onto that very intense content, you know, in a popular but sort of underground popular culture . . .

R. CRUMB: Well . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . and make something out of it the way you did?

R. CRUMB: I think that you had to be really, really alienated to get to that point where you could conceive of stuff like that, you know? You had to be very very alienated from the culture, which I was when I was young. I was you know, almost catatonic when I was young. I was you know, an extremely alienated person.

ROBERT HUGHES: But you can't have been catatonic if you were taking all this stuff in, and processing it.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, I was processing it, yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: In my own funny way.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, that's the thing. It was a funny way. A really funny way.

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: But nobody else tried to be that funny.

R. CRUMB: Well.

ROBERT HUGHES: Why is it that some artists can handle material which you would think would be reprehensible . . .

R. CRUMB: I'm telling you . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . to most of their audience?

R. CRUMB: . . . you've got to have nothing to lose. You've got to be at the point where you got nothing to lose. I mean, if you're trying to work the art game . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: (Inaudible).

R. CRUMB: . . . let's say, you know, if you're like Andy Warhol or something, then you're in with these people of you know, the cake eaters of society, and you want to please them, and get their money, and you do what Tom Wolfe called the BoHo dance, and you know, you're in there. You know, there are other outsiders whose stuff is not even recognized, or ever seen by most people that are doing you know, those kind of interesting kind of statements that don't have anything to do with any of that nonsense. But usually, it just doesn't get seen 'til maybe much later, you know. In their own time, there are people who look at it and they're horrified by it.

ROBERT HUGHES: You know, you're one of the few people that I have ever met, and we've only just met tonight, who actually does hate the contemporary art system. (Inaudible).

R. CRUMB: It's the kiss of death. It's really the kiss of death.

ROBERT HUGHES: Who really hates it even more than I do, which is saying something. (Laugh)

R. CRUMB: Well . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: I mean, I thought that nobody hated Warhol and what he stood for more than me.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, like well . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: But you do.

R. CRUMB: Well, it's just kind of annoying when you see a Marilyn Monroe silkscreen print going for \$100,000 when you know, a drawing I worked really hard on might go . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Let's stick another (Inaudible). (Laugh)

R. CRUMB: Actually, you can buy, I saw one, saw a small Bruegel painting, a little one for sale, for less than an Andy Warhol silkscreen print of Marilyn Monroe.

ROBERT HUGHES: That doesn't surprise me in the least.

R. CRUMB: That's so shockingly ridiculous.

ROBERT HUGHES: Oh, come on. I mean, I remember buying a couple of prints of Bruegel's back in the Sixties for forty pounds each.

R. CRUMB: Wow.

ROBERT HUGHES: But you see, I'm a critic, and so I can't collect something which does not deter some of my colleagues. But nevertheless, you know, when you get to the point, I mean, for instance, you know, I bought, I confess, a number of etchings of Goya's.

R. CRUMB: Yeah? Good taste.

ROBERT HUGHES: At the time, they cost about \$4,000 each. And now, I think they're worth all of five.

R. CRUMB: Yeah? Wow. Incredible. Amazing. That's amazing.

ROBERT HUGHES: And if you consider the relative merit say of a five thousand dollar Goya Capriccio, and on the other hand, a five hundred thousand dollar work by the immortal Jeffrey Koons, (Laugh) you know, you become aware that something is indeed . . .

R. CRUMB: Terribly . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . absolutely rotten in the state of Denmark.

R. CRUMB: Some things . . . right.

ROBERT HUGHES: You know, that there's been some really serious mass-hysterical degeneration of taste.

R. CRUMB: You must have some kind of analysis of that worked out, right? You must have worked it out. I can't quite figure it out. But I think you've probably had some . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, that's because I have my nose shoved against it you know, every day . . .

R. CRUMB: Yeah, that's right.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . for thirty years in America. But now, let's go to what, in museum culture, really influenced you. What really made an impact on you, and you know, how it might or might not have formed your work. You do name quite a number of artists as being, I mean, of museum-type artists . . .

R. CRUMB: Sure.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . as being your primary influences. (Overlap)

R. CRUMB: Not primary, no. All the primary information, I mean all go back to those childhood comic books, and TV shows, and old movies that I saw on television. Everything basically comes from that. And then later, secondary influences, the stuff that I found that was from the culture I came from, harder to find, you know, museum culture as you call it.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: Or, even older stuff that I've found in books, old books like Gillray, and Rowlandson, and Hogarth, and . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Hogarth.

R. CRUMB: . . . and Thomas Nast, who was a huge inspiration on me in my late teens. Just for his cross-hatching style. You know, you can't beat that cross-hatching.

ROBERT HUGHES: But it must have been great, you know, given your developing tastes and proclivities, when you were a kid, to find, for instance, there's somebody like Gillray, living two hundred years ago.

R. CRUMB: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: Who paints all these amazing scenes of shit and disaster.

R. CRUMB: Superhuman. I don't know how he did it. I don't know how he did all that in one lifetime. It's mind-boggling. He must have had his nose at his etching plate eighteen hours a day every day of his life.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, he pretty much did, because he was a hack. You know, he worked like hell.

R. CRUMB: That's right.

ROBERT HUGHES: He worked really hard. He worked all the time.

R. CRUMB: He drove himself crazy, actually.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, yeah.

R. CRUMB: But I think they had a higher, you know, work ethic back then than we do now. They just accepted . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: But see, that's something I wanted to ask you about. This whole matter of work ethic. Because . . .

R. CRUMB: Well, I was driven when I was young.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, I mean, you're very, very American in a lot of ways, and not least in your commitment to continuous, relentless . . .

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . production.

R. CRUMB: Well, it's not so true anymore as it used to be. I've tapered off a lot now that I'm slightly more well adjusted to the world.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, you're happier.

R. CRUMB: I'm a little bit happier. Yes, I don't feel as driven. When I was young, I just lived my life on paper. I didn't really live in the real world very much. And as a consequence I couldn't cope with real world and real people very well. And that, in itself, became life-threatening. So, I had to actually stop drawing so much and learn how to cope with people. Otherwise, it would have killed me. That's when I latched onto Aline, my wife, because she's a lot more solidly grounded in reality than I am. And she's kind of like helped get me through.

ROBERT HUGHES: She's a cartoonist, too.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, she is. She very good. She's a great cartoonist in her own right. (Applause) God love her.

(ALINE KOMINSKY-CRUMB: "Thanks, boys.")

ROBERT HUGHES: That's okay. It's a concession we make from time to time.

R. CRUMB: Right. Acknowledge the little woman. (Laugh) (Overlap)

ROBERT HUGHES: Let's suppose that you hadn't had that immense outlet for dreams and resentment.

R. CRUMB: It was an immense outlet, that's a very good way to put it. Immense outlet. A great outlet. (Overlap)

ROBERT HUGHES: Do you think you would have imploded? I mean, would . . .

R. CRUMB: Oh, boy. I'd be drawing those big butts on some prison wall if it wasn't for that. (Laugh) I would. Or, lunatic asylum, or someplace. Or, I'd be dead. I could have easily just killed myself, I was so depressed. (Laugh) But now, I'm better. (Laugh) And fame helped. You know, getting famous helped. Recognition.

ROBERT HUGHES: Oh, truer words were never spoken.

R. CRUMB: Getting recognition helped. But you know, it can also be hell on earth. But being suddenly, being the object of fascination from attractive women because of being famous, that helped. It wasn't about the work. It was about being famous, for women.

ROBERT HUGHES: It's what the great Dr. Sigmund said, that you know, artists, I think this was Dr. Sigmund, said that artists are impelled by three principle motives, namely fame, money, and the acquisition of beautiful lovers.

R. CRUMB: The acquisition of beautiful lovers, I would put that at the top myself. (Laugh) I could do without the fame. Even the money, I don't give a shit. But I couldn't live without beautiful lovers.

ROBERT HUGHES: You know, in my experience, generally the artists that do say that they could do without the fame, and they could do without the money, are those who are fairly famous and are doing quite well. I mean, in all my, shit how long is it? Well, forty-five years as an art critic, I have never met an artist who was obscure and said that he or she wished to remain in that beatific state.

R. CRUMB: I'm sure that's totally correct.

ROBERT HUGHES: I mean, wouldn't you rather be . . .

R. CRUMB: But see, the trick is that you can't get the beautiful lovers, unless you get the fame.

ROBERT HUGHES: That's right.

R. CRUMB: If you're a guy like me. Okay, if you look like Robert Redford, it's a different story.

ROBERT HUGHES: Oh, no. Oh, no, no, no. He needed the fame, too.

R. CRUMB: No, no. I mean, there is like, you know, bums on the street that are good-looking rugged guys who are very attractive to women, because they radiate some sense of like danger, or some kind of masculine, and I just didn't, I was a wimpy, nerdy, nothing. I was just like, I just didn't have whatever that animal magnetism, whatever it is, you know, I just didn't have, when I was young, I just didn't . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, I don't know about this Crumb.

R. CRUMB: Let's not dwell too long on it.

ROBERT HUGHES: I'm not sure that you're telling the whole truth. Because your pictures, I mean, your strips, and your pages are full of horrendous-looking nerdy nothings with large overbites, who . . .

R. CRUMB: Sure. It's all fantasy.

ROBERT HUGHES: Nevertheless, you know, their general apparent unattractiveness is compensated for over a few frames by the exhibition of this gigantic schlong. And . . .

R. CRUMB: It's all fantasy, you know?

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, probably.

R. CRUMB: And it was really fun to draw all that stuff.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, it was fun to look at, too.

R. CRUMB: I tell you, I lived my youth out on paper. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: See, do you think the people identify with your characters . . .

R. CRUMB: Well, some must.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . to a degree which they don't with most comic-strip characters?

R. CRUMB: I think some do, you know. The real dyed-in-the-wool Crumb fans, these other, like pitiful guys like me, they're my big fan base, you know? (Laugh) Bush has his Christian fundamentalists, I have like these pathetic nerds that love me, alienated guys, (Applause) alienated-type guys like me that come up and say, "Crumb, your comics saved my life, and boy, I identify totally." You know.

ROBERT HUGHES: Do you believe them when they say that sort of thing?

R. CRUMB: Yeah. And it even, like really warms my heart. But then they also say, "You, and Frank Zappa, and Bob Dylan." Oh, Jesus. (Laugh) And it kind of doesn't mean as much when they say that. (Laugh) Oh, boy.

ROBERT HUGHES: Does it piss you off when people treat you as a sort of representative figure of the 1960s?

R. CRUMB: The Sixties? Mr. Sixties? Nah, I guess I got used to it.

ROBERT HUGHES: No, no, no. But did it? After the Sixties?

R. CRUMB: It was just kind of ironic. You know, because at the time, I really didn't consider myself a Sixties typical guy at all, you know? In the late Sixties, you know, I felt kind of like outside of all of that nonsense. And to be identified with it later is kind of ironic. But yeah, in a way, I was a typical Sixties guy. I took LSD, I said, "Oh, wow, oh, groovy, man." You know, I said all that stuff. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: But you know, we were all Sixties people in that none of us was born, I think, as late as 1970.

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: You know, there's a kind of weird stereotyping that went on, as inevitably happens. But there's always cultural stereotyping.

R. CRUMB: Sure.

ROBERT HUGHES: You know, there are certain artists that nobody talks about as a Sixties artist. Nobody says, "Oh, gee, Giorgio Morandi, the Sixties artist."

R. CRUMB: Who?

ROBERT HUGHES: There you are. He was this Italian, who painted still lifes, bottles, arranged on a table, in his studio in Bologna.

R. CRUMB: Done.

ROBERT HUGHES: Done for by three rather odd sisters.

R. CRUMB: Don't know him.

ROBERT HUGHES: Continuously unmarried. One of the really great artists of the twentieth century.

R. CRUMB: Is that right? What's his name?

ROBERT HUGHES: Giorgio Morandi.

R. CRUMB: Pete, you ever heard of this guy?

R. CRUMB: Pete knows them all. You talk to him. He's much more of an art guy than me.

ROBERT HUGHES: Anyway, I can't believe you've never heard of him.

R. CRUMB: Nope.

ROBERT HUGHES: But . . .

R. CRUMB: Have you ever heard of this guy?

(OVERLAPPING VOICES)

ROBERT HUGHES: You know, if you're talking about, let's say, you're talking about Francisco Goya, okay?

R. CRUMB: Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: Do we talk about Goya as being an artist of the 1780s, that is? Or, an artist of the Nineties, when he was doing the Capriccios, or an artist of the . . .

R. CRUMB: Right, okay.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . or the . . .

R. CRUMB: Okay, I understand what you're saying. You get stuck with this label, that you're a guy . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, that's annoying as hell.

ROBERT HUGHES: It's really . . .

R. CRUMB: Because what about everything I've done since then, you know? But the fact is, that a lot of people in my generation and a little bit younger, were struck by that stuff when it was first happening. And that initial reaction really stays with them, you know? And so, you know, it's like people think of the Beatles, they think, when it first hit them, the Beatles, or you know, I'm sure it was always the same, you know?

ROBERT HUGHES: Tell us something about your musical tastes. I mean, one of the things that struck me hearing, or reading, about your career.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, I'm a real crank about music.

ROBERT HUGHES: Is that you never really seem to have any really close affiliation with the music of the time.

R. CRUMB: No, I hated all that crap.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well that's the impolite way of putting it, I guess. Never really (Inaudible) affiliation with the music of the time. Yeah. Awful lot of shit is that. I mean, my idea of hell is to be locked in a room for all eternity having to listen to Black Sabbath, for instance.

R. CRUMB: Right. Or, endless Grateful Dead guitar solos? Oh. (Laugh) Oh. Oh, boy.

ROBERT HUGHES: You know.

R. CRUMB: It all went to hell, I think, in the late Sixties. I like rock and roll much better before like all those psychedelic middle-class kids started playing it. Like, when it was still a real working-class thing, and kind of rough, and . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Supposing we just hive off the notion of class.

R. CRUMB: Hive off?

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, supposing we just get rid of the notion of it being . . .

R. CRUMB: Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . working class or middle class, you know?

R. CRUMB: Okay.

ROBERT HUGHES: The . . .

R. CRUMB: Okay, we'll hive that off. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: I mean, I have no idea, you know, whether the great black blues guitarists from whom the Stones . . .

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . (Inaudible) so much actually were working class or . . .

R. CRUMB: Oh, they were the lowest of the social rung, those men.

ROBERT HUGHES: They weren't even working.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, they were bums. They were completely at the bottom. They were less respectable than the people—

R. CRUMB: (In Progress) plantation. They were the lowest.

ROBERT HUGHES: They couldn't get a job as a slave.

R. CRUMB: In the Twenties, yeah. Right. They couldn't even get a job as a slave, right. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: But let's think not about the class affiliations, or the kind of culture that you admire. But about how you came into it, so to speak. How you learned what it was about, and how you came to . . .

R. CRUMB: I don't . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . see ways of using it.

R. CRUMB: I don't know how that happened. I don't know. I have no explanation for that, why I was attracted to that stuff. I don't know. I can't explain it.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, it must have seemed perhaps, maybe, seemed to you to be realer.

R. CRUMB: Maybe so.

ROBERT HUGHES: Than the kind of popular culture . . .

R. CRUMB: I certainly found it more appealing than Perry Como, or Frank Sinatra when I was a kid. You know, I was young. That stuff. And then later . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: You didn't like Sinatra.

R. CRUMB: No, hate Sinatra.

ROBERT HUGHES: Really?

R. CRUMB: Yeah. And then . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: I think quite a lot of him, but . . .

R. CRUMB: And rock and roll in the mid-Fifties, I kind of liked some of that. But what I liked about it was the part that harkened back to there was something atavistic in rock and roll, you know, that had to do with that older blues, and hillbilly music, you know?

ROBERT HUGHES: well, it connected you back to an earlier America.

R. CRUMB: Yeah. And I wasn't even aware of what it was at the time. I didn't know about old blues, or hillbilly music in the Fifties. But there was something in that rock and roll that I wanted to hear something more. And then, when I discovered the music of the Twenties, that was the gold nugget that you could hear a little bit in Jerry Lee Lewis, or early Elvis, or Carl Perkins, or Little Richard, the nugget of the whole thing was in this music of the Twenties, it was a revelation.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: When I discovered that's the real thing. But of course, you know, it was twenty years before I was born.

ROBERT HUGHES: But that doesn't matter.

R. CRUMB: No.

ROBERT HUGHES: Goya was two hundred years before you were born, so what?

R. CRUMB: Yeah, you're absolutely right. Actually.

ROBERT HUGHES: I mean, one of the great things, in my opinion, about cultural memory, is that you know, if properly understood, it annihilates all that bullshit about avant-gardism. Because everything is simultaneously present to you.

R. CRUMB: I totally agree with you. Couldn't agree with you more. And the thing about comics is that comics are part of a very definite, very specific lineage. And no cartoonist ever considers themselves a complete groundbreaking innovator. You know, you're proud of the fact that you picked up from this guy, and that guy before, and that guy before, and it's . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: You've got a shared common culture.

R. CRUMB: That's right.

ROBERT HUGHES: You've got a shared, people can take . . .

R. CRUMB: Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . stylistic elements.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, there's no . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: And . . .

R. CRUMB: . . . there's nothing wrong with that.

ROBERT HUGHES: And who feels bad about taking something from a great pioneering comic-strip artist like George HerrimanHerriman, for instance.

R. CRUMB: Absolutely.

ROBERT HUGHES: Crazy Kat.

R. CRUMB: Sure, you don't want to be a complete copy cat, but you pick up stuff from him, and you know, that's not unrespectable. That's not . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, in the same way that Herriman, I'm sure, was quite capable without shame, of taking stuff . . .

R. CRUMB: Sure.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . from Joan Miró.

R. CRUMB: Well . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Maybe.

R. CRUMB: . . . nah. I think . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Nah?

R. CRUMB: He probably did look at modern art. He probably did.

ROBERT HUGHES: I think he did.

R. CRUMB: But he . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: I doubt that Chester Gould would have. But I'm sure Herriman would have.

R. CRUMB: What do you think? Do you think Herriman looked at modern art?

R. CRUMB: Art Spiegelman, ladies and gentlemen. Bill Griffith, some of the greats of . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Oh, there's the great Spiegelman, my God, oh. Oh, oh, oh. (Applause)

R. CRUMB: And Bill Griffith.

ROBERT HUGHES: My God.

R. CRUMB: Who does the best, the last good daily comic strip in America. (Applause) Zippy.

R. CRUMB: Ah.

ROBERT HUGHES: I don't know how you do it. I don't know how you do it.

R. CRUMB: So, you can really bring them out, can't you?

ROBERT HUGHES: It's a miracle that you can do that. There's no way.

ROBERT HUGHES: “The great comic-strip artists” is a phrase which you can now use without either embarrassment or condescension. And it was not possible . . .

R. CRUMB: Well, it was things like that where . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . to do that when I first got to America thirty years ago.

R. CRUMB: Words like that were always used in the little subculture of people who admired comics and cartoon strips, you know? But it was just a small subculture of fans, and devotees of comics and comic art.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: It was a small little world, you know?

ROBERT HUGHES: And other people, I guess, saw them as sort of like perverts or something, you know?

R. CRUMB: Pathetic.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: I mean you can't . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Debating over whether the guy who drew *The Shadow* was better in 1930 than he was in 1950.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, things like that. Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: Which is a perfectly valid question.

R. CRUMB: Of course. But the people from the on high, you know, *haute couture*, or whatever you call it, fine-art museum world, just all that seemed like, I don't know what you would compare it to, rubber goods, or something, to them. They just didn't even look, could not possibly consider that as something you would take seriously enough to discuss in the same way you would discuss, you know, the lineage of you know, all the isms of modern art, you know?

ROBERT HUGHES: See, I remember when two friends of mine, one alas now dead, Kirk Varnedoe, and another one very much alive, Adam Gopnik, but on this . . .

R. CRUMB: High & How? The High & Low?

ROBERT HUGHES: The High & Low show.

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: Which was in some ways, okay, it was flawed in a number of ways. But it was a hell of an interesting show, I thought.

R. CRUMB: Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: And one of the interesting things about it was that so many people in the real art world, so to speak . . .

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . went completely ballistic about it, even at this late date.

R. CRUMB: Yeah? Really?

ROBERT HUGHES: You know, what are we doing, putting on shows, of animated mice in the Museum of Modern Art?

R. CRUMB: Right. It scares them.

ROBERT HUGHES: Why does it scare them, do you think?

R. CRUMB: Well, for one thing, it's all done for print. It's not done to hang on the wall. You know, it's done for . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, but I mean, so was . . .

R. CRUMB: . . . it was done for the masses.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . (Inaudible) was done for print.

R. CRUMB: That's so old, and antique, and from another society. It's European. Each print is a precious article. Whereas, you know, the comics, and illustration is done for cheap, popular, I mean, we could go back to like the 1600s, those cheap, lurid prints that were done in Germany, and England, and France.

ROBERT HUGHES: That's right.

R. CRUMB: Those things are still not really very much respected by the art world.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, they're more respected than quite a lot of you know, first-rate contemporary . . .

R. CRUMB: Yeah, because they're so old, I guess.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah. That's right. They're old.

R. CRUMB: It's actually hard to find reprints of that stuff. I'm always looking for that.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, that's because they were done on cheap paper, which is full of sulfite and, therefore, falls to pieces.

R. CRUMB: Even that far back, you think?

ROBERT HUGHES: Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

R. CRUMB: 1600s?

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, yeah, sure.

R. CRUMB: Yeah?

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: Oh.

ROBERT HUGHES: Done on lousy paper.

R. CRUMB: They were.

ROBERT HUGHES: I mean, they had much better paper than . . .

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: Anyway.

R. CRUMB: If you do something for newsprint and all that, and it's not you know, actually, for me, and most of the people in the milieu that I'm in, the finished thing is the printed thing, it's not the original art.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: My biggest thrill is to see the printed book. That's, to me, that's the finish piece of art, for me.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yes.

R. CRUMB: The original is secondary. And that's why I used to just . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: That's right.

R. CRUMB: . . . give them away casually, when I was young. What a fool!

ROBERT HUGHES: Incidentally, (Laugh) it's analogous to sort of similar relationship between a photographic negative and a photographic print.

R. CRUMB: That's right.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: You know, all this messy white out, and stuff on there. It's not really attractive, necessarily, the original. It's . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, nobody wants to have a thing with messy white out hanging on their wall.

R. CRUMB: Right. They don't, no.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah. They do now, I guess.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, actually . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: They do?

R. CRUMB: . . . it's worth less if it has a lot of white out.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, you see, these advertised in these catalogs, they're like, no white out. (Laugh) It's true.

ROBERT HUGHES: Just done straight from the pen, with one fluid . . .

R. CRUMB: That's right. Right, no . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . expert hand.

R. CRUMB: . . . no penciling, nothing.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: You just drew it just spontaneously.

ROBERT HUGHES: I have to make a confession. Because I probably haven't been sufficiently egotistical this evening. I used to be a cartoonist.

R. CRUMB: Oh, my *God!* (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: The . . .

R. CRUMB: Oh, my God. That is so *pathetic.* (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: I was not a very good cartoonist . . .

R. CRUMB: Oh, my God.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . (Inaudible).

R. CRUMB: Many are called, few are chosen. (Laugh) (Applause)

ROBERT HUGHES: That's right. And also, of those many who were chosen, not all that many can do it.

R. CRUMB: Well, did any of your work appear in print?

ROBERT HUGHES: It certainly did.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, where?

ROBERT HUGHES: I had the peculiar distinction of being Rupert Murdoch's political cartoonist, and simultaneously, Rupert Murdoch's art critic for the *Daily Mirror* in Australia . . .

R. CRUMB: Oh, really?

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . from 1961 to 1962.

R. CRUMB: Unbelievable.

ROBERT HUGHES: And . . .

R. CRUMB: Imagine what collector's items those are now, your cartoons.

ROBERT HUGHES: I don't think they are.

R. CRUMB: Did you save them? Do you have any of them?

ROBERT HUGHES: Not really. No.

R. CRUMB: Oh.

ROBERT HUGHES: I think Doris may have one or two. I don't know. But anyway . . .

R. CRUMB: There's a book in this somewhere.

ROBERT HUGHES: The . . .

R. CRUMB: Robert Hughes's political cartoons.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, I don't think, and frankly, I don't think that nag is going to run.

R. CRUMB: My publisher's already interested, right there.

ROBERT HUGHES: But . . .

R. CRUMB: Talk to her after the show.

ROBERT HUGHES: But since we are on the subject of books that might or might not be done, I want to talk for a minute, or I want you to talk for a minute, not about the present volume, because we can already see they're put about. But one that we cannot actually see, which is understand is going to be R. Crumb's Genesis.

R. CRUMB: Yeah? A foolish undertaking.

ROBERT HUGHES: But it's something that every ex-Catholic boy might entertain nightmares about doing.

R. CRUMB: Right. I gotta get it off my chest.

ROBERT HUGHES: What's it doing on your chest?

R. CRUMB: Well, I was fooling around with Adam and Eve one day. Just making doodlings about Adam and Eve. And at first, I did this whole big takeoff, satirical take on Adam and Eve, with lots of little jokey asides, and like you know, Jewish slang, and stuff like that, because you know, they're Jewish.

ROBERT HUGHES: Right. (Laugh)

R. CRUMB: As I got more into it, I . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Was Eve in fact a shiksa or not, as she is so constantly depicted in the . . .

R. CRUMB: Shiksa. Well, yeah, she gets a bad rap. She would be looked upon as a shiksa, but no, she's Jewish. (Laugh) They're all Jewish, but God is Jewish.

ROBERT HUGHES: In your book.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, of course.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, now, you're gonna get it for anti-Semitism, won't you?

R. CRUMB: No. Finally fooling around with it like that, and joking around, and I got over that, and I just realized I gotta just do it straight. Just tell it straight. Straight from the book.

ROBERT HUGHES: But I think, I don't really, but I mean, let's say, for the purpose of convenience that I did, I think of God the Father as being a sort of, tremendous patriarchal figure.

R. CRUMB: Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: Not altogether dissimilar to your Mr. Natural.

R. CRUMB: Well, Mr. Natural is . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: But a bit more frightening

R. CRUMB: Mr. Natural is a little . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Now, is there actually a relationship between Mr. Natural and God the Father? I mean, he seems to me to be a libidinous, nitwitted guru, but . . .

R. CRUMB: Yeah, he's libidinous, yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: Like the ones we had in the Sixties. But . . .

R. CRUMB: Right. Well, ends up . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Is he based on God the Father?

R. CRUMB: Nah, not really.

ROBERT HUGHES: Is God the Father in your Genesis going to look anything like Mr. Natural?

R. CRUMB: Nah. He has a white beard, but he actually ended up looking more like my father, actually.

(Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: Who did not have a white beard. What, is he going to have a Marine uniform?

R. CRUMB: No. But he has this very severe, very masculine face, like my father. I had a problem, how am I going to draw God, when I first started thinking of this whole thing. How am I going to draw God? What should I do? Should I just make him like a light in the sky, who has dialogue balloons coming away from him, or what? And then, I had this dream, or actually saw God in the dream. God came to me, only for a split second.

ROBERT HUGHES: Uh-oh.

R. CRUMB: But I saw him very clearly, what he looked like. And I thought, that's it, okay, there he is. I got God.

ROBERT HUGHES: And what did she look like?

R. CRUMB: Well, I went through that whole thing. I'll draw God as a black woman. That'll do it. You know, that would be good. But nah. You actually read the Old Testament. He's just an old, cranky, Jewish patriarch. He really is. You know?

ROBERT HUGHES: What, something like Norman Mailer?

R. CRUMB: Right. He's not patriarchal.

ROBERT HUGHES: Like Charlton Heston.

R. CRUMB: Of course, he's not Jewish, but . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: He's not Jewish? He's old and cranky, but he's not Jewish, is he?

R. CRUMB: No, Charlton Heston?

R. CRUMB: Spiegelman, is Charlton Heston Jewish? (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, he played Moses. But I mean . . .

R. CRUMB: The head of the NRA? He can't be Jewish. (Laugh)

(From the background: "He has Alzheimer's.")

R. CRUMB: Right. Anyway.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, it comes to all of us. Maybe.

R. CRUMB: At some point, yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: Anyway, go on about your Genesis.

R. CRUMB: Genesis, what? What were we talking about? I don't like to talk about things too much that I'm working on. You know, it kind of . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Fair enough.

R. CRUMB: . . . takes a lot of the, you know, what do you call it, the tension out of the project.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yes.

R. CRUMB: If you talk about it too much. I knew a guy, a dear friend of mine, who wanted to write the Great American Novel when he was young. He talked about it so much.

ROBERT HUGHES: Oh, one of them.

R. CRUMB: He just depleted the whole thing, just by talking and talking. He'd go to bars and talk about it all night.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, well, as the great Cyril Connelly once said, a really dedicated idler can talk about the substance of four books in one week.

R. CRUMB: Yes, exactly. Exactly. So, you know, I don't know, what can I say?

ROBERT HUGHES: Which he did.

R. CRUMB: It's a lot of fun doing Genesis, actually. It's great. It's very visual. It's lurid. It's full of you know, all kinds of crazy, weird things, that to draw, will really surprise people, when you actually draw uh, what is it, Jacob, or Abraham, who has sex with his daughter-in-law, who disguised herself as a temple prostitute. That's, you know, just to actually draw that, will shock a lot of . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: . . . nice, religious people. And just draw it straight. Not make fun of it, no.

ROBERT HUGHES: There are a lot of American families like that.

R. CRUMB: It's strange. It's full of very strange stuff. It'll be surprising.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, of course it's strange. And it's doubly strange, I might say, I think, for us ex-Catholics, because I don't know about you. But certainly in my childhood, we were not given the Old Testament. We were given the New Testament. The Old Testament was just something that you know, led up to the arrival of the Messiah in the form of Jesus Christ.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, I read . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: But we weren't taught about the Old Testament.

R. CRUMB: I read a little bit . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: All that fascinating stuff about, you know, people slaying one another in their tens of thousands, and sending their daughters out to screw the king of Cappadocia or whatever. I mean, it was just .

R. CRUMB: Bring me the head of, what's it? Girl brings the guy the head of somebody she . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Oh, yeah. A favorite, actually, of Late Renaissance painting. Judith and Holofernes.

R. CRUMB: Right, but anyway, I think you had a somewhat different Catholic education from me, from what I've read, your description of it.

ROBERT HUGHES: Mine was probably classier.

R. CRUMB: I think a little bit classier, yeah. Because we had . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, that's all right. I mean . . .

R. CRUMB: . . . the sisters. And you know, they did give us the lurid parts of the Old Testament, you know, to entertain us. This is America, you've got to keep them entertained.

ROBERT HUGHES: Those Catholic sisters, they were just Christian Brothers with tits. (Laugh) I mean . . .

R. CRUMB: Well, we never saw any tits. They were just . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: I tell you . . .

R. CRUMB: . . . they were creatures. They were . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Nobody can say that they've truly experienced Catholicism unless they have been inducted into it at the lower end, as you were . . .

R. CRUMB: That's right.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . by those fearsome sisters.

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: I mean, there's this absolutely chilling page in the current Crumb manual of this dreadful sister with a bosom like an icy, starched bolster, who chops off the dick, or tries to chop off the dick . . .

R. CRUMB: Tries to.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . of the young Crumb figure.

R. CRUMB: Right. They were scary. They were scary.

ROBERT HUGHES: Who then comes back and I think blows up the . . .

R. CRUMB: (Inaudible) don't even talk about it. That's too embarrassing. That's another thing I had to get out of my system.

ROBERT HUGHES: One of your characters in one of your strips is one of the truest things that, I don't want to seem to be pissing in your pocket, but you know, I think it's one of the truest things that I've ever heard about the condition of art and the condition of narrative, and like (Inaudible) and all the rest of it, this lunatic, you know, grimacing hideously, and drooling from the corner of his mouth says, "I can do anything I want. This is a . . .

R. CRUMB: Only a comic book.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . comic strip."

R. CRUMB: Yeah. (Laugh) Then, he procee—

ROBERT HUGHES: And once you've given that one away, who's going to accuse you of obscenity?

R. CRUMB: Right. It immediately is, that's Johnny Fuckerfaster, that one is. And then he stops a beautiful woman on the street and says, "Okay, now just kneel down and give me a blow job." And she does. Because it's a comic book.

ROBERT HUGHES: It's a comic strip. (Laugh) Yeah. You know, I mean, this is the essential . . .

R. CRUMB: Oh, boy.

ROBERT HUGHES: And I think this is why people write fiction, you know?

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: It enables you to, see, not for reasons of any virtue, but I have never had any capacity for writing fiction because I, unlike you, find the idea of creating . . .

R. CRUMB: Making things up?

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . these dolls, and making you know, these highly sexualized, violent . . .

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . effective dolls, and making them walk across the table, doing their various things, and then you catch them, and they fall off the other side, you know.

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: I don't have the imagination to do that. So, all I can write about is ones that actually exist. So, you see, I envy you.

R. CRUMB: Well, the great thing about comic books was, and still is, of course, is since it was always a real low medium, that you weren't like hindered by any need to be like deep, or respectable. You just draw any stupid thing you wanted. You know? It didn't have to be intellectual, or deep, or complex. And say hey, it's a comic book, I can do anything I want. So, you just do any silly, stupid . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: But see you were never . . .

R. CRUMB: . . . thing.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . animated by any kind of, you know, the French phrase, (Inaudible), you know, sort of condescending look at popular culture, were you? You know, you didn't feel unconstrained because you in some way despised the . . .

R. CRUMB: Well . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . popular comic-book medium, or did you?

R. CRUMB: Despise the popular? I had my critique of it. You know, and then, even from a young age, I discriminated between good comics and comics that weren't as good. You know.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, of course.

R. CRUMB: Some of them were bad and all that. So, you know, some discrimination.

ROBERT HUGHES: I mean . . .

R. CRUMB: But as far as the whole medium goes, it was just, I don't know, I was just like born into it. I just never had any separation from it.

ROBERT HUGHES: Born on the 4th of July, yeah.

R. CRUMB: Right, that kind of thing. Yeah, born in a theater trunk kind of thing.

ROBERT HUGHES: Born in a trunk at the Princess Theater.

R. CRUMB: Exactly.

ROBERT HUGHES: In Opa Locka, Idaho.

R. CRUMB: Right. Precisely.

ROBERT HUGHES: Or, wherever the hell that was, yeah. (Laugh) Hey, I don't know, I mean, personally, I'd be quite happy to keep going all night. But you've had a long and tiring day. I don't know. How do we feel about this? Do we . . .

R. CRUMB: I would like to ask a question, okay?

ROBERT HUGHES: Yes, yes.

R. CRUMB: I was thinking about this. I said, I want to do this with an audience sometime. I said, okay, now, I've kind of become a celebrity lately, in the last couple of years, since the Crumb documentary came out, and everything. And the thing is celebrity is really weird, and it's a nightmare in a lot of ways. And it has its perks and all that. And I just want to ask a question of this audience. I would like you to answer it honestly with a show of hands. How many people here really believe that they would *like* to be a celebrity? How many people would like to be, come on.

ROBERT HUGHES: There's one down the back.

R. CRUMB: Be honest.

ROBERT HUGHES: Two, three, four, five, six. Oh, come on, be honest. (Laugh) There's somebody with two hands over there.

R. CRUMB: Like to be. You really like, you have dreams of being a celebrity and famous. Here's a guy going like this. A little bit, a little bit.

R. CRUMB: Right, highly sophisticated audience.

R. CRUMB: They're kidding themselves. Okay. That's my question.

ROBERT HUGHES: That's your question?

ROBERT HUGHES: Okay. Let's have questions, if such there may be.

ROBERT HUGHES: Questions, to Dr. Crumb. Yes.

(Question from audience inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: It bothers me when they like my early work to the exclusion of everything I've done in the last three decades. (Laugh) Why do I bother to go on, you know? But I think that my early work, when I was young, you know has a kind of youthful spontaneity to it, a wackiness that yes, you know, I've become more self-conscious, and more trepidatious, and worried about whether it's deep enough, or whether it lives up to my you know, which nothing can kill you like success, you know what I mean? I mean, I got that recognition when I was so young, and I was in my twenties when that all started happening in the late Sixties, you know?

ROBERT HUGHES: Can I jump in there? There is something to be said for getting older.

R. CRUMB: Yes, there is, indeed.

ROBERT HUGHES: As an artist.

R. CRUMB: Absolutely.

ROBERT HUGHES: In this album, that's here tonight, there is for instance, to me, a very moving thing at the back.

R. CRUMB: Can I ask you a question about that?

ROBERT HUGHES: Yes. Yes.

R. CRUMB: You have this disdain for contemporary art.

ROBERT HUGHES: Not all of it by any means.

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: Some of it I have the highest respect for. Some of it I like very much.

R. CRUMB: Do you consider yourself alone in this? Or, are there others?

ROBERT HUGHES: No, no, there are other people who discriminate quite severely about this, too.

R. CRUMB: Oh, good.

ROBERT HUGHES: Because I'm just not terribly taken by the system, as such. And I think a great deal of the stuff that is presented to us, not so much for our admiration as for our investment is, to put it mildly, garbage. I mean, it was never clearer to me the ancient relationship between gold and shit. But anyway, I was going to say something, but no, I'm not going to monopolize this. You . . .

R. CRUMB: The advantages of getting older.

ROBERT HUGHES: Oh, right, yeah.

R. CRUMB: Forgetfulness is one of them. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, there you are. Late in this book, there is a to me very moving story, in which the old cartoonist . . .

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: Comes in and you know, he is confronted by this . . .

R. CRUMB: The (Inaudible).

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . benign angel of death, with these fat, big legs.

R. CRUMB: Oh, right.

ROBERT HUGHES: And she's going to, yeah, carry me away.

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: And she flies out the window on these white, angelic wings.

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: Now, I've got to say, I thought that was actually very you know, one of the most moving comic-strip things . . .

R. CRUMB: Yeah?

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . I've ever seen.

R. CRUMB: Yeah? Really? Wow.

ROBERT HUGHES: And also, I don't believe you would have been capable of it twenty years ago.

R. CRUMB: Absolutely not. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: So, you know, anybody who, listen, prefer, you know, every artist knows that having somebody prefer your early work is a way of disliking you.

R. CRUMB: Hmm.

ROBERT HUGHES: Anyway.

R. CRUMB: Are there any more questions? Sir?

QUESTION: You look like a very happy man, and I think about the miserable, surly R. Crumb in your early work, who slammed doors in people's faces, and . . .

R. CRUMB: Yeah, but I wasn't really like that in real life.

QUESTION: Okay.

R. CRUMB: I was miserable, but I was always very polite, and very nice.

QUESTION: Well, what you seem to be, I'm sure you weren't this happy, this mellow, in your day-to-day life long ago. You have a publicist, you have merchandising.

R. CRUMB: Oh, it's a nightmare. Merchandising. You can't believe what a nightmare it is. But you know, I can't complain. You know, I've got it good. It's unattractive to complain when you've got it as good as I do. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: What is this . . .

R. CRUMB: My wife always says, "Robert, don't complain about that stuff. It's very unattractive."

QUESTION: What does it feel like to see someone, an actor portraying you in like *American Splendor*?

R. CRUMB: What's it like?

QUESTION: Yeah, you see someone . . .

R. CRUMB: It's very eerie. Very eerie to see an actor playing you in a movie. It's very disturbing.

ROBERT HUGHES: It must be like looking into a rather out-of-focus mirror.

R. CRUMB: It is, yeah. And Aline she saw that movie with me, *American Splendor*, where this guy plays me. And she said, "Oh, if you were like that, I would have divorced you a long time ago." (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: A question. Why is it that so often, I mean, on the . . . I mean, you know, not so often, but on the relatively rare occasions when your work is adapted for film . . .

R. CRUMB: Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . do they screw it up?

R. CRUMB: Why does that happen?

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, why does that happen? I mean, do you think that Fritz the Cat would have been natural? It was a total screwup. And you believe so, yourself, don't you?

R. CRUMB: Yeah, oh, yeah. It was terrible. A travesty. Why does that happen that way? Well, you know, there's a lot of money in the industry. What, Aline?

R. CRUMB: Because I don't get involved with it.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, I mean, I can't fight with those people. Forget about it. (Laugh) You know? They've got their agenda, and they put all their money in, and you know, they wanted to make as much money back as possible. And so, they think they know how to do that.

ROBERT HUGHES: Do you remember the great remark of actually, my fellow countryman, Errol Flynn, who came from Tasmania, when Louis, was it Mayer, it might have been Louis Mayer, asked him, sent the dread invitation that he wanted him to come and have a golf game with him.

R. CRUMB: Ooh.

ROBERT HUGHES: And Flynn retorted, "Tell Mr. Mayer that the day I want to play with a prick, I'll play with my own." (Laugh) This would not unfairly describe your reactions to the great world of the West Coast.

R. CRUMB: No, that's absolutely true. But not a very good career move for Errol, though. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: Yes, yes, yes, there.

(Question from audience inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: I don't.

(Question from audience inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: *Merci bouquet*. I can't speak French, I don't know.

ROBERT HUGHES: (Speaks in French.) He speaks perfect French, and so does his wife.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, yeah. She does. She speaks very good French. What was the other guy you pointed to, wanted to ask a question, over here?

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, there.

QUESTION: Yeah, I was at the Modern today, looking at one of your students' work, Philip Guston. (Laugh)
And . . .

R. CRUMB: Not a student.

QUESTION: No?

R. CRUMB: No.

QUESTION: I just wondered what you thought about that. I always think of . . .

R. CRUMB: It's an interesting thing. Because Guston kind of stumbled onto this same kind of level of the collective unconscious that I did, right around the same time that I did. It's a very eerie, weird thing. He started drawing this seedy-looking bare lightbulb, you know, shoes with nails in them kind of stuff, right around the same time I did.

ROBERT HUGHES: Plus he was really influenced by Krazy Kat. He was really influenced by Herriman . . .

R. CRUMB: That's right. Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, he really was.

R. CRUMB: I think he even tried to be a cartoonist when he was a teenager, or something like that. But he'd been doing these like abstract stuff for a long time. And then, when he started doing that stuff with the shoes and stuff, a lot of people vilified him for that.

ROBERT HUGHES: That's right. They hated it.

R. CRUMB: Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: But that's the stuff we liked, though.

R. CRUMB: Yeah. That's right. It's interesting. He's just like a simultaneous thing of the time that happened there with him and me, I don't know. And he's from the fine-art world, I was from the you know, comics world. These two different worlds.

ROBERT HUGHES: See, you've got a weird take on it when you do comics or fine art.

R. CRUMB: Yeah. (Laugh) It's just something else to make fun of, really. Comics.

ROBERT HUGHES: When you do parodies of Cubism and so forth . . .

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . they are . . .

R. CRUMB: Cubism's fun, you know?

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . what can I say? They're sort of . . .

R. CRUMB: It's a fun thing to . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . kind of touchingly naïve, really.

R. CRUMB: . . . joke around with. (Laugh) I don't know anything really about cubist theory, do you?

(Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, touchingly faux naïve, anyway.

R. CRUMB: No, it's truly naïve.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yes.

(Question from audience is inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: Yeah, I went there to die, yeah. It was a good place to die. It's a good place to die, in France. Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah.

(Question from audience is inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: Totally. I've been through that many times. Had that impulse to just say, what this work has brought on is not worth doing it anymore. I don't want to do it anymore. But then, my ego starts to push forward again, and I continue on. So, it just happened recently. I was in London. I had to do this public appearance thing. And these paparazzis were out there taking, snapping pictures of me and Aline, it was so horrible, I was so angry. And I just wanted to smash their cameras in their faces. And later that night I was just thinking, I'm just gonna quit drawing. Fuck this whole thing. It's just not worth it. That shit. That shit was horrible. Yeah, I've had that feeling many times.

R. CRUMB: In a trap, that's right. Life is a trap. (Laugh) It is. We're all trapped. One way or the other.

ROBERT HUGHES: Madonna has the same complaint, you know.

R. CRUMB: She once said, Madonna said, "To me, the press is just shrubbery." That's a quote from Madonna. I'm working on that. I admire that. (Laugh) Fucking Madonna, man. She knows.

ROBERT HUGHES: Now.

R. CRUMB: Let's ask this girl a question here. Girl. Girl, you.

ROBERT HUGHES: There's a girl in the front row.

R. CRUMB: Plus, you're cute.

QUESTION: I was wondering what advice you'd have for aspiring cartoonists.

R. CRUMB: For starving cartoonists?

QUESTION: That, and aspiring cartoonists.

R. CRUMB: Keep your day job, first of all. And the other thing is, you know, as the advice that any successful person always gives, is just work your ass off. And you have to be really maladjusted, and alienated,

and that's the only way you're ever going to make it. If you're having too much fun as a youth, and you're in there too much, and you like pop music a lot, you're never going to make it as a cartoonist.

QUESTION: I have one ego-boosting question, too. Could I get a picture with you and Aline after the show?

R. CRUMB: What?

QUESTION: Could . . .

R. CRUMB: After the show what?

QUESTION: Could I get a picture? (Laugh) Could I get a picture with you and Aline after the show?

R. CRUMB: Do what? (Laugh)

QUESTION: Go back to your house?

R. CRUMB: Well, I got my wife here.

QUESTION: That's okay.

R. CRUMB: Thank you, dear. She said I was free.

QUESTION: No, that's okay. She can, okay.

R. CRUMB: Well, leave your phone number with the people over there.

ROBERT HUGHES: Ma'am.

QUESTION: Did you ever have a day job?

R. CRUMB: Yes.

(Question from audience is inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: I did. For . . .

(Question from audience is inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: No. I didn't. When I was young, I thought I would have to work nine to five my whole life. And I was lucky enough, I thought it was miraculous, when I was nineteen, to get a job in my chosen profession. I was doing artwork for a greeting-card company in Cleveland. And I did that for a couple years. And did hundreds of cards. And I thought that was going to be my life. And then, I took LSD, and I ran away to San Francisco, and became a hippie, and lived on welfare for four years, and then, this miracle happened, and these crazy comics I did actually started earning money. That was miraculous. Who knew that would ever happen? I thought that comic thing was finished for me. That I was just kind of doing it as a hobby or something. I don't know. It's funny about that.

ROBERT HUGHES: It's always a miracle if you end up being paid for something that you really like doing.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, you kind of . . .

ROBERT HUGHES: Most people have no sense of that.

R. CRUMB: That's right. There are a lucky few.

ROBERT HUGHES: There's a person over here.

R. CRUMB: Oooh.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, it's not altogether, true (Inaudible).

R. CRUMB: Visual artists? I mean, for me . . .

R. CRUMB: Well, I like her work, I like his work, I like his work. Some of them right in this very room are my favorite visual artists.

ROBERT HUGHES: It would be a fairly long list, and probably not an . . .

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . altogether meaningful one. I mean, you know, there are artists that I feel an intense liking for, an admiration for, and who actually are very famous, like Lucian Freud, who wasn't famous ten or fifteen years ago, but is now.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, I like his work, yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: There are others who I really like, and who are totally obscure in America and elsewhere, like for instance, there's an Australian artist called John Olsen, whose work I really love, that John's nearly eighty now, and he's never going to be famous in the way that famous artists are, although he is famous in Australia. And in between, there are all sorts of gradations. I mean, one of the things I'm really sorry about is that you know, I mean, I'm glad that America is comparatively rich in good caricatural and illustrative artists. One of the things that I think really sucks about American media is the almost total absence of really good political cartooning. You know?

R. CRUMB: Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: I mean, the fact that my former employer, Rupert Murdoch can't get it up to employ anybody better than visual illiterate Sean Delonis on *The New York Post*, I think is really a terrible pity. But you know, there you are. America used to be so strong in that, and now it's so weak in that. What can you do? But to make a list of everybody you like, oh, hells bells, it's like . . .

R. CRUMB: Right. Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: And then, there are the dead ones, oh, my God.

R. CRUMB: The dead ones.

ROBERT HUGHES: You know?

R. CRUMB: Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: I love dead artists. I am particularly fond of dead white males. I have this you know, feeling as a nearly . . .

R. CRUMB: Tsk-tsk.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . dead white male myself . . .

R. CRUMB: Well, not quite dead yet.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . I have this strong feeling of affinity with other dead white males. (Inaudible), you know. Yes.

(Question from audience is inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: He's good, yeah.

(Question from audience is inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: Oh, yeah. There's all kinds of interesting young comic artists. Lots of them. Lots of them. It's kind of heartbreaking because you know, I know it's so hard to sustain the focus and concentration to keep doing that stuff in the face of not making any money doing it, or barely enough to get by, and doing an enormous amount of work every day for very little money, or very little recognition. So, when you see these young people putting all that effort in that, and some of it's really good. There's a lot of them. A lot of young ones. My daughter, Sophie, she's a really good artist. And there's other ones her age that she's turned me on to that are really promising, and really interesting. But it's hard to know how they'll actually sustain that, and be able to keep doing it. It's hard. It's just, there's no venues. You know, you have to print it yourself on a Xerox machine, you know? It's really hard to get that stuff out there, and make any money off it.

Even my books don't sell in that big a numbers. I sell ten, twenty thousand at the most of my books. Well, this handbook is being so intensely promoted by this crew of promoting geniuses that we've got at MQP. But generally, my books, you know, I did this thing called *Art & Beauty*, it sold like a thousand copies, you know? It's just they don't, you know, I have this name, and this celebrity, but the work itself, it's a curious thing, the work itself, people, most people don't really know about it, except for like *Keep on Truckin'*, and *Fritz the Cat*, or something. Otherwise, they don't know what I do that much, mostly.

ROBERT HUGHES: You know, there are always gonna be a thousand people who know your name for every one that knows your work. That's part of the unfortunate . . .

R. CRUMB: Yeah, that's celebrityhood, yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . thing. But celebrity is a sort of weird thing.

R. CRUMB: It is. It's a product of modern mass-media culture.

(OVERLAPPING VOICES)

ROBERT HUGHES: (Inaudible) penetration. But it is weird, because the essence of celebrity is being well-known for your well-knownness, as Daniel Bornstein, I think pointed it out.

R. CRUMB: Yeah. Celebrity becomes a career in itself.

ROBERT HUGHES: It's not what you've done.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, that's right.

ROBERT HUGHES: It's for . . .

R. CRUMB: Just for being famous, yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: And so, it feeds upon itself.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, and the media is only too happy to monger celebrities.

ROBERT HUGHES: Well, the media are not only just only too happy for it. It has become, with a few honorable exceptions, the essential subject matter of most media activity. I mean, I don't remember any time

R. CRUMB: That's right. That's right.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . there was such an obsessive concentration on you know, people . . .

R. CRUMB: . . . celebrities.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . who actually have done fuck-all.

R. CRUMB: Whatever they do, yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: Identifiable, and therefore get written about. I mean . . .

R. CRUMB: Yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: . . . what, do you think people are going to be sitting down in another twenty, twenty-five minutes' time thinking about Britney Spears, for Christ's sake? I mean, come on. This is an industry.

R. CRUMB: Hell, yeah. Really.

ROBERT HUGHES: It's a shoddy, crappy, cynical industry.

R. CRUMB: Absolutely.

ROBERT HUGHES: Which does nothing but manufacture people who are well-known.

R. CRUMB: Right.

ROBERT HUGHES: Look, I remember when, I'm sorry, I get carried away on this. But I will . . .

R. CRUMB: Be my guest,

ROBERT HUGHES: A small anecdote. I mean, I worked for *Time* for thirty-two years. And . . .

R. CRUMB: *Time* magazine you worked for for thirty-two years.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah. There you are. Am I downhearted? No. However, there was one sublime moment, I remember, in 1972, when Time-Life launched a new magazine. They'd done one of those focus-group studies. One of the earliest focus-group studies. I think the first time that this imbecilic conception of journalism was loosed upon the world. You know, they went, as Jesus says, into the highways and byways, and they dragged in a whole bunch of people and made them sit down in a room until they had to pee or die.

And because they wanted to find out what was the part of the magazine that people most read. And it turned out to be, of course, the people section. So . . .

R. CRUMB: Thus, *People* Magazine?

ROBERT HUGHES: Thus, *People* Magazine. That's how *People* Magazine was born. And Henry Greenwald, who died the other day, who was a great editor, and a great friend of mine, in fact, in some ways, bears a heavy responsibility of bringing me to America, well I won't say, in the 1970s. We were having lunch, and Henry says, "Well, Bob, what do you think of this new magazine that we're putting out?" I said, "What, you mean *People*?" And he said, "Yes, do you think it's going to last? Do you think it's going to be a success?" And I said, "Well, shit, I don't know, Henry, it might be. It probably will be." And he said, "Well, I think it's going to be a complete failure. And I will tell you why," he said. "It will fail because they will run out of celebrities." (Laugh)

Now, I mean, there was a great editor, and indeed, the last intellectual to edit *Time* magazine. And he was so totally catastrophically wrong about what America was turning into. Because you know, he had this idea of America as being this place that he'd emigrated to as a young Jew, looking for freedom and intelligence coming out of Europe. He didn't realize that it was going to be this you know, totally administered dumb show of hooligans that it has now become.

R. CRUMB: Oh, come on, now.

ROBERT HUGHES: Oh, come on, mate. I mean, I've got my green card, I can say this. (Laugh) But you know. I mean, here's this great country whose idea of a religious revival is headed by Madonna's Kabbalahism? Oh, fuck me dead. I mean, it's just . . .

R. CRUMB: Hey, come on. *She's* the classy end of the religious revival going on. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, that's true.

R. CRUMB: Jerry Falwell and these other people? Oh, my God.

ROBERT HUGHES: From George Orwell to Jerry Falwell in two and a half seconds. Anyway, I'm sorry, I don't mean to be ungrateful. (Laugh)

R. CRUMB: Grateful for the opportunity.

ROBERT HUGHES: Where were we? Yes. Yes.

(Question from audience is inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: Picked up the banjo? Well, when I was eleven years old, I tried to make a cigar-box ukelele, but it didn't play very well. So, for Christmas, my mother got me a plastic ukelele, and I played that for a few years. And then, I found a little three-dollar banjo uke at a flea market, and I played that for another five years. And then, finally, a friend of mine said, "Just buy yourself a real banjo." So, I splurged, and I got a real, a nice banjo, and played that for a while. Love banjo music.

ROBERT HUGHES: How much it cost you, that banjo?

R. CRUMB: About fifty bucks, or something. For the time, that was a lot of money. I'm a sucker for banjo. I love banjo music, what?

ALINE KOMINSKY-CRUMB: He gave me the banjo uke.

R. CRUMB: I gave her the banjo uke. And she played the banjo uke. But I never became a real accomplished musician. It was always just kind of a hobby. I was too spastic to really be a good musician.

ROBERT HUGHES: We have a hand over there.

(Question from audience is inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: Peter Saul? Yeah, I like Peter Saul's work. Like it, actually. Do you like Peter Saul's work?

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah, up to a point, yeah, I do.

R. CRUMB: Up to a point, yeah? Up to a point. I saw him recently at a show that was in Amsterdam. And he said, "Come on," he took me aside real intimate said, "Crumb, you're real good. Get in on this art racket," he actually said this to me. He said, "There's so much more money than in this comic thing." He said, "What do you make, a few thousand bucks off these comics? I'm telling you, this art thing, that's where the real money is." He said, "Come on, get in on it. I'll help you. I'll introduce you to some people." It was solicitous. It was great. Love him.

ROBERT HUGHES: Yeah. Oh, I think you were first, weren't you?

(Question from audience is inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: Yeah?

(Question from audience is inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: All that fine lines, remind you of the grooves? That's heavy. (Laugh)

ROBERT HUGHES: We've got one question over here.

(Question from audience is inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: Great. Great stuff.

(Question from audience is inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: Wonderful artwork.

(Question from audience is inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: Beautiful.

R. CRUMB: Sure, it's all in the tradition. A lot of guys modeled that way with pen and ink, you know, those little lines, neat little lines there on the edges, to make it a dimension. That's an old technique, you know?

(Question from audience is inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: A thousand things, where do you even begin, you know? You study a lot of old comics, and try and pick up stuff. It's a tradition. It's strong. It's this rich, rich tradition.

QUESTION: We have one silhouetted hand down there, and this is going to wrap it up for the night.

(Question from audience is inaudible.)

R. CRUMB: Who? Him or me? (Laughter)

ROBERT HUGHES: It must be for you, I didn't hear.

R. CRUMB: Do you have a typical workday schedule, Mr. Hughes?

ROBERT HUGHES: Yes, I toss and turn all night.

R. CRUMB: I do too, yeah.

ROBERT HUGHES: And then I'm awoken by our dogs.

R. CRUMB: I'm awakened by our cats.

ROBERT HUGHES: Then I go back to sleep.

R. CRUMB: Then I go back to sleep. (Laughter)

ROBERT HUGHES: And then Doris takes a nap. Doris also takes her son to school. And then I worry.

R. CRUMB: Yeah, yeah, I do some worrying, yeah. (Laughter)

ROBERT HUGHES: And then what's your schedule like?

R. CRUMB: I don't have any schedule. It's always different. Every day's a new battle. (Laughter) You got to be a warrior, that's all I could advise you, just you've got to be a warrior. Life's a serious business, it'll cut you down. It's impersonal, it's not out to get you personally, it's just the way it is, just got to be (Overlap).

ROBERT HUGHES: And with that optimistic thought . . . (Laughter/Applause).

R. CRUMB: I love this. They love you (Inaudible).

ROBERT HUGHES: Thank you, thank you for this. Thank you very much.

R. CRUMB: No, I won't sign nothing, I won't sign nothing, go away, don't ask me. Don't ask, I won't do it, I'm out of here, don't even bother. I got bodyguards. I got some really tough people here.

ROBERT HUGHES: Oh, thanks, man.

R. CRUMB: Thank you.