

# NEGATIVLAND

## NEGATIVLAND INFORMATION

Began in September 1978.

First LP "negativland" May 1980.

Second LP "Points" February 1981.

Third LP "A Big 10-8 Place" September 1983.

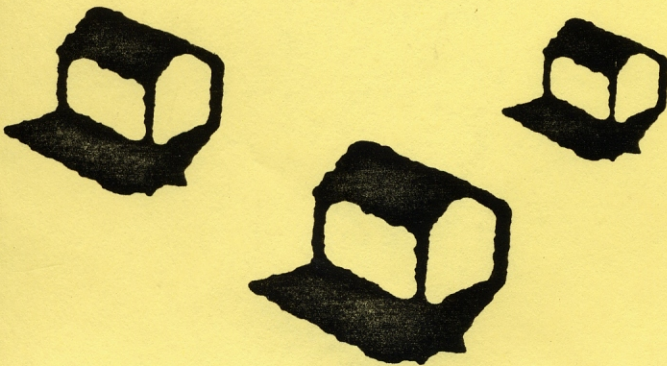
Live performances- 17 so far.

Radio performances- Over 100 hours since July 1981.

Currently- Extremely happy with the completion and release of new LP.

Disatisfied with the lack of complexity, effort and thought in most peoples work. Developing our live performances in preparation to "tour" parts of the U.S. Studio work sounding more and more like what is commonly accepted as music.

For more information, read on...



Seeland Records  
Box 54  
Concord, CA 94522  
(415)653-9651



Somewhere in Europe someone is probably listening to the voice of David Wills' grandmother. On the same record that person can absorb "A Nice Place to Live," a piece consisting mainly of a taped speech about Contra Costa County's economy.

These sounds are delivered courtesy of Negativland, an aggregation made up primarily of Wills and fellow Contra Costans Richard Lyons and Mark Hosler.

Negativland is not a band, according to Hosler. "We're flexible," he explains. "It's not like everyone has the one thing that they do."

When the trio collaborates in the studio, with other transitory associates, they create what can be described as anything from a futuristic view of suburbia to a collage of electronic mumbo-jumbo. Acoustic instruments, voice fragments and the sound of lawn mowers and vacuum cleaners emerge throughout, dodging various blips and doodlings.

Sometimes it's music, sometimes it's noise. But is it entertainment? "It's entertaining," allows the 19-year-old Hosler.

Negativland has released two albums on its own Seeland Records label, which operates out of Lyons' tile cabinet.

Both albums — the eponymously-titled debut released last year, and *Points*, released last spring — have sold over 2000 copies each, mostly in Europe. The first disc ranked number one for a week on the *Sounds* magazine import chart earlier this year.

Since artists are rarely able to survive by their art alone, the three maintain day jobs. Wills is a service technician for a cable TV company ("I'd love to make a service call for someone who has our record"), while the others are employed by the Montessori Childrens' House.

A third album is in the works and the three admit it's been the most difficult to date. In Hosler's words, Negativland is "more self-conscious, more aware of expectations" this time. Their creations are taken a bit more seriously now — more so, anyway, than since the recording of that first album, for which Lyons and Hosler made all the covers by hand, from wallpaper and old magazines.

The group likes it here, despite the lack of local interest in them, and the incidental labeling of Negativland as "suburban." Says Hosler, "Somehow we ended up with a suburban image. The only intention was just to be creative and do things we weren't hearing other people do."

And if you think the records *do* sound somewhat suburban, it only makes sense — Negativland grew up right here. As Hosler describes it, "We just let what was coming through flow out."

Negativland will stay in Contra Costa because, says Lyons, reiterating the title of that piece about our economy, "This is a nice place to live."

*Negativland, in a rare performance, plays tonight at 11 p.m. at the On Broadway, 435 Broadway in San Francisco.*

— R.S. Geller

## Negativland

"POINTS" (1981): Seeland Records, OPT-LP-002 SEELAND 002. *Instrumentation:* All instruments and tape work by Mark Hosler, Richard Lyons and David Wills, except Bob Jackson, clarinet; Ian Allen, tape processes on "No Hands"; Peter Dayton, bass on "That Darn Keet".

Whereas MY LIFE IN THE BUSH OF GHOSTS is demeaning to those it exploits, POINTS by Negativland is a gracious celebration of the mundane, a glorification of junk culture, living media and suburban values. There's a tender touch behind all this subversive activity.

I want to get back to the idea of junk culture and art. For some reason I collect things like soundtracks from old TV shows (Batman, The Man From Uncle...), from movies (especially James Bond films), 1950's dance records (how to cha-cha, rhumba, tango...) and any other records ranging from MILITARY MARCHES OF JAPAN to THE CHIPMUNKS. These albums are also a celebration of sorts. They represent the kind of sounds I was surrounded by as a kid, the kinds of things that older people took seriously, the kinds of things I still have a soft spot for, for whatever childish reasons. Negativland feeds on this impulse for junk by seeking it out and holding it up and by creating their own.

Like the first album, POINTS is an ever-changing excursion through swimming pool and barbecue land. They are working from within; subversives trying to shape a new suburban consciousness that is a mutation of the status quo. Formal structure is generally lacking, except for a few moments like the superb "The Answer Is", a frolicking faux-pas that sounds like it was played on Mom's Genie organ in the living room. Another high point is an excerpt from a presentation at the Los Angeles County Fair, during which the many splendors of Contra Costa county (Negativland's home turf) are declared. There's also another chunk from an outdoor event -- presumably the same fair -- during which a rock band blasts in the background while layers of crowd sounds mingle and converge around the sounds of meat sizzling. Whew! The album is one surprise after another. I recommend that you jump on this merry-go-round and close your eyes. —T.H.

OP

The "F" Op Summer 1981

**Negativland: Points** (Optional/Systematic, 729 Heinz Ave., space #1, Berkeley, CA 94710)

Inquisitive teenagers are stuck in nowhere-ville with only the crudest of tools, but they make their own fun. They have imagination and heart. This is the folk music that has evolved from the work of Cage, Stockhausen, Varese, etc. Hardly so cosmopolitan as they may sound, this reeks of suburbia. They have faced their reality and used it for their inspiration... the cheesy home organ that does everything with two fingers, mom singing and playing the accordion (which she probably hasn't touched in years), Big Bird and T.V. in general. All of this has been captured with barely functional dime-store equipment, and stuck together with Scotch tape and some Elmer's glue to create a sound collage that is an entertaining and completely honest portrait of the world these people inhabit. An essential soundtrack for the tract-home dweller. -S.P. 9



# Negativland

On Broadway  
April 22, 1983  
Performers: Mark Hosler,  
Ian Allen, David Wills.  
With Don Joyce.

Considering that the plug would be pulled on them after only 20 minutes performing, Negativland took a long time setting up. It became an interesting question how they would capture our attention when they were ready, after being onstage playing tapes, quite loudly, for so long before starting.

When it was time, they stopped messing about and became still, though not with any exaggerated or theatrical stillness. They simply took their places and looked at us. Really looked at us: they turned a photo flood in our faces. That's when the audience feedback began: "Hey wouldja turn that light off?" and so on.

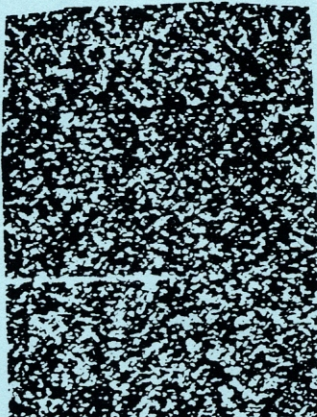
In this way, all the sounds and sequences in Negativland's performance reached out to us as watchers and listeners, rather than occurring in some self-involved trance that we happened to be witnessing.

The first piece lasted for as long as it takes two slices of toast to burn irretrievably. No one was compelled to react to this event as it

slowly transpired. Yet people did. "Hey, your toast is burning!" sounded through the theater not once or twice but many times. It rang out in almost every silence between the reiterated taped phrases, "hello!" and "can you hear me?"

So we were involved. It turns out to be hard to let toast burn—even though it's only toast and not other things that may burn, such as books or houses or bodies.... We learned, I suppose, just how much we feel we must intervene in a given process of dissolution.

(Cont'd. next page)



The second piece continued—via sappily hortatory taped voices—to draw us in. "Make a fist. Clench it tight" said a voice, and "Open your mouth wide and say, Wow!" There was music, there was a sense of eventfulness. Not everyone went for it. "Play the good part," someone called out acidly. And one local musician simply walked out of the building, not returning until Minimal Man was safely set up half an hour later.

And yet the occurrences on stage were well shaped and well organized to a degree that made objections or walkouts, if not part of the show, at least not counter to it. And it's surprising how many people sat vocalizing in their seats with big round "Wow"s: people who probably hadn't anticipated anything of the kind when they set out for the OB.

The last piece involved a live narration shaped by Booper—David Wills's home-built electronic device which processes sounds simultaneously with their live production. The piece celebrated sewerage water, aka Sue Ridgewater. Neither would seem riveting as a subject. But members of the audience got in on it all the same, lining up to Boop their voices.

Music was used sparingly throughout the set—as if too much might prove distracting. The synth background was the most primal sound going: deeply

submerged chords, chaotic churchbells, tribal drumming. When live music was allowed to layer in for a few minutes, it seemed astonishingly fresh, particularly Ian Allen's keyboards.

When the set was, too quickly, over, there was bafflement, mixed with delight. A member of the audience made what was perhaps a symbolic encore request by climbing onstage and pushing down the bar of the old-fashioned toaster—as if to re-start the cycle. The air was thick with the aroma of browned bread. People sat cross-legged on the stage munching pieces of unburnt toast. Where had it come from? Where had we been?

Negativland have done only eleven live shows in the last two years. Each show, being completely new, represents a sacrifice of recording time (their second LP sold 2,600 copies before lapsing; their third, still in the making after two and a half years, may be issued by UK's Recommended Records).

Yet this is a group whose projections are well suited to stage shows. They can call you out and take you somewhere. Their agreeable stage presence—intense but casual, serious but unpretentious—is perhaps a front. They are really wizards. Wizards of lo-tech.

—Kit Drumm

## LIVE ACTION

NOVEMBER 5, 1982, ISSUE NO. 142

talk music, the cartoon soundtrack tunes of Klezmann, and a lot of impeccable planning, the day was an artistic success.

It is hoped that Bread & Roses, a non-profit corporation that brings free entertainment to prisoners and shut-ins, did make a profit from the Festival. For it's a very deserving group that takes the joy of music (and laughter) to people who can't get it, and probably need it the most.

—Joseph Territo

### Negativland Ollie's Back Room, Oakland August 30

The evening is sponsored by CAVAN (Committee Against Visual and Aural Numbness), and the predominant mood is one of senous art. But whether or not one has the taste for performance pieces, innovative feedback demonstrations, or photographed poetry, the headlining act is certainly worth the wait.

Mark Hosler begins the Negativland set alone onstage, playing a penicive and pastoral piano over the electronic hum of waiting amps. Next to appear are guitarists Peter Dayton and Chris Grigg, beginning a slow tide of whining, blating, flanged, effects-box sounds that seem in no way related to the piano. Hosler raps on wood by the microphone as if to summon out

synthesists David Wills and Ian Allen, the latter of whom proceeds to operate the tapes that are this band's trademark. The studied irrelevance is in full swing—welcome to Negativland.

Suddenly, Hosler is banging out brief cannonades on a set of floor toms, and over the deep grumbling of synthesizers, David Wills is out on the floor, babbling into a mike as he interacts with the audience. There is no poetry to this monologue, no grace, no profundity of any kind—Wills is being stupidly absurd, and would be the first to admit it. Compulsive cleaning of a stage monitor with Formula 409 somehow segues into his setting up a kind of miniature electric chair. As Hosler paces the band's tonal drift on rhythmic bass guitar, Wills zaps several luckless macadamia nuts with bright, syncopated sparks, crackles, and exclamations, looking for all the world like a demented engineer doing graduate work.

The next section has no "vocals." The base keeps a slow backbone to the low-end rumble of slow tapes, synthesizer hugeness, and subtle, muted guitars that create the soundtrack to a Super-8 movie about a Pocono winter in the '40s. Middle-aged ladies wrestling in the snow are underscored with hugeness, whining, pulsing; randomness and dissonance are somehow synched to the film. Innocent fun is turned sinister. Home-made sound generators provide wind, and the bass is water dripping. The music comes in waves, Chris Grigg

massaging a slide guitar and then going to the drums to punctuate the crescendo beneath windswept trees.

The audience, though calm, is insistent for more. And if you've ever felt that *Negativland* and *Points* are impenetrable as albums, or that their monthly radio spot on KPFA's *Over the Edge* is inaccessible, by all means catch a live show to complete the picture. No visual and aural numbness here!

—Alan K. Lipton

### Greg Kihn Band Phoenix Theatre, Petaluma October 22

After several months of remodeling and reorganization, the Phoenix Theatre triumphantly reopened its doors with a terrific performance by the Greg Kihn Band.

The concert was a total success, and part of the credit should go to the old downtown movie house itself. As far as I'm concerned, the Phoenix is the best concert spot in the Bay Area, definitely worth an hour drive. You don't get either the prison cafeteria or hosed-down drunk tank feeling there that you do at two of the prominent Bay Area clubs. It's small, every seat is a good seat, and the staff is low key and competent. There wasn't a single menacing goon working security.

Apparently, the small town atmosphere has the same effect on the mu-

sicians as it does on the audiences.

Last night...

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THE CALIFORNIA MUSIC MAGAZINE

After Kihn turned it over to bassist Steve Wright, who opened "Happy Man" with a pumping bass solo, he ran through "Valerie" and a put-your-hands-together version of Ray Charles' "Hit The Road Jack." New lead guitarist Greg Douglass used the metallic ping of his Stratocaster impeccably, and added some dirty slide guitar work as well. Larry Lynch was particularly impressive on drums. There were no dull thuds from this guy. The drums were tuned to sound sharp and crisp, which fit perfectly with his relentless tick-tock backbeats and simple but excellent fills.

Kihn saved "The Breakup Song" and "Testify" for the climax of the fourteen-song set, and the hits came on like fireworks. He also introduced three songs from the album he's currently recording, and one of them, "Jeopardy," might be his next hit single.

Joseph Territo



# Negativland BY NEGATIVLAND

David: Boy I'm the stupidest thing that ever happened... yeah, I'm gonna choke now, yah hah hah hah...

Mark: How would you explain what we're doing?  
David: Well unfortunately it's insulting... I think it's like sound effects. But I like that because it's got all that electronic stuff in it. It isn't just plain sounds.

Mark: What do you mean? It's much more than that. It's definitely music.

David: I don't mean to be insulting. With this new record we've progressed beyond... well, it doesn't always follow the definition of music.

Mark: Your definition, David.

Ian: We've performed live about ten times now...

Mark: Yes, but we've also been on the air for about 85 hours total since July of '81 as part of a radio program on KPFA called "Over the Edge." We use live instruments, tapes, records, carts, noise, and input from callers.

Ian: Jamming...

Mark: Yeah. For the listeners at home using their telephones the show is an open circuit for them to interact creatively with the radio. This idea of "Receptacle Programming" is one of the show's strongest points. We should be releasing a "Best of..." collection from the show in a few months.

David: I want to get on the satellite and make the whole country think differently.  
Mark: I don't know if that's possible, but there's something about hearing what we do on the radio that makes it work for lots of different people who would never listen to our records.

David: But then we might make more people open to different kinds of ideas, and not just ours of course.

Mark: So what about our politics?

David: I think of it in a very general sort of way because I don't understand much of what's going on. How should I put it? I've always had an uneasy feeling about going into stores, and shopping and getting along with people in general. Especially here in Contra Costa County. I hear things about the increase of the Ku Klux Klan out here...

Ian: And it's getting all polluted and urbanized.

Mark: Our childhood dream of suburbia is dead.  
David: And the weather gets real hot. The weather plays an important part of how I think people are... it seems to me that everybody within reach of the coastal fog is more "hip," if you will, or I don't know what... but they seem more interesting. But when you get out of reach of the coastal fog, like into Contra Costa County for instance, then people aren't that way.

Mark: What about the east coast?

David: Well on the east coast you've got humidity in the air. I think moisture in the air... out here it gets so dry it makes people crazy. It never stays 58 degrees out here.

Mark: You'd better explain that one.

David: 58 degrees is the best temperature to have sex.

Mark: I know, but what does that have to do with...

David: It's all connected. Having sex, 58 degrees, and being creative. There's a higher O.P.M. rate on the coasts and more marijuana busts. I'm probably all wrong, but who knows...

Mark: So what does all this have to do with negativland?

David: I really think that whether you like it or not, we're all driven by our sexual feelings

Mark: Yeah, well that's... I mean that's pretty...

David: But that's too bad, damn it. I wish I could be creative without that being attached... it's like it's got me. It's like a religion.

Mark: I wish you'd relate this more to negativland... Now what about your new Frank Luther records?

OP: Independent 'N' Issue Nov-Dec 1982.

NEIGHBOR HOOD NOISEMAKERS

David: Well, I really like the idea of having somebody to tell me to clean up and get rid of my dirt. Buying that record is the best thing that ever happened to me, because I'm really fussy about dirt and germs and I just never thought I'd hear anything like it.

Mark: We all grew up listening to those records, so how do you think they affected us?

David: They made it seem that anything can be possible... because I like the idea that you can be playing a harmonica and you're going to go back into your house that's burning because a pain caught it on fire. The idea that this pain can be chasing somebody and then it runs back into the house and burns up and of course the old lady is saved and now she can play "Home Sweet Home" on Happy the Harmonica... listening to those records is like being in another dimension.

Mark: Yeah, well you talk about that, and your anti-sex attitude and 58 degrees, and then I know that you've made the Booper into a vibrator.

David: Well, of course!

Mark: What do you mean, "of course"?

David: Why not? I have a little basic knowledge of electronics, so I decided to see if the Booper could make alternating current at 115 volts. And it did! It lit up a light bulb. So, I thought: How would that be to run a vibrator? And I was able to make it oscillate at just the right frequency.

Mark: So your vibrator was hooping?

David: It actually sounded like a speaker, it was very loud in the coil windings. I ruined a vibrator doing that. The Booper oscillated at too high a frequency and the windings shorted out and the vibrator started smoking and then stopped completely.

Mark: What about the Booper?

David: I guess I wanted to impress everybody at my high school that I'm not just "The Weatherman." This was before it was contained in a box. I had all these wires, and all of a sudden these funny sounds would come out. They'd say "alright, the Weatherman is going into 'oscerations' again!"

Mark: That sounds like when I used to run around Concord High School with my portable electric bullhorn and shout at people.

David: I started doing things at about age 13. I had my little AM radio with six speakers attached to it and I did things with feedback and Monkees records, and it progressed from there.

Mark: What do you see your role in the group as?

David: I supply you with raw input and my voice and you deal with them. You're the master processor. You and Ian seem to know how to do it best at this point.

Mark: What's interesting to me is how I've sort of hidden behind your personality in the records and interviews.

David: Well, you're the behind-the-scenes person that makes this group and this thing called David Willis all function as negativland.

Mark: Umm...

David: And here it is, functioning right now... you know I was drunk when we edited the first album.

Mark: Don't say that. That's against the code...

*Negativland is various combinations of Mark Hoalter, Ian Allen, David Willis, Peter Dayton, and Chris Grigg. Write to them at Box 54, Concord, CA 94522, or order their two (soon to be three) albums from Systematic, 729 Heinz Ave. #1, Berkeley, CA 94710.*

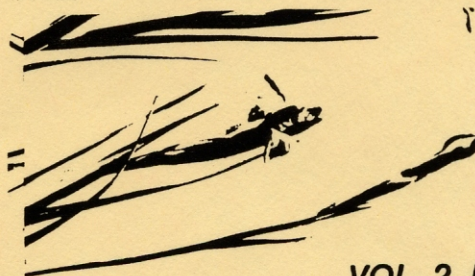


# OVER THE EDGE

## DON JOYCE

When I was in art school in 1965 I read Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media*. All critical discourse on McLuhan has never shaken that first, clear realization that the electronic revolution can suggest and produce new modes of expression in the arts. Electricity is fast and life is slow. By the late 60's it was clear that this culture could be infinitely more interesting than the isolated "problems" of object art. From 1970 to 1980 nothing happened but I always had the radio on--I had always had the radio on.

In '81 I began an all-night shift at KPFA and called it Over The Edge. I just play records. I always suspected that this avocation could be more fun; there could be such a thing as radio art. Through Ian Allen I came in contact with Negativland (Mark Hosler, Richard Lyons and David Willis), and we decided to use our slot on KPFA to mix music, sounds and noise in a continuous flow which would be similar to the way they mixed their records. We did the radio mix live and Over The Edge finally began to live up to its name. Fake Stone Age (Jeff Stoll and Tom Patrick) and the Refrigerator Lady (Helen Holt) soon joined our forces and, as core personnel, continued to present Over The Edge in a weekly, group mix format. However, this could not last.



### VOL. 2, NO. 9 ANOTHER ROOM

The Over The Edge broadcasting process continues to develop and with each technical modification, to improve. It also continues to expand the freedom of the live participants need in order to improvise. The long list of creative artists now

**WE DID THE RADIO MIX LIVE AND "OVER THE EDGE" FINALLY BEGAN TO LIVE UP TO IT'S NAME..... OUR MOTTO, "WHAT DO YOU SUGGEST?"**

OVER THE EDGE AIRS MONDAY 2am-7am KPFA 94.1fm..

None of us were being paid by KPFA (a listener sponsored, non-commercial station); our program lacked focus and direction; we were running out of material and ideas; volunteer burn-out seemed imminent. Miraculously I was then contacted by C. Elliot Friday, a former film producer, who was interested in backing Over The Edge with certain provisions. Mr. Friday offered to supply us with a wide variety of recorded material and financial compensation. In exchange, we were to do the mix following "autoschematic" outlines which would accompany his taped material. We agreed to do this with the stipulation that we could temporarily diverge from the outline when spontaneous conditions warranted it.

This is the form Over The Edge now takes. Mr. Friday's taped material for each program arrives in the mail each week along with his autoschematic outline indicating the order and duration of sound events. Each of our broadcasts is taped entirely and, following each show, the tapes are forwarded to Mr. Friday on Howland Island in the Pacific Ocean. This system continues to work well, and so far we have never met Mr. Friday. All our communications have been by mail only, which he uses with clockwork regularity despite his remote location. I have been unable to reach the island by phone and any queries as to his reason for supporting our program went unanswered. According to a film industry source in Los Angeles, Friday made Hollywood musicals in the 30's and 40's, became extremely wealthy as a collector and dealer or cubist and surrealist art, and moved to Howland Island in the 50's. He has lived there, as a recluse in an underground complex, ever since.

The wide variety of audio artists now involved in Over The Edge find the more prescribed format still provides plenty of room for creative input. I think this indicates the genius of Friday's so-called "Receptacle Programming" format. The format retains many of the audio structures which we originally felt needed development. I feel Friday's autoschematics have pushed our early, rather technical concepts into new realms, far beyond our original intentions or capabilities. Our show has become unique in the "objective," predictable, pre-produced world of mass-media.

Over The Edge is a random cultural sampling service. We rely heavily on live phone-in's, which Mr. Friday emphasizes in his autoschematics. His particular interest in telephone input is rather curious. Usually we are directed to respond to callers only with recorded voices and sounds assigned to phone response. This leaves callers in a callous, sound-filled limbo, talking to themselves. While some callers become indignant, others revert inward, conversing on a more subconscious level. This is an effect distinctly different from other public participation formats. Other callers use this open and undirected opportunity to play homemade tapes, musical instruments, or other sound sources over the phone.

booked to appear stand as a testimonial to the congenial interfacing now possible between art and technology.

Mr. Friday, perhaps because of his remote location, is a radio ham buff. Many of the programs sent to us contain fragments of ham broadcasts, including the current phenomenon of illegal jamming. After my many written suggestions that rebroadcasting this jammer material could jeopardize the entire program, I received the only reply to date which gives any insight into Mr. Friday's choice of material for Over The Edge.

In a brief note accompanying a weekly set of program material, Mr. Friday related the history of ham jamming and stated his feeling that, "it represents a sociological phenomenon which will inevitably spread to other forms of communications media as citizens gain access to more of the technology necessary to participate within channels reserved for a well-funded, technological elite. Local stations, following formats developed by national networks, produce one-way channels which transmit material designed for passive feeding, sucking and selling. The "audience" has the "freedom" to take it or leave it. In the near future, as our culture approaches real media access, the content of media will confront the thin line existing between pure democracy and anarchy. Ham jammers are there now and their attitude is that commercial culture is bloated with bias and suicidal in its blind rocket race towards catastrophic self-destruction."

I began to realize other examples of cultural jamming now in operation. For instance, the increasing art of billboard jamming; an unknowable number of phone phreaks tapping into our planet's one, endless telephone network; pirate radio ships broadcasting non-state-controlled formats into Europe for years. "Unauthorized" political programming emanates from portable transmitters deep in the mountains of Latin America, where the penalty is death. In general, the jammer mentality pursues a fight-back attitude towards the access limitations now placed on communications technology by its government or corporate operators.

The history of jamming is an underground history. So far, because of the time of night, or the relatively subliminal nature of these elements in our mix, we have continued without legal repercussions. Mr. Friday informs me that he is able to "post facilitate" any objections from the FCC; but I can only guess how long we have before the clamps come down and our artistic license expires.

In the meantime, this information may be helpful in approaching Over The Edge and the concept of Receptacle Programming. For me, the show is best summed up in our motto: What Do You Suggest?.