

The Gates interview

On Feb. 26, 2005, just one day before *The Gates, Central Park, New York City, 1979-2005* was dismantled, I had the pleasure of joining several media colleagues in an interview with the artists Jeanne-Claude and Christo, at their temporary office in Central Park. The following is a transcript of that interview.

Interviewers:

1. Yoon Lee, *W* magazine, (fashion) Korea
2. Patricia Ensworth, *Project Management Journal*, Newtown Square, PA
3. Margaret Millen (a friend of Christo and Jeanne-Claude)
4. Ivy Farias, *Bravo* magazine, (general news) Brazil
5. Barbara Sibbald, *CMAJ*

W MAGAZINE: Considering that your projects often take 10 or more years to realize, how do you get your inspiration and how do you motor your passion?

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Where we get our inspiration is from our two hearts and two heads. ... Never, never other people's ideas. Many people propose ideas to us and we always answer, "the best way to kill a good idea is to propose it to us because we never do other people's ideas, we do not do commissions." We only do what we want and where we want it, how we want it, and not always when we want it [smiles].

CHRISTO: In the Reichstag project [*Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin, 1971-95*] we had to get permission from 37 parties. We had to convince the people responsible for the permits and without that [the projects] would never be realized like the wrapping of the Reichstag and the Pont Neuf [*The Pont Neuf Wrapped, Paris, 1975-85*], like *The Gates* [*The Gates, Central Park, New York City, 1979-2005*], which took 26 years.

W MAGAZINE: How did you keep it alive?

CHRISTO: There are no rules why some stay alive and others we lost interest. There are all kinds of circumstances. There is no recipe.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Because each one of the works of ours is like a child of ours which we create for us. Like all true artists, artists create for themselves. If other people like it, it's a bonus. Since it is created for us, once it's no longer in our hearts, why should we build it?

PROJECT MANAGEMENT JOURNAL: [Explains that she's a project manager and she's like to talk about that aspect of the project.]

JEANNE-CLAUDE: You should speak to Vince Davenport.

CHRISTO: You should do that.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Because we have nothing to do with the management and engineering.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT JOURNAL: You are the client in effect?

CHRISTO: No, no! We —

JEANNE-CLAUDE: We have asked our Chief Engineer and Director of Construction Vince Davenport to take care of all the design, the management, together with Jonita Davenport, his partner, Project Director. So every question you have about that, ask them, not us.

CHRISTO: We cannot answer that. Actually, there would be no *Gates* if Jonita and Vince were not here.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT JOURNAL: How would you describe the role and responsibilities of the project manager?

JEANNE-CLAUDE: The project manager, the chief of construction, their role is —

CHRISTO: — to build the project.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: To do it. That's it.

CHRISTO: They are like family. We've known them for many years, we live together, we work together, we share a lot of things together. It's a working family you know. Actually we don't have any friends except people who work with us.

[Laughter.]

JEANNE-CLAUDE: It's not funny. Our family is the people we work with. That includes the art collectors —

CHRISTO: the lawyers —

JEANNE-CLAUDE: engineers: the people who are related to our lives. Because in fact Christo and I, we do not work. It takes us 18 to 21 hours a day but it is not work because art is our life and we simply live.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT JOURNAL: What kind of information might you get from your project director or project engineer that would cause you to change a design idea?

CHRISTO: But I don't have design ideas. First I'm not an engineer myself. Jeanne-Claude and I, we have images and we have links and we try to translate these images.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: The original [*Gates*] was 96 inches wide. Vince Davenport said we cannot follow Theodore Dougherty — our builder/contractor for many years — we cannot follow his engineering, we have to put [in] steel bases because if we follow the 1980 and '81 engineering plans, all the poles would be like this [hands slant inward]. Everything about management and engineering, you talk to Vince. Don't ask them in the next three weeks ... let them finish the removal, which starts Monday morning, then you ask.

BRAVO: You usually do art in public spaces so how do you meet with the government? Here in New York you had to meet with the Mayor —

CHRISTO: How do we reach these people?

BRAVO: How do you deal with them? Do you have problems?

CHRISTO & JEANNE-CLAUDE: [Laughter.]

CHRISTO: Everything in the world is owned by somebody. Nothing never, ever is free like that. When we try to do the project we find out who owns the space where we'd like to install. Sometimes they are private people, sometimes they are involving county agencies, state agencies, city agencies. Sometimes they are entities that have jurisdiction on that space. Basically, it's a process of looking who has the right to that space. In the case of Central Park it's not complicated because it's much more clear. Some other

projects, *Over the River* [*Over the River, Project for The Arkansas River, Colorado*. In progress.] and *Umbrellas* [*The Umbrellas, Japan–USA, 1984–91*] is much more complex. Our future project, *Over the River*, is much more complicated than ownership of the site of *The Gates*. Now Central Park is entirely owned by the City of New York. [In] the City of New York, the mayor is elected and of course he appoints all the commissioners at his leisure. They are not elected the commissioners. In some countries commissioners are elected. Commissioners of the traffic, all the commissioners here are appointed by the mayor. The park is managed by the Park Commission. They manage all the parks of New York City, many in several boroughs.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: For the young lady from Brazil. You have to know that New York City is not Manhattan. There are five boroughs. And Manhattan is only one of them.

CHRISTO: And Central Park is part of that management. And they are in a tricky situation. Central Park was in very bad condition in the '70s. It was in so bad condition in the late '70s that the federal government, Department of Interior who manage national parks like Grand Canyon —

JEANNE-CLAUDE: — in Washington.

CHRISTO: — they were seeking taking Central Park from the New Yorkers to make it a national park because of this devastation. The New Yorkers were very ashamed, and the Park Commissioner, Gordon Davis, and the Central Park curator Betsy Barlow [Roger]. ... they created the Central Park Conservancy, 1979–80. They put together 32 very rich New York billionaires who would give their own money to keep the park in good condition. For the last 25 years, from 1980 to now, these private citizens spent nearly \$300 million to keep the park in this condition.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: — of their own money.

CHRISTO: And they paid the salary of over 250 gardeners, tree pruners, all these people to keep the park —

JEANNE-CLAUDE: — the rangers.

CHRISTO: And so Central Park is owned by New York City but is managed by that non-profit commission called Central Park Conservancy.

BRAVO: And you had to deal with them?

CHRISTO: Now we understand the story. [Laughter.] They became like a trustee of the park and especially when [Mayor Rudolph W.] Guiliani was re-elected the second time. Guiliani literally gave the jurisdiction of Central Park to Central Park Conservancy and very wealthy, very conservative people who —

JEANNE-CLAUDE: — very generous with the park, opera, the ballet. But they don't have great knowledge of contemporary art.

CHRISTO: Or art. Our work after the refusal of the project in 1981, our work was very focused to articulate and explain the project to these very influential New York citizens because we were aware that they had no jurisdiction to stop the project, but their opinion —

JEANNE-CLAUDE: — by law they cannot stop it.

CHRISTO: But their opinion is very regarded in City Hall because they pay for the park. ... After the refusal in '81 we never applied again. The refusal for *The Gates* project came in a book of 107 pages —

JEANNE-CLAUDE: To say no! [Laughter.]

CHRISTO: — and a great many reasons why the project should not happen. And of course meanwhile, through the years after 1981, we understand that project will not happen if we don't try to mellow [our plan], or try to explain the project to these wealthy New Yorkers —

JEANNE-CLAUDE: — 32 of them.

CHRISTO: In 1995, after the Reichstag project, a friend of ours brought to our home in New York, down in Manhattan, one of [the Conservancy members] ... We tried to meet many of them. We showed our drawings, explained our project.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Some refused to come.

CHRISTO: But some came. They never said they liked the project or disliked the project, but they came. In 1995, a member of the Conservancy, a friend brought him, and he was a fan of ours.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: And we didn't know he was a fan.

CHRISTO: And he was very interested in our work, how we managed to realize our projects in Berlin and Paris. And he had a small television station and he offered for me

to come to his television station ... and he organized an interview. He was a member of the Conservancy. He was one of these 32 members —

JEANNE-CLAUDE: — one of the very rich and generous members —

CHRISTO: And he tried to help us and of course he was not very successful. Some of his friends disregarded him. And that was in 1995 to early 2000. In 2001 that man was elected mayor of New York City.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Michael Bloomberg.

CHRISTO: Many things changed We, Jeanne-Claude and myself, worked at his inauguration. January 1, 2001. ... You know very well the catastrophe, September 11. The city was in total misery, all kinds of things, security. There were a lot of problems in New York City and of course there was no way we would try to talk to him about *The Gates*. I was saying to Jeanne, Jeanne was saying to me that we should leave him alone and not talk about *The Gates* until the summer, 2002.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Until June. We leave him alone until June.

CHRISTO: In March 2002, we received a call from City Hall and the deputy mayor Patricia Harris —

JEANNE-CLAUDE: — said may I come and talk to you ... and I said “Yes, you may.” [Laughter.] And it all started then.

CHRISTO: We never reapplied for a permit. All of our projects have a lot of problems but it's a matter of many things. Of course circumstance. Life is a chain of many circumstances. There were a lot of similarities between *The Gates* project with the Reichstag with the permit process. For the Berlin project we started in 1971. We had three refusals: in 1977 —

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Reichstag is the Parliament of Germany and we wrapped it in 1995. We started the project in 1971.

CHRISTO: She was not born. [Laughter.]

JEANNE-CLAUDE: You did not look at our Web site?

BRAVO: I'll look it up.

CHRISTO: I'd like to make a point about the similarities. We went to 6 consecutive Parliaments. In 1988–89 there was a new president, Prof. Dr. Rita Süßmuth —

JEANNE-CLAUDE: — a new president was elected to the Parliament — Doctor, Professor Rita Süßmuth — and she liked our work very much and it all started then. You asked how we get the permit. Of course it's different when we want umbrellas, yellow in California and blue in Japan, then it is very different. It's no longer a president of parliament or a mayor. In Japan, we had to put the blue umbrellas on the private property of 479 rice field farmers. There we have to talk to each one personally with an interpreter. We have to know the current price of rice. We have to go to each of them and drink 6000 cups of green tea. [Laughter.] So this is very different. Okay, you know that is very varied.

CMAJ: I'm Barbara Sibbald from the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*.

CHRISTO: We have an exhibit in Toronto.

CMAJ: At the Art Gallery of Ontario, yes. In looking at your art it seems to be a process of creating then uncreating, recycling everything afterward sort of like a Buddhist Mandela or the work of Andy Goldsworthy...

CHRISTO: Who's that?

CMAJ: He's a UK artist who works with dandelions and things like that. Afterwards everything is recycled, back to nature.

CHRISTO: No, not back to nature, it goes back to different purposes.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: We buy industrial material and after the removal it's industrially recycled.

CMAJ: Okay, good clarification. It seems to be important to you to close this loop, between the creating and uncreating, I'm wondering if you can explain this process.

CHRISTO: No, no there is no process. We are only creating. That's all. After that it's part of the mechanics. We are not at all involved.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: We are not even here.

CHRISTO: We're only involved in creativity. The moment *The Gates* were solved. We worked 26 years, we like to see our 7500 gates for 16 days. We work so hard. For that 16 days we make sure our workers have food, have clothing, it's cold there —

JEANNE-CLAUDE: — that the garbage was picked up.

CHRISTO: We were like the bosses.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: We were no longer artists, once *The Gates* were standing in Central Park. There was no creativity.

CHRISTO: We enjoy the work but at the same time it's very tiring, you should know that we have a contract with the City of New York, 43 pages. We practically own Central Park for three-and-a-half months. Nothing can happen in Central Park except for *The Gates*. No Walt Disney, no pub, no rock concert. Only the people can run their dogs. And nobody can sell anything. But we're responsible. That big snow in January cost us a quarter of a million dollars.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: We had to hire an extra 130 workers.

CHRISTO: We wanted the project to proceed [well]. We have to be out by March 15. We have to be out.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Everything.

CHRISTO: They organize the mechanics of how this huge amount of hardware goes directly to the factory for melting of the steel, the fabric goes to another factory ... but that is pure mechanics. The same way the entire project was manufactured offsite. We have 7 manufacturers on the East coast, 2 manufacturers in Germany. All this hardware was shipped to an assembly factory in Queens. We have 30 000 square feet of fabric.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: That's all on the Web. You talked about recycling?

CHRISTO: It is removed properly. We return the park in the condition we find it. Technically removed very nicely by workers. After the project it's all maintenance and removal.

W MAGAZINE: There's been a lot of questions about the colours and blah blah blah. Is there any story with how you chose your [bright orange] hair colour and do you plan to stick with it?

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Yes there is a story. In 1986, when Christo's hair turned grey, mine turned red. [Laughter.] And Christo chose at the hairdresser the first time, he chose the colour. There is no other story about my hair related to any project. I didn't have blue hair for the blue umbrellas?

W MAGAZINE: And you plan on sticking with it?

JEANNE-CLAUDE: As long as he likes it because it's for him. [Laughter.]

PROJECT MANAGEMENT JOURNAL: What makes your project managers easy to work with professionally?

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Inventive and devoted. And they know that when we are screaming — and we are the best screamers in the world — we are not screaming at them. We are simply screaming. Period.

CHRISTO: The most important thing is that they do things very simply. The simple things are the most difficult.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: All our 600 installation workers in Central Park, all of them say it's amazing, Vince must be a genius, it's so simple and easy to install. Because he has spent months and months finding ideas, designing them, experimenting, building life-size tests. Then once it arrived on site, all the gates were installed in four-and-a-half days. 7503 gates in 4 days because it was so simple. Vince calls it fool proof because he's a kind man. We call it idiot proof.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT JOURNAL: Is that kind of planning and prototyping typical of your projects?

CHRISTO: Yes. Each ... project is [a] unique image. We will never do another *Gates*. We will never do another *Umbrellas* or *Surrounded Islands* [*Surrounded Islands, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida, 1980–83*]. We need to do life-size tests.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Life-size tests, [and] more than one time. Wind tunnel tests.

CHRISTO: For example, for *Over the River*, Vince and Jonita did 4 life-size tests for us. It's done.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: We go usually to an isolated place, we rent a place. Washington State for Central Park.

ART FOUNDATION: What do *The Gates* represent for you and why Central Park?

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Oh, that's a very long answer. In 1964 when we arrived in New York City with our little boy Cyril, who will be 45 in May, we were fascinated by the buildings in Manhattan, the tall skyscrapers. Coming from Europe we were really

impressed and we very soon went to see the owner of tall buildings. In Lower Manhattan, number 20 Exchange Place is the address, [and] number 2 Broadway. ... And we showed them collages, drawings that Christo had created — because I do not make drawings — and we showed them what their buildings would look like if we were to obtain permission to wrap them. Both of them thought we were nuts. We also through the years tried to wrap the United Chemical Tower, number 1 Times Square and the Whitney Museum of Modern Art. No permission. But we worked very far away from New York, our home. We worked in Australia, 1969, to do the *Wrapped Coast* [*Wrapped Coast, Little Bay, One Million Square Feet, Sydney, Australia*] and we were thinking about New York. We worked in Colorado in '72 to do the *Valley Curtain* [*Valley Curtain, Grand Hogback, Rifle, Colorado, 1970–72*], far away from New York and we were thinking about New York. We were in Northern California to do the *Running Fence* [*Running Fence, Sonoma and Marin Counties, California, 1972–76*] far away from New York and we were thinking about New York. And we realized our fascination always with big buildings had changed. The fascination was now with the people of New York. The people of New York walk, hurriedly by hundreds of thousands. Every sidewalk. And for a brief moment we thought that for New York, which is the most walked city in the world, maybe it would be interesting to create a work of art using the sidewalks but because we are very realistic, we very quickly knew we'd never get permission for the sidewalks. But there is a place where people walk, many people, leisurely and that is in the park. And that is why in '79 the idea for *The Gates* project in Central Park was born.

BRAZIL: Why did you choose saffron?

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Saffron is a colour that we like aesthetically because it's all about aesthetics. The colour offers a great variety of tonalities and hues. You must have seen it — sometimes they are golden yellow, sometimes deep red, salmon — it keeps changing all the time at every moment of the day according to the sky. And that is why. And also because saffron is in perfect harmony with the silver grey of the branches and some of the trunks.

BRAZIL: How do you choose a place where you set up your work?

JEANNE-CLAUDE: There are 2 different ways, you know that we work in both urban sites and rural sites. When we say rural it means outside a large city, we never work in nature. This is not nature. This anyway is an absolutely urban project. When it appears like the yellow umbrellas in California this was a very, very used site. Always our rural sites are places that were previously managed by human beings, for human beings. And in both countries the blue and yellow umbrellas, they were going in front of the barn, behind a gas station, near a church, always you could feel the human presence. Now when we do an urban site, for instance we had a wish to wrap the oldest bridge in Paris, the Pont Neuf, we know exactly where it is, we don't have to look for it. But when we want to do an *Over the River* project, we have to go and find the river. And for that it took us 50 000 miles, of driving in the Rocky Mountains inspecting 89 rivers and the next summer we went back to only 6 rivers possible. Every summer travelling again, narrowing what for us is the perfect river: the Arkansas River in Colorado. All of that is written on our Web site. The majority of the Web site is written by us and it is written for you. You can take whole chapters and use it, it's not stealing it, it's for you.

CMAJ: *The Gates* when you originally conceived it, it was a lot larger work, 11 000 to 15 000 —

CHRISTO: No, no. The very first drawing for *The Gates* in Central Park ... was exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum last year for 4 months, April, May, June, July, an exhibition titled, *On the Way to The Gates*. When you entered the exhibition you could see the first drawings it was titled "The Thousand Gates." And the gates were 12 feet tall, not 16 feet. And the poles were thin like this, two inches metal steel, looked like plumbing. On the top was a cable and hooks and the fabric was attached on the top; it looked very much like a shower curtain. Then with builder/contractor Theodore Dougherty, who is no longer alive — he had built for us *Valley Curtain*, *Running Fence*, *Surrounded Islands* and he worked in Paris for the *Pont Neuf* — with him we walked in Central Park and we had the little measuring wheel and we were measuring all the walkways and we said great there is enough space to put between 11 000 and 15 000 but this is without ever looking up. And what is up? Low branches. You cannot put 16 foot tall under a low branch. It's impossible. And what was your question?

CMAJ: My question was how did the project change over the years?

JEANNE-CLAUDE: It is very similar to say you want to have a baby and at the beginning it was only a little round ball, then it has one arm and another arm and 2 legs, oh it changed completely. That's called evolution.

CHRISTO: All projects develop through the making of the project. We never have perfect ideas. With the Reichstag it was simply wrapped in white fabric, it was very fine, light fabric. Finally it was very heavy silver fabric. All these things they develop according to the project, the lines, the space. We don't have a final idea for a project at the beginning, it is only a proposal until we have more knowledge about the site.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: But we mature and the project matures. The very first drawing for the *Valley Curtain*, the curtain was white and it was hanging from an absolutely straight cable between two mountains. There is no force that can put a straight cable between two mountains. And white fabric. We said well, we have to find two mountains.

CHRISTO: For the Reichstag project we were thinking of using wooden poles. All the project —

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Let me finish with *Valley Curtain*. *Valley Curtain* that's in the studio looks great but we had to find 2 mountains and a valley. Where would we find that? In the Rocky Mountains of course. We drove and drove in the Rocky Mountains and as we discovered Colorado, we saw not only the rocks and mountains were red, but the word Colorado, in Spanish, does not only mean coloured, it means red. Yes. We didn't change anything. We learned because each one of our projects is a learning experience, it's an expedition.

W MAGAZINE: This 26-year project is about to end. When projects end do you go through some sort of depression?

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Do we look depressed? [Laughter.]

CHRISTO: First thing is we're relieved because it's exhausting.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Since Jan. 3, Christo and I have slept 3 hours a night. We feel like going home, to sleep.

CHRISTO: We're very conscious that a project stays [a limited period of] time but at the same time we're very responsible [for making sure] that a project has a perfect record.

During the making of the project, through the years, we have a very close relationship with a photographer and film maker. They're filming the stages of the projects through all the years. For example, with *The Gates* project, since 1979, Albert and David Maysles have filmed the project. They have 40 hours between 1979 and 1981. David passed away. Albert Maysles is finishing the film. Albert and David made films about *Valley Curtain*, *Running Fence*, *Surrounded Islands* and *Umbrellas*. I do many original works of art myself.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: He works alone in a studio on the fifth floor, with no elevator. He even frames them himself. We've kept a good number of original works for ourselves. Each [project] has its own documentation: 240 to 480 items. There will be an exhibition about that for *The Gates*. The amount of material needs to be edited ... and reduced for a book, 700 to 800 pages. Our friends tease us: This is not a coffee table book, it is a coffee table. [Laughter.]

We're so excited to do *Over the River*. All the projects are seasonal, chosen for the aesthetics. *The Gates* is a winter project, with leafless trees so you can see far away. We chose spring for *Surrounded Islands* because of hurricanes. *Over the River* will be a summer project. We've asked for 2 consecutive weeks between July 15 and Aug. 15. We don't have the permit yet. We've spent more than \$2 million in 4 life-size tests in wind tunnels, and environmental assessments. When [New York Mayor] Michael Bloomberg was elected, we put *Over the River* on the back burner.

W MAGAZINE: What part besides the permits do you find the most difficult?

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Even here we could have had an earthquake.

CHRISTO: No, no the permit is the most difficult part.

BRAZIL: How do you define your art?

JEANNE-CLAUDE: We don't define art, we create art. Many journalists and art historians to make their life easier they like to have categories and labels. Christo and I believe that labels are very important — for bottles of wine.

BRAZIL: A lot of people compare your art to land art. What do you think about that? Are you closer or further away?

JEANNE-CLAUDE: We never create works of art unless it is a site that has been previously managed by human beings, for human beings, never for nature, never in the desert, so that immediately puts land art far away from us.

CHRISTO: For instance the Reichstag —

JEANNE-CLAUDE: — and the Pont Neuf —

CHRISTO: — and Central Park.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Central Park is a very urban project.

CHRISTO: This is an entirely man-made park. When the City of New York bought that park 160 years ago it was only rocks.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Masa [Yanagi, their media liaison] do you have that text I wrote? Can you make a few copies?

CHRISTO: It's a history of the park.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: They also say we are conceptual artists and that is very funny because anyone on Wall Street will tell you that \$21 million is not a concept. [Laughter.]

CMAJ: Some of your projects seem to deny an inner space: the Reichstag for instance, the wrapping of things. While *The Gates* seem to expose an inner space and allow a comparison with the outer space because you walk through them...

CHRISTO: Very good.

CMAJ: I'm wondering if you can talk to me about the interrelation between the inner and the outer.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: In *Under the Umbrellas* there is an inner and outer space and *The Gates* and *Over the River* also you can see it from the road, from above and you can raft, rubber raft for 6 hours underneath. But it really start in 1963 and '64 with Christo's *Store Fronts* and *Show Windows*. It's in all the books.

CHRISTO: These sculptures are created from the demolition of parts of stalls and doors. [He indicates a photo of *Store Fronts*.] The inside is obstructed by hanging curtain or paper, obstructing their visibility but you see their light and their spaces [revealed in the uncovered strip at the top of the windows] are still there, you can see something has

happened there and it cannot be used. They are early work Of course, these objects were done in the '60s; they are precursors of the Reichstag and others.

CHRISTO: *Store front* — it's light inside but you cannot see what's inside, you cannot open the door. It's 1964. That inner space became more developed with *Gates*. *Gates* in 1979 was the first proposal where you could really walk through, inside, but of course it was realized so much later. But inner space was also revealed in *Under The Umbrellas*. They are 20 feet tall by 29 feet diameter: 640 square foot surface.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: It's like a small bachelor apartment each one of them. [Laughter.]

CHRISTO: People were going under the umbrella.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: You see the platform, the sitting platform, it was big, like half the size of this [12 foot long] table. And people would picnic on the sitting platform.

CHRISTO: Of course the cars could go under them.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Those umbrellas that were along the road, the buses were driving right underneath.

CHRISTO: And the churches, and temples and schools, there was a gas station.

W MAGAZINE: Do you have any word of advice for the next generation of artists that pursues expression in your scale?

CHRISTO: We only give one advice, and it's not necessarily to artists, it's to any young person who comes to us and seeks advice. We tell them if you want to do something and you are ready to work 17 hours a day, 7 days a week, never take a vacation, you will do it. What is very hard is to know what you want. That's all. Then you do it.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT JOURNAL: How many people are in your core team?

JEANNE-CLAUDE: About 12 000 people worked on *The Gates* but they don't all 12 000 live with us and weren't all with us the whole time. It absolutely depends.

CHRISTO: We try to save money. Jeanne-Claude and myself we try to be very cautious. I don't have an assistant, I do all the preparation myself. Jeanne-Claude has 2 assistants.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: One is ... the son of my sister, and the other one is ... the son of Christo's brother. That's it, in our home.

CHRISTO: And she has a part-time accountant, but she doesn't work at our place.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT JOURNAL: When you begin to work on a project how many people are actively involved in influencing you and giving you information?

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Influencing? Nobody.

CHRISTO: But giving advice or information, many people including Masa Yanagi, our adopted Japanese son.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Masa was, for *The Umbrellas*, our ears and eyes, we don't speak Japanese.

CHRISTO: Masa is an art historian, he wrote several books.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: When we were not building the umbrellas, he lived in New York.

CHRISTO: And he was measuring the length of the walkways in Central Park.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: And he wrote many books and catalogues about our work and exhibitions.

CHRISTO: And of course when you have business with the exhibit, everything passes through Masa.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: This is written by Christo and I [one-page article entitled "Why Gates?"], you can take any sentence you like. I made a mistake — it's not yet on the Web site. Masa can you tomorrow ask Jonathan to email to Jacques to put it on the Web site? Thank you. Two nights ago we went home, as we will now, to find a pile of faxes like this [indicates two inches] and this was one of the questions. This question is asked so often I thought why not just write the text and it's done.

BRAVO MAGAZINE: About the —

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Choose well your question, this is the last one. We have to go count how many faxes we got. [Laughter.]

BRAVO MAGAZINE: In Brazil we had a military regime ... a long time ago. And a lot of artists left the museums and galleries and went to the street. They ... protested, to shock the government. Your art also shocks, impacts, but you have people that work for you, not just like being artists and putting on the street, you have assistants.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Christo and I are not strong enough to put up the installations.

BRAVO MAGAZINE: What and how do you see this chain: these people working for you?

JEANNE-CLAUDE: That's 2 questions. First you will not find an artist who is 70 years old, or will be in June [both Christo and Jeanne-Claude turn 70 in June], who works alone in his studio. They all have an assistant. Always. Christo works alone that is, in the studio. Now you will find many artists, like Alexander Calder who does not build himself his giant works. That is done in a factory with many workers and that is natural. But we, Christo and I, we are neither painter nor sculptor, we are artists in a much broader sense of the word.

CHRISTO: Many of our projects have other elements like architecture, urban planning. An architect who builds a building of bricks he has all sorts of workers, he has cranes. When we did the Reichstag we had the same, we had cranes, we had trucks, very much like building a building. With *The Gates*, the same thing. It's a matter of construction. Some artists when they paint watercolour, they paint it themselves. When they try to paint a big thing, a fresco, they cannot prepare it themselves.

BRAVO MAGAZINE: The jealous people say you are more capitalists than artists.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: We like it. For instance, people think we are very rich. We like them to think that. Everything we have is in Central Park right now. Yes, we are rich enough to be able to spend everything we have in Central Park, our philosophy, well we have many philosophies but I have one I like very much: Money is the same as manure ... It is valuable only if you spread it around. [Laughter.]

CHRISTO: You should know that all these projects in a Capitalist society — now I talk like Marxists, but I have studied Marxism. In a capitalist society that we use with all the regulations, all the laws of a capitalist society. We are working and building this project like a corporation. We hire companies, we buy goods, we pay salaries, we have insurance, all kinds of liability, we have lawyers who write contracts and it's very serious. Very much like any other business. All our projects they are built by a corporation. We are the owner of that corporation but it's not a non-profit corporation. It was created many years ago to build our projects, to sell our works of art and to buy back our original art. We're the biggest collector of our works. We have storage in Switzerland

and New York City. We have so much art work that we have our own curator who directs museum exhibitions. We work very much like a capitalist country. We need to have money. We cannot say to the workers we cannot pay you because Mr. Smith said he wouldn't pay for a work of art. This is why we need to work with banks so we can have a cash flow each Friday. To get that cash flow, we need to have collateral. ... We don't have anything except art. This is why the banks take our works of art as collateral. We have a line of credit, millions of dollars, that we can pay the workers if we do not sell enough [art]. It's a real business.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: But for *The Gates* we are very very lucky. For the first time in our life, we sold enough original works that we did not have to take money from the bank. It was ready, we had a contract with the bank ... we didn't take the money from the bank. We sold enough. It's the first time this happens to us. [Applause.]

CMAJ: I wanted to ask about the influences of Socialist Realism on your work, I know you came from Bulgaria, under a Communist regime.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: It had a great influence, that is why he escaped. [Laughter.]

CMAJ: I'm thinking of the art for every man.

CHRISTO: No, freedom, freedom. I escaped a Communist country for freedom. I was very young, I was 21 years old, I was in art school in Bulgaria in the doctrine of socialist realism. Like any totalitarian state — Hitler, Stalin — the art was the same. And of course I like to go where art could be created free. I wanted to go to Paris. When I escaped alone with no money, no parents, no brothers, no sisters, alone.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Well you had brothers and sisters but you left them in Bulgaria.

CHRISTO: I was alone. I did all kinds of odd jobs to survive. But all that work was meant for art so I could be an artist. I wouldn't compromise with anything for the freedom of the artist. The freedom was the principal element of all my work since I escaped from Bulgaria.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: When Christo said he worked odd jobs he washed cars in garages, he washed dishes in restaurants but he found a way to make more money was to paint portraits, oil on canvas. And that is how we met in Paris in 1958.

CHRISTO: I was signing the portraits with my family name, Javacheff. This is why I always try to do the things I like to do. We do not have a gallery.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: We work with many galleries.

CHRISTO: But never a gallery to represent us. I'm eager to have control of the things I've made and the things I like to do.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: And if you want a good title for your writing you can use Christo's sentence that he uses in his lectures. My work and Jeanne-Claude's work, our work is a scream of freedom.

CHRISTO: This is why the works do not stay. This is the principal reason why the work will not stay. To us. Because nobody can buy these projects, nobody can own this project, nobody can commercialize, or sell tickets. This is why our work should go away because it is the enemy of possession, and possession is equal to permanence. This is why this collection will go away. Because it's all about freedom, even ourselves we do not own *The Gates*.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: We did not buy Central Park, we gave a \$3 million cheque, but that's not enough for that big piece of real estate.

CHRISTO: This is why when the projects go away they translate into absolute freedom. They cannot be kept and controlled.

JEANNE-CLAUDE: Can we go home now?

CMAJ: Are you coming to Canada?

JEANNE-CLAUDE: We're giving a lecture at the closing [of the AGO exhibit]. We could not go to the opening.

[She signs my card.] We sign Christo and — *and* is our middle name. [Laughs.]

CMAJ: Are you planning any projects in Canada?

CHRISTO: Not yet, but nothing is impossible.

NOTE: *Over the River* is slated to be installed in 2008.