Swimming to Cambodia: December 20, 1983

The Spalding Gray archive includes more than 150 audio cassette tapes of Gray's performances, interviews, and more. These cassette tapes, along with more than 120 VHS tapes, help trace the evolution of Gray's work in front of audiences across more than two decades.

Gray's best-known monologue was probably *Swimming to Cambodia*, which premiered in 1985. Gray had been working on the monologue off and on for two years prior to that, and in December 1983, Gray presented work-in-progress showings of *Swimming* at The Performing Garage in New York. This first audio clip is an excerpt from a performance on December 20, 1983.

TRANSCRIPT

Saturday, June 18, 1983.

MX missile sails over Pacific in successful maiden flight.

Hua Hin, Gulf of Thailand—Gulf of Siam, Thailand:

It was our first day off in a long time since we had come back down from Bangkok to the town of Hua Hin. And there are about 130 of us all out by the swimming pool, trying to have a holiday, have a celebration at this big hotel. It was kind of like a, well, a kind of pleasurable prison. That's what it was. It had very large electric fences around it. It was one of those hotels. It was just put up in the middle of the jungle just outside of Bangkok. I suppose it was a package deal. If you're going to take a vacation or a holiday, you could line it up with that hotel, fly into Bangkok, and then be driven to the hotel and be completely protected by guards because there were so many bandits in the area.

So we were all trying to rest and relax and out on the beach along the gulf which was as hot, the water as warm as a bathtub, there were wild dogs straying and wandering. And fishermen going out put, put, put—no sail, that's the little motor, just a boat.

Occasionally you'd hear a shot because one of the hotel guards would shoot a rabid dog. And if you went for a walk along the beach, the dogs would get in packs and kind of try to intimidate you, which they did with me often, and I just learned I just had to shake a piece of seaweed and everything would be hunky-dory.

So everyone was out just trying to have a good time and the sparks were out. The sparks are the English electricians for the film. They're called the sparks, and they all had their Thai wives. They were smart: as soon as they arrived in Bangkok, they just went into one of the dancehalls and bought up five or six women, I think there are about five sparks. And this worked out very well because the women, you see, they all could talk Thai. They spoke Thai, and the men didn't. So the women could spend the day socializing and when the men came home at night—well, it wasn't really a radical idea, I guess. The men would come home at night, and they'd just go out for dinner together. And, you see, it all worked because it was a cluster of Thai women and a cluster of English men. So the sparks were out there, 250 pounds, lying like beached whales by the swimming pool on their day off with these little Thai girls. I mean, they must have been 90 pounds, in bikini bathing suits. Luscious little, sweet little country girls walking up and down on these guys' backs, giving them shiatsu.

And the other people, others of us who didn't have Thai wives, were sitting around drinking beer under umbrellas. And the waiters were running trying to bring us beer fast enough. Kloster, more Kloster. There were two kinds of beer besides Amoret, but Kloster and Singha was the most popular. They have Singha here. They

export it to the United States. But no one would drink it over there in the crew because they all said it had had formaldehyde in it. They had found out that so they were ordering Kloster.

Now the Thai waiters were jumping over hedges to get there. And they're very formal, they were dressed up in jackets and smiling. They smile, the Thai's are smiling all the time. They're the smilingest people, and in fact they're very very happy. They have a special word for fun, and they won't do anything unless it's that word. They mean it in the deepest way. It's not that they're idiotic, their smiles, but they like to have fun. There is a saying that Thais are the nicest pole money can buy and that a Thai will do anything for money. It's a furang saying that the English have over there.

Anyway they're jumping over hedges, carrying—the waiters were balancing these little trays. And then one would come running up to this table and the Klosters fell off the tray, they exploded on the cement next to the swimming pool. And with a big smile, he'd go, "Sorry sir, no more Kloster. We're out for the day." So everybody was beginning to drink Singha.