**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**INTERVIEW WITH:** **RICHARD S. WEINSTEIN (RW)**

**INTERVIEWER:** **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

**LOCATION:** **THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**

**DATE:** **JUNE 7, 1994**

**BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1**

SZ: Tell me where and when you were born and just a little bit about your background.

RW: I was born in New York City. I lived for fifty-two years between 67th Street and 72nd Street on Central Park West. I went to the Ethical Culture schools.

SZ: So you were born in...?

RW: Thirty-two. I'm sixty-two; thirty-two I was born. Are you about to flatter me?

SZ: Yes [laughter].... So you went to Ethical Culture....

RW: And Fieldston, the University of Wisconsin, Brown, Columbia, University of Pennsylvania, where I got my masters--Harvard was in there somewhere also.

SZ: How did you have such a...?

RW: That's another history [laughing].

SZ: Would you like to share it with me?

RW: I studied architecture by correspondence courses when I was in the Army, at Walter

Reed Army Hospital, and there I worked on a Frank Lloyd Wright house that was being built for his son, Llewellyn. I decided I wanted to be an architect and got into Harvard, encountered the death throes of the Bauhaus, [and] was abominably treated because I brought Wright's books into the drafting room and was told that was not permitted for a first-year student. I complained to a friend who was teaching at MIT; he sent me to the University of Pennsylvania, where Louis Kahn and Robert Venturi and Romaldo [Aldo] Giurgola were teaching. I studied architecture, I went to work for I. M. Pei, I won the Prix de Rome, Jack Kennedy died, I came back from Rome to design a theater for the Ford Foundation, which was building theaters all over the United States. Went to work for Edward Larrabee Barnes, got bored during a long summer, went to work in John Lindsay's political campaign, with several others wrote his white papers under the direction of his leading policy guy, whose name was Donald Elliott.

SZ: Had you known Donald before?

RW: No.

SZ: So your job was what?

RW: Went to work in the summer campaign when he was running for mayor--just that. I and my friends were directed to Elliott, who was in charge of content, and he had us write white papers about architecture and design and urban planning for New York City. The mayor used the materials, over the objections of his political advisers. His comments were particularly in relation to Coney Island, where we did an analysis. It was very well received; he became mayor, he offered us more money than we were making as young architects, we joined his administration. He proceeded to implement the recommendations of our white papers. He set up what was then known as the Paley Commission, which basically ratified our policy suggestions. He then brought us into the government, and, as Elliott was his chief policy analyst, at the head of the planning commission, we created something called the Urban Design Group, which revolutionized zoning in the United States. After we'd done that, we each were sent by

administrative order of the mayor to a different part of the city to create the mayor's planning and development offices. I was sent to lower Manhattan, and there my community leader was David Rockefeller.

SZ: Just tell me a little bit about what the revolutionary aspects were of these policies.

RW: The revolutionary aspects were that, up until that time, zoning variances, and indeed the whole zoning code, was limited to certain crude rules about getting light and air down to the street. We transformed the zoning codes into means of implementing complex planning objectives, and we completely stopped the practice of granting variances to developers in exchange for increased taxes to the city and took the position that public benefits had to be identified as flowing from the variance, in keeping with the plans of the area, which we had basically done. So, for example, in the theater district, which I was responsible for, if a developer wanted to build a building, he had to build a theater in it if he wanted the variance. As a result of that policy, four theaters were built: the Minskoff, the Uris, the Circle in the Square, and the American Place Theater--two experimental theaters and two Broadway theaters. In exchange for that, the developers got variances which previously they had gotten as a matter of political wheeling and dealing--in this case, in exchange for public benefit, which in that particular part of the city was deemed to be a theater. We did similar things to save the South Street Seaport buildings when I was in lower Manhattan. We transferred the air rights off the Seaport and deposited them in the air and got a consortium of banks, led by the Chase, to buy the air against future sales, and we saved the Seaport. And then Rouse Company came in and did [its] number. It took me years to persuade David to do this.

SZ: That kind of thing was changing at that point.

RW: It was changing, but David wasn't interested in the Seaport, until I noticed a letter from Alexander Hamilton outside his office one day when I was going in to talk to him. I said, "I see you have Hamilton memorabilia." And he said that his father had collected

Hamilton memorabilia. I said, "You know, Hamilton used to carouse in the pubs of the Seaport." In those days, insurance was traded the way stocks are traded today, and people would bet how much the cargo would be spoiled on its way from the continent to the Seaport, and the merchants appealed to Hamilton to regularize these transactions so that they would be a more predictable and more lucrative. He used his influence in the fledgling government to basically establish insurance laws and trading laws, which ultimately became the foundation of the New York Stock Exchange. "Of course, the Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Chase, was involved in this," at which point David said, "All right, all right, you win" [laughing], and he called in the chief of his real estate division and instructed him to help me figure out how to save the Seaport. We had it figured out, Don Elliott and I; we just needed a lead bank to organize the other banks to buy this air. The office building boom was over, but we sold it as futures, basically. So we created an air-rights futures investment for the leading banks and the telephone company, and we were able to buy out the interests of someone who had the right to tear down the last eighteenth-century brick buildings on the island--six blocks of them. And that's how we saved the Seaport. So I did a lot of work with David, because he was head of the Lower Manhattan Association in those days, an institution that he basically created. When Lindsay went out of government, David arranged for me to spend a year at the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation.

SZ: You were at...the Urban Design Group.

RW: The Urban Design Group remained, but as per our white papers, we argued that unless planners and architects worked with the direct authority of the mayor, it would be impossible to successfully negotiate the kinds of deals with the development community that would be consistent with a whole other level of planning for the city. So Lindsay created, initially, the Office of Lower Manhattan Development, and then the Office of Midtown Development, [which] produced the Convention Center; and then, eventually, each of the boroughs had their own office. When we left office, there were one hundred first-class architects working for the city.

SZ: So that was really an incredible feat, wasn't it?

RW: Yes. It was an amazing moment. We placed urban designers in the agencies that spent the most money, and the one that spent the most money, of course, was the Department of Transportation. One day, some young kid that I'd put in that agency called me up and said, "They're going to paint the Brooklyn Bridge. It's going to cost $9 million dollars." I said, "What color?" and he said, "Olive green--the way it's always been painted." I said, "It's impossible that [John] Roebling, when he designed that bridge, wanted it painted olive green. Let's find out what it was originally painted." We traced the information at the Smithsonian, and we sent the kid down to the Smithsonian where they had the paint samples, which were two colors of tan and silver. So, ever since that day, the Brooklyn Bridge has been painted two colors of tan and silver, which is the way it was originally painted. That is the parable of the Brooklyn Bridge. So we had infiltrated, basically, the whole government.

SZ: Did you feel that you had a mandate from Lindsay?

RW: Absolutely! Totally. The developers would call up screaming and arrive in Lindsay's office and the mayor and I would be drinking coffee and laughing as they walked into the room. He was totally and completed committed, which is why we stayed there.

SZ: For one brief moment in the city's history.

RW: Eight years. The agenda for major construction in New York is still the one that we established. Battery Park City, for example--I negotiated the lease with Nelson Rockefeller's people for the landfill and sat on the platform with Robert Moses, who said, "Young man, do you know who I am?" I said, "Yes." Of course I said yes. So when Lindsay left office....

SZ: Just for you, I assume this was a pleasing change from what you had been doing [before] and found to be tiresome?

RW: Working for the man?

SZ: Yes.

RW: Rather than being a junior person in a big architect's office? Yes. Also, it was a world we had never been taught about in school. When we were sent out to Coney Island, we were involved in a race riot; when we were in the Bronx, we had to be escorted from Roosevelt High School by armed guards and police, because people didn't want a bunch of intellectuals telling them how to replan their community. Herman Badillo had his own bodyguard who was an ex-middleweight champion. Badillo told us he never wanted to see us in the Bronx again. Then, three years later, we put the first low-income public housing in, I think in the United States, in a middle-class Irish and Italian neighborhood in the Bronx, largely through the help of a left-wing Catholic priest named Mario Zicarelli who took us by the hand and taught us how to do community politics. We tried to do the same thing in Forest Hills, and the community wouldn't accept it, and Mario Cuomo was brought in by Lindsay to arbitrate, and that's how he entered politics.

SZ: When you went to architecture school, was it required that you take planning courses, too?

RW: No, but it's just that architecture schools, then as now, are isolated from the reality of the street. I run an architecture school, and no matter what I try to do, what the students want are the hot, cutting-edge designers; they're not as interested in the social issues of the built environment, or political issues. They get interested later, when they're professionals. That may be changing, or beginning to change; but for the last fifteen years American architecture has been dominated by paper architecture--architecture which is a form of social criticism, a form of resistance.... When I left Lindsay, David arranged for me to spend a year at the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. I had an office on the fifty-second floor which looked north, over The Museum of

Modern Art, to the park....

SZ: Lindsay went out in '73, I think, right?

RW: I don't remember, to tell you the truth. [Unintelligible] tea and coffee was served in the kitchen at the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and if you got there right on time, you could get warm Sara Lee coffee cake. The president of the Foundation, William Dietel, was obviously informed by his secretary when the coffee cake was ready, because he would come charging by my office. That was the signal that I knew, so I would race after him to get there before the coffee cake was gone, because, once the coffee cake was gone, there were only biscuits, sort of dry biscuits. One day, as I barreled into the kitchen, Bill [Paley] was there talking to Richard Salomon, who was David's sort of chief of staff in those days. Bill was complaining that too much of the disposable income of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund was going to fund the deficits of The Museum of Modern Art, which were growing by about a million dollars a year. He was complaining to Salomon. He was saying, "David probably thinks we're going to fund the deficit again this year, but the kids are getting increasingly irritable, and they want more money for environmental causes and Native American rights and so on"--these were the children of Nelson and David and Laurance who were the most active participants in the direction that the Fund was taking. I got my coffee cake and went back to my office and stood there sipping my coffee and looking down at the Museum. And, because I was an architect who now knew something useful, I observed that the zoning envelope of the Museum was way underutilized, not only because the Museum wasn't very big, but that the garden was and that there was no development over it. I thought, supposing we do something similar to what we did at the Seaport and move the air to an adjacent property and build a building on that property, and then use the profits to fund the Museum's deficit? I called up Donald Elliott right at that point, and said to him, "I am looking down at The Museum of Modern Art. What do you think of this idea?" He said, "How big is the property?" I said, "Well, let me see. The block is 200 feet deep," and I sort of measured it with my eye and said, "It looks like it's about a hundred by this by that." Donald said, "Okay, the zoning there would be

such-and-such, and how high is the Museum building?" I said, "Five floors." He made a little calculation, and I said, "How big a building can we build there?" He said, "Fifty stories"--something like that. I said, "How much profit can we get out of that?" He sort of figured it out on the back of an envelope. We had a conversation like this for about an hour. The next morning I went in and said to Dietel, "I have a nutty idea. There's one chance in a hundred, but I think it's worth exploring." So I took him into my office and I said, "Supposing we took the air off the garden and we built this tower? It would be worth a lot of money, and it might help with the deficit." He called up David, and he said, "How much do you need to just put this idea in a respectable form so we can show it to people?" I said, "Five thousand dollars, because I need consultants." If memory serves me correctly, he called David, and David said, "Give him five thousand dollars." So Donald and I and a friend of ours named Peter Patterson got together and began running some numbers and looking at the maps. Peter had been in charge of negotiating one of the theaters I had built, and we had become friends. He was a classy guy, ex-Yalie, a real estate developer and analyst and so on. So we put together this little "if-then" one-pager--if you could transfer the air rights, if you could do this, if you could do the other thing, then you would get some income somewhere between this number and that number. Then Bill called [Richard] Oldenburg and Dick Koch, whom I saw for the first time in fifteen years an hour ago in a restaurant in Soho [laughing]. Dick said, "This is a great idea." Oldenburg said, "This sounds interesting," but not being an enthusiast the way Dick was, he was more cautious.

SZ: When you went to work for the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, it was to do what, specifically?

RW: Help them with grants having to deal with urban situations, urban planning, urban design and architecture.

SZ: So this idea wasn't specifically related to that.

RW: No, it just came because I overheard this conversation at the coffee machine, and

because my office looked down on the Museum, and because I'd done a lot of this work for Lindsay. It was just a natural extension of all that. So Oldenburg talked, I think, to Paley. David was supportive, because he was fond of me, and Dick Oldenburg and I flew out to Aspen to visit with Armand and Celeste Bartos, for the purpose of asking them to take a flyer and give us $15,000 to develop the idea further, the odds now having dropped...to five out of a hundred instead of one out of a hundred. Armand and Celeste gave the money.

SZ: Why did you approach the Bartoses as opposed to somebody else?

RW: This was decided by others, by Dick, David, Paley--I don't know who. Dietel? I don't know. We then took the idea further, and what became clear was, not only did the Museum have a deficit, but it needed to expand its space--that two-thirds of its collection was in vaults, and there was a much more sophisticated analysis to be made having to do with the increased income that could result from having more gallery space, and would the cost of building it neutralize the advantage of the bigger gross? We knew something about retail, and we proposed a huge expansion of the retail operation of the Museum, as another source of revenue. We did a crude analysis of the cost of the expanded building, given the property owned by the Museum. I believe there were two pieces the Museum had optioned but hadn't bought, so we threw those in to expand the Museum. We decided that the sole value of the space was not enough to cover what we needed to reduce the deficit and pay for the new wing, so Donald Elliott dreamed up the notion of the Trust for Cultural Resources--a piece of state legislation which allowed you to capture the tax revenues from a commercial space to finance bonds that were issued to build cultural facilities. With that tax increment, plus the value of the air rights, we brought the chances down to fifty-fifty, let's say, with still lots of unanswered questions, not the least of which was, would the board accept the notion of a commercial facility funding The Museum of Modern Art. Wasn't the Rockefeller family rich itself just enough to do it themselves? That issue hadn't been addressed. In order for it to be addressed, there had to be a plan that seemed workable. How could you have the entrance to an apartment house in such a way that

it didn't diminish the primacy of the Museum's entrance? Would there be a shadow on the garden? We then went to another stage of funding, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund organized--now we were getting into big money--there was a major grant from Dietel, but there was also money from David and others on the board. I'm not sure exactly how that worked, but we were now a serious enterprise. I set up a consulting office in the Pan Am Building, and the thing that I spent most of my time doing was working on this project, on the Museum project. Don Elliott was counsel, and Peter Patterson did the real estate analysis, and Paley directed us to work with Arlen Realty.

SZ: That was Paley's choice.

RW: Yes. We would not have chosen them.

SZ: Because?

RW: Because their reputation was not the best. But Paley felt that he could get a lot of free work out of them in support of the project, maybe partly because the reputation of the young real-estate genius that ran it was in such a position that being associated with an institution like the Museum would help them, and in exchange for that we would get a lot of free front-end work. And we did. They worked very hard, they were very smart people, and they began looking into what they could sell the condominiums for. They had developed condominiums, because they had built the Olympic Towers next to Saint Patrick's--another Lindsay project, by the way, where we had used zoning for the public benefit. Instead of subsidizing theaters we subsidized retail, by allowing people to build apartments over retail. Best's and other department stores had closed; Saks Fifth Avenue was thinking of closing--Retail on Fifth Avenue was threatened. Apartments were not then buildable along upper Fifth. So we knew the Arlen people, and personally we liked them. They were incredibly smart, but they were questionable figures, too. They weren't like the old New York real estate firms like Tishman and so on. So we worked with Arlen.

SZ: You've said that you had reservations about using Arlen, you had some opinion about them. Did you see some of your own fears playing out in that process?

RW: Yes, because their problems increased. They were overextended, and articles began to appear in the paper that their empire was threatened, and at a certain point Paley dumped them--this was much later in the project--because there was just too much in the Times: Were they going to survive? Weren't they going to survive? And so on. But what Arlen did was...this was Paley's way of saying, "Okay, now these are very bright young people and we like them very much, and I supported them when they worked for Lindsay, and they're very creative and all that, but let's just find out, where the rubber hits the road, is this thing going to fly?" So he wanted a big, tough real estate outfit to come in and say this isn't crazy. And that's what they did. They came in and they said, "If you can get all of this stuff that they're talking about getting, you can generate the numbers you need." At that point, we then went into a completely realistic project. I did a set of plans which basically is what's been built. I located the tower, its size; I proposed the escalators in a glass enclosure on the garden, so people could see the sculpture from above, different angles as they moved through the Museum. We insisted that the store be where it is, because there would be the maximum traffic between Fifth Avenue and the Museum. We basically sold the board [on the proposition] that the Museum could expand, that the expansion could work from a curatorial point of view, that the numbers of people we anticipated would come because of the size of the facility could be handled with the escalators, and we had the most elaborate calculation of shadow on the garden that you can possibly conceive of--that was the big issue.

SZ: You knew that would be an issue?

RW: One of the big issues.

SZ: That, and the mid-block location?

RW: Getting the variance to build a tower in the mid-block was a problem, but it wasn't as great a problem as getting the legislation, or as [great as] convincing the board that this wouldn't be some kind of monstrosity we were building, and, as part of that, the shadow on the garden. What we discovered was that, by completely re-air-conditioning the Museum, we could take off the roof of the old building about twenty feet of shadow from the old air-conditioning equipment, which used to sit over the old building and actually created more shadow in the garden than the fifty-story building. So when we removed that, we added sunlight. We had this tabulation of adding and subtracting shadow and all of this, and we were able to show that, during that part of the year, when most of the people are in the garden between twelve and two, we actually had more sun, and that at other times, of course, we had more shadow, like in the winter. The prospect of expanding the Museum, increased revenue at the gate, increased sales in the bookstore, and a gradual, at least projected, decline in the deficit was attractive enough so that the board supported it.

SZ: Without too much difficulty?

RW: Yes, without too much difficulty. I had by that time gotten to know Blanchette Rockefeller quite well, and it was time to assign a member of the board to sort of be the point person for the board on the project. There was a lot of discussion with Oldenburg, Koch and us as to who that person should be. It was decided that that person should be Donald Marron, because he was a collector himself and was at a point in his career where getting on a track that would ultimately put him as president of the Museum, which it was felt would be the case if this project worked, would appeal to him. And we were right. He was very ambitious, liked the project, liked the challenge. We were also right that the idea of ultimately replacing Blanchette when she retired appealed to him, too. Although it was never discussed in quite so naked terms, it was obliquely surfaced, and the fly was taken. If you can somehow <u>obliquely</u> place a fly on the surface of the water--I guess a deft fisherman could. We were pretty deft; we were not stupid. He took hold with a vengeance--very, very smart, and, of course, a very quick study, fabulous with numbers, and very anxious that the whole

thing should work.

SZ: So he was a good fit?

RW: A terrific fit. And Blanchette was just a queen in the way she sort of managed the board, dealt with Paley, and relied on Marron, because she was not, of course, a financial whiz. He was. There was also a great moment...I can't even remember some of the great moments, but one of the great moments was, when the finance committee of the board--which was John Loeb, Gustave Levy, Paley, David, and several others of that level--were assigned to make an independent assessment of our numbers that we had generated and to advise the board as to whether the numbers were sufficiently solid to go forward. It was one of the sort of break points in the project....

**END TAPE 1, SIDE 1**

**BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1**

RW: And I remember this meeting very, very well, because DR was late, and Paley was just fuming. This was actually a crucial meeting and we were horribly upset. Since DR was understood to be the person that was going to have the most money on the line in all likelihood--more than Paley--his view of the financial stuff, which he had no doubt independently audited through people at the Chase, was very important. Not definitive, but important, and none of us knew what his views were. At one point several years earlier, I went to the bathroom in David's office, and in this little bathroom there was a picture from one of his grandchildren of a beetle hanging over the toilet. When I was done, I said to David, "I see your grandchildren must like bugs," and he said, "No, I do. I am an amateur entomologist, or whatever the word is. [Note: specific term, coleopteralogist, not used according to the Museum of Natural History--ed.] And he said, "Actually, I have quite a collection, which I've donated to the Museum of Natural History."...I said to him, "My son, Alex, is a complete fanatic on the subject and draws them all the time." He said, "Let me arrange for you to see the collection I donated to

the Museum of Natural History." So I took Alex, who was then eight or nine, up to the museum and we went through the collection, and it was amazing. I said, "Now you've got to write Mr. Rockefeller a nice note." So Alex drew a fancy beetle from his collection, because he had some beetles, and said, "Dear Mr. Rockefeller, thank you very much," blah, blah, blah, "Alex Weinstein drew this picture of a beetle." This led to an invitation on the part of David for us to visit his home in Tarrytown, where he had a beetle collection in the basement of his own. So Alex and I went up and had dinner there. After dinner we went down into the cellar, and there, next to the wine collection, was this room, and in the room were these wonderful drawers full of beautiful beetles. David came into this meeting late, and he said, "Before we start, I have something for Richard." He opened up his attaché case, and he took out a block of plastic with a beetle encased in it, a magnificent...rhino-ceros beetle, about that big. This was a signal to everyone in the room that David supported the project. I found all of my consultants sort of relaxing, and then the report was given and it was favorable. That was a great moment, because we knew we then were authorized to go for the legislation. Somewhere--we're now about a year and a half, two years into the project--and somewhere in that period, Dick Koch was let go by the Museum, which was a very painful experience for me, and for Donald, because we were very fond of each other and we had been conspirators together. Oldenburg was supportive, but skeptical of the project, and was constantly trying to understand what Paley wanted; it, of course, was impossible to ever know what Paley wanted. You never knew what Paley thought until he had acted, which is absolutely terrifying for someone who runs the Museum to deal with the chairman of the board, and you could never tell--it was impossible to tell, until later--was it thumbs up or thumbs down. When you were with him, you were absolutely certain--because he was so warm and funny and likable--you thought, Oh, well, everything's going great. But after a while, you realized that this was the mask behind which he operated, and that you would never know until some subsequent time whether you had made a complete fool of yourself or whether he agreed with you or whether he was going to fire you or whatever [laughing]. So Dick [Oldenburg] was, I think, having survived as long as he had already survived at that time, with Paley much less institutionally enthusiastic. We were outsiders trying to sell

an idea, and Koch sort of became one of us. I'm not party to the reasons why Dick was let go, but that was a sad point in the life of the job.

SZ: You're saying that that may have been part of it?

RW: I think Dick's enthusiasm for the project and the things that he told us about how the Museum functioned and how to deal with the board were all a very valuable sort of orientation for us, who didn't know much about it. Ethel Shein, who was a friend of mine, was working for Dick then, and she was a great help, because she knew the board very, very well. I think the reasons for Dick being let go preceded the project. I think the project may have brought into sharper focus some of the reasons that people who thought he should leave basically used to persuade whoever was persuaded. I don't know who was persuaded; I don't know whose decision it was, even. I don't know whether those things were decided by Dick, by Blanchette, by Paley, or by the board--I don't know. I wasn't party to that part of it. But his leaving had no direct negative impact on the forward motion of the project. It was just sad to see a colleague, from our point of view, sad to see a colleague leave the enterprise before it was brought to a conclusion. The next dramatic event was the legislation, which was needed in order to capture the taxes to retire the bonds. It was the Bicentennial year [1976], I remember, when we advanced the legislation. It was late in the session, very late in the session, and Donald went up to Albany. The bill was introduced, something like two days before the end of the session, very close to the end of the session. We were in touch by phone, and in the late afternoon--I was in my office in the Pan Am Building--he called, and I said, "What happened?" And then he said it was defeated.

SZ: Were you surprised?

RW: Yes, we were surprised. We only had one or two days left in the session--I forget whether it was one or two days.

SZ: Two.

RW: Was it two?

SZ: I think it was two, yes.

RW: Then I said, "Okay, call me back once an hour for the rest of the day." And I called David. David said to call Bobby Douglas, who was then in some kind of a senior position at the Chase.... I called Bobby, whom I had met, because he was active for David in the Lower Manhattan Association; we knew each other. He said, "Well, you're in luck. I'm going to Albany to do some lobbying for the Chase, I'll be up there anyway. Tell Don Elliott to meet me in the bar of the Holiday Inn hotel, but tell him that I will come in through the kitchen, so that I won't have to pass through the restaurant where I'll be seen by others." The bar was next to the kitchen or something. So Donald called back an hour later and I said, "You're to meet Bobby Douglas at 9:30 in the bar of the Holiday Inn. He'll be coming through the kitchen." Meanwhile, I had called the heads of every major cultural institution in the city--Lincoln Center, the Met--and Oldenburg was on the phone. Each of these institutions had their selected upstate legislators whom they needed to get the state arts budget funded, and they would send an exhibit to Rochester or a ballet company would go to Buffalo, and that was the payoff for getting the votes for the annual appropriations. So the cultural network was activated that afternoon. Douglas listened to the whole story and said he would go to work. The next morning, Donald called me back and said, "The deal is as follows. Douglas called them. Having spoken to the majority whip for the Republicans"--I forget whether Republicans were in the majority or not, but whoever was the whip for the Republicans had said, "I'll give you two votes for every Democratic vote that changes. I'll give you two Republican votes." So then the call came down to especially concentrate on the upstate legislators who were Democrats. So then the cultural network went out, and John Mazzola at Lincoln Center, and I forget whether [Thomas] Hoving was still at the Met or not....

SZ: He was still at the Met. Actually, he was on his way out, because it was June of 1976.

RW: So we had the ballet companies and we had the Philharmonic, and these people knew how to talk to each other, because they did every year when the State appropriations came up for the arts. I was on the phone until twelve o'clock that night. My secretary brought in a greasy hamburger, and Donald would call in every hour to give me a progress report. I was calling board members at dinner parties around town. Donald Marron had, of course, been alerted. He was calling the people he knew, Paley was calling the people he knew, David was calling the people he knew, Oldenburg...it was like a pyramid scheme. God knows how many phone calls we made. And the next day, we turned the vote around. I remember when Donald was asked how come, he said, "It was an extremely complicated piece of legislation. It required a second reading," or some damn thing [laughing]. So we had the Trust for Cultural Resources Act of 1976--the New York State Trust for Cultural Resources, it's called.

SZ: That whole lobbying effort met with some criticism in the press, as I recall.

RW: Yes.

SZ: But that didn't make any difference?

RW: None whatsoever. We thought we were making cultural history, and I think the reason it was [initially] voted down was resentment against the Rockefellers, and that's not a good reason.

SZ: And the reason it was changed?

RW: That was just power politics. The deal to get two votes for one was power politics, but the votes that were changed were changed by dancers and musicians and directors of museums and Off-Broadway theater groups. The Democratic votes that were changed--and I suppose there were some Republicans [who] changed, too--[we changed] without strong-arm tactics. And then the Dorset suit came. The explanation

that I was given for the Dorset suit, which I had no way of knowing whether the reason was accurate or not, was as follows: Peter Bing, who owned the Dorset Hotel and was then the chairman of the board of Stanford University, had huge real estate holdings in New York; in fact, I went to school with his niece, Kathy. It was said that he sold his real estate holdings with assurances from Nelson Rockefeller that rent control would be broken by the State the next year. If the story is true, there must have been some understanding in the person to whom he put the real estate that somehow, if that didn't happen, then the deal would be reversed. That was the year that Nelson decided to run for the Vice Presidency, or wanted to be a Vice Presidential candidate, and he reneged on the rent-control thing, which he had publicly stated he was going to do and then pulled back from. By this time, Bing had moved to California. I guess all of that actually happened about five years earlier, when Nelson was Vice President. But Bing was unable to unload his real estate as a result of that, even though he had counted on it when he decided to move to the West Coast; at least some or all of it was put back to him, and he had this headache of what to do with the real estate. And that was given as the explanation. Then the lawsuit began, and it was conducted in a very un-genteel way, and things were said in the lawsuit and were alleged in the lawsuit that were preposterous and insulting, like The Museum of Modern Art was a private museum, that it didn't serve the public, and that it was simply the playtoy of the Rockefeller family. Eyebrows began to go up. Is this really the kind of lawsuit that the chairman of the board of Stanford University wants to be associated with? Nevertheless, that was the lawsuit. And then Blanchette decided to fly out to the coast and have lunch with Peter Bing, which she did. The reports on the lunch were that they had a very nice lunch, and that the subject never came up. But the message was clear: the Rockefellers were going to the Bings. He then instructed his lawyers to clean up the case a little and refrain from the smear part of it and try to fight it on substance, but, of course, there was no substance. The Museum obviously was a public institution and there were no grounds for claiming that it wasn't. Finally, after five years, whatever it was--four or five years--the case was decided in favor of the Museum. Unfortunately, this gave [Donald] Trump a jump on building condominiums in the neighborhood of the Museum, so our condominiums came on a little bit, like a half a year, after Trump's did,

so we didn't do as well as we might have, had we not been delayed by the lawsuit. By that time, I was out of the project. Donald retained some peripheral involvement, because he was lawyer for the Trust, but once the law was passed and once the board decided to go forward with the project and the lawsuit came, there really was nothing more for me to do at that point. So I was given a kiss on both cheeks and sort of lost touch with what went on during that protracted period of the lawsuit. I did meet the developer that was finally chosen, Charles Shaw, who is a fabulous, remarkable man. I just spent some time with him at HUD, actually, and he's a terrific guy. He's doing amazing things in Chicago, building low-income housing and so on. I think there was some sense that Shaw didn't move as quickly as he might have when the lawsuit was settled to get stuff on the market before Trump, but I'm so distant from it that I don't really....

SZ: When you were given the kiss on both cheeks, did you go back to the Rockefeller Brothers Fund?

RW: No. I became just a private practitioner. And then I dreamed up, with Donald...it's a whole other story, but the Ford Foundation was quite interested in this notion of linking commercial facilities and cultural facilities--paying for cultural facilities with commercial [development]--and they called Donald and me up at a point where they were being asked to buy the Ziegfeld Theater on 42nd Street, which was prompted by the work we had done on The Museum of Modern Art, and which ended up in the plan for the redevelopment of 42nd Street that Donald and I worked on and for which Ford raised $2.5 million dollars from the major foundations and corporations in the city. That's what I spent about three years of my life working on until [Mayor Edward I.] Koch double-crossed us, redlined us, and I took the job as dean in California, because [Koch] he couldn't stand the fact that it had been put together by Lindsay people.... We told Koch that it would never get built, that he had Rockefeller Center and Harry Helmsley and Olympia & York on a letter of intent to build it if the city would assemble the space under urban-renewal powers--they would build it and pay for the property. When Koch double-crossed us all, the Equitable was going to finance it, and Olympia

& York went and built Battery Park City--the same amount of footage they were going to build in the vicinity of Times Square. What we exacted in exchange from the three developers was a $2 million annual cultural subsidy to operate the theaters that weren't of a size that could be commercial. If you're a New Yorker, you'll remember that the Met was to be taken over by a Swedish genius named Goeran Gentele, who was killed, tragically, with his family in an automobile accident the summer before he was going to take over.... His widow, who is now married, or was, when I left New York, to Sidney Greuzen on the Times, was in charge of something called the Mini Met. She was going to run the chamber opera, which the Metropolitan was going to put on 42nd Street. Columbia Film School was going to come down there. It was an amazing project, and Koch said if we got a letter of intent, he would announce it. We got the letter of intent, and he said, "One of the things that's good about being mayor is you can change your mind." We'd all worked for six months without pay, we all lost our shirts--thirty people worked for six months. He gave the project to the Urban Development Corporation after the Daily News beat him up. The Times wouldn't write about it because they owned property on 42nd Street. That's why I went to California: I couldn't get work because of Koch. The other interesting piece that I can add and probably nobody else could was the selection of the architect.

SZ: Just what I had on my list here. Let me just ask you straight out: did you ever have any interest in being the architect-of-record on that?

RW: What I did was the conceptual plan to demonstrate to the board that it was feasible to do this in a way that wasn't damaging to the reputation of the Museum as a cultural institution, that there was a feasible way to build new space, that it could be connected to the old space in a usable way, and that the increased number of people that could use the Museum could move through it in a way that was pleasant and interesting, and that it would actually enhance the experience of the garden because everybody who moved up and down would...etcetera. If you went back to the New York Times and saw the little diagram, you'd see that what has been built is essentially what I proposed be built, because César Pelli, being a very smart man, came to the same conclusions

I did [laughing]. There was no way that I, at that point in my career, could have been given this job. It would have had to have been a major figure, established, with a big office and all that. And that wasn't me. But I was interested in making sure that whoever was selected was not one of the typical people that would be selected for Rockefeller projects, who are, in general, second-rate architects--like the ones that built Lincoln Center, which has been described to me as a complex of buildings ordered by Mussolini over the telephone [laughter].

SZ: Is there any building there that you feel is....

RW: At Lincoln Center?

SZ: Yes.

RW: None. They're all second- or third-rate buildings, and the whole complex is second- or third-rate, and I was determined that the establishment architects would not get this project.

SZ: [Wallace K.] Harrison was still alive at that point; he was still on the [Modern's] board?

RW: Yes. Ed Barnes was on the board, Philip [Johnson] was on the board.

SZ: Gordon Bunshaft was on the board.

RW: Yes, and Bunshaft and I had collided when I worked for Lindsay.

SZ: You collided where?

RW: When I worked for Lindsay.

SZ: Just in general, or for any specific reason?

RW: He wanted to build a building in lower Manhattan on a site where we wanted to preserve the historical wall of the last five blocks of Broadway as it curves into Bowling Green. We had a zoning district that required all buildings that were built in that area to be built to the line of the street to maintain the sort of Regent Street curve that the end of Broadway has. Bunshaft had a client who wanted a plaza for his building, because banks sat back on plazas, right? So he came down to see us, and I said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Bunshaft, but the zoning requires that there be no plaza in front of this building." And he said, "You're not just talking to some second-rate developer's architect. You're talking to Gordon Bunshaft, and I say that aesthetically it's better to have a plaza." I said, "I'm sorry, but the people of New York have decided that it's better not to have a plaza." And he said--because, of course, all this zoning legislation had to be passed by the Board of Estimate in those days and supported by the local community, namely, the Lower Manhattan Association--Bunshaft swore at me for about five minutes, using every expletive at his command. The consequence was that he went and built these two buildings that go like this indicating angle of abutment, because he could do it as a matter of right. But, because he was a Bauhaus cubist, he had to have one shape. So he couldn't set a building back; it had to be conceived as one object. Of course, he would have preferred to have had a plaza and then a rectilinear object, but the only way he could do it and comply with the as-of-right zoning was to have those buildings.... So that was his way of sticking his tongue out at the Lindsay Administration, on 42nd Street off Sixth, and on 57th, with that hideous black wall behind the Plaza Hotel. So, the idea that Bunshaft would get it, or Harrison, who was sort of a pathetic figure and the model for Richard Keating in The Fountainhead, because Rockefeller Center is based on an early project of Wright's, as perhaps you know, called the Insurance Building project in Chicago, which was practically a dead ringer for the big slab at Rockefeller Center. Rockefeller Center is a wonderful complex. At least when he was younger, he knew who to take his ideas from.... I was particularly anxious that Philip not get the job.

SZ: Do I need to ask you why? Can you tell me?

RW: I think Philip is.... I was taught architecture by Louis Kahn, whose whole approach to architecture and life was about as diametrically opposed to Philip's as is possible to conceive of. I watched many of my friends fall into his circle of influence and have their careers basically governed by his manipulations. I found the whole spectacle to be repugnant, and it seemed to me entirely consistent with his behavior as a young man. I didn't think architecture should be managed in that way. He represented a commitment to ways of doing things that seemed to me to be completely opposite to everything that I had been taught and had come to care about myself. But in addition to that, I discovered that people in the Museum were concerned about having him do the project. Some of the curators didn't feel that the wing he built worked very well, and they didn't like working with him on it. In addition to that, there was a lawsuit in which he was involved on the wall in the garden, the long wall on 54th Street, which had to be fixed and torn down and the contractor was suing Philip and Philip was suing the contractor and the Museum was suing Philip and the contractor. Philip had a reputation for not honoring budgets, and with the way this project was set up, you had to build the Museum for a certain number, because if you didn't, then the whole premise of the project, providing funding for the addition, etc., would be undermined. I very indelicately probed: What did Dick Oldenburg think, how did Blanchette feel about it, and David, because they were the ones that I had more access to than Paley. What I found was that they would have been just as happy if Philip didn't get the commission. There may have been other reasons that I didn't know about, but I emphasized how important it was to get somebody who could build it for the number.... I used that because it was the most available means, I thought, to frustrate his desire to get the commission. I also, to a lesser extent, used the notion of the conflict of interest between a member of the board...I urged Ed Barnes not to join the board, because I thought he was a candidate for the job, but he joined the board anyway. There was a point where he could have not joined the board, but....

SZ: But when Philip did the '64 building, he was a member of the board at that time.

RW: Yes.

SZ: So there was a recent history of....

RW: A precedent, yes....

**END SIDE 2, TAPE 1**

**BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1**

RW: This was a much bigger game we were playing, and the idea that no member of the board should do the job because of conflict of interest was a way of diminishing the appearance of singling Philip out. Because there were others who at least would have been eligible, even though everybody understood that Philip was the logical choice and the presumption was that he would get to do the job. No, I don't think any one element of the argument [unintelligible] over the garden wall, the members of the board with conflicts of interest, the discomfort of, if I remember correctly, Bill Rubin with the wing that Philip built, and Rubin was arguably the most important single person in the Museum in terms of the board's behavior.... This was all being done to get control of the deficit and to expand the Museum, and Philip did have a reputation for ending up building buildings that cost more than he said they were going to cost. All these things taken together, plus whatever I could do to sort of create anxiety about it by saying, Well, here's someone who is a personal friend of most of the members of the board for the past thirty years; if he starts doing something, who's going to control him? He has a big collection that he's planning to give the Museum; is someone going to try and clip his wings if he gets too expansive, or are they going to be afraid to do so because of friendship, because of the fact that they might lose the collection? I did everything that I could come up with, but I hadn't been able to figure out what to do about Paley, until I learned that Paley was tight. He had given to the Museum, but many people thought he hadn't been very generous, because it really wasn't <u>his</u> museum, it was the Rockefeller museum. I don't know who told me this, but by that

time I had friends on the board who were fellow conspirators and so on. And what began to emerge is that what was important was for David to indicate what his preference was before Paley spoke. Because if Paley spoke and indicated to the board what his preference was, then you couldn't get the jack back in the box. So I had to somehow get David to indicate what his preference was in terms of architect selection before this happened, because the first person who spoke had to give the most money [laughing]. The crucial meeting at which Paley was going to discuss architect selection with Oldenburg and myself and Donald and Blanchette was to take place. I called up Richard Salomon and I said, "We're going to be meeting with Bill from 4 to 5:30. David has got to place a call relatively early in that meeting and indicate that he would like a selection process to go forward with no members of the board on the list." So we got into this meeting with Paley, and Paley said something like, "Of course Philip is going to do the job" [laughter]. I was absolutely jumping out of my seat. And then the call came. The phone rings and Paley picks it up and he says, "Of course, put him on," and he says to us, "It's David." He said, "David, we're sitting here talking about who should be on the architectural list, and of course I think Philip should do the building." And then whatever it was that David said. He said, "You know, I'd never thought about that. That's certainly a consideration," and so on and so forth. So it was settled that David would have his way and Bill would not, and therefore [Bill] would not have to give as much money. None of that was said, but that was what was understood, I believe. Maybe it's just the novelist in me that thinks that the way these things happen. But it certainly seemed like that's what happened. Then the advice to the board from Paley was that we had too many distinguished and talented architects on the board, and if they could all do the building together it would be wonderful, but that the executive committee felt that the best way to proceed would be to interview other architects. Then a committee was set up, and we went around the country and looked at the work of people. Arthur Drexler was party to the list we put together, as I recall.

SZ: You put together a list based on your own particular personal preferences?

RW: No, I made a long list and then went through the list, if I remember correctly, with Arthur, with Oldenburg, with members of the board, and we narrowed it down to about five people, as I recall. Then we went and looked at all their work, and Pelli was chosen.

SZ: On the strength of?

RW: On the strength of his proven ability to deliver a product on time and for the money. On the basis of his presentation of himself it was felt that one advantage that he brought was that he could do the commercial structure as well as the Museum structure. We also had to consider what the development community would want.

SZ: That wasn't the original plan, was it? There was going to be a separate architect for that.

RW: It wasn't clear, but it was clear that the ideal thing would be to have someone who would suit both the developer and the Museum, for all the obvious reasons. It could have been done differently. But it was decided, all things being equal, if you could find someone who was plausible for both, that would be an advantage. Also, Pelli is a master salesman, if you want to call it that. He makes a very strong and favorable impression. Romaldo [Aldo] Giurgola, who was another architect who was considered--who is, it seems to me, a better architect, a more interesting architect--is Italian, with a thick accent, and didn't make as convincing a presentation as did César. César knows how to talk to corporate people, and the board is basically a corporate board. He was just persuasive and very smooth and understood the cost issue, understood the whole machinery of the project. He's very, very smart. And Aldo is just a totally different...he's an Italian, and the board didn't feel comfortable with him.

SZ: Was Pelli the first choice?

RW: Giurgola would have been my first choice, yes.

SZ: Was Pelli a unanimous choice among the board committee?

RW: I don't remember. But there was a strong...it was pretty strong for Pelli. There was a strong consensus for Pelli, and I think the practical, the fact that he had done big projects--big commercial projects as well as projects of cultural interest--meant a lot to the board. Giurgola had only done one big commercial project, at that time, in Philadelphia; since that time he's done many. So César was chosen. And then he had to wait [laughing]--five years or four years, whatever. It seemed like forever. So those are the high points as I remember them. Donald did all of the legal, conceptual, all of the political stuff in the city.

SZ: You didn't talk about the city approvals, that whole process.

RW: That was managed by Donald, and that was very tough. We had a climactic meeting with the local community board in which we had a magnificent testimony from the head of Time-Life, Andrew Heiskell. He came to the community board meeting. I don't think he was on the board of the Museum.

SZ: Not at that time....

RW: He came to the community board meeting, and we had a very close vote.

SZ: He was a member of the Trust.

RW: He may have been on the Trust, subsequently. There was a lot of phone calling about...I knew some of the members of the board. I had built the American Place Theater on Sixth Avenue. The theater was built as part of the Theater District zoning created during the Lindsay years. I was its chief architect with Elliot, and negotiated its construction as part of an office building. Barbara Handman, who was the wife of the director of the American Place Theater, was on this board, but she was opposed to the

project. I remember endless conversations with Barbara about this, and lots of people couldn't stomach the idea of the confluence of commerce and culture. Some people went berserk. Suzanne Stephens, who's a prominent architecture critic, accused me in a public hearing of taking money from the Museum on the side and insisted that I show the community board my checkbook. No explanation was plausible that I could support and be involved in this project, other than somehow I was going to get points in the process, or something like that. I couldn't believe it when she said this, because I was sort of part of her crowd up until this; that is to say, she was a young critic and I was a young architect, and everybody knew each other and we all went to the same parties in the Hamptons in the summer and all of that. And that she would say that about me because she couldn't stand the idea of the project, that was a huge shock to me. So the whole city politics part of it was handled by Donald. It was a rough...I think of it as less significant only in retrospect because of what happened at the State legislature, which was a surprise. We didn't anticipate what would happen at the State legislature; we didn't have any warning. Whereas the stuff that was happening with the community boards, we knew all about that, because we were wired into the city in a way that we weren't wired into the legislature, and it was difficult. But the benefits to the city were so obvious that finally, most people acknowledged that it would be great to have the two-thirds of the collection that was in vaults somewhere on the walls. So, if I hadn't liked Sara Lee coffee cake....

SZ: It would have never [happened]. It would have been another time.

RW: Maybe.

SZ: Let me ask you now how you feel about the result, from all the vantage points you've just talked about--historically, architecturally.

RW: I think it's a very satisfactory solution architecturally. I don't think it's as good as it might have been. I think there are, particularly in the sort of materials and details...but I think in terms of the basics, the workability...I think all the basic decisions we took were

vindicated by the building that was built. I think other architects might have, and probably could have, made a more carefully...could have put it together more carefully, and there could have been more interesting use of materials and details and so on. But those are all tertiary, second-, third-, and fourth-level things. The basic decisions are, I think, good. I think it is nice to go up the escalator by the garden, and I think people who say it's like a shopping center, it's like the woman who said to Frank Lloyd Wright, "Why does the Guggenheim look like a Bendix washing machine?" And he said, "Madam, you have the mind of a washerwoman." I think it's a very superficial mind that takes something from one place to another place and then generalizes like that. It all works very well. I like looking down on Rodin, on Balzac, and seeing him this way and then seeing him that way. I think all of that works very nicely. I regret that they didn't build the space over the restaurant that we had proposed, which was to have been a big, black box that could be used for theater, for music, for giant installations, and was just a flexible space that could change with time and be used differently at different moments for different kinds of things. That was cut because of budget issues, and I regret that. I think they should have found someone to give [that facility] to the Museum. I think the footings permit you to do it, to build it. I think you can build over there. I think César told me that he had put enough steel in the footings so that, if they ever decided to do it, they could. It was supposed to be a big, twenty-foot-high room, a big, huge room.

SZ: Which might accommodate some of the larger works?

RW: That, or people could just come in and do an installation, or Robert Wilson could come and do a chamber piece, or whatever, because every inch of space had been captured by the curators, so that there was no space that was unassigned. I think that would have added a lot to the life of the Museum, to have had funky, crazy stuff that's only up for two weeks or whatever as part of the institution. I think that would have been nice. But on the whole, I think the project has met the expectations that most of us had for it. It was a constrained enterprise from the beginning. It was politically constrained, financially constrained, spatially constrained. It wasn't an opportunity for strong

architectural statement, because by the time you solved all the problems, there were very few choices you could make. It was a problem-solving kind of architecture, and I think most of the problems have been successfully solved. The refinements are a matter of taste. Someone else might look at it and say, "It's just fine, it's unfussy, it doesn't try and make a statement," etcetera, etcetera; and someone else would say, "Well, I wouldn't have made the glass the way he made it," and so forth. Those are arguments that architects have; they are not important [laughing].

**END SIDE 1, TAPE 2**

**SIDE 2, BLANK**

**END INTERVIEW**