

## DAVID HOFFMAN MOMA HISTORY INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH: PAUL GOLDBERGER (PG)  
INTERVIEWERS: CARL COLBY (CC); RUTH CUMMINGS (RC)  
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PG: To appreciation of architecture, yes it [MoMA] has contributed a lot. To a continued sense of the new, I'm not so sure. It has not managed to be in our time what it was 50 years ago. The great International Style show [[Modern Architecture: International Exhibition](#)] half a century ago really was an epoch-making event. It really did do huge amounts to shift people's perceptions. There's relatively little that the Museum has done in architecture since then that's been quite as important. The only thing I think that in fact has been a real event of that scope and magnitude was the Beaux Arts show [[The Architecture of the École des Beaux-Arts](#)] of 1975. And ironically, that was, of course, an anti-modern thing. But it was a very important event in terms of legitimizing the movement back toward history and classicism and so forth. So that it should take place in The Museum of Modern Art was an extraordinary irony, of course; but there it was. What further enhances the irony is that that was really the only show in many years that has been of paramount importance in the architecture world. Most of the others have been very nice little homages of one kind or another. And some of them have been well done; others have not. The Transformations show [[Transformations in Modern Architecture](#)] two years ago, I thought, was a dreadful and disappointing thing. The Skyscraper show [[Three New Skyscrapers](#)] that is still going now, I guess, is kind of nice, in some ways, but curious in others.

CC: Exhibition by three—by two trustees, somebody said.

PG: That's what I said, actually. [Laughter] I said in the *Times* that the Museum could have titled this show "Buildings by Trustees," but it chose not to. And—

CC: I liked Arthur Drexler's opening paragraph, though, in his catalogue; it was kind of fun.

PG: What did he say again?

CC: These skyscrapers are monuments from which to make money.

RC: They're here to stay. They're terrible for social intercourse. And he listed all the negatives and said, "Yet they're here to stay." And so, here we are.

PG: Sure; all true.

CC: We talked to Lawrence Alloway recently and he gave, almost from a sociological point of view, that at the beginning, modern art, or the proponents of it—the precursors [like] [Alfred] Barr, et cetera—were proselytizers and very much like Christ and his disciples, you know, selling modernism. And then once it was sold, though, and everyone bought it—now it's continued on a very elitist, very narrow line.

PG: Well, I'm not sure it's been so elitist, really. I would say more, once they'd sold and everyone bought it, they weren't quite sure what to do with it.

RC: So where would you say that point begins?

CC: What do you mean, what to do with it?

PG: What to do with themselves, maybe, is more the point, rather.

CC: I mean, everybody bought the International Style, so what then, do you mean?

PG: That's part of it, yes. I mean, the role in architecture has always been a little different from that in painting and sculpture, because it was always that overriding question of utility and function, [which] was the great bugaboo of modernism anyway, you know. Is that really the most important thing, or is it not? Sometimes they would try to sell it that way, sometimes not, whereas with art, you have none of that nonsense.

CC: You're not worried about it.

PG: Exactly. Now, the extent to which the Museum has had a real influence in architecture and design, I think it's probably been fairly under, and in a lot of

ways it's been simply a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. [If] The Museum of Modern Art says the [Alvar] Aalto vase is alright, then the Aalto vase is alright.

CC: Is it a reflection of Philip Johnson's personal taste?

PG: No. I think originally it was, but I think it's gone far beyond that now. So that I don't worry about.

RC: The concepts of good design, I mean, certainly they've capsulized that.

PG: I think they very much helped make that part of our society. I think that if the Museum had not done all of the things it had done over the years, whether we would have stores today like the Pottery Barn and Conran's is the real question. Because that's where you see all of this design ethos filtering down into the masses. I hate a word like "masses." To a broader public, let's say.

CC: Bauhaus at Lamstons.

PG: Yes. Well, you don't see it at Lamstons, but you do see it at—Conran's is a sort of a Bauhaus Lamstons, or Pottery Barn, The Workbench. I mean, they are in some ways—are more significant than Knoll or ICF or companies like that, because they are where it all really becomes a part of a wider culture.

RC: A wider culture.

PG: Yes. Further, I would say that the gift shop in the Museum in some ways is as important and as influential as the galleries. Again, we're here talking only about design.

CC: That's a good point.

RC: Yes.

PG: But today it carries a stronger proselytizing or propagandistic effect than the shows themselves.

CC: Yes, that's interesting. Alloway, for instance, said that they, in recent times, Pop times, from then on, they've bought a number of things. They'll go buy selectively, but then when they do take those selective things, they promote the hell out of them, and then they reproduce them, and you see those images everywhere.

RC: Sure; they become real icons.

CC: It's like that [Henri] Rousseau and all—I mean, we just see it so many times.

PG: That's right; that's right.

RC: It's hard to look at the real thing and know what to think because you've been instructed—

CC: It's like a cultural marker, rather than a picture any more.

PG: That's right; that's right. Of course, that's happened in all times of history. I think it's not fair to pretend that it began here. I mean, you know, *Venus de Milo*, *Mona Lisa*, I mean, the Louvre is as full of cultural icons that you can't any longer see as pure objects. So I mean, who has ever been able to go look at the *Mona Lisa* and talk about color and composition? I mean, you can't do it.

CC: If you could track something like Bauhaus through the International Style and then all the way down to Conran's, seeing if you can do that, doesn't that though—? What about people who don't fit? What about, not just Michael Graves, but what about people who are very decorative in their architecture?

PG: Michael Graves is much better than he wants to pretend to be.

CC: Than he would like to pretend; yes. But what about someone who is very baroque, or someone who is very—? Where do they fit around that? Do they get shoved out?

RC: In arts and sculpture there were people who were left out, who were valid, very good.

CC: Or even right now, does that pretty much shut out—?

PG: We're seeing a curious moment in architecture, because in fact, right now we're moving back very emphatically toward a recognition of those people, toward an appreciation of them. Look at Philip Johnson today. Look at all the other people who are much talked about: Robert Stern, Allan Greenburg, Charles Moore, and so forth. There's an enormous appreciation of that. No one literally calls himself baroque, although there are people who quite literally call themselves classicists today. Now, the Museum is in a funny position vis-à-vis all that. I mean, of

course, yes, the Beaux Arts show was a great endorsement of this on the one hand, but it was not as total as the International Style show because of course, Arthur Drexler couldn't quite bring himself to say with a straight face: This is what everyone should be doing. He was merely saying: Look at all of this stuff that in the days of modernism's triumph, we overlooked; isn't it beautiful. But then you draw your own conclusions beyond "isn't it beautiful."

CC: Whereas Johnson was actually selling cars and look at this design of this, and look at that.

PG: That's right; that's right.

RC: This is it, this is the definitive—

PG: That's right. So, what the Museum has been trying to do, all these things—and of course it brings us back again, as I'm sure you continually come back in issues of painting and sculpture too, to Gertrude Stein's[?] law. You just can't but come back to it again and again because it's the crucial dilemma. It's an obvious point, but it's the central point. And we're at a moment—never mind the Modern as an institution or the moment where the idea of modernism is no longer modern, in architecture, art, sculpture, any of those.

CC: Not just in the Museum but in all—

PG: In our culture in general.

CC: So is it a mausoleum now? Is the Modern a mausoleum?

PG: The Modern, in fact, has not really decided. And I think it—certainly in architecture and design, it's tried to be a little of both, and not fully succeeded at any of them. I mean, it is not a—it's sort of not anything. I mean, I rather liked the [Richard] Neutra show [[The Architecture of Richard Neutra: From International style to California Modern](#)] of last summer, which was all about a modern architect. I liked the Beaux Arts show better.

CC: For the Museum or architecture though, has [it] been the only discipline yet to emphatically state, I mean even the word "postmodern," that there is something that happened after this. Everyone else has been hedging, and you know, Minimal and this and that, New Image, and all that, I mean, new, new, new. After

all, there are not going to be any news left. But what, does this force them into a great bind? Do they almost have to acknowledge the fact that they have to become what Bill Rubin perhaps wants them to become, which is a great repository of terrific pictures and everything [of] what *did* happen, and keeping maybe a little eye out for the future?

PG: Well, I don't see what's wrong with that. Their period is one of the greatest periods in the history of all art. I also think that museums that do not try to be all things to all people are usually more successful. I would like nothing more than a Frick of the modern period. [Laughs]

CC: [Laughs] Yes.

PG: And in fact, you know, the second floor of the Modern in its old configuration was one of my favorite places in the world. I mean, I, being a lot younger than Philip Johnson or Alfred Barr, I mean, I grew up on that floor. And I loved the fact that I knew every painting, and that it was all familiar, and it was just—you could wander through blindfolded and know that [if] you put your finger at a particular thing, [you'd] know it was there. And that to me was every *bit* as important as any new things that might be on the first floor.

RC: It was like an old friend.

PG: Very much so. Now whether that means therefore they're wrong to try to continually be new...

RC: I'm not sure if they could even answer that.

CC: They're more optimistic now because with the new building they're going to have a whole permanent display for Architecture and Design, which they haven't been able to have.

RC: And be able to circulate.

PG: I'm just thinking now, not so much architecture and design as painting.

CC: They're going to be able to show those five disciplines so much more.

PG: Yes, they will, although it will be bigger, and the sense of the scale will—the Modern as it used to be, I thought, pushed to the limits what a museum could be

and still feel intimate. I mean, it was much bigger than the Frick or the Cloisters, but it was still small enough so you felt you could grasp it. You knew it. You could visit it all in a single visit and not be exhausted. And now it will be beyond that.

CC: To be wandered around?

PG: Yes, sure.

CC: It really is getting to be a little out of hand; it's getting very big?

PG: Oh yes.

RC: Any projections early about how—?

PG: About the building?

RC: Yes.

PG: Well, I've always actually liked the new galleries; I think they're not bad. I think that—I worry that that whole escalator thing is going to look a little too much like a department store. And I worry a little bit about the loss of the intimacy. But, beyond those things, I think it'll probably be alright. It just won't be the same; that's all.

RC: Any comment on the Tower?

PG: Yes, it's very dreary. It's a real disappointment, in fact.

RC: We heard that Philip Johnson bought a place there.

PG: That's true, I think he did.

RC: A great view of his work.

CC: It is disappointing to see that after [César] Pelli—after seeing him in Dallas and other things which are much more adventurous, to see something that's just...

PG: It's disappointing. I mean, it's not terrible, it's merely disappointing because—

CC: It doesn't go anywhere; it doesn't take another step.

RC: Well, I love what Paul says, it's really intimate things, and those are the kind of things that would be helpful to—

PG: I'd be happy to say them on film.

CC: One thing I noticed—

PG: Just remind me what I said when we get around to it.

CC: It seems to be in Europe, especially in the last five years, those students who used to study painting and sculpture, now a lot of them study architecture because it has that added advantage of being—while it's hard—but it also has a function, something useful. It's societal. It has a mission in society, even though you could take a walk through Paris and someone could say, it's already built.

PG: So you plan to film in April and May?

RC: Late spring.

PG: When do you aim to have the whole—?

CC: It wouldn't be until the end of the year—would everything be finished.

RC: The finished product is due February '84.

CC: We're going to do it in sort of a staggered way. We've got—

RC: About 30.

CC: We're going to pretty much start with the early crowd, with Lincoln Kirstein and Philip Johnson, Eddie Warburg, and all of them.

RC: And make sure they're still around.

CC: There are quite some characters in it, though.

PG: It's already far too late for Alfred Barr.

RC: Yes.

CC: If we speak to—? Well we're speaking, obviously, to Arthur Drexler and Philip Johnson and yourself. Is there anyone else you can think of who might either be able to expand on Philip Johnson or maybe describe his role a bit, or anyone from the outside who is—? I'm not even looking really for anti-Modern, but if it's outside of the Modern, maybe someone who has an ideological conflict with that.

PG: Well, Henry Hope Reed is probably the greatest one.



CC: Henry?

PG: Henry Hope Reed. He's president of something called Classical America. He's an ardent classical revivalist who truly believes that this was the right and moral thing to do with modernism [INAUDIBLE: 0:15:10] brought a secession from the greater historical school and now everyone's wisely coming back. But he is not a crackpot. He's written some books; he speaks frequently. He was for some years the curator of Central Park, official city post. So I mean, he's a legitimate person.

RC: Old world New Yorker.

PG: Yes. I mean, he's one person. Now, somebody else who you should definitely speak to, although not for ideological conflict because he's very much a modernist, is Henry Russell Hitchcock.

CC: Yes, we've been told by a number of people.

RC: He is really old.

PG: He is quite old, not terribly well.

RC: Is he still?

PG: Yes, but he will ramble a bit, but after all, what are filmmakers if not editors as well? He is not always that easy to understand, but you should talk to him and try to get what you can out of him, because he's very good when he's good. And also, you will have important historical footage if you talk to him, because he really—I mean, he was Johnson's mentor.

CC: Yes, he was very instrumental in the early years.

PG: I mean, he really made Philip Johnson, and not the other way around. And he is I guess about seven or eight years older than Johnson.<sup>1</sup>

CC: He's been mentioned a number of times.

RC: He's certainly a key figure.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Russell Hitchcock is 3 years older than Philip Johnson.

PG: Yes. And he's around; he lives in New York. He is, as I said, he's not terribly well but he's far from sick and crazy. You just have to be careful and probably be rather patient, and your ratio of film to usable footage would be higher than some people. But you should really get him because he's important and quite extraordinary, and he could well make observations and give you stuff that nobody else could.

RC: Okay.

CC: Ada Louise worked with him.

PG: She did, she worked with him.

RC: She's not interested in speaking on film. Perhaps she prefers to remain a critic, I think was the way she said it.

PG: I think one could be a critic on film.

CC: She might have personal reasons.

PG: I don't intend to do anything except tell you what I think about things.

RC: No, no. Right.

CC: She might have personal problems with it.

PG: She has chosen, since she left the *Times*, also to be very much out of the public eye. I mean, she's turned down lecturing engagements; she's turned down a lot of things.

RC: You know who else was surprising to me? I didn't know any of the history, but, Edgar Kaufmann said: It's not that I wouldn't like to help you, but I want no connection at all with the Museum. I severed my connections with the Museum, and that's it.

CC: A few people, I think, are a little, you know; time passes on.

PG: Well, I certainly, you know—I should say, you having said that, that I certainly don't want to do anything that would suggest that I had any official connection with the Museum.

RC: No, no, no.

CC: It's not an official Museum film.

RC: It's under their aegis, but—

PG: Not under their aegis, but it will not be presented in such a way that suggests...

RC: No, that these people are—

CC: The official line.

PG: Because, in fact, I would run into a problem as far as the *Times* is concerned if I appeared to be connected with the Museum.

CC: No, we've tried to have people like, as we've said, Lawrence Alloway, Robert Hughes.

RC: Henry McBride. Representations from across the board.

CC: What about any architects or—? I used to work a long time ago with Max Protech, but, any architects? [Robert A.M.] Stern or anyone?

RC: I was thinking of Young Turks or European imports.

CC: We don't want it to be about that discipline, perhaps, but maybe someone who—  
? It's kind of tough, though; that's hard to—

PG: [INAUDIBLE: 0:19:00].

CC: You don't want to have them really—just have them talk about buildings.

PG: Also, they all have their own axe to grind.

CC: We don't want to get into personal vendettas.

PG: Somebody who has been treated kindly by the Museum just appear to be saying thank you, or somebody who had been treated unkindly appear to be doing the opposite. So...

CC: The only ones we've gone to on the painting and sculpture area—we saw Pierre Matisse, Sidney Janis, and Leo Castelli, but those are long term.

PG: Well, the thing about gallery people, no one really sold—architecture wasn't a subject that existed in that world until a few years ago.

RC: And would the Museum have had any part at all in that?

PG: I think not.

RC: It's just a coming of age, kind of a—

CC: I think it's the widest possible thing you can say from an architectural standpoint is, what role the—Marcia Stevens<sup>2</sup> even said to us, in the most obvious things, he said that the [Abby Aldrich Rockefeller] Garden and the Museum itself has always been a social gathering art place in New York, and maybe that, it's obvious to all of us, but it's so true, too.

PG: The Garden is one of the most civilized places in New York, without question.

RC: Best pickup spots; listed in all the catalogues. [Laughs] Okay. Alright.

CC: Paul, thanks.

PG: Okay? Good.

RC: I hope that was painless. It was very enjoyable for us.

PG: It was indeed. Sure.

**END OF INTERVIEW at 0:20:24**

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<sup>2</sup> Based on interview with Jack Limpert, Carl Colby is most likely referring to Mark Stevens.