DAVID HOFFMAN MOMA HISTORY INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH: **ROBERT HUGHES (RH)**

INTERVIEWERS: **CARL COLBY (CC); RUTH CUMMINGS (RC)**

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CC: So what we're doing, it's a project being sponsored by a corporation that we do sponsored things for.

RH: Yes.

CC: And it's about the Museum and it's approved by the Museum but not necessarily—

RH: You have final cut.

CC: Yes. They don't have it; we have the control on it. And what we're doing is spending a couple of months talking to people both inside and outside of the Museum to try to get some sense of the place, and, not to tell the story of art, per se, but to really tell the story from the inside out, and starting with the earlier days.

RH: Why it's there, what it did, what it does now, and how it got from where it was to where it is.

CC: And the reason we did that is that the early part of the story is pretty extraordinary.

RH: Oh yes, it certainly is.

CC: With Alfred Barr.

RH: Yes.

RC: Some of the people are still alive who we can talk to, to recreate that nostalgia for the time and the club, the family atmosphere.

RH: Yes, that's right. I don't think, you see, that anybody had any idea that it was going to get this huge and institutional as it has. I mean, the idea that it would eventually end up having to sell its own air rights to itself in order to have a skyscraper full of Iranians to keep itself going, would have been totally foreign to, you know—

RC: Beyond their wildest.

RH: Well, I mean, beyond their worst, not merely beyond their wildest. But anyhow.

CC: What's your perception of those Americans who started off that way in the late twenties?

RH: I think they were great, earnest, middle class visionaries of a moderately familiar American type. I mean, I think it had a lot to do with evangelism. I think it had a great deal to do with the sort of idea which really nobody in his right mind would entertain now, that, in some way, that the contemplation of works of art is morally edifying, that it's good for you, and that therefore, by bringing people into contact with such works, you're performing a public service. I mean, most museum practice today has to do with second-guessing the market or with narcissism, and with all sorts of, you know, fringe activities, but of course, that didn't—I mean, it had a great deal, I should say, of a kind of purity about it which has almost vanished from cultural transactions today. I mean, people tend to make fun of these people because they have names like Bliss and Aldrich and Rockefeller and what have you, and of course nobody could ever say that Nelson Rockefeller's motives for doing anything were simon-pure. But nevertheless, you know, there was an extraordinary amount of sort of free-floating idealism centered upon this. And of course that was part of what they perceived as being the modernist ethic itself. There was that idea that modernism itself was reformatory and that it was going to bring about a better world, [and] that if only people would open their eyes and see, they would see that it was better to sit in a [Marcel] Breuer chair than in some overstuffed whatnot, you know.

CC: And it was pervasive; photography, film, design.

RH: Yes, it was absolutely pervasive. This was the sort of last, in a way—it was, looking back on it from retrospect, this was the last, sort of, as it were, golden

age of illusion when people really thought that great changes in the language of the visual arts began to provoke corresponding changes for the better in society. And this was the contract of the Museum, essentially, with its public. I mean, this was what it ultimately hoped to do.

CC: Also, those were the days when in New York you could—some people have told us, you could spend two or three hours, one afternoon every week, and you could see everything there was to see.

RH: That's absolutely right.

CC: All of the modern art, all of the galleries.

RH: Yes.

CC: You could see even the bad things.

RH: That's right. And I'll tell you something else, you'd be on your own, which was even better.

CC: No one else would be mobbing.

RH: Yes. I mean, you didn't have this crisis that you now have where the audience of art lovers has got so large that it annihilates the experience of looking at a work of art, or endangers it. The climax of which, I thought, was the [Paul] Cezanne show. They were, these pictures cheek by jowl, and all these people streamed through, about three seconds per picture. A nightmare. What can you look at? What can you see?

RC: But would you say then that the experience of art becoming more public to the masses is bad? Or how do you preserve and yet spread out the experience?

RH: No, I don't think there's a simple answer to that. It's like, for instance, supposing—I mean, to take something; my main hobby or spare time occupation is hunting, shooting, and fishing. I love to go and hunt duck. It becomes increasingly difficult to do so because everybody in the society has the democratic right to hunt duck. But, there is a finite supply of duck. And consequently, duck are getting fewer and fewer in the Long Island area. Now I can't say that I think that, if I were sort of king for a day, I could tell people not to hunt duck and that only I would be allowed out on the marshes at five o'clock in

the morning. I mean, that would be ridiculous. But at the same time, I think I can express a nostalgia for the old days in Australia when you'd go out there and throw a stone in the air and you'd knock down three. Museums have the same sort of in-built paradox as wilderness areas, in the sense that, from the time—I'm sorry; I'm probably gabbing on too much but...

RC: No, no; it's great.

RH: From the time when—you think of when the American west first disclosed itself to the wandering traveler. And then very rapidly, this idea of untrammeled wilderness got built into the American ethos. It was a sign of moral qualities, rather as art was a sign of moral qualities—one of the reasons why you have that link between landscape painting and morality in the 19th century. And it rapidly became apparent to people that it was desirable to contemplate wilderness on your own, that it put you in touch with God, that it put you in touch with yourself. And of course the result of that tradition is the ecology movement we have today, it's the national parks. But, today, you go to a national park, and there you are solo contemplating the wonders of untrammeled nature with 58 Winnebagos, you know, cheek and jowl. And that's the direct result of that. You see, there are certain experiences which can only bear so much participation, and certain experiences which are not intrinsically participatory. Theater is participatory. Going to a rock concert is participatory. Going to a museum is not. There was never any work of art whose contemplation was improved by having a whole lot of package tourists or even a whole lot of perfectly honest intelligent fellow citizens on your left and on your right. It's a solitary vice, looking at art.

CC: Do you think art conquered America faster than any other place, in the sense of, in 1929—?

RH: Well, it had to, because America had less time.

RC: It had to catch up.

CC: It had nothing, though. I mean, really, there was a *New York World* editorial when the Museum first opened in 1929, and it said [that] the average American—it was just like the *New York* Post would write now—it said, art, a new art

museum? Fine. The average American housewife goes to the department store to buy a couple of pictures—

RH: Yes.

CC: And she puts up family pictures. The man of the house doesn't even like pictures.

RH: That's right.

RC: Doesn't see them, doesn't care.

RH: That describes my own family perfectly, in Australia. We're not ashamed of it, either.

CC: The kind of art that's shown, the shows that they see, are like Scandinavians experiencing theater. They see an [Henrik] Ibsen play, they see a [August] Strindberg play, they come through—a hundred-year-old play comes through once in a while.

RH: Yes. Yes.

CC: Everything they see, good art, any art, is dead art, and so they've never seen live art. So, he says, this is a good thing, now having a few pictures from people—

RH: Well, perfectly reasonable, too. Except, you know, I've never gone along with this thing about dead art and live art. The only dead art is bad art. Most art being made today is dead as soon as it pops out; graffiti art, that sort of thing; that's dead. [Diego] Velázquez is alive. However, the—

CC: But it was primed, New York [in] the 1920s, thirties; there was a real primary for this?

RH: Absolutely. It was becoming one of the world's great cultural condensers. The Museum of Modern Art was one of the instruments of that. I mean, it was both a product and the instrument of it. And you ask yourself, why should the same thing not have happened in Paris? People talk about the legendary—and [H.L.] Mencken used to rave on about the bourgeoisie, and the indifference and the hostility of the Americans to modernism. But the hostility of the Americans to modernism is *nothing* compared to the hostility and the indifference of the

French. [Laughing] That's why, as a matter of fact, The Museum of Modern Art was able to get so many great paintings,

RC: There are paintings. They must be a little embarrassed by that now.

RH: Because the frogs did not want them.

CC: [Laughing] That's true.

RH: And they only began to want them after they'd gone to America. And then they began to complain and bitch and carry on about American imperialism. Bullshit. They didn't know what they had, I mean, to put it very crudely.

RC: Riva Castleman was just saying—

CC: John Szarkowski said that yesterday. He said—we looked at [Eugéne] Atget, and he said, this really is extraordinary.

RH: He's an extraordinary photographer.

CC: And I said, "What about the French?" And he said, well, the French, they missed the boat, so, they said, 'an interesting primitive.'

RH: Tough luck. Tough luck. This horrible little poofter, Jack Lang, with his—oh, I'm sorry; I don't want to get onto that.

RC: Riva Castleman was just saying though that the Americans are a much more visual culture, the French more literary and ideas and writing, and we just glom onto pictures.

RH: Yes, that's probably true.

CC: But it's not so necessarily true back in the twenties though.

RH: Well, I don't know. America certainly wasn't an exclusively literary—America has never been a—there is no American [René] Descartes. It's a different kind of educational system. As a matter of fact, you have your own—I'm not an American citizen, so I have to say, we here have our own vices. I mean, one of the things that came out of this enormous effect that The Museum of Modern Art had on education in America is this fetishistic kind of attention which is paid to creativity. I think generally speaking, if little Johnny spent more time learning his Latin verbs and less time playing with plasticine, the world would be a better

place. And this is entirely due to the malignant idealistic influence of The Museum of Modern Art and that of the Freudian witch doctors.

CC: So that's really what they did. They first brought the thing here, but then later, in the forties and fifties and sixties, with all these traveling exhibitions and the circulating shows, and the catalogues, and all that, that's the great influence in other places.

RC: Were they pandering, then, to the masses? You don't think that was quality? How could they have done better? Or do you think they shouldn't have?

CC: They were popularizing; they were proselytizing.

RH: No, I mean, you're not necessarily in control of what people deduce from what you say.

RC: Right.

RH: The Museum of Modern Art was saying, quite correctly, let us pay more attention to the role of the visual in education; let us become more aware of our—I mean, let us recognize that everything around us is designed by somebody or other. It may be hideous, it may be beautiful, but it is designed. Let us then try and intervene, on both a conscious and unconscious level, on the chain between demand and supply, by modifying design. It did modify design, and the process had also modified art education, and consequently affected the curricula of American schools as a whole. It gave the idea of, first of all, of modern art studies as a subject of an academic prestige it had never possessed before. There was no way—today—America in the forties was like Australia in the fifties and early sixties when I was growing up there. In Sydney, there was no place you could go to do a degree in art history. You had to go to Melbourne, which is 600 miles away. And now, it's very largely due to The Museum of Modern Art that these kind of studies—I don't mean studies in older art history, but studies in modernist history—became such a feature of American curricula, and then eventually became a flaming great out-of-control growth industry. Now, the field is so intensively tilled that I do believe they're going to practically run out of subjects. All you have to do is read the—I mean, talk about from a sentence by Pinstrom, a phrase by Minstrom, a comma by Tomsk, you know, that song of

Danny Kaye. [Laughing] I mean, we know everything about the size of [Pablo] Picasso's hobnail boots, you know. I think some things have become too studied almost. But you have to maintain the academic—

CC: But evangelistic, of all those, is somebody like Philip Johnson [who is] that type, do you think? From early on, I mean he wanted good design—we have old film clips of him, "Now this car; why are we showing this car?" The announcer would say. Well, he said, "This car is good design. Look at the way the window relates to the door." And I mean, he would like to have changed things, really.

RH: Oh yes he would have, certainly.

CC: Really have us all living in very—

RH: He would have then. But he still would now, except that he—

CC: He's living there, at least.

RH: I mean, Philip is a very, very complicated bloke. I mean, talk about the modernist as fascist, you know.

CC: Absolutely.

RC: Oh, well when he designed [Edgar] Kaufman's house, Beaver Run.

RH: No, that, I think, was Frank Lloyd Wright.

RC: You're absolutely right, but I meant, somebody else said, that's tough, you'll just have to sit with—the client said, this is really uncomfortable, but it'll be good for you.

RH: Oh, no, but he was also literally a fascist. He was very caught up with Huey Long. He had a tremendous—who are you going to play this tape to?

RC: Just us.

CC: Just for ourselves.

RH: Oh, okay. He had a tremendous homosexual attraction to Nazism per se, you see, all those beautiful boys with flashing bare knees in their lederhosen, you know. It affected him greatly when he went to Germany for the first time. There's a sort of—but then, of course, there is also an authoritarian side to

modernism. Anybody who supposes that modernism is simply a sort of democratic process is completely wrong.

RC: Very rigid and—

RH: No, it's not—you know, there are some parts of it that are rigid and some that are not. And like all art, like all culture, in fact, it tends to come down to the work of certain masters, and I suppose mistresses, if that's the word, to certain maestri anyway, who do, in the end, set the standards, I mean like [Peter Paul] Rubens, or for that matter, Picasso and [Georges] Braque. But then I have a very elitist view of culture. I don't think it's something that comes off the street, although it's aided by that.

CC: Modernism is very much more so [INAUDIBLE: 0:15:17], even more severe [INAUDIBLE: 0:15:18].

RH: Yes, because it's a more limited audience. I mean, modernism—

CC: And it doesn't mind being?

RH: Modernism ostentatiously defines itself as being for the relatively few, against the relatively many.

CC: Then wasn't it a contradiction for them to hope that Marcel Breuer would be able to house the—now he's scattered all over New Jersey.

RH: No, because they genuinely believed that if what was perceptible to the relatively few became available to the relatively many, then the relatively many's life would be improved by this.

RC: That is fascistic.

CC: This is great. It's a very rightist—it's a new vision but it's a brave new world, but very fascistic.

RH: I don't think it's necessarily fascistic to sort of think that you can design things for other people. In practice, we do that all the time. If I was to wait around with this telephone, and wait for a consensus upon what I was going to write every week, no, no. People, generally speaking, value configurations, expressions, thoughts, opinions, because they come strongly out of one mind. You can then accept or

reject them as you please, and in fact, modernism was a babble of conflicting voices.

CC: Did they feed on the combative air at that time, or the fact that they were doing something that was very avant-garde-ish?

RH: You know, the funny thing is, I don't think that the Museum—

CC: Did they like being rebels?

RH: I don't think the Museum, really the people who started the Museum, basically saw themselves as being terribly combative people. They saw themselves more as missionaries, I mean as lovers rather than fighters. I mean, in practice, they did have to fight somewhat, but they were certainly fighting from a certain immense monetary security, representing artists and people who of course had no such base. And I think probably it was only because those people were rich that they were able to so effortlessly—well, not effortlessly, but so convincingly—maintain their standards against other people who were also rich who were defending different ones.

CC: What about now? Is the Museum—?

RH: I mean, the thing is, you know, most revolutions are made by the middle class. This idea that revolutionary activity is an upsurge from the proletariat, nine times out of 10 is total bullshit. It's the dirty little secret, but it's true.

CC: Sure.

RH: The history of modern art is no exception. Russian constructivism wouldn't have existed without the background of the enlightened middle class in Russia which was eventually destroyed by the revolution. But without that sort of axis of ideas between Paris and Moscow, it wouldn't have happened. And [Vladimir] Tatlin wouldn't have been able to go to Paris and see that guitar in Picasso's studio, et cetera. So I don't think that The Museum of Modern Art ever started off to be a populist institution. I think in that respect, it's being true to its charter. You remember all that ludicrous business in the late sixties and early seventies when the artists—there were sort of pressure groups [that] were trying to get The Museum of Modern Art to open a wing which was going to be for Black Studies. And they ended up proposing that it should be called, I think, the Langston

Hughes Wing[1] because they couldn't come up with a Black artist of sufficient eminence to name it after.

CC: And a writer, at that, with not any business being in a museum.

RH: Exactly. The thing is, that sort of idea was never really part of the Museum's intentions; it was never intended to be a community center or a completely ecumenical instrument which showed all art, democratically reflecting sex, race, et cetera, et cetera. It wasn't intended to be a purely New York institution. It wasn't intended to be a purely international one either, but what it was intended to do was to try and pick the very best, as far as they could pick it, and then show it, in the hope that this would give people instruction and delight.

CC: Are they in a quandary now, though? Are they in a real morass because they—?

RH: Yes, I think they're in a considerable quandary now for a variety of—well, in some respects they are, and in others they're not. You have, first of all, on the most simple level—as you know, The Museum of Modern Art is not the only game in town. It used to be, but it no longer is.

CC: No, at least the galleries alone.

RC: And the Whitney.

RH: Yes. And secondly, it's operating in an art world which has become almost inconceivably overpopulated and crowded.

RC: Not only in New York.

RH: And not only in New York, right across the country. The idea, therefore, that with its—it has, *in excelsis*, the kind of problem that, you could almost call it a journalistic problem that I have here every week. Let's say the guy at *The Times* or the people at *The Times*, [John] Russell and Grace [Glueck] and [Michael] Brenson and the rest of them, they publish an aggregate of 6,000 words per week, roughly, on the visual arts, I mean, on painting and sculpture. Okay? Let's make it 7,500 words if we're reckoning in photography. 10,000 words a week reckoning in architecture. Okay, now suppose theoretically to cover painting, photography, architecture, and sculpture, I've got one article of 1,500

[1] Martin Luther King, Jr. Wing.

words per week, if I'm lucky. Generally speaking, it comes down to more like 35 a year. Therefore, among the sort of clamor of possible material, what is it that you choose?

CC: And does it become all too predictable?

RH: You tend to favor that which is institutionalized. That's inevitable. Now, the same sort of thing has happened with MoMA. It has gone more for the—MoMA is very interested in, and rightly [so], I think, interested in trying to establish a canon of modernist history. And then adding to the canon. It's slow moving in the sense, for instance, it didn't pay very much attention to women artists with the possible exception of Helen Frankenthaler. Then it sort of makes up some of this lost ground by having the *Louise Bourgeois* show. At least it didn't make the mistake of having 15 [Louise] Nevelson shows. But its wheels grind slowly and sometimes they grind exceedingly slowly, if not always. But the thing is that they can't pretend to be, with the space they've got and the kind of scheduling that they've got, and the very serious concerns about quality that they've got, they can't possibly pretend to represent everything that's going on in the art world. They're like the church; they have time, or so they like to think. Now I think that, since I believe in—I mean, I like museums to be like churches; I like them to be stable, conservative. I like them to have the sense of having time. I love the idea of the museum as temple. I think of them as lighthouses of utopian responsibility. And I don't think of them as discos or places where if you don't get it on the wing, then you're never going to see the bird. No, no.

CC: If you want that, there's plenty of galleries.

RH: If you want that, you can go to Soho; you can go to Tony Shafrazi gallery; you can go to Mary Boone for that.

CC: Or all those Artist's Spaces and PS1.

RH: All those Artist's Spaces and PS1 or all that—all that side of late modernism is served very well indeed, probably to excess by all that. What The Museum of Modern Art is trying to do is be Tiffany's. And I think that's perfectly reasonable. It's the Tiffany's of modernism, and so it should be.

CC: They have a terrific collection.

RH: They have a magnificent collection. They have the best collection of modern art of any institution in the whole wide world. There are lots of things that I wish were in it, but then on the other hand, one can't be too greedy.

RC: It's nice to have to go to some other place to see something.

RH: Yes, exactly. You want to go to other places to see other things. I just adore The Museum of Modern Art. It educated me.

RC: How was that?

RH: I'd never seen any of this stuff, you see, when I left Australia.

RC: Books, catalogues?

RH: Catalogues, yes—[from] *Art News*, you'd cut out the two-inch by three-inch black and white photo of the [Willem] de Kooning. You'd go home and you'd paint a purple de Kooning because you didn't know what color they were in real life. [Laughter]

RC: And that was the experience of a lot of people.

RH: That was the experience of a lot of people. Believe you me, whenever people talk about the sort of educational elitism of The Museum of Modern Art, I think, fucking hell, if only I'd had that, some institution like that presiding over my childhood. Ah! I mean, in Australia, we couldn't see this stuff. To me it's still absolutely magical for this reason. You know? There's a great deal to be said about children not being let into museums, I therefore conclude. [Laughter] I felt frustrated and deprived, and then the ones that are really going to be interested—

CC: John Szarkowski said yesterday, he went to the University of Wisconsin, and he was part of a student coop group, and they'd go to the coop and a big crate would arrive from The Museum of Modern Art, and they'd open it up and there'd be a [Vasily] Kandinsky, and they put this on the wall, in the cafeteria, no security, no nothing.

RH: There you go, amazing!

RC: Nothing, nothing. They didn't know what they had.

CC: Drawings and a little few photographs, and that was it. And this was the first he had ever seen of it. He'd never seen any of that. Walker Evans, the first time he'd ever paid any attention. He said, 'Where's this? Where's the backlighted snow scene, and where's all the artful technique?'

RC: Right, it just looked like objects.

CC: And it wasn't there; it was all these faces and...

RH: Yes, just old, little wrinkly faces.

RC: Just the thing itself, yes.

CC: He started seeing—he'd never seen it before. So their only problem is what? How they survive, really? Not so much what to do with themselves, but how to survive?

RC: So you're content with what they are, what they're doing now?

RH: Oh I don't say that I think every exhibition they put on is wonderful, and I don't think that every person there is a sort of philosopher prince, but from an overview standpoint, I think they're a fantastically good institution, you know. But this is because I am, myself, a conservative reactionary modernist. [Laughing]

CC: You celebrate what they have. You're appreciative.

RH: Yes, exactly. I mean, to me that stuff is just, you know, it's magic. It always has been and I'd cross the street—oh, Jesus.

CC: You'd draw somebody else to task much more than you would them, as an institution?

RH: No, I mean—

CC: It's actually hard to say who's doing a bad job in the museum game.

RH: It's very hard to say who's doing a bad job in the museum game because it's such a hard thing, running a museum, even in the best of times.

RC: It's so hard. We heard that their financial staff is this big, and the curatorial is...

CC: One of the people told us today that [the] financial [side], the whole bookkeeping, the whole crap side of the business is giant.

RC: Many more people.

CC: Then there's a few little people, and really, the curatorial is quite small.

RH: See, I have some beefs about the—I mean, there are one or two minor beefs that I have about it. I think, for instance, that their relentless emphasis upon the richest trustees rather than the learned is absolutely insane. I think it's counter-productive. I think it gives the Museum a bad name, and in fact, it does harm. The Tate, the National Gallery in London, which is not an organization known for its patronage of modern art, has more living artists on its board of trustees than all the museums of New York put together.

RC: We just spoke to Eddie Warburg, and he said he was made an honorary board member, but he's—

RH: Andy Warhol?

RC: No, Eddie Warburg. [Laughter]

CC: Oh! Jesus! Deliver us! [Laughter]

RC: There, then, that's to the extreme. But he said he really has no power to—

RH: He's got no voting power.

RC: No, nothing.

CC: No, you're right though. The one now that they—some cringe, others are—is this Donald Marron, who's the financial—

RH: Marron is a brass-bottom copper-plated shit of the first water. I mean, he—I hope you aren't not going to play this tape?

RC: No, don't worry.

CC: It's just for our sakes.

RH: I mean, Marron is the most relentless manipulator. He's a dreadful man. He's got about as much soul as a goddam, you know, automatic gun.

RC: He wants to be the president; right?

RH: That's right.

CC: What does he want to be? He wants to enshrine himself?

RH: He wants to enshrine himself. Marron's just one of these horrible power-mad shits that come up in American life and who unfortunately play a very prominent part in cultural deliberations because they persuade people that only by toadying to them can they get the money.

RC: Does he have some advisors who give him good information, at least?

RH: I'm sure of it; of course.

CC: But he wants his name enshrined with the Rockefellers and the Blisses?

RH: Yes, he's surrounded by a giant cloud of sycophants. Every dealer in town will naturally energetically kiss his anus in order to, you know. I mean, Marron—sort of awful little customers like the Boonette [Mary Boone] regard Marron as about their only chance for The Museum of Modern Art because [phone call; tape break at 0:28:33-48]

CC: We were thinking to ourselves, the best areas probably to come back to talk to you about.

RC: On film, if you'd be willing to.

RH: Sure.

CC: If you're willing, [it] would be included, would be the—

RH: People would look at my face; maybe I better get it—

RC: Oh, not at all, you make art so colorful. It's great. That *Carravaggio* was just...

RH: That was on last night, to my great surprise.

RC: It sure was.

R/C: And a lot of people saw it. [RC and CC simultaneously]

RH: I was looking at it wishing I had a pair of scissors. [Laughing]

RC: Oh, that...

RH: I didn't realize how long my hair used to be. That was 1975, god. Anyway.

RC: Oh, it's wonderful.

CC: It would be, I'd say, what you said about being in Australia and getting your first contact even from catalogues, and that sort of thing.

RH: Yes.

CC: It gives an appreciation, I think, because obviously you have observed—you're detached form the Museum and you're not native American, I mean, you were from the outside, in a sense, looking in.

RH: Yes. I might say that I never really had any particular—the initial feelings one had about the Museum were not colored particularly by the social class to which its founders belonged, either. That, of course, is because I come from the upper bourgeoisie in Australia too, I guess. I mean, it's quite possible that—

CC: But what you said about the—I wouldn't say this—off of the fascistic for a second, but the whole of the missionary zeal of the—

RH: I'd like to talk about the missionary zeal aspects because I think that's absolutely crucial to an understanding of what the Museum is trying to do.

RC: That's right.

RH: Because you see, nobody believes in missionary enterprises any more, I mean, for good reasons.

CC: Just what I'd like to hear. That's very real. Because people, number one, they might not feel that. They might think it was just a group of elite Park Avenue ladies and a few—

RH: Having fun.

RC: Yes.

CC: —Professors from Harvard.

RH: Also, you see, there's that thing—there's that idea that people probably would get, from the beginning, that they went for modern art because it was a good investment. Whereas, in fact, it was no kind of an investment at all. I remember, I mean it is within my memory—well no actually, it's not true, I never saw it hanging anywhere, but a friend of mine in London told me about how the [Henri]

Matisse [*The*] *Red Studio* used to hang in a drinking club [Gargoyle Club] in London; a sort of artists' drinking club, all through the war, because the Redfern Gallery didn't have space to stow it. And there it sat in this drinking club in Soho, the real Soho, and the price on it, all through the war, right up to 1946, was 600 pounds. [Laughter]

RC: Right up to war. Wow, that's amazing.

CC: The most modernist picture, I mean, one of the most—

RH: And this idea that the Blisses and the Rockefellers and all the rest of it got together and founded the Museum in order to make good on their investments, as this son of a bitch Marron now does, you know.

CC: Yes, that's a totally different situation.

RH: That's totally a different situation. I mean, that, I think, is a very good reason why there should be—you see, the thing is that there are disgraceful situations among the Trustees. Look at, for instance, Barbara Jakobson, who doesn't mean any harm, but who actually is up to her neck in all sorts of deals with Leo Castelli and curates shows for Leo Castelli. She was up to her neck with all this promotion of, you know, the Boonette [Mary Boone], [Julian] Schnabel and co., and who depends for some part of her income since, you know, on all this; how can she possibly function as a trustee of The Museum of Modern Art? These people are supposed to be detached.

CC: If half the Museum starts to say now, and it's against the missionary sense, but if they're starting to say, as even Riva Castleman was saying, in the Prints Department, she said, well, people shouldn't worry if the artists are making money, and if we're doing this and that. Then she became very pessimistic at the end and she said she thinks maybe it'll just be enshrined one day as, the government will own it, [and] it'll all be taken over.

RC: All museums.

CC: There won't be this independent spirit that created it.

RH: No, I don't think you can preserve that independent spirit.

CC: But do you think it is going to be—? It already is, so closely now allied obviously with the marketplace, that there is no detachment anymore.

RH: No, I think there is some detachment. I think that there are people who try to keep it to some extent, separated from the marketplace.

CC: Is there any curatorial integrity, then?

RH: Yes, I think there's a lot of curatorial integrity. None of their people there you could say was an outright crook like Henry Geldzahler. None of them are on the—take in the way that the detestable Geldzahler was. But that, of course, is your exceptional case of institutional venality there. I think very highly of people like Riva Castleman. I think very highly of The African Queen.

RC: Kynaston McShine.

RH: Kynaston McShine. [Laughter]

CC: They're tough characters because in the end—

RH: You see, Kynaston has a very difficult job there because it is upon him, much more than upon Bill Rubin, that all of this clamorous pressure from the marketplace comes. Because it isn't going to be—Bill Rubin ultimately is responsible for whether or not you buy a picture by let's say Jean-Louis[sic] Basquiat [Jean-Michel Basquiat], you know, or [Francesco] Clemente or something. Clemente is not a bad painter but, you know...

CC: They're not going to go to Rubin; he's busy getting his Cezannes.

RH: But you see, it's Kynaston who has to deal with all this, and I think he does a fairly good job of dealing with it. I mean, I think he does a much better job of dealing with somebody like Barbara Haskell, whose idea of dealing with it is to lie down with their paws up in the air like a fluffy bunny and hope that nobody's going to stamp on her throat. I mean, you know.

CC: He has an integrity to him.

RC: Yes.

RH: You're not going to say all this on the film? [Laughter]

RC: You can say it. We'll give you a little edited version of the Bobby-isms best. [Laughter]

CC: The best of. [Laughter]

RC: The best of Bobby.

CC: You'd get suicides. We would hear cringing and moaning.

RC: We can put soundtrack.

CC: We'll take this. We'll take the rap.

RH: Hello. [Phone call at 0:34:25]

CC: We saw John Canaday and he had been, in a way, he missed the whole thing. I mean, he came in, he's a gentleman, but he was led into in the late fifties

RH: Canaday had some fairly combative moments in his time.

RC: Yes, in the fifties with Abstract Expressionism.

RH: Bob Motherwell to this day can't hear that—I mean, he practically has a fit of projectile vomiting whenever he hears Canaday's name.

RC: Good point; we were thinking of talking to him.

RH: Oh you should definitely talk to Bob.

CC: Yes, we want to talk to him.

RH: Do you know him?

RC: Yes, I've met him but he won't remember me. But I went one time to his studio.

RH: He's my dearest friend and he gave the wedding party for us when we got married last year, so if you'd like me to—

RC: He's marvelous. Oh, that would be great.

CC: Because he's been referenced by an awful lot of people.

RH: No, no, I mean, first of all, he's extremely clear.

RC: He's a great spokesman. He's brilliant.

RH: He's a great artist and one of the very few people of that generation left.

RC: That's right.

CC: And he did his own—look at his publishing with his early books.

RC: Oh, he's wonderful.

RH: Yes.

RC: Is he still with Renate Ponsold?

RH: Sure. Absolutely.

CC: Another artist that we were thinking of who might have something on the outside to say was, Sol Lewitt, [who] was a guard there.

RH: Yes, yes.

RC: He has [had] a big show [*Sol LeWitt*], he's been involved in the protest.

RH: You should definitely [see him]. You see, you should get a hold of some of the people who were protesting against—I mean, there were two levels of protesting. One was PASTAMoMA, which I think was absolutely right. I mean, I just think it's disgraceful the way the MoMA pays its people. But then, you know much more about that than what I do. But then there was all that stuff in the late sixties, early seventies about how, if you could get MoMA to do this or MoMA to do that, then somehow or other this would miraculously produce an end to the bombing of Cambodia or to sort of cause American racism to disappear, or, you know, something of that nature. And it might be interesting to talk to some of the people who were so active and demonstrated.

RC: So who are some of those?

RH: Well, I mean, for instance, [Robert] Morris; Poppy Johnson, his former mistress.

RC: Robert Morris, you mean?

RH: Yes. The GAAG people, Guerrilla Art Action Group. Jean Toche and [John] Hendricks.

CC: What about someone like Lucy Lippard?

RH: Lucy Lippard would be perfect. You should definitely talk to Lucy. She's as clear as a bell, she's extremely intelligent, and she used to work there. She's a marvelous woman. I disagree with almost every one of her opinions about politics, but Christ, I respect her.

RC: Yes, she's wonderful.

RH: She's really good. Do you want me to—? I can send her a signal. She lives across the street from me.

RC: You know what? We've been trying to call her. I didn't know if she was out of town or what. Maybe you could just...

RH: She was in Australia most of the summer, but I understand that she—well, I know she's back now because I saw her the other day.

CC: Yes, that would be good.

RC: That would be great.

RH: Do you have a card or anything?

RC: Yes, we both have cards.

RH: Give me both your cards, and I'll call Motherwell and slip a note under Lippard's door. Is there anybody else that you—? Thank you. Terrific. Varied Directions Incorporated. Jesus, I mean that's a great one. [Laughter]

RC: That's the production company.

RH: Ran off in all directions? [Laughter]

RC: That's how it is some, a lot of the time. That's the production company that we're working for.

RH: Would you like some coffee?

CC: Yes. We didn't want to take up—we love speaking to you.

RH: That's okay, I'm in no hurry. I'm just trying to think, do I have—?

CC: You were talking about the eastern shore—you know, I have a good friend, I go down pretty often to Easton, Maryland, right around St. Michaels and all that. It's terrific.

RH: Yes, yes, it must be. I've never been.

CC: You've never been there?

RH: No, I never have.

CC: And you're a hunter? Oh, you've got to go down there.

RH: Yes, I should.

CC: You'd go nuts.

RH: You're absolutely right; I should.

CC: The marshland, the heavens of marshland.

RH: I was going to go out to Idaho [tape break at 0:38:08].

RH: [Impersonating someone in a French accent] Even though The Museum of Modern Art, New York would not be the same without it, and I would not be the same without it, either.

CC: He's just going to be very diplomatic in that too.

RC: But how about any other people?

CC: Sidney Janis is a hard nut, too.

RH: Sidney Janis is a dreadful, exploitive old crook.

CC: He was the villain in—I did a film on Franz Kline, *Franz Kline Remembered,* it was called, and he's the villain in the film.

RH: Really? Yes.

CC: He's there, and after he speaks about the paintings going up, up, up in value, and we show them, up, up, up in value in his gallery, and then Betsy Zogbaum, who was Franz Kline's mistress, comes up saying, 'We never thought we were making any money.' And really, the whole thing was built around it. I think he died because of the pressure. He was [INAUDIBLE: 0:38:56].

RH: Yes, like booze and what have you. But where [INAUDIBLE: 0:39:00].

CC: It's terrible what happened though. I mean, the way they were championed like that.

RH: [INAUDIBLE: 0:39:03] I mean, you should have seen what he did to our Louise Nevelson. I mean, he really screwed her. He ran her backwards through a mincer. He just stripped her. And they're all—you know, people had these ceremonial dinner parties for these people.

CC: Yes, I know, they're championing them.

RH: They're championing them, and then suddenly, it all turns around and gets dumped on the head of Frank Lloyd, the—

RC: When everybody else is—

RH: Hello, yes, come in.

Chris: Excuse me, Bob.

RH: Yes, Chris; sorry. [tape break at 0:39:30] It's very interesting to me. I don't know [Arthur] Drexler at all.

CC: Is it novel though also in terms of other museums, in other areas?

RH: Well, I think you see again that The Museum of Modern Art did a tremendous amount to crank up and get going the present lively debate about architecture that we have. If it hadn't been for the Museum first of all making such efforts to introduce the theory of the International Style, of international modernism, anyway, in the thirties, then we probably wouldn't have—well, first of all, we wouldn't have the sort of academic architecture, glass box architecture that we now have got, or it wouldn't be so intellectually respectable. Tom Wolfe's analysis of the situation is needless to say completely wrong, but it wasn't as though a bunch of rich snobs got together and then imposed a style on America. The reasons why Americans wanted to build in that way was that it was cheaper [phone call at 0:40:24; tape break].

CC: Architecture is taking over that evangelical ethos that art used to have. A lot of young Europeans, instead of going to art schools now and all, they think they can do something for society by becoming architects.

RH: That's right.

CC: And you see, it's a very glamorous profession.

RH: Yes, the Italian architecture schools are absolutely chock a block. I mean, nobody actually graduates and gets to design a building.

CC: I know.

RC: It's like for dilettantes, more social.

RH: Well, no, no, no; I think it's just that—I mean, the less you are exposed to the practical exigencies of putting up a building in the real world, the more you tend to develop your theories about architecture, and these theories always include, of course, ideas about its social purpose. And that is why you have such a fantastic number of non-practicing ideologues.

CC: Aldo Rossi.

RH: Aldo Rossi and people like that, you know. I mean, it's very largely a matter of idea responding to idea. I'm sure that, for instance, Peter Eisenman will mellow the day that he gets some buildings to do. But until—

CC: And they don't take structural engineering classes.

RH: Oh, I think they take structural engineering classes, yes. I think the hope is that eventually they might get to design when the millennium comes; they'll design some sort of [INAUDIBLE: 0:41:42] for the Italian workers and [INAUDIBLE: 0:41:43] fall out.

CC: We talked to somebody, actually a *Newsweek* person, someone who said he felt that

RH: Who? Dave Davis or Mark?

CC: Mark [Stevens]. He said—actually what he said was interesting. He said, to him, art's become so popular now that in a way, it may go the way poetry went in the 19th century. Now, people are still doing good poetry, but it's not as fashionable

anymore, and painting and sculpture might become so diffuse now. Is it as important now as it was in the thirties, forties, fifties? Abstract Expressionism?

RH: Absolutely not. Absolutely not.

RC: And why is that, would you say?

RH: Because I think that the idea that it had some power to change the world has evaporated.

CC: And that's what gave it strength?

RH: And at the same time, you see, tremendous reserves of energy can be built up if you believe that what you're doing, no matter how obscure it is, is really going to affect the way that people live. And, you know, you can—and it was a condition of work for a lot of people before the age of television. I mean, now we know that actually—I mean, all that stuff of [John] Keats's about the artist, the poet being the unacknowledged legislator of society, which was an article of faith to the Romantics, we know that's not true. We know that the unacknowledged legislators of society are actually people like Dan Rather or Milton Friedman. [Laughing] But, in other words, it's television that's pre-empted that kind of social address. But in the days when audiences were smaller and the general IQ level was higher, and one thing and another, I think yes, there was that feeling that art was an absolutely primary form of social discourse. I think that feeling's gone now. I think Soho is the proof of how far it's gone. I think this is another phenomenon.

CC: Is it destroying itself, in a way?

RH: Yes, I think it's just a phenomenon of the overcrowded art world. We've got an overcrowded art world. It's like—I think of all these thin, frantic deer with their ribs showing going around gnawing the bark off trees. That's what Soho reminds me of.

CC: So there would never be, obviously, a late 20th century museum like The Museum of Modern Art is.

RH: I don't think there'd be any point to having such a museum.

RC: And it's like the New Museum didn't—I mean, where that went; it was an interesting question.

CC: What is Pontus Hultén going to do that's any different than anyone else?

RH: Who knows. I mean, probably nothing.

CC: Probably nothing. Already he said he's going to work his way up in the war. Well, hell, I mean, there's plenty of stuff.

RH: Plenty of stuff. But you see the thing is—well, he's gone now anyway. But—and he's going to have to do the bicentenary celebrations in Paris in '89. But he's going to have to come up with something like the Eiffel Tower, which is what they had in 1889. [Laughter] I don't know except I suppose Niki de Saint Phalle will design some sort of [laughter]—anyway, the—

CC: Do you see it as becoming more fragmented and proliferated?

RH: Yes.

CC: The proliferation of it is becoming a more acceptable part of society now? It's not as revolutionary—

RH: Yes. I think that what happens is that art is rendered meaningless to the extent that it—I know that this sounds like classical boring old-line Marxism, but I can't help it. I do think that art loses its communicative power and is rendered meaningless to the extent that it becomes an object of market speculation. I think market speculation alienates people from the experience of works of art. I think it sets up things which—I know this all sounds so pat, but I nevertheless firmly believe it. By which I don't mean that the artist should not have a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, only that to have an art world in which you have all these sort of sad or happy inflated May flowers, all sort of gambling on having their one day in the sun and making a zillion bucks, and then getting out. I mean, can you imagine what Julian Schnabel is going to look like in 15 years?

RC: How could you possibly? He'll get [INAUDIBLE: 0:45:45]. What could he be doing?

CC: What's really sick about it almost is to know that something like, Willem de Kooning who had his first one-man show when he was 44; Franz Kline was about 44 or 45.

RH: Yes, absolutely.

CC: Yet, he showed at the Washington Square art thing. They never thought—they never imagined anything would happen.

RC: Some people think that's what killed them.[2] In their lifetime, they would never [make it], and then all of a sudden, it took off.

CC: De Kooning said about his painting *Attic* that came to The Met, he said he let that go for a hundred bucks or whatever, and then someone told him, Elaine [de Kooning] or whatever, who was always keeping track of those things, said, oh, it was just appraised at $850,000. One painting.

RC: Yes, what does that mean?

CC: I remember that painting. It doesn't mean anything. It's still the same picture.

RH: It's still the same picture. I would think that one would just find that paralyzing.

RC: They were catapulted to become stars.

CC: How could you continue?

RH: I've run into 25-year-old artists down there on West Broadway, the street of shame, who say—they're basically indignant that I don't write about their work. And I've tried to explain to them that very, very few people have anything worth saying until they're 40. And people who really made great art in their twenties, like Raphael or Masaccio or [Arthur] Rimbaud, which is one they always like to come up with—

CC: There are few.

RH: —are very much in the minority. I mean, Picasso, Braque, yes, but generally speaking, no. And therefore, we all have time; we can all wait.

CC: Look at [Mark] Rothko. He was fooling around with Surrealist canvases and—

[2] Willem de Kooning lived to age 93.

RH: They get this weird look on their face and they say, “I’m 25 now and I’ve worked like a bastard all my life.”

CC: [Laughing] Just got here.

RH: [Laughter] What you need, my boy, is a solid diet of disappointment for at least another 20 years; you know. [Laughter] Then let’s see how you do; yes; ha-ha. [It will be] my job to give it to you. [Laughter]

RC: Then come and talk to me; right. Good point.

CC: That’s the expectations that the market has created.

RH: They think that criticism is about publicity. And then naturally, they get pissed off if you give them a kick in the butt. Or they think you’re an irrelevant old fogey; one or the other.

RC: Right. Well these days, negative publicity is publicity. People read more of that than they’ll read something that’s an appreciation.

RH: That’s right; as long as they spell your name right; you know.

CC: I think it would be an interesting story to tell, though, if you could really tell a good story about the institution, a tough one, a controversial [one], in the sense that, why it was started, and if you get some of the original characters. We got some of the original characters.

RC: Some of the original characters mixed with people like yourself who are really strong in their ideas, yes.

RH: I think you can make a wonderful film out of this. If there’s anything I can do to help.

END OF INTERVIEW at 0:48:15