DAVID HOFFMAN MOMA HISTORY INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH:	**ELIZABETH SHAW (ES)**
INTERVIEWERS:	**HARVEY ARDMAN (HA); CARL COLBY (CC); RUTH CUMMINGS (RC)**
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ES: [Laughter] [INAUDIBLE: 0:00:01]. I was sort of the second generation. I was a part of the group with Arthur Drexler and John Szarkowski, who had been *very* much influenced by the Museum when we were in college. And we'd read the books, we'd been to the exhibitions. And long before I ever went to work for the Museum, I wouldn't buy something that the Museum hadn't shown; I wouldn't have a cup or a saucer. [Laughter] I've changed since then.

HA: So you joined the staff somewhere in the mid-fifties, would you say?

ES: No; before that, it was late forties.

HA: Late forties, I see. Then that was the time when [René] d'Harnoncourt was just really coming into his own as the Director.

ES: D'Harnoncourt was made Director the same year that I joined.

HA: I see.

ES: There had been a troika, running the place.

HA: Right. Yes.

ES: And as René's title got shorter, he got more power. [Laughter] He came in as what? Vice President of Manual Industries, or some such insane thing. But he had a hard time. He couldn't go to Board meetings for quite a long time.

HA: Why not?

ES: He had no say and he was being added to the Board for quite a long time. And that all changed. But when he came in it was not easy.

HA: So you worked very closely with him, I'm sure.

ES: Yes. With d'Harnoncourt and [Alfred] Barr. I worked very closely with d'Harnoncourt, he was Director; and Barr became one of my husband's closest friends. He and his wife became very close friends of ours. And in fact, Sam was executor; my husband was the executor of Alfred Barr's estate.

HA: Is that so?

ES: We spent thousands of weekends together. Thousands of cheap lunches and tea every day at the Museum.

HA: Well then you probably knew him at least as well as anybody we're talking to, really. Because most of the people we're talking to knew him on a professional basis, some of them over a long period of time, but you knew him on a personal basis, very intensely.

ES: Oh yes; very, very, very close. Very close.

HA: How would you describe the man?

ES: I thought he was one of the most important men of the 20th century. He was a missionary, a dedicated missionary, really extraordinary fund of knowledge. I've never known anyone who knew so much about so many [INAUDIBLE: 0:02:32]. In fact, I thought once I'd trip him up on mushrooms. [Laughter] And we had a book about mushrooms, which I had read on. He knew all about mushrooms, it turned out. [HA laughs] He knew a great deal about music. Of course, he was a great birdwatcher, which was one of his great bonds with my husband who was also a great birdwatcher. And we have Alfred's birdwatching book. I used to sit on the Collections Committee meeting. I think I was the first non-curatorial person to ask to sit in. Billy Rubin told me that. And Alfred would argue for a picture bringing to bear *every possible* connotation: [Sigmund] Freud, history, everything. I mean, nothing was mystery; nothing was too arcane or too obvious to use to try to get people to like this painting that he thought the collection should have.

HA: Was he mostly successful when he went into one of these salesmanship spiels?

ES: Not always. Philip Johnson bought a lot of things that Alfred wanted and then gave them to the Museum later. And Dave Thompson did that sometimes, or Dave McAlpin sometimes.

CC: So he wasn't simply a scholar who happened to get in; happened to start it in a zealot's way, begin the Museum, but then got caught up in it? How was it that he wouldn't have continued or when do you see the second generation beginning, and why did René come in or have to come in?

ES: Well, Alfred was fired.

CC: And why would that have happened, though?

ES: Well, he was not a very good administrator, I guess, and he wanted to write some books. Marga Barr has been trying to figure that out. She came for lunch the other day, and she said she'd spent a lot of time going through letters and correspondence, and she thinks it was a kind of plot to get rid of him.

CC: The only thing that we could come up with, and we've just started looking, it must have been the administrator—that he just wasn't an expert executive director, in a sense, and so they just simply needed someone to run the plant.

HA: I also had a feeling the chemistry wasn't good between him and [Stephen] Clark.

ES: It was *terrible*. Terrible.

HA: Yes, they didn't seem to get along very well.

ES: My mother spent a weekend with the Clarks in Cooperstown. And she said, "Mr. Clark, my daughter works at The Museum of Modern Art." And he said, "I used to know that place."

HA: He's no longer alive, is he?

ES: No.

HA: I understand that he died without leaving any pictures at all to the Museum?

ES: No, he left them to the Met and to Yale.

HA: After having been president of the institution; that's really quite something to do that. That's a very deliberate act, isn't it?

ES: Very disappointing.

HA: Yes.

ES: But I think he'd pretty much lost interest in what the Museum was doing, and which happens with trustees. They stop. Their interest stops, and they think that the next more recent, contemporary work is not as good and not as important, and they don't like it. Alfred still loved very contemporary work, even after he was really pretty much gone. I ran into him at the Whitney Museum one day giving a kind of impromptu gallery talk, in front of a pile of hay, as I recall. [Laughter] But he loved to talk about works of art, and he liked to transmit and share his pleasure. There was a great—I ran across it the other day—a definition of criticism. He says it's supposed to be illuminating rather than laying out, and that was Alfred's view of criticism. He wanted you to like and enjoy and know more about.

CC: In the first 15 or 20 years, did it just happen almost by chance or luck that the Trustees' vision was the same as Alfred's? Or that they saw things alike, they both had this missionary zeal, and that after that it began to split?

ES: There was virtually—well, we used to say, we didn't come at the beginning and we can't stay 'til the end. [Laughter] But those first years, I don't think Alfred got everything across that he wanted, and this is talking at them, and he had a series of points. And there were a couple that he couldn't sell the Trustees [on]. It was very closely held. Mrs. [Abby Aldrich] Rockefeller was *very* active. Lillie Bliss was very active. I once had those scrapbooks; I don't know where they are now.

HA: They're still around.

CC: We saw them, and [there was] an interesting letter this morning in Alfred Barr's papers. It was a letter from Seal Harbor to Alfred two months or so before the opening show, telling him, diplomatically, why they should not have an American show and why they should start with the French show [*Cezanne, Gauguin, Seurat, van Gogh*]. And it was a very interesting—it gave you great insight

though into what the relationship must have been. And that she was extremely active and it was as much her interest as his interest.

HA: She seemed to be running the show, with him, of course, but of the trustees, she seemed to be the one running the show.

CC: Mrs. Rockefeller.

HA: Yes.

ES: Oh yes, it was a real thing. It was very courageous of her. You consider that 1929, the women who had been great collectors like Mrs. Jack [Isabella Stuart Gardener] in Boston, just started their own private museum, or had their own private collection, or Mrs. whats-her-name in Chicago, whereas *these* women decided to make a *public* institution. And I think that was very, very farsighted.

HA: Noble.

ES: Yes.

HA: Of course, the period that you were in the Museum was a period of—as I recall from Russell Lynes' book [*Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of The Museum of Modern Art*]—it was a period of protests and there were strikes and all kinds of goings on.

ES: There was a lot of that; there always had been, though.

HA: How did you deal with it? I've done some public relations work in my life and I know that when the crisis occurs, the public relations person is the one who's always on the hot-seat.

ES: Well I got very good at television interviews. [Laughter] I got very good at crossing picket lines. [INAUDIBLE: 0:08:43] newspaper joke. But—

HA: What were some of the really terrible problems that you faced when you were on the hot-seat, so to speak?

ES: Well, of course, I was very much infected by the missionary zeal, so that I was pretty self-righteous about it. You criticize the Museum, you criticize *me*. I think we all felt that way, a terribly strong sense of loyalty. After the Museum fire, which was probably the worst thing that ever happened, Alfred left me a note,

which I've lost. I took it on [INAUDIBLE: 0:09:28] and showed it to my husband. And it was a very sweet note, and it said, "Dear Elizabeth, I've always thought you were this and this and now I know that you're strong." And I took it and I showed it to my husband, and he said, "Oh god, Lizzie, if Alfred thinks you are strong, I'll never see you again!" [Laughter] Because he was a consumer of people; he really was.

HA: Ah, I see. So he would have you doing everything in the whole wide world, then.

ES: Yes, that would suit his purposes. But I didn't think those times were so bad. Though I mean the Black protests—we started the Children's [Art] Carnival and I had a big hand in that, and that was fun, in Harlem. And I interviewed something like 120 organizations; the Real Society, Black Panthers.

CC: When did you leave the Museum?

ES: I left five and a half years ago.

CC: Do you think if you were to give a graphic scale of how things started, shooting, beginning with a cannon, and then through the forties and fifties [where] it seemed to have really reached the peak of its powers with a lot of the exhibitions; what about now? Is it of necessity, in a sense, stagnant, or beginning to be a 20th century museum and not something projecting into the future? Or, how would you describe its mission now, or if it even thinks it has one?

ES: The question of when we stopped being a modern museum was always being asked. That was a constant topic of conversation.

HA: It's a very interesting question.

ES: Yes. I myself think that right now, because the Museum is trying to stagger along and be open, when it really is not equipped to be open, that that's a pretty hard time. I think it's hard on the staff, I think it's hard on the public. And I went through today with a former colleague, and with great excitement he was talking about his next exhibition. And I said, "Where is it going to be?" He said, "Oh, this ghastly space we have now." I mean, his voice, everything just changing. With the last big expansion we closed. And I think that was better, I really do.

HA: And as I recall, a lot of paintings were sent to the National Gallery.

ES: Yes, which was very smart; the *best* place to send them.

HA: A clever idea, actually.

ES: *Marvelous* idea that was a *beautiful* idea.

CC: That's true, because in the last couple of years, I've been over a couple of times, and I was very disappointed.

HA: Well there's no space there.

CC: There wasn't really any place to look at anything, so you start thinking, "I don't want to come back."

ES: It's all temporary and it's all sort of—

CC: But if this comes out—what we're attempting to do is an hour-long film about the history of the institution, and in a sense tell the story from the inside out. We'd begin by actually telling what we think is a very fascinating story of the institution, not of modern art per se, but of the institution: how it grew, how it got bigger, its mission perhaps changing. And then at the end come in with commentary from—it could be anyone. It could be [François] Truffaut, it could be Clint Eastwood; people talking about the contributions that the Museum is making now. But when it gets to that stage, we are not presupposing that it's going to be a great explosion of good will at the end. There could be questions like—and that's really what we're trying to come up with now—what are those questions that should be directed at the Museum now? Should it be what I believe someone like Rubin may say, which is, we have a fabulous permanent collection; we probably are *the* 20th century museum; let's stay that way or, let's make that better. Or will there be people like—

ES: Kynaston McShine, who will say, let's get on with experimental stuff.

CC: Or someone like Mary Lea Bandy who just said, let's get on with the Film program. [Laughter]

ES: A big union leader.

HA: Yes. Sometime we'll talk to her about that.

ES: It would be interesting to, yes.

RC: Given that you were so involved with Barr's vision and mission, what would you see the direction being?

ES: You mean from here on?

RC: Yes, how do you feel about it?

CC: Do you see it as Barr without Barr, really? And very, very different without Barr?

ES: Oh sure, it's different without Barr, and the world is different. And I think that—I mean, the whole business, for example, of corporate grants didn't exist when Alfred was really running the place. And damn well all was this beginning to get government money. That's why it was so smart to send the collection to Washington, because the Congress could see it. [Laughter]

CC: That's true.

ES: And we also had lent a lot of things that we would never have lent to other museums, and of course, the whole lending thing is a form of I scratch your back, you scratch mine. If I lend you a [Aristide] Maillol, you'll lend me a [Georges] Rouault.

All: Mm-hm.

ES: But I don't think that either Alfred or René really regretted leaving, because Alfred wasn't well when he left; René was, but they both had a lot of other things they wanted to do. René was going to write books and curate exhibitions on American Indian art, which was his great field. And Alfred of course wanted to rewrite the books and bring them up to date. Though they had never trained successors, you see.

HA: Yes. Well, how could you have trained a successor?

ES: Well, I think they might have tried. [Laughter] [William] Lieberman; Barr was trying to train Lieberman as his successor, and that didn't work out.

CC: And what about Dorothy Miller?

ES: Well, Dorothy was probably too contemporaneous, really. Have you talked to her?

CC: No; we're going to.

HA: Not yet; she's high on our list of people.

CC: We just really started talking this week.

RC: You worked closely with her, didn't you?

ES: Yes, yes, I did.

CC: Well I'll mention somebody that we talked to who probably you were in some contact with.

RC: Oh, Monroe Wheeler.

HA: No, no, no; John Canaday.

ES: I always liked John. For a while I was the only person on the staff who spoke to him.

HA: He has a lot of personal charm; we enjoyed our interview with him.

ES: He's bright.

CC: He was very strange. He confessed openly, he said, "I got much of my education from art." And he was very, very plain about that.

HA: That's right.

CC: But then he said that he was a champion of Abstract Expressionism and then suddenly—

HA: It became everything.

CC: It became everything, and then he wrote that one article which he says that's it, that barbecued him. From then on no one would talk to him, and he was late on picking up everything else.

RC: [INAUDIBLE: 0:16:21] dismissal.

CC: And I remember even when I was 19, 20, reading his reviews and thinking: stolid, old, and really, not contemporary. And I guess he felt that, he always felt that. He said he had many run-ins with the Museum.

ES: He did. When he was writing about the Metropolitan Museum's deaccessioning, I saw him in a gallery, and he said, "Don't worry, Liz; I'm not going to write about

what you said. I don't give a *damn* what you said." [Laughter] I said, "Let's keep it that way." Actually, the Museum has always had a very good selling policy, very, very carefully thought out, because it was part of the very beginning of the place.

HA: That seems to me, that's always been an interesting part of the story, too, and that is, I know that many times, several times in the Museum's history, that they were thinking of turning paintings over to the Metropolitan, and finally this policy was not followed.[1]

CC: Is the Museum run differently than any other museum from your observation? In terms of departments they have and [the] sort of exhibitions they'd be putting on?

ES: A lot of museums now have similar programs that we certainly pioneered in covering all the visual arts, the more contemporary visual arts, and the traveling exhibition program and the book program. The book program was—as I recall, it was never anticipated that it would be so successful, but of course it was terribly important. And I bought *all* those books when I was in college, as I said.

CC: The ones Monroe Wheeler put together?

ES: Yes.

CC: We spoke with him.

RC: I was curious about that. How would you describe the effect of the Museum? When you first visited, you were obviously influenced when you were in college by the Museum and modern art.

ES: It was ecstatic. I thought it was an absolute revelation. I took one course in art at Smith, and I've got a good visual memory, so it was a snap. By the time we got to [Paul] Cezanne, I just went out of my mind; [INAUDIBLE: 0:18:31] a whole new vision of the world. And I really believed all of that. And I also believed—and this is very much the Modern, and I didn't know at the time, but it was very

[1] Ardman is referencing the Inter-Museum Agreement among MoMA, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1947, intended to allow the Met to acquire a number of older works of painting and sculpture from the collections of the two modern museums, freeing them to concentrate on more contemporary acquisitions. This agreement, by which such works as Picasso's *Woman in White*, entered the collection of the Met, was terminated in 1953.

much Alfred's view, that if everybody loved modern art we'd have a better society.

HA: Why?

ES: We'd be all better people.

HA: Why?

RC: Bigger vision of things, or—?

ES: Sense of order and a sense of proportion and good thoughts, and—[laughter]

RC: Sounds great; I'll join. [Laughter] I'll sign up for that.

ES: So that was the—the mission was partly a moral mission, it wasn't just an aesthetic mission. Aesthetics and morals are so mixed up. I think then, in the twenties; look at de Stijl group, the Bauhaus, Futurism, all those.

RC: Right.

ES: They have very strong—

HA: Did René have the same—? Was he thinking along the same lines, or was he—?

ES: I don't think so. [Laughter]

HA: What sort of a man was he, and how was he thinking? You were working closely with him, obviously.

ES: Well, René; he had a great eye. He was trying to—I don't know, coal or something. [He was an] Austrian count. [He] had no money after World War I. Went to Mexico, as far as he could get—he wanted to go to China—and became an art advisor in Mexico. And then really fell in love with the indigenous Mexican art; he knew a *lot* about that. And he was interested in education, so in one sense he was like Barr. He did one of the first radio programs ["Art in America"] I think ever done in the arts in America. But René was much more of an organization man, much more of a diplomat, and keeping things pasted together.

RC: So he did push the Museum along, then.

ES: Oh absolutely.

RC: In the direction it needed to go.

ES: Absolutely.

HA: But he was really the administrative type more than the—

ES: Yes, in an extraordinary way.

HA: Of course he did have the artistic side, too.

ES: Oh yes; yes; very.

RC: John Canaday said of his exhibitions, he had such an eye, he put together beautiful—

ES: Beautiful, beautiful installations; absolutely beautiful. And [he] never wanted the art to be overshadowed by the installation. He was very—he made very elaborate models and there's a terrible film [*Nine Days to Picasso*] that Warren Forma made?

RC: Forman?

HA: What about?

ES: René installing an exhibition.

HA: Really?

RC: Milos Forman.

ES: No, no, no; a documentary filmmaker.

RC: But it's terrible?

ES: Forma, I think it is. It's very boring.

HA: Well, nonetheless, a few frames of it might be of use to us.

ES: Yes. The Museum should have it someplace. It was installing the Picasso Sculpture show [*The Sculpture of Picasso*].

HA: We'll have to check—I don't recall seeing that mentioned.

CC: So Barr must have been a very modest person, though, at the same time, since what he did influenced—he's probably influenced all of us, the way we see

things, the way we were introduced to art. He's probably the greatest popularizer of art in this country. But in an unsung way, you're saying. He wasn't championing himself then, it was always the cause.

ES: It was always the cause. Always the cause; yes.

RC: I was curious, was your teacher of modern art? You embraced it immediately upon seeing it, but had your teacher been—?

ES: Connected with the Museum? Yes.

RC: See, that's an interesting way. Because they really formed, as I understand it, a core of people who went out and were preaching the word.

ES: It was Jere Abbott.

HA: Your teacher was Jere Abbott?

ES: Yes.

RC: You see? Oh, that's great. Okay. That's an interesting one.

CC: Well, he was at Smith and Barr was at Wellesley.

RC: That's right.

CC: And Paul Sachs was at Harvard.

ES: All at different times. Now Jere Abbott, worked for Alfred in the Museum, and then he left the Museum and went to Smith. And it was he who picked up, the new survey course, the modern section, and that was the day that I—

CC: Did you ever take that test that Barr had where you're supposed to answer 20 questions or 50 questions, if you could join his class?

ES: No, I never did.

CC: He gave that test at Wellesley. [Laughter]

ES: I never did.

CC: They couldn't get in the class unless they—

ES: Helen Franc took that test and did very well, as I recall. [Laughter] I never even saw that test; I'd love to see it.

HA: I don't think we've met anybody who knew Jere Abbott, although maybe Wheeler did, but we didn't talk to him about it. What sort of a man was he?

ES: No idea really. [Laughter]

HA: Just your teacher?

ES: A huge audience, on the stage showing slides.

HA: Was he a good teacher?

ES: I met him years later; he was in the Museum in the sculpture gallery and Alfred was talking to him and he introduced me, and I tried to tell Abbott that he had taught me, and he didn't even seem to be interested; not at all.

CC: Was this very cultish or was it very, very popular, at Smith, for instance, his class? Was this just you and 20 others, or—?

ES: No, I was really a history major. It was a huge, huge course.

CC: This was popular stuff?

ES: Yes.

CC: They were caught up in it.

ES: It was a survey of art.

CC: I mean the Modern.

ES: I don't know how people felt.

CC: You yourself were caught up.

ES: Yes, I was caught up myself.

CC: And as soon as you graduated, [then] what? Did you come down to New York?

ES: Yes. I had come here all the time to go to the Museum.

CC: Then you started to work for them later on.

ES: Much later on.

CC: But you'd go see all the shows.

ES: Yes.

RC: It sounds like still it was a special breed of cat. It hadn't really caught fire, but those who got interested—

ES: Arthur Drexler who, of course, you should be talking to—Philip Johnson who hired him was stunned that Arthur knew so much about the Museum. Arthur said he spent all his time there. [Laughing] And Philip was sort of showing him where the galleries were, and he says, "I know where that is; I know where this is." Philip hadn't realized that there was another generation of, which was totally—

CC: Attracted to it.

ES: Yes.

RC: Caught up. It still does sound like a club, and it sounds very attractive. I mean, it was just a group of people. Now, everybody, probably, has been at least once to The Museum of Modern Art.

HA: Well, everybody in New York feels a certain sense of ownership of the Museum.

ES: I hope so.

HA: Oh I think that's true.

RC: That's due to—we were talking about the corporate sponsorship, which changed, when would you say, like, in the sixties.

ES: Yes; right.

RC: And that was again, it seemed like another step that had to be—that's the evolution, and that changed the character of the Museum and possibly its exhibitions, and possibly—

ES: The Museum was very good about that and I think it still is.

RC: In terms of, how? How do you mean?

ES: We—they, never, to my knowledge, put on an exhibition that the curators didn't want to do. Never—

RC: Pandered to the corporate sponsors.

ES: No; no. And then, they really never interfered. A good corporation like Mobil or Exxon or Aluminian[?] what they want is the Museum's expertise. And they want it done the Museum way, and that's why they're putting up the money; or IBM.

RC: But what about—? Let's say it was the twenties. Would they have put on a real forward show like the Surrealism show? We're not sure if corporations take chances like that. So then you say, well—

ES: We would have done the show anyway.

RC: But what's the comparable? I don't know what the comparable exhibition is. Does the Museum still take chances, given its new structure, out of necessity, for funding and so forth? Do you see it as really being out there?

ES: Keep in mind that when we did the Surrealism show [*Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*], it was in 1932, I think, and Surrealism wasn't new then. Nor was *Cubism and Abstract Art*.

HA: It was only new to the United States.

ES: That's right. But it was an established tradition with a lot of literature, and a certain amount of time had already gone by.

CC: I think that's very crucial because if you start thinking that The Museum of Modern Art, not to take anything away from it, but that it introduced everything and it was very, very radical, it wasn't. It was a museum sponsored by at least Mrs. Rockefeller—she had courage, but she wasn't a fool; she didn't sponsor the Armory show; I mean, it wasn't 1913. But they were introducing [modern art] to the United States. But the best clip I'd ever seen from a newspaper was that 1929 *New York World* little editorial about the Museum saying that it's about time something like this opens up; most American housewives go in a department store and buy a little painting and show photographs of their children in the house, and the husbands don't even pay attention to that, much less any art on the wall. They don't know what art is; the only time they've ever seen it is they get dragged to a museum and they see dead masterpieces. They don't know that anyone is painting now or that they should pay attention.

HA: Yes.

CC: And so the Museum helped do that.

HA: I came across another article in—today we were going through these clip books, your fabulous clip books, which are fabulous, by the way. And there was an article from the *Milwaukee Journal* of 1935 that said, the headline was, "Museum to Show Paintings by Maniac." And you read it, and it turned out they were talking about [Vincent] van Gogh [*Vincent van Gogh*]. [Laughter] And I realized that today, there isn't a newspaper in the country that wouldn't say "Van Gogh Exhibition to be Held at Museum" and expect everybody to know who he was.

ES: Exactly.

CC: Was your precursor that wild—?

HA: Sarah?

ES: Sarah Newmeyer. Yes. No. Actually, she was not; I'm sorry; I take it back. Betty Chamberlain was my precursor, and she's around, someplace.

HA: Yes, yes; she's on our list.

CC: But that first one, I mean, she really—

ES: Sarah was crazy, I do think. [Laughter]

CC: She might as well be working for Paramount or something.

ES: Nobody had clean out her desk until I came, which was years later.

HA: Her desk was still full?

ES: Yes! So I cleaned it and I was absolutely fascinated by the—[laughing]

HA: What did you find?

ES: Memos, a lot of late stuff. She was trying to sell a book to somebody, and [pause] she was really quite crazy. Quite talented in the beginning, and then quite crazy, and then quite pathetic. And when she was looking for a job at one point [and] she called me up and asked if she could have tea in the members' penthouse for her interview. Of course, but it seemed to me—I felt sorry for her.

HA: That she had to ask such a question.

ES: Yes, exactly.

HA: Yes, that is sad. What great events do you remember? Or that you were kind of riding on the back of when it was happening?

CC: Maybe we'll put it this way. In looking at our story, we were trying to isolate certain big transition points or conflicts, points of controversy that came up. There was the very beginning, of course, and the problems attendant to that. Then, the beginning of the war effort where the Museum—it changed a bit at that time.

HA: Yes, and then when Barr was demoted.

CC: And then later there were cries out by American artists saying: What are you doing for us? Are you really a masterpiece museum? Especially right around the time beginning with that *Italian Masters* show and then really since then, there have been that sort of protest.

HA: How has the Museum dealt with those protests?

CC: We're just trying to isolate the larger issues that came up. Because I don't think the strike and all that sort of thing is really—

HA: The strike is just a strike.

CC: As a big story, I mean, if you have an hour to tell the story of a great institution, the strikes, and that sort of thing, but—

HA: The strike is just a strike.

CC: And the fire.

HA: The fire, it was, I'm certain, a memorable experience, negative and positive, but from our point of view, it's not a terribly important thing that happened to the Museum. It would have been important if the Museum had been totally destroyed by it, yes; then it would have been important. [Laughter]

CC: Your quotes contributed though to probably more exciting pages than Russell Lynes' book, I must say, which it needed. [Laughter]

HA: Yes.

CC: It's hard slogging that book.

HA: Yes.

ES: I always felt that Russell, because he had known the Museum earlier, through his brother, and [was] very conscious of the club-like atmosphere, did not understand people like Szarkowski and Drexler and me. I'm very fond of Russell and he lived in my office when he was writing that book. But we never could make him really understand that we were not part of his part of the club, but it was a different—

HA: A new generation.

ES: Yes.

RC: A different organization.

CC: Maybe that's key, then, is to really—

RC: So now's your chance. [Laughter]

HA: Well, the new generation, there was a changing of the guard just after World War II, essentially.

ES: Yes.

HA: So that's another watershed moment in the Museum's history.

CC: You're talking about when Beaumont Newhall and [Edward] Steichen then moving over in Photography.

HA: That's right; that's another example.

ES: Well, Newhall was out, and then Steichen was in, and then Steichen retired—

CC: But that whole transition is key.

ES: Yes, and Szarkowski; and Johnson, who had started that department, and then Peter Blake and then Arthur.

HA: Drexler; right.

CC: And for Film, was Margareta Akermark in by then, or no?

ES: Oh yes, she was there forever. We had Dick Griffith who left and then died. And then—

CC: And in Painting and Sculpture who was it by then? Lieberman was in Prints.

RC: Rubin.

ES: Yes.

CC: He was in charge of Prints when he was 25.

HA: I know; or some very young age.

CC: So that was when he was being groomed actively?

ES: Yes.

CC: When he would go out under Barr's tutelage.

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

CC: We're seeing him on February 1st. In a way, do you think if we talk to him, we should really try to get him to in a sense give us the detailed eye? It'll be difficult?

ES: [Pause]

HA: I guess his move to the Metropolitan was a recognition that he thought [that it was] as far as he could go at the Modern.

ES: Well, the gag was that he made a lot of demands, and that [Richard] Oldenburg was willing to give in to every single one of them except he would *not* give him Bill Rubin's head. [Laughter]

HA: I've heard that those two people were not fond of each other.

ES: They didn't get along at all, which was too bad, because that made it *very* difficult. Bill was doing a lot of painting exhibitions for the traveling program, and trying to borrow from Bill, and you would have thought that they were two different institutions.

HA: You mean they acted like super-powers.

ES: Yes. And at one point, Bill Lieberman had been head of Painting and Sculpture. [Bates] Lowry made him head, and Bill lived through all of that stuff, and Lieberman—and then Rubin came in and [pause] sort of cut him off.

HA: You lived through the Lowry and the [John] Hightower period.

ES: Yes.

HA: You were there.

ES: Yes.

HA: That must have been a really difficult period for the Museum.

ES: I think it was very difficult, I really do.

HA: How did it survive with its ideas and its impulse intact?

ES: I really think it was the strength of the staff and the Trustees. I mean, the Bates stuff was a disaster. And then the troika was very difficult. It's very hard to be run by three people. It depended who was in *town*, for heaven's sakes; really. Perfectly capable people, but it's just not a good way to run a museum. And then poor John Hightower, I think the Trustees were just sort of desperate and wanted somebody, and Nelson said he'd be good. I saw John's resume, and he didn't do anything he hadn't said he was going to do. I don't know why everybody was so shocked. I mean, he said he was a populist, and he thought [INAUDIBLE: 0:35:03] was a work of art. [Laughter] But he *told* everybody this.

HA: And they took it with a grain of salt, I guess.

ES: Yes, yes.

HA: And he meant it.

ES: Yes. I think the Museum was very lucky to have settled on Oldenburg.

HA: I don't know him, I haven't met him, but from what I gather he's a very solid and capable man.

ES: And he'd been head of Publications and he'd worked with all of the curators. And he had a very good feel of what they were up to and what their particular limitations and abilities were. And he's respected by the curators, not because

he has an arts specialty, but because he is literate. And so that—he's not just an administrator or just a money man; he's literate and cultivated. And of course he's been in the art world all his life. His mother, I think, was an opera singer; his father was consul from Sweden; his brother of course is the artist Claes.

HA: Mm-hm. So that's a great period of stability right now for the Museum, although Canaday felt that maybe it was doing some marking of time and didn't think that was necessarily bad.

ES: To mark some time. Well, I would even go further and say that I think that they should have closed.

HA: Well, because of the construction. But I think he meant in the artistic sense—

RC: Plotting its next direction.

HA: In the philosophical sense that they were marking time.

CC: In a way, what *can* they do when they open up like that? I mean, what kind of shows can they have that will stamp them as any different really than other museums? Because other museums are now doing what they used to do.

ES: Well, the collection is unique. It's the greatest collection of 20th century art in the world. So they'll open with a big bang with that. I think they're going to lose a little bit of the bang because of the way it's being done, but that's—I think it was the decision of membership and development [INAUDIBLE: 0:37:12].

HA: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

ES: I don't know; it's very difficult to predict. And the future of art, certainly the changes in the 20th century have been more rapid than of any time in the history of western art.

HA: In this phase of our work, we're talking to as many people as we can. [Interruption from 0:37:40 to 0:38:00; not transcribed] Two purposes. The first purpose is to get some background information from the people who experienced this, rather than from books or articles or something like that. The second purpose is to try and figure out who should be in the film, because that's something we don't know the answer to until we talk to the people involved.

CC: We really just started over the holidays reading, beginning to see people, and we're not even going to make decisions as to who we want to include in the film in terms of the interviews. We look at the film, an hour long, as being—really talking about the Modern. It'll be mostly interviews, and not a lot about modern pictures, and not a lot of photographs and not a lot of film footage.

HA: Not a lot of the Museum itself. Very little of the Museum.

CC: Very little of that. As a matter of fact, it's people talking.

ES: What's the Archives of American Art got?

HA: We were there this morning, and they do have one resource which is of great interest to us. They have many taped interviews of important Museum figures, and they have transcripts of these interviews. Unfortunately, before we can see them, permission has to be given before we can see these or listen to the tapes or even read the transcripts.

ES: They got [James Thrall] Soby; it was here, the tape.

HA: Soby was on tape two hours. I think she said, an hour or two hours.

ES: He would be *wonderful*.

HA: Yes, I'm sure. And it's even conceivable to me that we might even want to use his voice as it was on that tape, possibly.

ES: I love his voice. He wrote marvelously funny letters.

HA: Did he?

ES: Yes, very funny.

HA: He was a really key figure, it seems to me.

ES: Oh yes.

HA: For a very, very long time.

ES: Yes; yes.

HA: And yet, when you read Russell Lynes' book, he doesn't really jump out at you the way that Wheeler does or some of the other figures.

CC: And we felt an affection for him, and it's strange; there's not that many entries. But it seems he was key.

ES: Oh he was, absolutely. And when Alfred was fired, he took over, at Alfred's request, [and] helped hold the painting and sculpture area together because [James Johnson] Sweeney was in there, too.

HA: Yes. I don't understand what role Sweeney played exactly.

ES: I don't either. [Laughter] You can ask him. But I notice that as he gets older he hates having been left out that he was part of the Modern museum at one point. [Laughing]

HA: He wants to be recognized as being part of it.

ES: Yes, he does.

HA: Outside of the people who—the obvious names starting with the index of Russell Lynes' book—are there people that you might know who might not be well known, who we should be talking to, who could tell part of the story or who would be interesting to speak to? We thought—for example, someone this morning suggested that we talk to René's wife.

ES: Sarah.

HA: Yes. I don't know; is she a good person to talk to, do you think?

ES: She's charming. She was never very much involved in the Museum. My husband and I are very fond [of her]. In fact, Sam represented her at one point. But she wasn't anything like as involved as, let's say, Eliza Parkinson.

HA: Well, she's another one, of course, who's on our list. Now, Mrs. Barr is another one who—I feel that there's some problem involving Mrs. Barr but I'm not quite sure what it is. I understand that she's hard of hearing, but I also have understood that she's not terribly willing to talk about her husband in the Museum context. I don't really know. Is that your impression?

ES: Well, she's furious with Bill Rubin.

HA: [Laughing] Why?

ES: And she's not terribly fond of Dick Oldenburg, who I think is rather scared of her. She's mad at Bill Rubin because she thinks that he dismantled the collection that Alfred built. Which is, I think, [pause]. But we find Marga Barr a good fun. And—

HA: Do you think she would talk to us?

ES: I certainly could ask her; also need to recommend it.

HA: And if she did talk to us, would she talk to us frankly? Would she tell us what was—?

ES: Well, [INAUDIBLE: 0:42:33] the other day in the country and she was extremely frank. [Laughter]

RC: We'd heard that she'd be very frank or that she had some grudges.

ES: She's done a lot of work on Alfred's in the Archives and she's given the Museum money for that. And I think she would want very much to be a part of this record.

RC: I think it would be a pleasure for her to remember those days. I mean, what better person, in a way, if she gets into the spirit of the thing.

HA: It's obvious, when anybody begins to do even the least bit of research about the Museum, that Alfred Barr is the heart, is the soul of the Museum, or was the soul of the Museum.

ES: Yes.

HA: And to not be able to capture him in some way—

RC: Well I think we should give it a try.

HA: Yes, oh yes.

ES: Oh you have to.

CC: We're going to try to stretch back as far as Eddie Warburg and Lincoln Kirstein and of course Philip Johnson to speak, to get not only a sense of what it was like in 1929 and what kind of people had the courage to do all this, but also to add—well really, to give a good description of the character of Barr. Because if you can't capture him, if you don't get an inkling of what he was all about in terms of

his personality and his eye—that's why I understand about Lieberman and him—I would hope someone would be able to give us—we're not asking for much, but just little points of insight that really start to describe his personality. Because if people begin to understand what he did, then there would be, I think, great sympathy for him. And then they would understand the Museum in a missionary context, which a lot of people probably don't see it that way; they just see it now as a big bastion with a lot of masterpieces in it, and don't realize that it was the other way around.

RC: And that it was really people, the people who made this and people's ideas and committed to that idea that moved it along.

HA: Let me read to you the list of people that we are going to attempt to contact, and maybe you can give us some comments or add some people to it, if you can think of any. Lieberman, of course, Allen Porter, Bernard Karpel, Richard Koch. We're going to probably talk to Monawee Richards and Frances Keach, who are there and who have evidently been there for a long time. Szarkowski, Akermark, Pearl Moeller. Someone mentioned Mildred Constantine to us, and I don't even know who she is.

ES: She was there for a long time. She was in Architecture and Design. And it might be worth talking to her.

HA: And then we have—Wheeler, we've talked to; Rubin, Dorothy Miller, Lincoln Kirstein. Elodie Courter, is she still alive?

ES: Absolutely. She's married to Bob Osborn. They live in Salisbury, Connecticut.

HA: Right, well, okay, that's somebody. Arthur Drexler, of course, Sweeney, Victor D'Amico, Warburg. William Burden we were thinking of; I don't know whether he'd—

ES: He's just written a book, you know, called *Peggy and I*.

HA: *Peggy and I*?

ES: That's what it's called, Peggy [INAUDIBLE: 0:45:38]. There was a full-page ad in the *Times* last Sunday. It's published by a press in Vermont; I'd never heard of it. [William] Paley you're talking to, I assume.

HA: Yes, Paley. Eliza Parkinson, Mary Sands Thompson. She was one of the secretaries in the early thirties. Jimmy Ernst. Russell Lynes; we've had people say two different things to us about Russell Lynes, one of which is, everything he knows is in the book, so why talk to him. Another one is, wait a second, he could tell you a lot about the people he interviewed and has a lot to say.

ES: Well, I'd talk to him. Do you know him?

HA: No.

ES: Oh, he's [INAUDIBLE: 0:46:22].

HA: Then we asked about some people who are there right now, and somebody said Kynaston McShine, who they said would be difficult to talk to but nonetheless would be good.

ES: Very shy.

HA: Shy. John Elderfield.

ES: John Elderfield; yes.

HA: And of course Riva Castleman, Jean Volkmer; Stewart Johnson we've talked to a little bit. Barbara London, is it?

ES: Mm-hm.

CC: Yes, I know her.

HA: Then also we were recommended to speak to Martin Segal, Beth Straus, Mrs. Alfred Stern.

ES: Joanne Stern, by all means, yes.

HA: Let me write down her first name. This is practically—it's only a third of New York. [Laughter] Philip Johnson, David Rockefeller, William Paley, Blanchette [Rockefeller]. Beaumont Newhall, who I understand is in New Mexico, but—and then another, Pierre Matisse, Sidney Janis.

CC: Outside people who might—

ES: Sidney Janis, by all means. Very, very important; key. He was on the first Advisory Committee, in the thirties. And—

CC: I interviewed him for a film I did on Franz Kline; he's very good. He's very sharp.

ES: Yes, he was on a panel the other day, and he's obviously getting old; I'd get to him right away if I were you.

CC: Yes, no, he speaks very well.

HA: We have that problem with everybody. A lot of people, when we first—

CC: That's why occasionally we ask, "Are they alive?"

HA: Are they still alive; yes. Someone said we should talk to Ada Louise Huxtable. Emilio Ambasz; does that name mean anything to you?

ES: Oh yes. Emilio was Curator in the Architecture and Design Department. He's from Argentina. Now he's president of the Architecture League, and I see him there if I'm on that board. And he's now on Arthur Drexler's Committee.

RC: Does he speak with a thick accent?

ES: So bad, and it gets worse and worse and worse. I think it's like a mask.

HA: That could be a problem for us.

RC: Yes, that's what I remember. He's wonderful but—

CC: Who in this list—? Do you see people who—? Out of Lincoln Kirstein, Warburg, Johnson, do you think the three of them speaking in a sense together, or back and forth, could they create an ambience of the late twenties, telling that story? Or do you think it would be very slanted? What we're almost looking for is, if we can't get it from the subjects themselves—that's why it's so interesting to speak to you, because you were involved but you're not constantly in the public eye, so you can talk about it from almost a dispassionate point of view. You were there, you were an observer. And I'm almost asking this question, for instance, about the Rockefellers, and it's so key, and if nobody says what we would like to have said about them, or bring them up in the way of, look at what they've done, but also the problems of it all, and just to give a good portrait of them. Because if they don't say it themselves, then we're stuck with people who won't say things like that they went that extra mile, [and] that they had the courage to do that sort of thing. And then Nelson—really, the whole family stuck out for it.

ES: Yes, well, Nelson, of course, in particular, and now Blanchette is sort of carrying on the mantle of her mother-in-law.

CC: Right, and David Rockefeller. It's just that whether or not *they* would say that. Maybe William Paley would say that about them. I mean, who's to say?

ES: I don't know. [Laughter]

CC: That's why we're seeing—we're fishing for various—

HA: Did William Paley get along well with the Rockefellers?

ES: I never knew of any real—

HA: No open strife?

ES: No, no, no. I think he was probably closer to Jock Whitney. And [INAUDIBLE: 0:50:09].

HA: But their story is so important to the story of the Museum; I mean, those two stories are linked in a way, it seems to me: the Rockefellers' influence on the Museum in its way is almost as important as the Barr influence on the Museum.

ES: Oh yes, but that's—somebody you might want to talk to is Tom Braden.

HA: Tom Braden?

ES: Yes.

CC: The columnist?

ES: Yes. He knew Nelson well, and he knew Mrs. Rockefeller and he thought she was wonderful. And he was Secretary of the Museum. In fact, Tom hired me.

CC: Tom Braden, the columnist.

RC: Washington?

ES: Yes.

CC: Well, that's very good.

HA: A very good suggestion. That's precisely the thing that we're looking for.

CC: Someone who was there and who can speak well.

HA: I just have a couple more names.

CC: What about a later period? Let's say, the sixties with the strike and that sort of thing, the late sixties, that changed the Museum when it tried to go very republican and—is there anyone?

RC: Yes, who would be a spokesperson at that time?

CC: John Canaday, we spoke to him and there are a few little nuggets, but the fact that—and though he was in an adversarial role—

ES: It could be John Russell. For one thing, John knew Alfred Barr.

HA: John Russell?

ES: Yes. He almost did a book on Alfred, [and] then I think he decided he couldn't handle more.

HA: John Russell, as I recall, I talked to him once and as I remember, he has a very bad stuttering problem, doesn't he?

ES: But you could still interview him, can't you?

HA: Just like this, but not with a camera.

CC: What about on film?

ES: What about Rosamond?

HA: Rosamond?

ES: His wife, Rosamond Bernier.

RC: Oh, sure; she's [INAUDIBLE: 0:52:02].

ES: She's a professional speaker.

HA: I didn't even know that was his wife.

ES: She knew Marga, certainly, and Alfred, not nearly as well as John did. And she didn't know John then. And they knew each other separately. John Russell used to stay at the Barr's when he came over when he was still working for the *London Times*.

RC: What about somebody else who is more contemporary, though, who could give the focus as of the sixties? And there is one last question; I want you to describe your generation, because we haven't gotten anyone.

CC: It's tough to ask this question like who says who describes the sixties, whoever this lucky person is. [Laughing]

ES: Everything happened three years ago for one thing. [Laughing]

RC: I meant more or less from after the War. Somebody like Russell would be great.

CC: Let's put it this way. If you were to be interviewed on film for a half hour or whatever, which areas would you be most—? And you know the nature of this sort of film we're trying to make. Where do you think you'd be able to speak about best? Or what would you *want* to speak about? Alfred, or—?

ES: Anything. [Laughter]

CC: Because really, what you said about Alfred was really wonderful, and that sort of thing, if somebody doesn't say that, then it becomes—

ES: Oh, I would be the genitor of Al.

CC: He was the Director and you don't get the feeling—

RC: What's so wonderful, besides working at the Museum, here's somebody who got the magic info, [and] was touched by what they were doing.

HA: Not only that, you had a thousand cheap lunches with him. [Laughter] I'm not going to forget that phrase so easily. [Laughter] You learn an awful lot about a person—

ES: It would be a sin to pay much for lunch.

HA: I understand; there's some part of me that feels that way, too. It's the part that isn't on the expense account. [Laughter] At any rate—

ES: Well we didn't have expense accounts then. There are a few other people.

CC: We were just saying to ourselves—[we were] about to tell you, and when you went out of the room, we said to ourselves, it may be that we're not asking you tough enough questions. [Laughter] We've got to do a little bit more homework.

HA: We also have on our list Wilder Green and Porter McCray.

ES: Yes, by all means. Porter was really in the Museum a long time in the traveling exhibition program. A very nice guy, and then went to work for the Jay Rockefeller fund.

HA: Right. I think that's all we have on our list at the moment.

CC: It's quite a long list.

RC: It's a long list.

HA: Those 3,624 people; that's it. [Laughing]

CC: What do you think of someone like Monroe Wheeler, for instance? Was he always there? Was he there when you first came in, too?

ES: Oh yes, very much so.

CC: Was he floating or was he quite powerful at that time?

ES: Well, let's see, there was—if you met Barr and you met d'Harnoncourt, you met Monroe; these three people.

HA: He was one of the troika?

ES: Yes, *that* troika.

HA: Yes, that troika.

ES: Yes, he was indeed. And he was in charge of exhibitions and books, which is a very powerful position.

HA: [Laughing] I'd say.

ES: Alfred was in charge of collections, and René was in charge to be the boss of the staff. [Laughter]

CC: Was he an extraordinary talent, would you say?

ES: Monroe? Oh yes, he was extremely good. And as a publisher and in the great museum tradition, he wanted beautiful books.

CC: Set standards, in a way?

ES: Yes. Absolutely. He did a few numbered editions, but books are still taken, I'm sure, very seriously by the Museum.

RC: What I find amazing about the Museum that's prevalent today is that it really was a taste-maker. If you look around, probably in this room there are things that were influenced by the Museum and its design department.

ES: That's true. [Laughter]

CC: Some things that we take for granted now. You see catalogues of exhibitions, hanging pictures that you go from one thing to another and it starts to tell a story.

HA: All the pictures on a million college dormitory walls all over the world.

CC: [Paul] Gauguin reproductions in every—that kind of thing. You don't know that right off.

RC: What we're talking about was just happening. You probably were really involved when it was starting to—

ES: It was early in the fifties, I guess.

CC: Did America catch on quickly, or was it still a hard sell, in a way?

ES: What do you mean?

CC: In terms of picking up modern art. The traveling shows—

ES: I think it was—the American press helped a great deal. Alfred was the first person I ever heard at a museum give enormous credit to the American press. I mean, not just *Vanity Fair*, which is saying a lot from the beginning, but *Vogue*, *Time* magazine. Today *Time* magazine has I think one of the best art critics in the *country*, Robert Hughes. To have that in a general—

CC: In a major national—

ES: Yes, [INAUDIBLE: 0:57:23] what's happened last week, but they're exposed. I have a nice story about Bob; you can't use it in the film, but I think it's nice. I ran into his editor one night at a party, when I was still at the Museum, and he said, "Do you like Hughes?" And I said, "I think he's terrific. I like him as a person and he writes wonderfully; he has a very good art historical background." And he

said, “I’m glad you like him, but there’s one terrible disadvantage; Bob will not review an exhibition unless he’s seen it.” [Laughter]

HA: I hope he was laughing when he said it.

ES: No, he was very serious. I rushed to tell Bob; right? [Laughter]

RC: What were you going to say though? You said, in the fifties—we were talking about the Museum as a taste-maker.

ES: Well, one of the things that I found here [Christie’s], which is the leading seller of contemporary art in the world, most of these pictures are all French [INAUDIBLE: 0:58:27]. And I remember some of them in galleries, and they were not—my god. When I went to Wayne Thibaud’s first exhibition in New York at the Allan Stone Gallery, and his pictures were $300 apiece. He held the world record for $250,000. Jackson Pollock [held] world record [for] $550,000. David Smith. And I knew these people and I knew their works because the Museum was always buying and selling. A lot of stuff we sell has been through the Museum, been in exhibitions at the Museum.

HA: Mm-hm. Does that increase its value, by the way?

ES: Yes.

HA: If you have two paintings by the same artist, the one that’s been through the Museum is worth more?

ES: Sure. [Phone rings at 0:59:12]

RC: Well, in addition to taste-making, the Museum really created the art market. Right? Could you say that?

ES: Yes; it was a combination of a lot of things. The press was very helpful. World War II, for heaven’s sake, when all those artists came flocking to America, it made a *big* difference. There’s a wonderful piece in *Fortune*, which I’ll try to find for you: Is America ready for this influx of European artists?

HA: Really? *Fortune* magazine?

ES: Yes, and can we handle it? We don’t have sidewalk cafes [laughter] and we’re not Paris. [Laughter]

RC: These are the attributes needed to accommodate

HA: When was that, in the late forties?

ES: I think it was ’39. I think I may have it.

RC: But what about that, when the artists came over? Because none of us were here to remember it. Is that when American artists were really saying, hey wait a second, look at us? What about the Museum’s role in that? It was an international museum and they set it out to make it that way.

ES: We helped a lot of artists; the Museum helped a lot of artists into America.

HA: Right.

CC: And I think that’s a very interesting story, too.

ES: The refugees from Germany.

CC: Along with the *Guernica*, along came André Masson.

ES: That’s right, that’s right; and all the surrealist group that came over. And of course Ernst should know about a lot of that. Peggy Guggenheim and—

CC: So that someone like Dorothy Miller worked hand in hand, in a sense, in terms of—she was finding new things and at the same time she’d be rubbing elbows with [Sidney] Janis or Leo Castelli.

ES: Absolutely.

CC: And they were all on the hunt.

ES: Right.

CC: And she was there, and she was—so the fact that they became very popular and marketable, et cetera, it’s almost—it certainly wasn’t planned that way it just happened to be that they were all after it at the same time.

HA: Well, wait a second. How could they not have realized what was going on? I’m certain that they understood exactly the influence of the Museum on the galleries and the galleries influence on the Museum. It’s obvious.

CC: It’s kind of interesting, really, because they were constantly handling—

ES: They were trying, sure.

RC: They realized that they were making—they were creating what was a risky business of what is good, what is modern.

ES: Not everybody survived. Alfred's—to use another great quote, "If one picture in 10 survives."

HA: Yes, I remember that quote.

ES: And that was very much the attitude.

CC: And what was fascinating, too; remember the letter we saw? Letter after letter after letter this morning in the Archives was Barr writing to Mrs. Rockefeller sort of describing what he's done on his European trip or on his last buying spree, and what he got for—and he can get this for this price and that for that price—I mean, he really—he's been given $3,000 and he's going to go out and make the best deals possible. He's not a simple aesthete. He really went out, he had to build a collection; he was very conscious.

HA: I get a feeling from his letters that he was a very good bargainer.

CC: Extremely good, yes.

ES: Alfred always said that I had nothing that he wanted. I remember one guy at dinner—

HA: Say that again? I didn't quite hear that.

ES: I was always told I know of no work of art that he wanted. [Laughter] I [Alfred] would have gotten it. [Laughter] One guy at dinner—we were at the Barr's earlier and they had a big [Edvard] Munch. And Alfred said, well that is a fantastic drawing. It's really beautiful. I don't know how you could stand to live with it though; it's just so tough and so powerful. How could you bear that in your sitting room? [Laughter]

HA: It belongs on a museum wall.

ES: That's right.

HA: I see. His self-interest wasn't obvious at that time?

ES: [INAUDIBLE: 1:02:55].

RC: They were flattered.

HA: There are some people, though, who look at the people who founded the Museum and at the art that they were interested in, and at the value it had at that moment, and now see the value of that same art today, and make a connection of all of those events and feel that the Museum in a certain way was intended to popularize [tape break from 1:03:20 to 1:03:24]

ES: Not everybody made it. There were fine artists that she [Dorothy Miller] showed [that] you never heard of. They were exhibited along—for [each] Frank Stella, you haven't heard of 10 others.

HA: Right.

ES: And not everybody—the one in 10 principle is—

HA: That really helped.

ES: Yes.

HA: On the other hand, to take this with a totally different tack, there's that wonderful issue of *ArtNews* magazine which you know about; the one that celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Museum.

ES: Yes.

HA: And the part of that that struck me the most was the survey of museum directors all over the country: If you could take one thing from The Museum of Modern Art, what would you take? And more than half of them wanted Alfred Barr's eyes. [Laughter] Now that's very striking. And I see that it looks—retrospectively, it seems that he was able to spot each important artist; he knew the value before almost anybody else did. Well, yes, maybe in Europe, but before anybody else in America knew the value, he knew the value of this artist or of this movement or of this painting. Is it that he knew the value or is it that his choice of it made it have that value?

ES: It was both. I think Alfred had a great discriminating eye. It's almost impossible to define what is quality in a work of art. But he did, for example, bring in the first Jasper Johns into the Museum.

HA: Right.

ES: And he argued very hard for those. He didn't get them all but he got some, and he won them very cheap. He was right on that one. I've also [INAUDIBLE: 1:04:57] artists whose names I have since forgotten. It might have been a good picture. There was one artist; [a] small, Philadelphia artist, small paintings on wood of banners. And Alfred thought they had a marvelous kind of power; they were so small but you felt when you looked at them that they were huge banners flying in the wind. And he bought one for the collection, a couple hundred dollars. About three months later, I had a clipping, when we cut up the papers, [and] there was the artist on a ladder and scaffolding making an enormous one. [Laughing] I've never heard of him since. I don't think anybody has.

HA: Well, it might be—now, you said that there are some artists that Alfred argued for and no one bought it, and they were never heard from again. But it may have been if the painting had been bought, if his argument had been accepted, that maybe they would be famous today, the same artists.

ES: It's possible. I've always wondered about *Christina's World*. That was not Alfred's first choice; it was a *different* picture that he wanted to buy, a [Andrew] Wyeth, then somebody else bought it and he couldn't get it. And I've always wondered, if you could replay that whole part of history, would the other picture have become as famous as *Christina's World*? Now we reproduced *Christina's World* by the thousands, and sold those reproductions, and it was in the books, it was on view; so it was exposed. And I always felt—and I know from my predecessor in the press office that we plant photographs free and by the carload. Any publication that wanted it, anything from the painting collection, they could have it. So we did our best to keep spreading the word. So if it was in the collection it had a much better chance of exposure.

HA: Yes, automatically.

ES: When Bates Lowry became Director, he had written a book, a history of art, and it turned out that most of the reproductions were from the Museum collection; that's how we do at the Museum; look at our Library. [HA laughs] We really do.

HA: That's what he was doing. Oh, *that's* what he was doing! [Laughter] I see.

ES: He's running a museum in Washington.

HA: What museum is he running?

ES: I forget what it's called [National Building Museum]; architectural.

HA: Hightower is down at the South Street Seaport Museum.

ES: Yes, in New York.

HA: That's certainly a different chair than he was occupying.

ES: I guess it's probably ideal for him.

HA: Uh-huh. Well, are there any other people that we haven't thought of, who spring to your mind, that we should be talking to?

ES: [Pause]

CC: Or even any other curator outside of Rubin or Lieberman who could describe for us Barr's vision.

RC: Or any outsider. Somebody who may have experienced the Museum and is not formally in the art world [because] we need some outside perspective.

CC: Or an Englishman, or a French, or maybe a collector, an English or an Italian collector.

HA: At this stage our sights are as broad as possible.

CC: [Laughing] We might get Panza di Biumo to come over and tell us about his first walkthrough. Actually, Germany was very influenced, probably.

RC: Often times, we're always intrigued but [INAUDIBLE: 1:08:48] must admit, The Museum of Modern Art, the art center, moved; it's really big in New York.

HA: Yes, so, on the other hand, you could say that it isn't the center of art that moved from Paris to New York, it was the center of European art that moved from Paris to New York.

CC: Interesting. The rest of the United States is a whole other thing. I mean, look at the collection; a good part of the permanent collection, what? 50 percent must be European. That's really not only an acknowledgement of the great art of the 20th century; it's not all—[laughing] Canaday was saying the Abstract Expressionists might as well have been European, too. And some of them were born there, but—

ES: John never liked New York.

RC: He tried to warn us to not say anything bad about Texas, thank you very much. [Laughter]

HA: In fact, that was the first sentence out of his mantra.

RC: He won't hear anything bad about it.

CC: Any other—? Well, Henry McBride was too early, but he had written some very nice things about the Museum.

RC: Maybe he had some associate—

CC: Any journalists who wrote for—?

RC: Besides Braden.

CC: Braden is good, though.

HA: Braden is excellent.

CC: He could also know all the other characters, too, which is interesting.

ES: We had very, very, very intense experiences at the Museum. [Laughter] [Braden had a] long-standing relationship with Nelson.

CC: That's good.

HA: Somebody has to talk about Nelson, and if Braden can do it, that's terrific. What kind of a talker is Braden? I don't know what he looks like.

ES: Very good. He has a regular television show on national.

HA: Instead of pressing you for answers—

ES: Johnny Myers might be good to talk to.

HA: Who?

ES: Johnny Myers.

HA: Johnny Myers. Who is that?

ES: He ran a gallery and was very close to all the Museum people: Dorothy and Alfred and—

RC: Is he in New York now?

ES: Yes, he stays with Becky Reis when he's in New York, Bernard Reis's widow.

HA: Rather than pressing you to try and come up with names right now, maybe you could just kind of let the idea percolate in your mind and maybe we could talk to you and call you in a week or 10 days or so and see if anyone else has occurred to you. Because we feel that it may be the people who aren't immediately obvious who could really do something special for the film. Because the obvious ones—some of the obvious ones, their responses are just as obvious as the people.

ES: Yes.

HA: We know what they're going to say, and there's nothing really surprising that's going to come from them, or maybe nothing controversial either that's going to come from them., nothing dramatic. And we're seeking as much drama as we can find, because if we're going to have a lot of people talking, they'd better be talking about something that's exciting.

CC: Put it this way: you could tell the story with a narrator, an omniscient voice, and it would be the most boring thing and just very, very one-sided. But if seven, eight, 15 people—the telling of the story, well edited, becomes very interesting and controversial. Because some people are going to feel that it's gone too far and should be back to being a museum; other people are stretching it this way. And if that story is told from the very beginning, and then someone like a Philip

Johnson keeps reappearing, from the earliest day and then he's there now, it becomes quite interesting; it really feels like a living institution.

HA: The continuity.

CC: It would be a good piece of work—that continuity would be tough.

HA: This is a biography in the fullest sense, as if the Museum were—

CC: Like a chorus of people talking about somebody, witness to—

HA: You saw *Reds*, didn't you? Remember the people—?

ES: I didn't see it.

HA: Oh, you didn't see it. Okay, well, there were people that were—Henry Miller was interviewed in that, in and amongst the historical footage, suddenly there would be this interview of a person who lived that moment. And he'd just say a few—

CC: Who knew John Reed or Louise Bryant—

HA: That's right, and had very pointed words about it.

CC: And they talk about them. Somebody would come up and say, "Well, she was naïve. You had to know her to know how naïve she really was. She was stupid but she loved it. She loved the cause." And then someone else would come on very seriously and talk about the cause and how much it meant to them and how it dissolved. And it was very moving, because you were hearing it from people.

ES: You must be frustrated by the people that you can't get.

RC: Well, sure.

ES: I mean—

HA: All you can do is shrug your shoulders.

CC: If we had Barr, we'd probably just run the camera for 30 minutes.

HA: That's right.

ES: Oh, I know; Lewis Freedman.

HA: Lewis Freedman; who's that?

ES: He's a television producer. He worked for Public Broadcasting in Washington, and now he's back in New York. He lives on Jane Street. And he interviewed Alfred, did a very good thing on—when he did, on PBS, his public service programs which Lewis did for some time. He did a marvelous interview with Alfred on the *Guernica*.

HA: I'd like to find that piece of film.

RC: Yes, that would be wonderful.

ES: I think the Museum has that.

HA: You don't think the Museum has that? You do.

RC: We're supposed to have a screening to see all that [INAUDIBLE: 1:14:15].

ES: Here's my story, running into Alfred and Marga at the Met, an exhibition of Italian drawings, and the place was just empty. And Lewis said, "What a shame; there's nobody here; it's so beautiful." And Alfred said, "They're all down at my place." [Laughter]

HA: [Laughing] They're all down at my place. He was probably right, too!

ES: Sure. But Lewis could give you—he never worked in a museum but he's interested in the arts and he's followed it.

HA: Uh-huh; okay; that sounds like a goodie. Did Barr have much of a sense of humor? All of the pictures I've seen of him—I see your eyes open wide—he must have had quite a sense of humor.

ES: Oh yes, he was really very funny; lots of jokes. And god, he loved gossip.

RC: Doesn't everybody in the art world? Isn't that what it thrives on?

ES: Oh sure, but Alfred and I would have tea almost every afternoon at 5:30, and he would say, "Well now tell me some gossip." [Laughter]

RC: You probably were in a prime position, being in Public Information.

HA: The photographs that we've seen of him, he looks so austere and so—

CC: He almost looks perpetually adolescent, though, I always thought. He looks very inquisitive all the time, very, very curious. In that one photograph with him much older looking at that piece of sculpture [*Gibraltar*], it's wonderful, really.

HA: Oh yes, that's—

ES: With the [Alexander] Calder? Yes, that's Victoria [Barr]'s favorite picture.

HA: Well, it's a wonderful photograph and we've talked from time to time of ending the film with it. To find maybe somebody looking at that sculpture right now, maybe a 10-year-old kid.

CC: Do they still have that piece?

ES: In the collection.

CC: Maybe other people would be looking at it.

HA: And then we'd kind of fade or dissolve to Barr looking at that; we like that great old picture of him.

ES: It'd be lovely.

CC: Because in a way it'll be—who's to say, it's very early, but I'm sure it'll be, in some sense, a real tribute to Barr and certainly his name will be known much more than it might have been before this.

HA: It's quite apparent to us that this man changed our view of art; he had had a greater influence than any other man of the 20th century, and nobody ever heard of this man.

CC: A lot of people don't know him.

HA: People have never heard of him, never heard of him, literally. It's stunning. Among people who love art, yes, but there are people who are appreciating his influence day after day who don't know.

ES: That's true.

CC: People reaping the benefits of what he did and they really don't know about him; they know about the institution.

HA: I hope in some measure that this film will help correct that.

RC: [INAUDIBLE: 1:17:04] who are still obviously alive [INAUDIBLE: 1:17:08] be recognized and so we can appreciate your [INAUDIBLE: 1:17:13] everybody else who lives here. Because people had to support it [INAUDIBLE: 1:17:18] a long voice and he was obviously right about something people recognized [INAUDIBLE: 1:17:22].

ES: Intense loyalty.

HA: Who?

ES: Intense loyalty.

HA: Intense loyalty.

CC: Was Johnson good friends of his?

ES: Yes, and then they had a break.

CC: They had a break?

RC: And what was that? Especially when people share a vision, then you wonder what.

ES: Well, it had to do really with the future of the Museum and Alfred, whether he should retire or not.

RC: And Johnson thought yes he should?

ES: Yes.

CC: So Johnson might be good on the earlier years but—

HA: Well, he'll have something to say about that, too.

CC: I hope so.

ES: Are you kidding? [INAUDIBLE: 1:18:00] designed it, the new Museum.

CC: He wanted to do the new—?

ES: Yes, he wanted the [Cesar] Pelli job.

CC: It's surprising why they wouldn't give it to him. I mean, he was there, practically capable of doing, or at least suggesting, who should design the first one, when

the first modification occurred, but then they gave it to [Phillip L.] Goodwin and [Edward Durell] Stone, who was known to the Rockefellers.

HA: They gave it to Stone; Stone is the one who—

CC: Stone really did that.

RC: [INAUDIBLE: 1:18:30].

ES: And then Philip did the next one.

HA: That's right.

ES: And that was supposed to be the first step in a two-phase program. He was going to do an East Wing. He was going to put a layer through the West Wing. And of course he did the Garden.

CC: But what happened? Wasn't he in a perfect position to do this?

HA: Why wasn't he picked to do this most recent [expansion]?

CC: In the perfect position to—?

ES: I think that there was a feeling of our board that he'd be too expensive.

HA: Too expensive?! Of all things.

CC: God, he must have tore his hair out after that! It's one thing to lose a commission for AT&T building or whatever, but to lose an institution you helped create; that's rough.

ES: And he's very, very, very hurt.

CC: He must be.

RC: He's still on the Board?

HA: That would be something for us to keep in mind.

ES: He's less and less active.

CC: [Laughing] Yes, I guess so.

HA: [Laughing] Now I understand why.

CC: What does he think of Drexler, though? Is he close with Drexler?

ES: No. No one ever was.

CC: This will be interesting, then. So we're going to get some fiery commentary from—

ES: I would think so.

HA: That's alright. If Philip Johnson says to us that it's lost its original impetus, it doesn't have the vision that we once had in those old days—

CC: Then we'll let Arthur pick up the ball.

RC: [INAUDIBLE: 1:19:50].

ES: I would say, yes.

HA: He could say something like that, I suppose.

CC: I'd be very curious, actually.

ES: He's supposed to have said he wants an apartment in the new tower [laughter] because it has the best view in New York: you can see the Seagram Building, you can see the AT&T Building.[2] [Laughter]

CC: It is; it's a terrific view of the AT&T building.

RC: That'd be great. Like getting up and looking in a mirror.

HA: [Laughing] His reason is very funny. He just wants someplace to stand so he can see those buildings. He's saying that it's the only decent function of that building is that it gives a good view of his [buildings]. Well, I'm kind of disappointed myself in the Museum Tower. I think it's a little bland, I guess, my feeling. What do I know, but that's just my reaction to it.

ES: I just hope they sell the apartments.

RC: [INAUDIBLE: 1:20:40]. I bet Philip Johnson [INAUDIBLE: 1:20:47] and all the Europeans.

HA: Eventually it'll sell. How many empty buildings are there in New York?

[2] Johnson designed both and did take an apartment in the Tower, staying there weekdays until his death.

CC: Well, but there are a number of empty apartments that are selling for $800,000. We'll see; it might catch on. Can't have another fire though.

ES: No. I'll ask my husband who he thinks—

RC: You've given us great suggestions and lots of your time. I have one last thing to do. If you'll bear with me, this is for our—just our visual—

CC: Our archives.

RC: Our archive that we're starting.

HA: So the people who weren't in this room know who we interviewed.

END OF INTERVIEW at 1:21:24