DAVID HOFFMAN MOMA HISTORY INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH:	**IVAN CHERMAYEFF (IC)**
INTERVIEWERS:	**RUTH CUMMINGS (RC); CARL COLBY (CC)**
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IC: They wasted a lot, removed but—well, you've got a prodigy of characters, Monroe Wheeler and—

RC: There are people. Exactly.

CC: Philip Johnson.

RC: Elizabeth Shaw, Lincoln Kirstein, Eddie Warburg. And we really have been pleased that with piecing all these people's anecdotes and remembrances together, we can evoke the time. That's what's quite exciting, because that was the concept—to see if this would be possible through reminiscences, to give a feeling for this nostalgia, this really romantic and special time when all of these forces and personalities came together and made something great.

CC: We can't very well celebrate the collection in an hour. And when we do use pictures—

IC: No. You don't want to use them in anything except at almost subliminal advertising levels.

CC: We thought we would—

RC: Exactly. Right, just if somebody refers to something.

IC: Just to remind you of [Pablo] Picasso.

RC: That's right.

IC: Baboons made of autos and stuff like that.

CC: Stuff like, for instance, we talked to Sidney Janis, and he came up with a couple of interesting stories about he and [Alfred] Barr chasing after a picture, and that

picture ending up being [Henri] Matisse's *The Dance*. And to punctuate a story with a picture, to make an emotional point rather than an aesthetic point with it, can mean something. We saw your resident Will Rogers over there, John Szarkowski.

IC: Yes.

CC: He was wonderful about—

IC: Yes. He wasn't around either [INAUDIBLE: 0:01:21] and he hasn't been there terribly long. But he can make it up so that it sounds like he was there. [Laughs]

RC: That's right; a very entertaining person.

CC: And he can get you excited. He had us jumping out of our chairs to look at these [Eugéne] Atgets, and look at how this is the negative image of that.

RC: Some people actually said that he embodies—when we're asking other staff members who's around that has Barr's spirit somewhat, and his name came up as embodying some of the—

IC: Barr was a pretty silent traveler compared—he was an active mind and all that; he had a great [INAUDIBLE: 0:01:55]. I wouldn't say that; I mean except for the insane person that mentioned that they were alike; he's probably the only one on earth.

CC: Well he probably meant—

RC: More in the spirit of what he's trying to do in his mission.

CC: But they're very different. If one got it—John is like an Elmer Gantry compared to the tough Presbyterian that Barr must have been.

IC: That's probably a very good idea. That's when all the life of it was—

CC: And then we want to burst it open, because if you start with the pyramid, very small like that, and tell the story of this unlikely odd couple, Mrs. [Abby Aldrich] Rockefeller and Alfred Barr and the attendant cast, then as it begins to go, and as really the battle is waged and won, then as even—we just got finished talking to Mrs. [Elizabeth] Straus, she said—and Mrs. [Blanchette] Rockefeller, we saw her—what do you do then? You're successful but then you become cautious,

perhaps, or you can become a little too engrained, you become a little too elitist. How do you get out of that quandary? When you've gained the success, then what do you do if everyone is looking to you for the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval and the imprimatur of the Museum begins to mean almost everything? It's a tough spot to be in. And then of course, with the changing physical plant, dramatically, like it's doing, and the Tower and all these other things, what happens next? And that's when we want to bring in—I wouldn't say controversy for the sake of it, but there are going to be conflicting opinions, ideologies, and they're not going be personality clashes. We're not interested that Bill Rubin doesn't like Bill Lieberman and that sort of thing. That can be left to those who can read between the lines. But if there are ideological conflicts or direct visions that are conflicting, then that's very healthy. God knows, you could come up with some people who hate the place and Lucy LeFarge has probably got her axe to grind, and other people are—but just to give you—some people don't want to know and you probably do want to know the tone of it, what we're trying to do.

IC: Sure. Well, it's the only way I can email [INAUDIBLE: 0:04:15].

RC: The Trustees, as we've understood from others, they're comfortable allowing the curatorial staff to give the directions, and you support that. But within that body of thoughts and ideas, there are diverse points of view. So we're trying to get a feeling of that from the Trustees who are really in the seats of power.

CC: Do you see an inertia now?

IC: Well, I wouldn't say inertia. I have a somewhat removed attitude, I suppose, because I'm one of the few people that's a working stiff. I'm a professional designer, and you know, there are few now, but that's been relatively recent. And Ed Barnes is an architect, and Gordon Bunshaft is really a collector and retired now, and Philip Johnson, of course. And at last, the professional people who are deeply involved in design matters, and like the Museum, they're all clapping about each other and all that too, and other colleagues outside and so on, all of which is irrelevant—but there's, I think, a slightly different attitude of someone who's very involved in these matters in a firsthand kind of way. It makes you more knowledgeable, in a certain sense. Therefore, that makes committees at that museum work very well, which are filled not necessarily with

trustees and the key kind of people who are part of the trustee and management group. But you end up without some other professionals who really know about drawing or know about film or know about industrial design products, or whatever it may be.

CC: Do you like the fact that there's—?

IC: Well it ends up being a terribly different kind of place that—well, let me back up my own feeling that's always been about the Museum is that its mission hasn't changed as radically as the Museum has changed and it must. Otherwise, it just becomes, as you say, an elitist collection of factions which deal with each other and have a hard time dealing with the very young and the very fresh comfortably.

CC: As an institution it's very—it's supposed to be modern, but is it—?

IC: The shift becomes not one of its exposure to an audience of a new kind of way of looking at whatever, art and design and all those things it's supposed to be, which is really the mission that Alfred Barr and a lot of people had—was to really feel that they were a part of the 20th century and this is what's happening, and it's exciting, and it's worth bringing out into the daylight.

CC: Do you think there's a backing off now of that, or less zealotry?

IC: No, I just don't think it's a useful role to the degree of having a staff of five or six hundred people, which is too many to function. There isn't quite that much good stuff to warrant all this.

CC: So in a way it's like this is 1945 and the troops have won and it's in Europe and maybe pull back a little bit now and get out of Germany?

RC: Celebrate what they have instead of trying to—

IC: No, I wouldn't say any of those things. I think it's not a matter of celebrating what you have; I think it's a matter of shifting over from being a sort of cutting edge [institution] of the avant-garde to a position of major responsibility in terms of education in the broadest sense on all of these subjects, which are now under this big umbrella called the Museum. So that it can really be dealt with by people outside of New York and who can afford to come to New York [which] differs very often in participating—

CC: You say the educational role and the study centers.

IC: Yes, which means the relationship to the government, who are lamentably poor, as compared to other countries about their relationship to artists and art. And I think there are dozens of places that are just so much more sophisticated about it than the United States. I think that's one of the roles that The Museum of Modern Art takes because of its, as you pointed out, motherhood and religious, elitist tones that it has. It's powerful. [Loud noise then tape break at 0:10:10] So I think that wherever it has to go to make it popular, [it should] make all that kind of activity central to the reason to be there and not to be in the business of developing things that make money like the Metropolitan's five-story store and all that, so that the whole thing gets off on tracks that I—

CC: Well somebody, I won't say who, but, well it was Lawrence Alloway who said that the Museum always seemed to have a propensity for—sure it went out and got the great Matisse or the great this or that, but when it gets one thing that's terrific, it then reproduces the hell out of it and sells a million of them. It's like getting into the T-shirt business. Really; you see those cards in the gift shop and—it is popularizing it, but I see what you're saying; it doesn't—

IC: I don't mind the popularization part, either. I just don't like [it] myself, which is not to say that you don't have to do some of that if you insist on having a staff of X-hundred people that have all got to be paid, and they're all badly paid, basically. And they're always complaining—as you no doubt heard, that people feel exploited to a certain extent. Yes, it's a free country and they don't have to do it; it's not a totally valid argument on their part, but, you know, there's truth in all that stuff. But if you're going to have this place, it's got to be justified by not necessarily just filling out rooms and not just bringing things out onto the walls that have been in storage because there aren't enough walls for the collection. That's a legitimate argument; to have 90 percent of your stuff hidden away is not very nice; it's not very sensible. But on the other hand, when you end up with a bureaucracy in order to deal with it—an analogy is, if you run into a little town, Memphis or someplace out there, and there are a whole lot of people who are interested in opera, certainly a complicated and expensive and esoteric form. It's sort of healthier and better when they take over a firehouse and somehow insist on doing it in the presence that's felt and then filled with the hundred seats up

and the thing is alive and part of it, as opposed to having to, by some fluke and some company that makes silicon chips in there who builds them an opera house. There's really, kind of, not that wealth in Memphis to have a whole opera house. And yet, that kind of role that the Museum had, it was a—they were there in the [beginning saying] you've got to come and see it, and they'd just painted it white, and there were probably pipes showing. There wasn't any marble on the floor, and there wasn't all this pieces of paper and all the snotty antiphony. They really wanted you to come then. It was kind of...

CC: Well it starts to lose its proselytizing role.

IC: Yes.

CC: It loses that sort of camp meeting feeling that it seemed it must have had. It was a club and it was a really—everyone wanted to be a member, and there was a reason to go.

IC: Well, but anything this big and this powerful naturally has a whole lot of people who do nothing but talk about art and actually have very little feeling for it.

CC: We were a little bit surprised with some of the curatorial people for instance. I mean, they're all very well educated; they all have graduate degrees and all that. But what's interesting is, it seemed like, you look at them, and of course they never would have gotten the job unless they were supremely qualified in an academic way. Look back to the early days in the thirties and none of those people had any qualifications really per se [laughing], except for Alfred, and Paul Sachs, of course. But he brought people in like Beaumont Newhall, [who] told a great story that he came in and I think he thought he was going to be working in the library, and Alfred said, well, you put on a show. And he says, well, of what? And [Alfred] says, well, why don't you do photography; what would you like to do? And Beaumont said, well how about history of photography? [*Photography 1839–1937*] [Laughing] And Barr kind of looked at him twice and said okay, I think you'd better go to Europe for that show. [Laughing] Well, here's Beaumont Newhall, he barely had enough money to get downtown. Suddenly he's out in Europe and he puts on a show that, what, 50 years later the book is still in print. I mean that's pretty incredible.

IC: Yes.

CC: But that feeling, I think is really...

RC: Well as opposed to when we were speaking with Jack Limpert who said, look, we don't compete with the other museums, we compete with Bloomingdales and hit Broadway plays.

IC: Yes; that's my point. It's certainly not the only point to make, but it's a difficulty about the place in terms of where it's going.

RC: Given that those are realities, the financial responsibility, and that you wouldn't—I don't know, now with this new building and everything, I don't know how they would cut back the staff. But where would you see it going, then?

IC: It's a disease and everybody has it in one form or another. You start out, you come and you get an assistant's job in the place you want to be, and you take it, and then you live on somebody else's couch with three other girls or whatever the hell it is. You thought pretty soon you could end up with a reasonable livelihood in New York, and to go even a quarter of the way back is tantamount to having your arm cut off.

CC: Yes; it's hard to go back and take those risks.

IC: You can't; you can't do it. Nobody will do it except very, very tough minded, usually crazy in the sense of malign people who say they're not going to live in New York and they move to Vermont and they go [INAUDIBLE: 0:16:43] paid or whatever.

CC: Once you start on a certain road, it's very tough. You get used to the life.

IC: They're not going to tear down any of those rooms or close them off because there's not enough decent art to fill them. [Laughing] They've got to be filled!

CC: I've heard among the Trustees—I don't know who mentioned it, but, the idea had been floated that okay now they have a brand new building, but maybe an answer to it would be to have the building and celebrate the collections, and particularly by department, each one will now really be able to show the best of and all that. But then maybe have an annex somewhere that really shows the more contemporary stuff.

RC: Similar to what the Whitney does [and] have branch museums.

CC: Maybe the fact that it won't ruffle Bill Rubin's feathers too much if it's not in the main building. Because now, those Projects are there, but they're in a corridor, they're in a small little place, and they're kind of—

IC: Oh I don't know about that.

CC: No?

IC: No.

CC: Should it have a separate building, or should it be?

IC: No, I think it's enough with the—more real estate? Jesus. No thanks.

CC: Not that they need it, but maybe—

IC: No; I think you've got to have—you've got to keep it alive, otherwise for sure you're not going to have the best people around to run it unless there's something to apply some thought and energy to. And whether you argue or don't argue and say that it's all lousy and it now stinks and all that, you won't even be able to say that, and then all the juices will pour into the sand very quickly.

RC: So if you see the Museum as in kind of a resting position as it gathers its forces together to be the big new place, when it launches off, is there a new direction? Or will there be more of an emphasis on—?

IC: I don't think it will necessarily evolve, but I mean, what we're talking about is really—is that will The Museum of Modern Art years from now be a really important force for young people thinking of being artists? Or is it just—I mean, it's always going to be a [INAUDIBLE: 0:19:04] except for the good stuff which gets continuously re-evaluated. It's been looked at differently by different generations, and all that part won't go away. But whether it's really part of the forces of new business, it's also—it is a question as to whether or not that has to be the role of the Museum any more. [INAUDIBLE: 0:19:32] the cutting edge of actually purchasing all kinds of new things and the tremendous volumes of material should then be brought in. And as Alfred Barr, I'm sure, would have said, one in 50 will be worthwhile another decade later, that we can only use judgment now; we can't waste all of the opportunities. Well, certainly people out

there—there are hundreds of artists in New York, thousands more, [and] I don't know how many hundreds of galleries, and very good artists can't [all] have galleries. And there are all kinds of people who are better than the people in the galleries, probably, and they will be the first to say so. [Laughing] But it's true; there are plenty of good people, and the galleries all themselves say that there are very good people that we would show if it was possible. But it isn't. Well I don't think it's the Museum's job to sort that thing out, because that takes a very big—I don't think that role that the Museum played originally isn't being played by, right? Because there's an art world. All kinds of basic critics and whole sections of all the newspapers in all kinds of languages, all over the world. And every time anything happens, the *Times*, the *News*, that everybody picks up—it's not as though it's a job that needs to be done quite that way.

RC: The Museum at one time did that. That's a good point.

CC: Do you think, in a much bigger way though than in 50 years from what now we regard as modern art, do you think the role of the Painting and Sculpture Department could possibly shrink smaller and smaller and smaller, and then in areas like architecture and certainly film and photography, and also design—I mean, the very fact that there isn't all that much, or even Mrs. Straus said in the old days, she remembers seeing that show—

RC: Useful Objects [*Useful Objects Under $5.00*].

CC: Things under five dollars or five cents, and she loved that. But now you're going to go out and Conrans and Pottery Barn, they all exist—they're like the museum shop, really.

IC: Sure they are. There's no reason for The Museum of Modern Art's Good Design shows that Edgar Kaufmann did in the thirties. And there's another one; I suppose it's on your list of people around a long time ago, if you want a very strong and clear point of view.

RC: Actually, his point of view was so strong that he didn't want to—

IC: Talk to you.

RC: Be connected; yes.

IC: To the whole subject; yes.

RC: So you're aware of where that came from.

CC: I'm just wondering if maybe that'll shrink a little bit. Maybe not; I don't know.

IC: I don't think—I would, in a way, hope that it would. It's silly to sort of race with Terrence Conran around the town. I mean, who needs it? And he's already late news, too. I mean, it's not just—

RC: Well, there's Art and Industry.

IC: There are all kinds of littler shops that don't have his distribution and marketing problems, who do a little specialist job of putting together Italian lights or whatever. You know? Right?

CC: Yes. Right. Sure. I don't know, maybe it'll shift a little bit. Maybe the memorable shows of the year 2000 will be a series of films that are shown, or photography, or...

RC: Or it could come back. I mean, it seems like everything is circular.

IC: Well, one of the problems—

CC: That's one of the advantages a museum has, it can ride with the various—

IC: Yes, if its structure and purpose is removed with some distance from being in the fashion business. That's what it really comes down to. I mean, Terrence Conran and Bloomingdales and Macy's and everybody else's modern departments in a thousand other shops are definitely in the fashion business. And the closer you get to that, the more trouble you're in.

RC: Well, the gift shop certainly—

CC: Then it becomes The Museum of Modern Fashion rather than The Museum of Modern Art.

IC: It's across the board. The more it costs to make a movie, the more commercial it has to be, the more problems you have, the more likely it is to be pretty bad. You can take a terrific thing like *Gandhi*; right? Wouldn't it improve enormously if they could cut out all the names of any star you ever heard of? They immediately took Millicent Gielgud and a whole bunch of people who are very good actors out

of it; then there would have been a sense of credibility about it which would increase the quality of the movie considerably.

CC: It could have been eight hours long, too. It could have been episodic, the way it was filmed.

IC: Yes, so, you know, the Museum is in that same trap as any other 30 or 40 million dollar production; it could never last an hour. [Laughing]

CC: In the 1930s and forties though, I guess there wasn't as much—I mean, art was art and it was reviled, and there was jokes made about it and that sort of thing. So, it was very much a special thing, and fashion was very much behind art. But now since there's such a—within hours of someone doing something it's suddenly fashion.

IC: That's right. [INAUDIBLE: 0:24:58].

CC: What happens then? I mean, does that bury art? Is everything faddish, and does the Museum then appear to—? Well not just the Museum, but do artists themselves then, in a sense they make something and then it just gets overwhelmed by the market. And then, the market roars off, it's the latest piece of whatever, and I just wonder whether it suffocates it. Is art getting suffocated by all the attention? Robert Hughes said every emaciated 22-year-old has got three one-man shows downtown; anything some people want to do gets done, and it's all out there.

RC: There really isn't criticism or judgment being made because everybody's afraid to. You're supposed to embrace all this, and that's what the Museum had a hand in doing.

CC: There's just an overwhelming plethora of stuff out there now. Maybe it's just too overwhelming now. Maybe the Museum is going to look staid or the critics are going to look staid.

IC: It may be overwhelming in quantity and variations on the same thing that make the quantity, but I don't think it's more good stuff than ever before. I really don't. I don't see where it is. I mean, there was a period—just to take the example of the chair, in the Bauhaus period and afterwards, that all those architects, Corbu [Le Corbusier] and [Marcel] Breuer and [INAUDIBLE: 0:26:25] much later, but all

of those people didn't turn out a tremendous thing. In the meantime, there's probably been 5,000 chairs that have been designed since then, and I wouldn't mention there's more than five that are worthy of continuing for a terribly long time after [Michael] Thonet. You know? And this is barely one of them. It's sort of a ripoff of a Breuer chair.

CC: And now there are millions of them, literally—and that's 60 years after they were designed.

RC: Well, there's Workbench and—

IC: I guess I'm saying, I don't think The Museum of Modern Art is well advised in its future direction, in my view, that it should be in the fashion business and therefore I think its only justification for being big is to be in the education business. So much more is going out from a central source than is there necessarily.

CC: So you're saying if you're going to be big, then okay celebrate the collection.

IC: Move it out and sure, you can have, present things that are [INAUDIBLE: 0:27:28]. I don't think you necessarily have to buy them, but I don't think you have to worry about them, and I think you have to meet a lot of audiences besides nearly-dead trustees or half-dead trustees like me. [Laughing] I mean, it's—

CC: [Laughing] You're actually the youngest trustee we've talked to.

RC: That's right, that we've seen.

IC: Until recently, I was the youngest trustee by, I don't know, 20-odd years. There are a few younger ones now.

CC: John Parkinson is in there.

IC: Yes but—

RC: Donald Marron.

IC: I've been a trustee for, I don't know, a long time, and at that time, there were none, no young ones. I was the sole thing. I was the token young one.

CC: I think somebody said to me today—I said, well, I saw so-and-so today and so-and-so, and that we were going to see you. And they said, "Hm," because I guess your name didn't strike them as being a big financial powerhouse; you're not the heir to a great fortune or whatever. And I said, "Well, think about it. Rethink what a trustee should be." And the person just had it in their mind that trustees are just bank accounts. It's not that. You're looking for direction in the Museum, you're looking for an attitude or response or a point of view, otherwise it's just a lot of bank accounts getting together and telling, 'Okay, we've got the money, rather than, I don't think we're doing this right and we ought to do this or.'

RC: They had to protect themselves, I guess, at a time, because they were just doing things like this, and that was probably what was very exciting, but their blanket was with the wealthy trustees.

CC: I think it got out of hand for a while. The Trustees were just doing whatever the hell they wanted, and if I had 8 million or 20 million dollars and I was the trustee of a small little clubby place and I wanted to buy a picture or 50 pictures, and then hey, alright, I'll buy these and I'll give 20 to the Museum and get a tax thing. That's probably what Nelson Rockefeller operated like, and he built a great collection and he was flinging it around.

IC: But he really trusted Alfred Barr. In fact, I don't think he would have considered buying anything, even a watercolor from a neighbor, without—

RC: Without Barr's consent.

IC: No. He didn't worry about having a bad thing there; it just wouldn't occur to him.

RC: A special kind of collector.

CC: There really was a great regard for—

IC: Sure; it was the sensible thing to do. Sure, not just in the value of the work, but in what Alfred Barr did for those people was to breathe a life into what he was showing them, and he was very good at making them feel a part of the process. He was de-mystifying it instead of mystifying it, which is really what the function of the Museum should really be. We all know that there are a whole lot of people, because the curatorial mind works that way, whose main purpose in life is to mystify as much as possible out of some neurotic desire for job protection or

something. They don't like to put their things out on exhibit for fear of the criticism or this, that, and the other thing, or that it'll be them seen by another curator in the same field. You know, they're a very closed pack. They don't feel as though—if you were told that if you put this out on exhibit, whatever it is, something, and you're told, because of what pigments were in it, in 100 years it'll be a blank canvas. Right? An incredible number. And you'd be surprised that there's a majority of curatorial people who will then wrap the thing in black cloth and put it in a safe forever. You know? Personally, my attitude is, you take reasonable precautions to see that it does last as long as possible. You don't put it in direct sunlight, you take some care to keep it, keep some sense of it, but if that's the way it is; tough.

CC: It's just like Franz Klines. At least half the ones I've ever seen are now yellowing.

IC: Yes, they're on newspaper, telephone books or something.

CC: They're not white any more. I mean, I know it was white paint; it doesn't look white now. It shouldn't be. If you didn't do anything with a canvas you just put it on.

IC: That's life I think. I mean, first of all, it won't mean that much that far removed from the generations that were involved in it. Franz Kline is a useful artist, and I mean, he had a certain verve, and that was inspirational.

CC: We were talking to Richard Oldenburg, and he was in a tough kind of spot because 20, 30, 40 years ago, The Museum of Modern Art was like Christ and his disciples. Barr and his group and his scout, Dorothy Miller, and they were really, the loaves and the fishes. They were really very early on—they were like early Christians, and everybody was hooting at the films. And Jay Leyda told us they used to buy a ticket to get in the Museum—you'd get it, and well, you [would] want to get your money's worth [so] you'd go into the galleries and check that out and be maybe overwhelmed, or laugh. And then, he said, they'd all go to the movie theater, they'd all sit down and they'd watch the films, and invariably a lot of them, he said, are hooting at the screen. Whereas now, the Museum has kind of the hushed tones of Saint Peter's or the Vatican, [with] everything very orderly and ritualized and the Pope and all the cardinals of the artists and the critics. And that's too bad. Things like—you open *ArtForum*, and if you had

three hours to read one article, fine, if you can make sense of some of that turgid prose and Michael Fried and all that. And then you go and look at something like *The History of Modern Photography* or Barr's own *What is Modern Painting?*—

RC: Still one of the best writers about art.

CC: —where it sells 20 million copies or whatever, and it's pretty clear. He's not trying to pull a cloak over it. I think he's trying to open it up, really.

IC: But opening it up in terms of fairness is not a good idea either. You have to open it up in relation to a set of standards that you can subtract it. And that's why I'm dubious about its being opened up at the front end, because there's too much out there and too much bureaucracy required to be fair. And if you're going to do it, you sort of have to be—at least you have to look and to reject things in order to accept some things.

CC: Nobody's following Barr's dictum of if you chose 10 and one becomes good...

RC: He even felt like you had to keep a respectful distance from the brand new and wait to see; you have to make some judgments and see how it all pans out.

CC: Do you think things like design then—? You were talking about Conrans—do you think the whole industrial design section of the Museum—? What should it do with itself, then, if most everything is just out there immediately, within hours? Or the best designers are working, probably; I mean, they're out, they're professionals. What can they do? Show posters?

IC: No, I mean, it's not—it's still, I think, a reasonable function to be very selective and to point out those things which are really outstandingly excellent. That's always a reasonable practice. It's just that, again, it has to be sharpened, and it has to be—you know, there was a point in time when it was a matter of saying, "Look, you can have a nice clean design [INAUDIBLE: 0:35:55] this in a simple fountain pen from Parker." And it's all within the range of affordability; it's not one-off, customized, Fabergé style; after all, it's manufactured, mass produced things that are there. Well, I think the shift has to be into things that are somewhat more important in terms of what they're opening up, which may be a technological thing. I think it's perfectly good for the Museum to include in there things that have suddenly become Dick Tracy-like because of a chip. Thanks to

a 40K chip you can get in there and suddenly you can do mathematical computations. It's alright. It's interesting.

CC: Philip Johnson, he's a little concerned. He said he's trying to put together this high-technology show and he says a lot of the stuff he's looking at are chips. He goes, well, what's the—? Is there good design in the chip? Yes there is, but Jesus, to explain that in a professional way is extremely difficult for him. As a designer, do you see an overly—?

IC: There's a lot in there, and anything to do with sports is high-tech stuff that couldn't have been built when Alfred Barr was born. Right down to things to protect you from breaking your knees. They really come from Kevlar and space technology. And even golf clubs, they're whatever, boron and all these new things that are light stuff, and some of which are also beautifully designed. And reconsidering the design is something because of technology; that's what he should be doing.

CC: And the whole idea of biomechanics, they're making things for people.

IC: And I think that's all interesting and valid. It's small potatoes but it's nevertheless interesting, valid stuff that it is again—it's more educational than it is religious.

CC: Yes.

IC: The religion part's over; it's all—

CC: You're only preaching to the converted.

IC: Yes, but if you're just dealing with Conran's set of new chairs from wherever it is that we can price out reasonably for a mass market; that's easy, you don't need to worry about that. Unless it's extraordinary. And sometimes that is. But I don't. I'm on that committee, which I enjoy very much, but I don't care about craft oriented fashion stuff myself. I mean, I can like it or dislike it on a personal basis, but I don't care about Antonio [INAUDIBLE: 0:38:53] little ceramic things. He's a good designer, fine. I mean, I don't think that's what we should be doing, myself.

RC: You mean forge a relationship with the Museum.

IC: I think that really belongs other places.

CC: Do you think a lot of the Bauhaus sensibility, that's just eternal? Is that being chipped away at now?

IC: You can ask all the post-modernist architects. They've already buried it, as far as they're concerned.

RC: But how about in the other areas, the other modernist aesthetic that really is still very strong?

CC: What about lettering and graphics and poster design? And building design—well, we're already starting to see it end.

RC: The Museum of Modern Art really embodies the Bauhaus sensibility.

CC: Is something baroque now taking its place?

IC: Sure.

CC: Is it being redressed now?

IC: Yes.

RC: But where is The Museum of Modern Art in terms of that? You don't think of it.

IC: Why, that's the fashion business of it. You know? That's what they're all about.

CC: I see that's exactly what you're saying.

RC: That's a good point. So there's the dilemma.

IC: Philip Johnson is the Oscar de la Renta of architecture.

CC: Sure, he might as well be decorating malls.

IC: He has to be better in his own way in a certain sense because it's big stuff. He's terribly articulate, and he's a great salesman. And he's very, very powerful, not just by example, not just the master and the students. He's actually a major proselytizer and financial supporter of the kind of things that he believes in. And he is not interested in anything else but that. I mean, he's not a fraud; he's genuinely—he wants an established position in art history, I mean, architectural history. And he has; he's done it.

RC: Oh sure.

IC: It doesn't make for all great buildings. He knows so much; he's very smart, [and] so on—a very commendable piece of work will have very exciting aspects to them, but—

CC: And also—

IC: It's a different business.

CC: If he comes in with a drawing and suddenly—

IC: That's not what [Walter] Gropius was trying to do.

RC: No.

CC: If he suddenly unveils his new building and it is a post-modern thing, and he's the one that was the former great champion of modernism, well, they're hearing it from the priest himself saying, well now shift to this, look at this. You're right, I think that's where fashion—that really answers it. Because if The Museum of Modern Art suddenly has a "baroque" show of all the—then really what, they're faddish; they're just moving. They're taking the word "modern" and instead of exercising a sensibility, reflecting a sensibility, they're just a popular club.

IC: Just to say it again, I don't believe that it should be the major thrust of the Museum. You can't remove all the side issues from it entirely because it's against human nature and it's against all common sense in relationships to reality, and you can't take it away. But you don't have to have it as the reason for being there is to be first and foremost with your collection in the fall and the spring. [Laughter] It isn't really necessary.

RC: That's a wonderful point of view and actually something—

CC: A very good point of view because really, you're saying—

RC: It's an instructive one to watch out for.

CC: You don't want it to be stillborn, you want it to be instructive of what it champions and continue to champion that. And in a way, it's crazy. It's what Iris Barry even said; people used to go laugh at a movie, a silent picture, then 20 years later they're [saying], oh, it's got fabulous attributes. And then later they're laughing again. The movies don't change, it's [the] tastes [that] change, you change. It's

like Brooks Brothers. They're putting out the same old stuff they put out 100 years ago or 80 years ago, 50 years ago, and every 30 years, people like it, and then they hate it and nobody goes, and then they go back. And it's just the same old style, it's the same thing.

IC: But it is especially problematic when you're The Museum of Modern Art because that means—

RC: That says something.

IC: I just came from Vienna a couple of days ago. You know, Vienna follows The Museum of Modern Art, more or less, and it's in part to do with what the Germans and the whomever may be doing. It may be some kind of—stuff may be going on there, but it's very much The Museum of Modern Art and a few other institutions like it that accept in a matter of seconds this kind of—and it's Michael Graves, and Philip Johnson and Bob Stern who are determining the fashionable architecture or the choice of what young person is going to get to do what shop, what little building or even big building in such a place, because thanks to William S. Paley and others, the communications are instantaneous. The people who have to know or want to know, anywhere in the world, are better informed than people who are only partially interested, who are leaning on the decision-making place. I mean, there are all kinds of people who know and they go to The Museum of Modern Art but they're fundamentally interested in something else.

END OF INTERVIEW at 0:45:01