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Didn't you meet A. at the opening of the ISK exhibit?  
 No. quite a bit later

Didn't A. "sky" pigs before huge fund-raising effort was to be undertaken - such as 35th anniversary drive before MOMA was closed for several months - @ 1963-4?  
 see (7)

On showing young people how to see in Museums: could talk about A.'s ideas on this later on. i.e. how do the susceptible become informed? not to the point in this interview

would you care to explain further A.'s ideas of wall label - didn't he feel they were to be read as background only - in order to enhance aesthetic appreciation of a feeling for the wk. of art?  
 I think I said enough

A propos of this: Marga, did you notice that Marga's lib changed green breeze walls on 2nd floor to neutral color for the Michelangelo show? no I did not. I didn't notice R.

Marga - Also had the Nation + Yale Cr. Press, didn't he?  
 Anywhere else? Don't know  
 into the new Republic

Do you want to further explain AHB + Katherine Mansfield?  
 No

Yet didn't A.'s contemporaries at Princeton find Hux very exciting & intellectually stimulating?  
 (see note 11)

There is a copy of Plus here on 96 St in the file,

Marga - Probably more like millions of copies!  
 you correct if you like R.

Did he discover icons in Russia or did he know about them before they left?

Roma  
 This is the list I would like to find. From (P-30)

He too - I know I've seen it & will seriously attempt to uncover it next wk (25 June...)

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fr. page 12

p. 20

from p. 8

to: wall labels  
from p. 19

fr. p. 19

p. 36

p. 34

to: MSB's lecture on  
Picasso  
(from p. 24)

p. 37  
(bottom)

p. 36  
2011 Frances Keech - how  
- of these sold?

p. 38  
(see MSB  
2011)

Rona  
this is the list I would  
like to find. from p. 20  
Heba - I know I've seen it & will  
seriously attempt to locate it next wk  
(25 Nov...)

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AMY NEWMAN 610 WEST END AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10024  
H 212.724.2524 O 212.580.1658 F 212.724.1453 NEWMAN102@AOL.COM

December 12, 2008

Michelle Elligott  
Archives  
Museum of Modern Art  
11 West 53 Street  
New York, NY 10019-5497

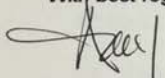
Dear Michelle:

I believe Rona Roob has alerted you that I would be in touch.

The enclosed "notes" by Marga Barr<sup>\*</sup> were recently located by me in the research material Irving Sandler and I had stored from the period when we were editing Alfred Barr's writings. Neither Irving, Rona, nor I can remember how it got to us, but not into the Archives of American Art or your archives. So, I am sending copies to you and the AAA now to remedy that lapse.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

With best regards,

  
Amy Newman

PS I look forward to meeting you one of these days in regard to a biography of Barnett Newman (no relation) that I am currently writing.

Cc Irving Sandler  
Rona Roob

\* to her AAA interview  
by Paul Cummings

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NOTES BY MRS. ALFRED H. BARR, Jr.  
July 1979

1. Classical education consists of five years of Ginnasio and three years of Liceo.
2. Professors assigned the subject of a thesis and left the students to manage by themselves. They gave <sup>no</sup>~~me~~ guidance or advice. I was supposed to write on the "International Style" in the fifteenth century in Italy.
3. Arthur McComb taught Italian Painting; he gave a general course and seminars.
4. By the time I got to my M.A. thesis Arthur McComb had left Vassar.
5. I am alluding to the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University in the Duke House at 1 East 78th St.
6. To continue to take courses in a concentrated way. I hoped especially to work in the Italian field under Prof. Richard Offner. Actually in 1927-28 and in '28-29 I taught my full schedule at Vassar, I taught at Sarah Lawrence in Bronxville and took two graduate courses <sup>per</sup>~~for the~~ semester at N.Y.U. in other words I slept in three places every week.
7. I think that in 1963 or '64 Alfred hung <sup>a</sup>~~our~~ gallery with pictures very close and "skied", two or three, one above the other, to dramatize the Museum's need for more space. He was dismayed because few people noticed the change and those who did, liked it. However, Philip Johnson deplored the many partitions that Alfred put up to get more hanging space and to subdivide the paintings by School or period. He said that the galleries looked like a department store. The

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minute Alfred retired his hanging of the permanent collection was dismantled and all later hangings were planned "decoratively" so that the visitors found themselves in ampler spaces. Alfred's last ground plan and hanging scheme are reproduced in his last "Paintings and Sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art: 1929-1967", 1977. In conversation he and I said again and again "Supposing you had one day in Basel - would you prefer to see the Museum grandly arranged with its most important pictures - or would you like to see as much as possible of what it owns?" It's funny because we said this so often and we always used Basel as an example.

8. When I say "do his correspondences" I mean two different things. I took dictation but I also wrote many borrowing letters in assorted languages.
9. If Alfred had heard this remark he would have been extremely annoyed. He hated the label taste-maker which, I think, was invented by John Canaday.
10. Several stories by Katherine Mansfield take place in German pensions. As a matter of fact I think Alfred met her once on a boat but did not find her interesting.
11. Charles Rufus Morey. I think that my remarks are unfair about Morey. I had him in graduate courses at a time when I had already experienced a sprightlier teacher<sup>s</sup><sub>A</sub>. Also I had come to dislike Early Christian and Early Medieval material so I was prejudiced. I think that in 1918-1919-192<sup>o</sup> Morey was giving introductory courses (it ought to be possible to look up old

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catalogues) and it must have been thrilling for Alfred who was so visual to be exposed academically to works of art. I know for sure that the first course with Morey made him abandon palaeontology for art history. Alfred took courses with all the professors in the art department and he came to like Frank Jewett Mather very much. I think it is he who first exposed Alfred to "modern art". Frankie Mather was a free spirit, his eye roamed into every field disciplined by a taste for quality. He was liberal in thought, warm-hearted, he treated the students as equals.

12. Russian icons, While in Russia, Alfred wanted to read up on Russian icons. Books on the subject in western languages were few (see footnotes in Russian Diary)\*. He wrote the Russian Icon article\*\* to satisfy himself, in a way, because in all things of the mind he wanted discipline and neatness; this accounts for the charts in the catalogue of the Italian Exhibition (1939)<sup>and</sup> the one in Cubism and Abstract Art. Actually his layout of the permanent collection in its successive hangings depended on his demand for intellectual discipline. When we spent some months in Rome in 1932-33 he was intent on arranging the whole course of Italian baroque painting in his mind and as we looked and looked in museums and churches I could see the restlessness and searchings that would have lead up to another logical chart of dates and influences. With stamps, butterflies and

\* October

\*\* The Arts, 17(5): 296-313, 355-362; 1931 Feb.

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birds as well as with works of art his mind was tidy.

13. I see no point in elaborating this. Alfred taught me to see and above all to love works of art. I taught the girls in my own way with no direct influence from him. You can only go so far with high school seniors.
14. When once the artists got here we did not follow them closely. <sup>They</sup> ~~This~~ missed café life. In the village they picked out the Jumble Shop - perhaps on West 8th Street - they called it "Le Jumble". Breton and Tanguy refused to learn English.
15. The Joint Rescue Committee never petered out. I should have said that the number of artists who solicited the Museum's help petered out.

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- (1) Classical education consists of five years of GIMNASIO and three years of LICEO.
- (2) Professors assigned the subject of to manage by themselves. They g I was supposed to write on the in the fifteenth century in Italy
- (3) Arthur McComb taught Italian general course and Seminars.
- (4) By the time I got to my <sup>MA</sup> thesis at left Vassar.
- (5) I am alluding to the Institute of Fine Arts of my university, in the Duke House at 1 East 78<sup>th</sup> St.
- (6) To ~~teach~~ ~~have~~ the ~~teach~~ courses in a concentrated way. I hoped especially to work in the Italian field under Prof. Richard ~~officer~~.  
Actually in 1927-28 and in '28-29 I taught my full schedule at Vassar, I taught at Sarah Lawrence in Bronxville and took 2 graduate courses per semester at N.Y.U. in other words I slept in 3 places every week.
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MSB on MSB

see w. her  
and History

in AAA

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"decoratively" so that the visitors found themselves in ample spaces. Alfred's <sup>east</sup> ground plan and hanging scheme are reproduced in his last "Painting, Sculpture & Architecture" 1977 The Museum of Modern Art 1929-1967 given date. In conversation he and I said again and again "Supposing you had one day in Basel - would you prefer to see the museum grandly arranged with its most important pictures - or would you like to see as much as possible of what it owns?" It's funny because we said this so often and we always used Basel as our example.

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10 Mansfield Several stories by Katherine Mansfield take place in German pensions. As a matter of fact I think A. met her once on a boat but did not find her interesting.

11 Charles Rufus <sup>RUFUS MURPHY</sup> Money. I think that my remarks are unfair about Money. I had him in graduate courses at a time when I had already experienced spigot-like teachers. Also I had come to dislike early Christian & early medieval material so I was prejudiced. I think that in 1918-1919-1920 Money was giving introductory courses (it ought to be possible to look up old catalogues) and it must have been thrilling for Alfred who was so unusual to be exposed academically to works of art. I know for sure that the first course

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with money made him abandon paleontology for art history. Alfred took courses with all the professors in the art department and he came to like Frank Jewett Mather very much. I think of it as who first exposed Alfa to "modern art". Frank Mather was a free spirit, his eye roamed into every field disciplined by a taste for quality. He was liberal in thought, warm hearted he treated the students as equals.

12. Russian icons, while in Russia Alfred wanted to read up on Russian icons. Books on this subject were so far as in western languages were few (see footnote in Russian diary). He wrote the Russian icon article to satisfy himself, in a way, because in all things of the mind he wanted intellectual discipline and neatness; this accounts for the poor graph (<sup>charts</sup> wrong word) in the catalogue of the Italian Exhibition (1939) the one in cubism and abstract art. In fact his layout of the permanent collection in its several successive hangings depended on his demand for intellectual discipline. When we spent some months in Rome in 1932-33 he was intent on arranging the whole course of Italian baroque painting in his mind and as we looked and looked in museum & churches, could see the <sup>restlessness</sup> anxiety and searchings that would have lead up to another logical <sup>series</sup> of dates and influences. <sup>with stamps in his files</sup> <sup>birds as well as with work of art his mind was tidy.</sup>

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- 14 When once the artists got here we did not follow them closely. They missed café life. In the village they picked out the Jumble Shop - perhaps on West 8th Street - They called it "Le Jumble". Berton and Taupny refused to learn English. Taupny
- 15 The Journal Review Committee never petered out. I should have said that the number of artists who solicited the Museum's help petered out.

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## The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N. Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

25 July 1979

Dear Bill:

We return herewith the transcript of Paul Cummings' interview with Mrs. Alfred H. Barr, Jr.

Mrs. Barr agrees with you that it is not worth editing - however, she has added some useful footnotes.

We hope that this is satisfactory for your purposes.

Sincerely,

Rona K. Roob

Mr. William P. McNaught  
Archives of American Art  
41 East 65 Street  
New York, New York 10021

encl.

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(12 June 77)

Dear Rona,

*done* | This is so awful that it is not worth editing and McNought agreed that no one would ever retype it even if I did edit it. I think that when you read it you might cut clips at the right hand margin for where you think a footnote would help. Then I would write the footnotes. Then we would xerox the whole thing plus the footnotes. Keep a copy for the Archive and returned this original AND the footnotes to McNought. No hurry, obviously.

Much love

*Marga*

P.S. When speaking to McN. you might discuss this. Dorothy Miller recorded for hrs and hrs. There must be a lot about the Museum and Alfred. It wd be so good to get a copy of these passages for the Archive. Of course we wd need Dorothy's permission. There wd be a lot about the WPA and that we wd not need.

(returned to MSB w. paperclips + notes - 20 June 1977)

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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

# ARCHIVES OF AMERICAN ART

NEW YORK AREA CENTER 41 EAST 65th STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 628-1251

*Tape*

*We never seen it*

November 22, 1974

Mrs. Alfred H. Barr Jr.  
49 East 96th Street  
New York, N.Y. 10028

Dear Mrs. Barr:

Thank you very much for participating in the Oral History Program of the Archives of American Art.

As Paul Cummings may have explained to you, the transcript of your taped interview will remain in the Archives offices where it may be consulted by qualified researchers who have obtained your written permission to do so.

We appreciate your interest and cooperation.

Sincerely,

  
Butler Coleman  
New York Area Director

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Archives of American Art  
41 East 65 Street  
New York, N.Y. 10021

TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ALFRED H. BARR, JR. - TAPE #1

AT THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ART, NEW YORK CITY

DATE: FEBRUARY 22, 1974 (Side 1)  
APRIL 8, 1974 (Side 2)

INTERVIEWER: PAUL CUMMINGS

PC: Paul Cummings  
MB: Mrs. Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (Margaret or Marga)

SIDE 1

PC Let me say this is February 22, 1974 - Paul Cummings talking to Mrs. Alfred Barr in the board room of the A.F.A. why don't we begin sort of at the beginning. You were born in Rome? ~~not~~

MB Yes, I was born in Rome. My mother was Irish from southern Ireland but Protestant. My father was from the Venetia, from the beautiful town of Bassano near Venice. I was brought up in Rome and went to the university there. But my father had died in 1916 so it was incredibly important to be constantly at work to earn a living. In 1922, '23, '24 I was working in the American Embassy in the office of the <sup>naval</sup> ~~naval~~ attaché. Thanks to one of my bosses who knew the head of the Latin department at Vassar College, I was asked to go and teach at Vassar College in the humblest possible position. I left Rome in ten days because I didn't want to live in my mother's house any more and live the life that I was living then.

PC How did you come to work for the <sup>American</sup> ~~American~~ Embassy?

MB My mother had become a Christian Scientist and the wife of the then naval attaché, called Captain Hasbrook, was also a Christian Scientist. This wife told my mother that her husband was looking for a bilingual secretary. I had spoken English before Italian so that I was suitably bilingual.

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PC What was it like living in Rome and growing up, going to school?  
What kind of world was it?

MB Well, I think I had a very peculiar early life and adolescence -  
but everybody's is peculiar - but as I look back on it, I think  
that I had a lot more fun than the young students of the same age  
that I'm teaching now.

PC Oh, really?

MB Oh, yes, I do think so.

PC In what way? You mean just kind of what the world was like gener-  
ally? Or people in Europe? Or --

MB I really can't explain it. The truth of it is that I was born in  
1901. My father died in 1916 which was in the <sup>midst</sup> ~~mist~~ of the First  
World War just before the Retreat of Caporetto. I knew we were  
left very poor, extraordinarily poor, because the money he had  
saved was not really quite sufficient. But nevertheless, you see,  
I went to a coeducational school - the <sup>(1)</sup> ~~lycee~~ <sup>liceo</sup> ~~lychee~~ <sup>lyceo</sup>, the gymnasium <sup>lycheo</sup>  
was where one used to go. We had an extraordinarily active school  
life. It was a day school. There were lots of young men, too.  
Little by little, they'd all have to go off to the wars. We  
started ~~wit~~ in a class of about forty and - I don't know - I  
think we ended up with about three or four boys. All the others  
had gone and the rest were girls. But it was really amusing be-  
cause one was satisfied with very much less than what the young  
now expect. There was an extraordinary amount of gossip and  
flirtation. We lived a very separate ~~lai~~ life from the adults.  
The adults were our enemies. And it was really very amusing.  
Then, of course, we went out a lot, dancing chiefly. And then  
later when I was working at the American Embassy I was making a

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a great deal more money - thanks to the exchange - than many  
of the boys that I had gone to school with. And I had <sup>nice</sup> ~~my~~ clothes.  
And I adored dancing and I danced three or four times a week in  
the afternoon and at night. This is terribly different from what  
our young do here, you know. There was a constant atmosphere of  
flirtation.

PC What kind of places did you go to to dance at?

MB We went to dance in places that were called - Oh, I don't know -  
and there were tea dances, and then you could go to hotels or  
to the same places for evening dances. But I was terribly handi-  
capped, of course, because those were days when the young girls  
~~more or less~~ were supposedly chaperoned by mothers. But my moth-  
er never had the patience to do this. She was extremely busy  
partly teaching and partly straightening out our catastrophic  
legal affairs. So fairly gradually I began to go out along<sup>g</sup> which  
was not supposed to be done. Then as soon as the First World  
War finished, a passion for skiing set in. This was the first  
time that the Italians had gone skiing. The people that taught  
us to ski, supposedly, were the young men who had fought the war  
on skis in the Alps on the Austrian border. We'd go to Cortina  
d'Ampezzo  
and for shorter trips we'd go into the Abruzzi. It was marvel-  
ous. Marvelous. We'd go-third class singing at the top of our  
voices, living on nothing, you know. Oh, it was really great.  
None of our <sup>American</sup> young know what it is to be young in that way.

PC It's all so complicated today.

MB But this is losing our time.

PC No. This is the background.

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MB But I'll tell you, I'll get very much closer to the Museum of Modern Art in two seconds.

PC Let me ask you one other thing before we jump that far. What were you studying in school?

MB Oh, in school one had what was called a classical education, and you got what is known as the <sup>licenza</sup> ~~licentiate~~ <sup>liceale</sup> ~~lyceum~~ at the age of nineteen, which is somewhat later than when you finish high school here. Then you went to the university. One did not need to attend the university; in other words, you could work full time or part time and still get credits at the university. My mother is a tremendously intelligent woman and absolutely polyglot, very much better <sup>at</sup> for languages than I am. She knew German very well, which I never really learned well. Anyway, she absolutely insisted that I should go to university. I, instead, wanted immediately to go to work and bring in some money. But she made enormous scenes, she had a ghastly temper, a ghastly temper, and a ferocious will and she insisted that I should go to the university. I said, "I don't want to go to university and I don't want to study." There are different subdivisions in Italy but, shall we say, the humanistic disciplines are called <sup>lettere</sup> ~~lectary~~ <sup>licenza</sup> ~~lectary~~ <sup>lettere</sup> ~~lectary~~. I said, "I don't want to study <sup>lettere</sup> ~~lectary~~ because all the girls in my class <sup>take lettere</sup> ~~study lectary~~ if they go to university at all." My mother said, "Well, all right, if you don't want to <sup>take lettere</sup> ~~study lectary~~ you can study whatever you want." I said, "All right, I'll go into medicine." You see, we were very geared to medical things because at the end of World War I, my mother and many another woman of her age, and younger, had

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gone to be ~~nurses~~ <sup>Countless</sup> (in hospitals), volunteer nurses, and quite a bit, ~~in quantity~~ poor unfortunate soldiers had come down from the ~~Italian front~~ <sup>North</sup> with their feet frozen because they had been in leather boots with cardboard ~~soles~~ <sup>soles</sup> sent up to the front with ~~taibot~~ shoes. My mother witnessed thousands of amputations <sup>performed</sup> without any anesthetic. It was ghastly, ghastly. And then one used to go to these hospitals when there were small festivities for the poor wounded. That's the first time that I ever encountered <sup>saw Vittorio de Sica who was to become a brilliant actor and</sup> de Sica, the great movie director, who ~~at that time~~, at the age of twelve or thirteen, was singing to the troops. He already had a great talent ~~in that way~~. Anyway, <sup>leccere? licere</sup> so then I inscribed for <sup>medecine</sup> ~~lectary~~ and at the same ~~time~~ <sup>en</sup> time I ~~was~~ working in an insurance office full time. And as soon as I was through I used to rush off to various parts of Rome where classes in anatomy, <sup>or</sup> chemistry, ~~this, that and the other~~ were being held. There were very, very few girls studying medicine and they were all very mousy. In Italy it is not a good thing to be mousy. No, not at that time. I used to arrive late. The anatomical amphitheater was full of young men still in uniform. They used to stare at me and draw attention to me in the most exasperating way. One day I landed in a class that was not anatomy - I can't remember what it was - I walked into the classroom late because I was coming from work. They interrupted the professor and said in Italian, "Ecco la <sup>inglesina</sup> inglese" because I looked more English than Italian. ~~And~~ that finished <sup>shitted</sup> it. And I quit <sup>leccere. lettere</sup> and went to take ~~lectary~~. I taught myself Greek and took the thirty required courses for a doctorate. I was working on my thesis <sup>an offer</sup> and finished up all the credits and <sup>And so I left.</sup> was in the middle of writing my thesis when I got this chance to go to teach at Vassar. I

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never got my Italian degree.

PC What was your thesis on? What were you writing on? <sup>(=)</sup>

MB It was going to be on something on the history of art.

PC Your father had been an antiquarian - right?

MB My father had been an <sup>art dealer</sup> antiquarian.

PC Were you interested in the visual arts? or literature?

MB Yes, I was much more interested in the visual arts but I was fantastically ignorant, catastrophically ignorant. The courses that were given at the university were very bad, with very bad <sup>poor</sup> equipment. Also by this time I was working at the <sup>american</sup> Embassy. <sup>Students</sup> You <sup>did not attend</sup> ~~didn't go to~~ any courses; <sup>at the university; they</sup> you bought mimeographed sheets of the <sup>professors'</sup> lectures and ~~you~~ learned them mechanically. ~~And~~ then you were examined orally by three professors and they gave you a mark and then you forgot about your studies until the next set of exams. ~~Then you killed yourself, practically memorized them and then you passed another set.~~

PC Were there any professors or any people you remember from those days who were important to you? <sup>?</sup> ~~as far as ideas or instructors or anything?~~

MB No.

PC Nothing?

MB Yes, I had some amusing professors in the <sup>liceo</sup> ~~lycea~~ but nothing really formidable. In America I began a totally different education. I was forced by Vassar College to be a student assistant because - well, first of all, they were trying to economize. My first salary was nine hundred dollars a year and out of that I had to send money to my mother. According to the head of the <sup>Italian</sup> department, it was important to start as a student assistant because

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of passport difficulties. You see, they were already putting  
 a great barrier against Italians. <sup>When I came in</sup> In September 1925 there were  
 already great limitations on <sup>Italian</sup> immigration and it was catastrophic  
 to be Italian. <sup>come from Rome because you counted as south Italian</sup> And, of course, if you came from Rome you counted  
 yourself Italian.

PC Oh, right. <sup>into the who had come</sup> And then so many were coming from Sicily and places  
 like that.

MB <sup>A: Vassar</sup> So they had to call me student assistant so I was forced to  
 take courses besides teaching.

PC Do you think that was a <sup>a good thing</sup> help in the end? ~~Or~~

MB Yes. It was quite extraordinary. After having had this compli-  
 cated life in Rome so full of young men and flirtations, to land  
 in a female world! and I can't say that I liked it much. But on  
 the other hand, I was sufficiently Anglo-Saxon to fall in with  
 it much more easily than an inseparable friend of mine <sup>did</sup> who had  
 gone to Vassar a year before me and who was completely Italian.  
 But anyway, the dean at Vassar, called Dean Thompson, said that  
 I had to take some courses <sup>so as to</sup> to maintain my status as a student  
 assistant. And she said that I'd have to take courses in Eng-  
 lish. I said that I didn't want to. She said that all foreign-  
 ers did. So she <sup>ordered me to take a</sup> sent me into some English courses <sup>in "technical teaching"</sup> which were

It was so boring that I dated Dean Thompson again and was gradually allowed to switch to the Art Department. At least I never to study

~~[very noisy train passing]~~. I said I couldn't she let me take  
 courses in the art department because, after all, I had been  
 writing a thesis on this subject. So she conceded and I began  
 really to study the history of art seriously because the kind of  
 teaching - well, I mean you can well imagine that whatever good  
 I learned when I just had to learn all the facts by rote without  
 even seeing photographs of what I was studying --

<sup>history of art seriously before I had learned all my facts by rote</sup>

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PC Was that the way it had been in Rome?

MB Well, <sup>as I told you</sup> ~~you see~~, nobody went to the lectures. You didn't have to.

And I was working. So I was a pathetic ignoramus.

PC You never went to museums or anything in Rome?

MB I went constantly to museums with my father but with no kind of training. Now that I teach, I know perfectly well that when you take a young person to a museum, first of all, you shouldn't make them look at everything, and then you should speak to them about the things you want them to notice. My mother and father traile<sup>d</sup> me around museums and churches from the age of zero. They used to travel in summer and ~~they used to go constantly through~~ <sup>though</sup> mostly in central Italy and Tuscany. ~~They used to trail me~~

<sup>routine</sup> ~~around.~~ When I reached the age<sup>s</sup> of ten and <sup>I found this</sup> ~~twelve this had~~ <sup>quite alarming!</sup> ~~reached really an acute situation for me and I detested it.~~

So I charged <sup>my parents</sup> ~~them~~ so much for a church, so much for a museum, ~~so much for eating cheese.~~

PC That's marvelous.

MB I had no set allowance but only got money for high marks, and <sup>in one way or another I had to find ways to be solvent</sup> ~~for those particular things I charged them.~~ - Imagine what I <sup>learned!</sup> ~~learned!~~ Nothing. The only thing I ~~ever~~ remember their hav-  
ing said was, pointing to a certain picture of the Virgin in Arezzo - which I would not be able to find - and my father said to my mother that <sup>this</sup> Virgin looked like me. <sup>That's</sup> all that I ever heard about any work of art. So I remained ~~really~~ susceptible but not informed.

PC Who <sup>was</sup> ~~did~~ you study with at Vassar in the classes that you took?

MB At Vassar there was a man called Arthur <sup>McCoon</sup> ~~McCoon~~. I don't know if you remember who the Askews are - do you know the Askews?

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PC Oh, sure.

MB Arthur <sup>McComb</sup> McCoon was Constance Askew's first husband. He was teaching. Constance and he were living on College Avenue. Their daughter Pamela, who is now head of the department at Vassar, was born while I was there. Well, Arthur <sup>comb</sup> McCoon was a very amusing teacher to me who had never been exposed to this sort of thing.<sup>(3)</sup> He was very English, though American. It amused me a lot to watch him, to follow his mannerisms. And, of course, I learned a very great deal. ~~And, oh, then~~ I took courses in the art department in quantity and ended by getting an M.A. at Vassar. Which was absolutely a farce. I'm ashamed of it. And what's more, they allowed me even to write <sup>my thesis</sup> it in Italian. But there was nobody to supervise an M.A.<sup>(4)</sup> thesis and nobody wanted to. It's disgusting. I'm ashamed of it. But anyhow I got an M.A. I taught at Vassar for four years in all. I went to see McCracken and I said, "What to do now from the point of view of passport and all that?" "You can go and study at New York University. My father <sup>did</sup> ~~is~~ this, or that, or the other for New York University, or was So and So at New York University, so I can get you admitted." So I began to take courses at New York University, which at that time did not have the glorious arrangements<sup>(5)</sup> that it has now. You had to go down to Washington Square or else there were courses in the basement of the Metropolitan Museum. At the same time I continued to teach at Vassar. Then in the last year I also taught Italian at Sarah Lawrence. I've forgotten to say that in all these places I taught Italian.

PC How did you like living in this country? This was a great change for you from Rome, wasn't it?

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MB It was very interesting; very interesting.

PC What did it look like?

MB Well, at the beginning I was very, very... About a month and a half after I got here I remember saying to somebody in ~~the~~ a car ~~car~~ that "it's all so interesting and peculiar." This person said, "Write it down." And I didn't. I was tremendously frightened of facing my first class. In the middle of September, 1925 - I was so frightened that I walked out of my room, <sup>dormitory</sup> ~~walked off~~ <sup>(campus down)</sup> ~~down~~ the road, and missed at least a week's worth of my classes. I couldn't face the class. I was too frightened.

PC You finally did?

MB I don't know how I found the courage I was so frightened. And it's funny because I had given private lessons since the age of sixteen. But it was facing the group and they were nearly my age, there was only three years' difference.

PC You didn't have large classes? Or did you?

MB Oh, about thirty girls.

PC That was a pretty good size class.

MB Oh, yes. Well now, I know exactly where I want to get myself because this is more interesting. In the last year that I was at Vassar, which I think was 1927-28 but I'm not certain - I was at Vassar four years - now can you figure that out? I went in September - yes, I finished in the spring of 1929. So it was in the year 1928-29 that I became quite a friend of Russell Hitchcock who was teaching there. Do you know him?

PC I know who he is.

MB Okay. He was very young. We used to love to chat. He was very deaf already then. He isn't deaf now. He's had an extraordinary

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operation since his retirement so that for the first time in his life he's not deaf. And he's very amusing. He had just been reading Proust. I had finished reading Proust. We used to love to go to the movies. We used to converse. He had more interesting friends among the faculty than I, but still not many. In fact, Vassar was not an interesting place then, at least not for the young <sup>faculty</sup> people. And he used to read me letters written by Alfred Barr and Jere Abbott who, during that winter, were in Russia in the height of winter. They had started a sort of year of travel and I think got to Germany and Poland and spent the center of the winter in Russia. These letters were fascinating. I don't know how they found time to write but they did. And he read them to me. Also Alfred had taught at Vassar the year before I had gone; in other words, he had finished in the spring of 1925 and I went to Vassar in the fall. <sup>So the name of Alfred Barr was</sup> still in the air. <sup>At the end of 1928 in the spring I got a</sup> Carnegie scholarship to study with <sup>(6)</sup>. By this time I had <sup>two</sup> years' work of New York University courses ~~in the afternoon.~~ So it was decided that I would spend from autumn to January - the first semester - in New York taking courses and then I would go off to Europe - don't ask me for what to study. So I came to live in New York on Madison and 91st Street. There were still trolley cars. I was a friend of Agnes Rindge who was teaching in the art department at Vassar and whose course in modern sculpture I had taken. This was the first course that opened my eyes to the <sup>advantages</sup> of modern art of ~~any kind~~. You see we won't be able to go on. [coughing]

PC Had you seen much contemporary art up to that point?

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MB There wasn't much to see. There were very few galleries.

PC Right.

MB I did go to some galleries. The thing that I remember best was an exhibition of Bellows in which there was a representation of the prize fighter Firpo. I remember when I went to Washington going through that cemetery to see the Saint-Gaudens monument. But there was rather little to see. Well anyway, Agnes ~~Hongan~~ <sup>with which I had a conversation in the late 1920s</sup> - ~~excuse me~~ Agnes Rindge came down from Poughkeepsie perhaps in December - I don't know - November or December of 1929 and she said, "Why don't we go together to The Museum of Modern Art?" What I'm trying to say is that Russell Hitchcock ~~let me~~ read me Alfred's letters. Agnes said, "Let's go to The Museum of Modern Art." I had never been there. It was the first exhibition. It was "Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, and van Gogh". A smashing exhibition! And it was the very first time I had ever gone in there. In the largest room in the Heckscher Building where it was there were a couple of couches. We were walking around and Agnes saw Alfred Barr. She ran toward him and said, "Alfred, et cetera" and they began to talk. This went on for quite a while so that I sat down on one of the couches to wait. So then she bethought herself of introducing me and said to him, "Of course you know Daisy Scolari." My name was Daisy, not Margaret, and Scolari was my last name. So I got up. And he recognized the name because somehow he must have heard something about me through Russell Hitchcock. But of course I had heard a great deal more about him through these letters that Russell had read me. I have no idea how we met again but it was not with great difficulty; I don't know how we met.

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I remember vividly that in those early days there was a most delightful Park & Tilford tearoom on the corner where Tiffany's now is; a wonderful place. He asked me out to tea there. Then by and by he asked me to have dinner. But one dined out of The Museum of Modern Art on 56th Street in a little restaurant which I remember as being Chinese, but I'm not sure. This was just a few doors on the north side of 56th Street. There the young people that were interested in the Museum all clustered. There was Alfred, and a young boy - man - called Cary Ross, Philip Johnson, and very often <sup>p</sup> the dealer J. B. Neumann. And these people were so excited and they were talking like mad. It was a fantastic atmosphere. You felt an unbelievable vibration. It sort of centered around Alfred but, nevertheless, everybody was adding their contributions, reminding one another of things and saying, "We could do this," "we could do that." It was absolutely electric. When Russell Lynes was writing his book Good Old Modern I tried as much as I could to try to give him an idea of the incredible excitement that surrounded the Museum in those early years. This, of course, was before I was married. Well, by January I knew that I was hopelessly in love with Alfred. But I never had any kind of connection or flirtation with any American man since I had come to live in America. Such possibilities were completely outside my sphere. I didn't know - I had no idea what was going on in his mind; none. I think by the end of January there was a meeting of the College Art Association in Boston. He asked whether I was going. I said <sup>p</sup> ~~yes~~ that I wanted very much to go. <sup>?</sup> He said, "All right, we'll go together and I'll take chairs." Do you remember

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when people used to take chairs on trains?

PC Oh, right.

MB Actually I had never been in a chair in my life. We sat in these chairs and kept looking over the programs of the forthcoming talks. I don't know where he found my name - and he looked at the name 'Margaret Scôlari' because my official name is 'Margaret' - and he said, "I don't like the name Daisy. Why don't we do this?" He erased the 'r-e-t' and that's why so many people call me 'Marga'. Then it became evident that he also had the same ideas and we fell insanely in love with each other. It was very amusing; most extraordinary. He and Jere Abbott were the most incredibly popular young men about town. They went to dinner after dinner and theater party after theater party both because they were young - and I think that in those days people, museum people were not yet feeling that one had to accept invitations of wealthier people for the good of the institution. I think that they were really liked, that nobody thought in these terms in those days. Although - well, maybe they did; maybe they didn't - I don't know. But the truth of it is, you see, that the stock market crash had occurred in October 1928, so that all this was immediately after the crash. Nevertheless, he was going out like mad. In those days, and for <sup>many</sup> years after we were married, you always had to know whether you were to wear black tie or white tie and any wife had to know the evening dresses that would go with black tie and then the fancier evening dresses that would go with white tie. Well anyhow, they were in constant demand. He was twenty-eight and I was

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twenty-nine and, more than naturally, he deeply hesitated about the idea of getting married, or marrying me. I <sup>'ve</sup> always felt that it was an incredibly alarming thing for a man to have to undertake, and I deeply sympathized with him. And also I - I'm not able to explain - but I was absolutely not going to do anything to facilitate this. He had some great friends in Princeton called George and Ethel Rowley. He used to teach Sienese art and Chinese. He was a charming man. He had married <sup>Ethel</sup> who was much older than himself. They both adored Alfred. Alfred said to me, "If you ~~will~~ allow, I will go off for a weekend to Princeton and see what the Rowleys think." So he went to consult them about this. Then he came back and he said, "All right." So then it was decided that because I had no family in America and because he didn't like ceremonial things of any kind, that we would ~~EXX~~ not get married in New York but we would get married in Paris. Because anyway he had to go to Paris to collect an exhibition for the fall in the Museum, about which more later. So it was all decided. I continued to live on Madison Avenue. He continued to live on 54th or 55th Street with Jere Abbott. The idea was that I would take such and such a boat and then he would follow in about a week. His mother who lived in Detroit was really terrified because the way he announced his intention was to write her: "If you turn to page so and so and so and so of Frank Jewett Mather's History of the Italian Renaissance in you will see a picture of an ancestor of the girl I am going to marry."

PC How marvelous!

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SIDE 2 - APRIL 8, 1974

PC This is Side 2 and it is April 8, 1974.

MB Well then, we have to backtrack because the first exhibition in The Museum of Modern Art was in the autumn of 1929 right after the crash. It occurred to me that I have not made it clear - or perhaps I did - what was so novel about this kind of exhibition. What was novel, apart from the choice of paintings - <sup>and such paintings!</sup> ~~and you remember that the first exhibition~~ <sup>it</sup> was <sup>Craune</sup> ~~Secret~~, <sup>Sewat</sup> Daumier, Van Gogh, Gauguin - such painters had not been seen publicly ~~easily~~ before in America. But what was also interesting was how they were installed. This is what I tried to recall <sup>that</sup> and I had not told you. First of all, they were installed on plain walls; if the walls were not totally white then they were the palest possible gray, absolutely neutral. And in the most novel way they were installed not symmetrically. When I ran up this little lecture on Picasso that I tried to make you look at - I don't know whether you did --

PC Right. I have it.

MB In 1932 still in Paris pictures were being hung symmetrically and by size, not by content, not by date --

PC Salon style.

MB And they were <sup>'skied'</sup> ~~sized~~. Whereas in the Museum right there <sup>in</sup> the first show in the fall of 1929 there were no pictures above other pictures, all the walls were neutral, and the pictures were hung intellectually, chronologically; nevertheless, not in such a way that they would clash. In other words, if the colors were not harmonious then they would be separated. But

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if there were intellectual connections between a large and a small picture they would be hung close to each other so that they could be seen together. And the labels were extremely interesting. For a very long time, up until the moment in which James Johnson Sweeney became the director of painting and sculpture for a brief time, the labels that my husband used to write were not only labels for each picture, but they were general intellectual labels to make people understand what they were seeing. Sweeney was very much against this kind of labeling. But as long as Alfred Barr was in command he used to write what were called 'wall' labels. 'Wall' labels were larger, they explained the general nature at least of that room or of the whole exhibition. And this had an extraordinary effect on the public; they were enormously interested. Such a thing had never been done before.

PC Why were the walls painted white? I mean what was the --

MB So as not to <sup>affect</sup> fade the paintings. Previously, the walls would be either paneling or else they would be brocade - red brocade, blue brocade, green brocade; they would suck the color <sup>out</sup> of the pictures. Instead, the idea was to let the pictures stand on their own feet.

PC What about the asymmetrical design?

MB The asymmetrical hanging had to do with hanging them intelligently instead of by size. If you could possibly see - and I don't think you will - the installations of the Georges Petit exhibition in 1932 in Paris, you would see that all the chronology was mixed up just so long as they could have a central

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vertical and then two horizontals, then two verticals. It didn't really matter what year they were in, or what it was all about just so long as --. The Metropolitan Museum, you know, still is hanging in this way; the Metropolitan still hangs on the system of one horizontal, two verticals; or one vertical, two horizontals. But now the Metropolitan doesn't sky. <sup>But it does</sup> ~~Forxxxxxx~~ even sky sometimes. To sky is just impossible - "to sky" means putting a picture above another - and if you want to see it, well, ~~you can't~~; you can't put your nose into it. <sup>(7)</sup> That was one of the things I wanted to tell you. And now I don't know where ~~you~~ <sup>we</sup> are chronologically.

PC I think we were back in Paris at the beginning. What I'm curious about is: in doing that first exhibition --

MB That first exhibition was selected by Conger Goodyear. It wasn't selected by Alfred. Not at all. Goodyear, who was the first president of the Museum, went off to Paris. In those days it was not half as difficult to borrow pictures of this period as it would be now, and they were certainly not as valuable, as diabolically valuable as they are now. So Goodyear borrowed the first show and Alfred hung it.

PC No, but I mean the exhibition that you two were working on in Paris.

MB The first exhibition that Alfred and I worked on was the exhibition of Corot and Daumier. The general notion was to hark back to the recent past to show, shall we say, the roots and beginnings of the more contemporary forms of art.

PC But had you <sup>had</sup> made a great deal of correspondence before arriving in Paris? Did you know what you were <sup>come to ask for?</sup> --?

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PC But had you <sup>had</sup> made a great deal of correspondence before arriving in Paris? Did you know what you were <sup>going to ask for?</sup> --?

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have extorted entertainment funds. I do know that all the people that go to Europe now for the Museum have a per diem. But we never had one of any kind.

PC That's amazing. You were subsidizing the Museum in a way.

MB No. We charged for exactly what it cost. And the funniest thing is that we used to go at such a hysterical rate that on July 14th when we would always be still in Paris, and while the parade was going up the Champs Elysées, that we would be nailed into our room in the Avenue Matignon, which was within hearing distance of the parade, and I would torture myself trying to make up these accounts; torture myself.

PC I'm very curious about those early years, the early nineteen-thirties in Paris and borrowing works of art from people. Were the dealers cooperative? Were the collectors and the artists available?

MB Okay, some of that is <sup>smuggled</sup> smuggled into my lecture on Picasso - though I don't see why you should have read it. But, you see, the Museum was not very well known. And, perfectly obviously, the various dealers and collectors were rather cautious. But, on the other hand, the borrowing that goes on now had really not begun at all, so that often it was possible to borrow. From the very start it was quite difficult to borrow from the Louvre. It was somewhat easier to borrow in Germany.

PC Oh, really? From the museums or -- ?

MB Well, yes. I mean the French were very obscurantist and very doubtful. But a great many borrowings had to do with people in France. A handicap was that the Museum was absolutely penniless. There was no money to buy anything. In the middle

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thirties, make it 1934, 1935, for the first time a beneficent woman, Mrs. Stanley Resor, gave Alfred about two thousand dollars for the summer to buy so that at least we were able to buy some smiches of things. And Alfred bought some quite beautiful pictures for her at these delightfully cheap rates which she passed on to her children. That was the beginning of when we could at least spend a few pennies. But otherwise it was just embarrassing to have to beg, to borrow without having money to spend; not a penny. The first really important picture that Alfred was able to buy was in 1938, the Picasso Girl Before a Mirror which he bought for \$10,000 with the help of Mrs. Simon Guggenheim. That was the first important picture he was able to buy - 1938. And by 1939 the war began.

PC But now from the first years you had gone every year to Europe?

MB Yes, we did.

PC Would you travel? Or would you just be in Paris?

MB Oh, well, I still would need the listing of the exhibitions that we ran up. But in 1934, I think, the Museum held the first great van Gogh exhibition. For this purpose we went at length ~~in~~ to Amsterdam and <sup>T</sup>he Hague. We had to borrow from Mrs. Kröller-Müller. Mrs. Kröller-Müller was of German birth. She was married to a Dutch businessman who already at that time counted as a nonentity. They were extremely wealthy. Her adviser and mentor was a certain man called <sup>van Deventer</sup> Vandeventer, so that we <sup>coaxed</sup> all the time with Mrs. Kröller-Müller and Mr. Vandeventer. Mrs. Kröller-Müller had the most marvelous number of van Goghs. She had a butler whose name is even acknowledged in the first van Gogh catalogue. The first time we went to call on her - it was

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not far by taxi from the Hague - the butler carried these pictures out and placed them <sup>against the</sup> on useful hedges in her garden so that we saw the pictures all in the bright sunlight. It was a most extraordinary experience. We went there for a very long time - oh, make it two, three, four weeks. But this first view was extraordinary. I wish I had that catalogue to tell you the <sup>name</sup> of the butler who attended her. But anyhow, he carried them out so that we could see them in the -- 'daylight'

PC Just one at a time? Or --

MB No, all lined up against box hedges - except that I'm sure that box doesn't grow there, but similar hedges. It was spellbinding! And then we went back day by day so as to make <sup>lists</sup> this and analyze and decide what to do. And then, of course, there was the engineer van Gogh who has just now put up this separate van Gogh Museum. I don't know if you saw it two days ago in the paper - there was a picture of it.

PC No.

MB Yes, there was a picture of it in the Sunday section - ~~that~~ today is Monday - in the Sunday section there was a picture of the van Gogh Museum that is being put up with the van Goghs that belong to the engineer. The engineer was the nephew of van Gogh; in other words, the son of the admirable wife of van Gogh's brother who so helped van Gogh through thick and thin. Well - ~~anyhow, the engineer has given all his pictures and there is now a separate museum. But we had to beg from the engineer.~~

We had to beg from <sup>some few</sup> various other collectors, one of whom had a <sup>with the</sup> most amusing name - ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> JOTEFIN NOLTEMIUS ~~refused~~ <sup>refused</sup> ~~to~~ <sup>to</sup> ~~give~~ <sup>give</sup> ~~his~~ <sup>his</sup> ~~name.~~ <sup>name.</sup> He had an extraordinary name.

*omit*  
*unfortunate*

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PC What did these people think when you came to them wanting to give an exhibition?

MB They were a little amazed. But nobody had ever asked to borrow these things. And there really didn't seem to be any reason to refuse. They were always shipped door to door and always insured at the price that they suggested. I don't know why they lent. But I think they lent also because they were proud of them and nobody had ever asked to borrow them.

PC So you were like the first, ~~coming to~~ --

MB Yes, sure.

PC It would be impossible to do an exhibition like that now, wouldn't it?

MB Yes, it would.

PC I mean the cost would be preposterous.

MB Yes. Because now people are exhausted and bored with lending. But, you know, we were young and Alfred was extremely charming, and very tactful, and very circumspect and silent and dignified and extremely serious. But above all charming. He never, never said a tactless thing, he never rubbed <sup>people</sup> them the wrong way. He had a marvelous manner. And he was really unique in this. Nobody had ever asked for these things before. All I did was do his letters and do his phone calls and do his correspondence.

PC But you obviously talked about the selection of certain pictures over other ones and things like that?

MB Well, I think that at that time <sup>collectors</sup> they did not exercise the slightest pressure in the sense of, "Please take this one and don't take that one." There was not the idea of increasing the value of a picture because it was being loaned. These

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were all later <sup>considerations</sup> ~~confections~~. You see, we are now in 1934. These were not the ideas that crossed the mind of collectors at that time.

PC Yes. Being a collector has changed a lot, hasn't it?

MB Of course it has changed a great deal. There is one young scholar that says that <sup>Alfred</sup> "single-handedly changed the taste of our time." But at that time these <sup>post-impressionist works</sup> things were not very much esteemed. (9)

PC But there were very few art books available.

MB There were very few art books available and there were, above all, very few books with color reproductions, very few books with good color reproductions. The van Gogh show was an unbelievable affair. People came in droves, even stood in line to see it. Mrs. Roosevelt went twice to see it. And then we had to go back <sup>to Holland</sup> the next year, 1935, to try to prolong the show.

PC Looking back, what do you think it was that appealed to the public in that exhibition? Was it the work and the quality of the man? The whole --

MB Since that time van Gogh has become, oh, one of the most excessively popular painters, you know, that uncultivated people deeply admire. But at that time there were both the ~~unculti~~ cultivated people who admired it and the uncultivated people who admired it. I mean there was an intellectual aspect to the exhibition and, nevertheless, also an appeal to everyday people in it.

PC I've seen photographs of the lines and the busloads of people and all the things that the show sort of entailed or that happened.

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MB Well, the fact that the paintings were so colorful and the fact that they were so intense and passionate... And also there were - as usual when Alfred did shows at that time - these wall labels with descriptions by van Gogh of what he wrote about the pictures to his brother. I mean Alfred carefully underlined all the letters that poor van Gogh had written to his brother trying to explain to him what he felt about The Night Cafe, what he felt about The Billiard Room, what he felt about all these things. So there was all this schmaltzy aspect, you know. I mean you saw, on the one hand, these ferociously intense and colorful pictures, and then you also saw what the painter was trying to put into them. I mean it was all written so that if people took the time to read the labels they saw in a very intense way what the artist was trying to do.

PC One thing that has always intrigued me about the Museum is that there have been committees of this and that, advisory committees and various things. Was it Mr. Barr who generated the ideas for the exhibitions and kind of said, "This is what we should do?"

MB In those days, yes. I wish I could remember the years, but I remember that while Alfred was still director, either Conger Goodyear, who was president of the Museum at that time, or some other important trustee - but probably it was Goodyear himself - wrote a memo to Alfred saying, "We're going to run out of ideas, we're going to run out of exhibitions. Will you please suggest exhibitions that you think we should have

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because I think we're going to run out." So Alfred made <sup>5 institute Rst.</sup> ~~an~~ ~~autocratic~~ <sup>anautocratic?</sup> suggestions, some of which have never been used.

Alfred was an educated art historian and so he had innumerable notions of works of the past that would also be significant in the world of now. Some of these exhibitions never took place and have been used by other museums. For instance, an exhibition of Fuseli - do you know who he is?

PC Yes.

MB Who is being shown now a great deal. There was a marvelous exhibition of his in Zurich about three years ago. And just an enormous book on him has just been written by a man called <sup>??</sup> ~~Gerdshiff~~ <sup>of Five Arts.</sup> at the Institute. Then Alfred wanted to have exhibitions of what he called "The Old and the New", that is, juxtapositions of artists of the past and present. I wish - I'm sure that if we could look through Alfred's papers we'd see the exhibitions that he suggested, many of which have not been used till this day. And now I don't know who could do them - I don't know.

*Gerst Schiff?*

PC Well, were suggestions for exhibitions given by trustees or other people? Or --

MB No. No --

PC He was supposed to do everything?

MB No - the trustees may have made some suggestions. But Alfred was a fountain of ideas. And also I think that one of the things that may have been exasperating to some of the trustees was that he was so pugnacious.

PC In terms of what?

MB 'Pugnacious' in the sense that he would insist a great deal on... for instance, when it came to the new building, which is the

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beginning of the building that is now on 53rd Street, there were certain architectural things that he wanted, and various things that he wanted which are listed in Russell Lynes' book. Alfred fought very intensely for what he thought was a good plan or the right thing to do. This got on the nerves of several of the trustees. He was terribly pugnacious, but not in an irascible way, not raising his voice, but being extremely insistent, extremely insistent, and not being willing to give in at all. This is not very diplomatic.

PC Well, you know, when one thinks of the great number of exhibitions --

MB I wish <sup>we</sup> had ~~had~~ that book. *A Russell Lynes' book?* I should have brought it. Alfred chose all those first shows. I mean Alfred did not choose the first one: "Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, van Gogh"; that was chosen by Goodyear. And then he chose all the others. [Sound of pages turning] That "German Painting and Sculpture" exhibition was an extraordinary one because nobody had ever thought of German painting and sculpture. Nobody.

PC Really?

MB No. It was really completely new. Diego Rivera had been at that time commissioned to do the large frescoes in Rockefeller Center. Don't you think we were in the midst of the Depression? Don't you think they were putting up Rockefeller Center so as to give work? And he was commissioned to do the frescoes. And he put in a picture, a portrait of Lenin and various other monstrous personalities. And they all had to be hacked out. Yes. Then --

PC Why did he do that, do you think? Do you know anything of why or --?

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MB Well, because he had been at great length in Russia and he was completely sympathetic to the communist cause. We in our own house have a drawing of his of the "Workers in the Subways". He felt that if he was going to do a fresco with social content that he certainly had to put in Lenin. Then the "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition" was a sort of battle cry to change the whole current of architecture. And it did indeed. If you remember the Chrysler Building that was done at that time - and I can't remember the date of the Empire State Building - the general notion was to build skyscrapers <sup>not</sup> to jolly them up with ornament either in a Renaissance or a Louis Quatorze, Louis Quinze decoration of some sort.

PC Or vertical Gothic or -- *Wiener Werkstatte*  
 MB Or even *Wienervechstatte*, but something or other to decorate. This was the battle cry: to have undecorated and completely simple and, if possible, asymmetrical buildings. I remember this perfectly.

PC I'm curious about the German art exhibition.

MB Oh, well, <sup>not</sup> art; it was painting.

PC German painting, right.

MB Well, Alfred, you see, in that famous year of 1927-28 when he had spent the winter in Russia had also spent a very great deal of time in Germany. And he just had an eye - I don't know why - he had this eye for all that was fresh and new, combined with an eye for quality. I don't know why. He had this eye for quality. Here in America nobody had even given a moment's thought - except people particularly interested in Germany - to the German artists of that time, such as Nolde

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Schmidt-Rottluff, and God knows how many other people. I knew all their names and I can't think of them now. And he put on this show that was completely fresh and new.

PC There were very few dealers showing those people here in America.

MB Oh, now yes; but not then.

PC Then, no. Nobody.

MB Well, of course, I mean it contained a Schwitters. It contained Klee, I mean people had partially heard of Paul Klee. Also in this famous year of 1927-28 he had been at length at the Bauhaus and that accounts for eventually the Bauhaus exhibition that took place when the Museum had moved to the Time-Life Building because they were putting up the new building.

PC Right. You traveled with him all through the thirties - right? Every time --

MB We traveled every blessed year. We traveled - I know exactly what we did: in 1930 we were married and did the Corot, Daumier show. In 1931 whatever did we do? [Sound of pages turning] I guess the Matisse show - yes - because there was a great big Matisse show at the Galerie Georges Petit in Paris. We did the first Matisse show. And with the left hand... We used to do two exhibitions in one summer so as to spare the Museum money. Nobody... You know, now to do an exhibition they go over two or three times. At that time the most expensive exhibition, at most, would cost five thousand dollars. And five thousand dollars seemed ~~an~~ unbelievable, pyramidal, pyramidal, enormous... And we used to do two exhibitions per summer.

PC Why was it possible, do you think, in those days? Was it because of the two of you doing everything?

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MB The staff of the Museum was very small. Insurances were not very high. The pictures were crated and put on boats. In 1932, in the fall, Mrs. Rockefeller was very preoccupied about Alfred's health because he was always ~~extremely~~ frail. He had started off the Museum. Doctors and people sort of looked at him. Mrs. Rockefeller decided that he should get a year's leave of absence. So in the fall of 1932 he joined me in Italy. My mother was still living in Rome. We stayed in Rome until about January. Then we went to <sup>St.</sup> Saint Anton <sup>Am</sup> and Arlberg to ski. There a good woman advised Alfred to go to Stuttgart because <sup>he had had her that he</sup> Alfred was always exhausted, <sup>yet could not sleep,</sup> ~~always exhausted, always exhausted~~. She said that there was a spectacularly charming and intelligent analyst doctor in Stuttgart who could 'de-exhaust' Alfred. So we went to live in Stuttgart beginning in the middle of January 1933. Now this is extremely interesting. We lived in a pension, always the cheapest possible. We were on half salary. So that meant we lived on... At the very beginning of the Museum Alfred's salary was \$10,000. The moment the crash began they had cut him down to \$9,000. So during the leave of absence we were living on the half of \$9,000. And we were. We lived in this very cheap pension. Alfred used to call it the Katherine Mansfield Pension. We began to live there, make it around January 15 or 18. Everybody sat at a table that was smaller than this one. The election that brought on Hitler was to take place around January 30. Nobody at the table was going to vote for Hitler's party, the name of which was ~~National Democrat ? - what was it called? - National Socialist ? - I can't remember what it was called at that time.~~

[National Socialist German Workers' Party]

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But anyhow, what I'm trying to say is that nobody at this table was going to vote for Hitler's party at all. We all used to talk at table at the same time. But the woman that ran the pension had just bought a radio, a most extraordinary, and exceptional thing at that time. And within a fortnight all these people at the table were completely converted to Hitler by the screams and yells that they heard on the radio. Meantime we became more - I mean Alfred was a priori anti-Fascist. I had lived in Italy through the March on Rome while I was still Italian. So neither of us was fascistically inclined. But all the other people became converted within a fortnight. We stayed on in Stuttgart until about May because of this admirable and charming doctor whose name was <sup>GARTHE</sup> Gastrecht. We saw the first Jewish persecutions. We saw the first yellow buttons. We saw the first department stores closed as Jewish persecution. And we became very ferociously anti-Fascist. We went to great gatherings and meetings in various theatres in the daytime in Stuttgart in which it was announced what would be done to the teaching of literature, to the teaching of history, to the teaching of every branch, including scientific branches, thanks to what they called the National <sup>ERHEBUNG,</sup> ~~Habolt~~, that is, the National Uprising. We left <sup>Stuttgart in</sup> ~~that place so~~ ferociously anti-Nazi by May. We were sent to Ascona by this doctor. That was supposed to be the sunniest part of Switzerland where we could go to rest. Why he told us to go to Ascona I simply can't remember. And Alfred, instead of going down to the beach on the lake, lay as naked as possible in the sun on the balcony of our room and wrote nine articles called "Hitler and The Nine

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Muses" in order to say what Hitler was going to do to the twisting of everything that was intelligent and intellectual in the Weimar Republic. When he came back to this country he tried to sell them to the Times. Alfred had always sold every blasted thing he had ever written and he couldn't believe he couldn't sell them to Harper's, couldn't sell them to the Atlantic, couldn't sell them to the Times; couldn't sell them to anyone. The only person that published I think what he wrote on movies was Lincoln Kirstein. He published one of Alfred's articles. And then later they were all published in Magazine of Art many, many, many years later. Nobody would believe that Hitler was the kind of person that he ultimately turned out to be. Nobody would believe it. Nobody would believe the content of what Alfred wrote. And he spent all this leisure time in which he was supposed to lie on the beach and rest writing these articles. I can find them for you sometime if you'd like.

PC That's fascinating. One thing is that he has an enormous bibliography and I wonder; how did he find time to run a museum, organize the exhibitions<sup>s</sup>, write the catalogues, write all the other things and the correspondence. You know, where -- ?

MB I don't know how he found the time. You know, he had never been particularly rapid. He always insisted so much on clarity and it is that that used to lose him time in his good days: the insistence that everything that he wrote should be understood by everybody. When he wrote What is Modern Painting? - which is a book that the Museum should still be selling, and has sold in thousands of copies (though we don't get any royalty on it), and should still be selling - he wrote it, it took him quite

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a while to write it so as to make it incredibly clear. And then in Vermont he would make ignorant <sup>summer</sup> people read it; he had housewives read it, farmers read it, maids read it, children read it; every possible person read it and mark what they couldn't understand so that he could rewrite it.

PC Why was he interested in such a kind of broad approach?

MB Well, it was because he was a rebellious art historian. When he ~~we~~ went into Princeton he wanted to become a <sup>1</sup>paleontologist. He graduated at twenty, so he was sixteen when he started there. He took a course with Charles Rufus Morey, who was a great historian of that time, and under whom I too have studied. He was an Early Christian and Medieval scholar. Alfred became strangely converted from the notion of paleontology to the notion of art history. How this can have happened is beyond me! According to me, Charles Rufus Morey, <sup>(11)</sup> under whom I studied, was the most phenomenal bore ever invented. But he was very, very good on method, very sound on method, and very insistent on method. And I think that Alfred, as a form of rebellion against all this methodology applied to works of art that were not intrinsically exciting aesthetically, turned toward the contemporary as a sort of personal, single-handed rebellion. Then by and by he went to Harvard ~~far~~ to do graduate ~~study~~ work. He was very disdainful of the lack of method at Harvard compared to the methodology of Princeton. But they left him ~~with~~ a freer hand. And then, of course, he was constantly penniless. He went through Princeton costing his family practically nothing, always on scholarships. He began to teach at Vassar while he was still doing graduate work.

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Then he taught at Wellesley. Then after two years of Wellesley he got this leave of absence thanks to which he did this great big wandering year of France, Germany, Russia. <sup>In</sup> I mean in Russia he began to <sup>think</sup> write <sup>(12)</sup> about Russian icons. He wrote constantly about modern architecture. He was just writing on <sup>Pollak</sup> ~~Poli-Bori~~ <sup>???</sup> when he was finishing at Harvard. He was very many-sided. He continued to be tremendously interested in Russian things over a period of years until the Museum just actually engulfed him. There are ~~many~~ articles of his on Russian icons.

PC I remember seeing some of those. When did you start going to Vermont?

MB Oh, my Lord, that has very little to do with the Museum. There's another thing that I wanted to tell you about that I wrote down. I wanted to tell you about how he was fired as director in 1943. Russell Lynes was so marvelously tactful, so extremely correct and intelligent in the way he handled this. But the way Alfred was fired was, I think, absolutely diabolical and I think it should be documented. In the midst of the war - and I think that Russell Lynes makes it very clear - there were various people that were assigned elsewhere. I mean Nelson Rockefeller was in Washington. I don't know who else was away. I don't know what Bill Burden was doing - I can't remember what in creation. But anyhow, Stephen Clark was the president of the Museum. Alfred had had always the most charming connection with Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., namely Abby. They were <sup>allies</sup> alive, they were friends. I don't want to say that she had a maternal attitude toward him, but I do

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want to say that they were the greatest of friends, so much so that at times in their very personal conversations they found themselves wondering whether Stephen Clark was really as stupid as they thought him to be. Well, by 1943, Mrs. Rockefeller, I think, was beginning to feel rather old and tired. After all, the Museum was begun in 1929, so by 1943 I don't know how old she was, but anyhow she was less energetic and less 'addicted', still interested in the Museum but less 'addicted' to it than she had been. There came a Saturday in our personal life - we were living already at 49 East 96th Street - in 1943 our daughter would have been - she was born in 1937 - she would have been five-and-a-half or six. All right. There was this sort of dead Saturday ~~on a system~~ ~~of~~ what should we do? I said to Alfred, "Do you want to go to a movie?" He seemed extremely depressed. And I suppose that we did go to a movie - I cannot remember - but in a spirit of resignation, in a ghastly mood. And when we got back he showed me a letter that he had received in the mail in the morning from Stephen Clark firing him. He fired him with a letter that he received on a Saturday morning saying <sup>f</sup>that he would no longer be the director of the Museum, that he really was no good, and that it had been decided in agreement with Mrs. Rockefeller that the only thing <sup>H</sup>we was good at was writing, and that they would cut his salary in half in six months (at that time it was \$9,000), and that all he <sup>C</sup>would do for the Museum would be to write. <sup>l</sup>I do not dramatize, but you have no conception of what this did because it was completely unexpected. One of the most absurd aspects of it was

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that we were in the midst of the war. And in the spring of 1943 Alfred had been asked if he wouldn't like to join the many art historians and art people who were sent ~~who were~~ in O.S.S. or whatever it was called --

- PC Yes, O.S.S.
- MB The art experts who went to save works of art, to track down works of art and all that. He had been asked whether he wouldn't suspend his activity at the Museum and join this force. <sup>The O.S.S.</sup> ~~It~~ included Lincoln Kirstein; and most of the people that we knew at that time got involved in <sup>it</sup> ~~this~~, got sent over to Europe for the preservation of works of art. And Alfred had asked Stephen Clark <sup>if</sup> whether he shouldn't do this, what did Stephen Clark think? <sup>6</sup> And Stephen Clark said, "No. You're much too valuable to the Museum. You must stay." And in October 1943 he fired him; in other words, he prevented him from doing this. If he wanted to get rid of him, or at least suspend his action, he could have let him do this. But not at all. He said, "Don't do it. You're much too precious to the Museum."
- PC What do you think provoked Clark to do this?
- MB There was an exhibition of an artist called <sup>H</sup> ~~K~~irshfield, I think.
- PC Morris Hirshfield, yes.
- MB In which there were some strange naked women, sort of puppet-like naked women. Alfred had put on this show. I think Mr. Clark was shocked by it. Let's see if we can find it. He was hanging that show with Dorothy Miller.
- PC The "Americans" -- ?

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MB It's "Americans 1943: Realists and Magic-Realists." He was fired in the midst of that. He continued to hang it with Dorothy Miller. I don't know where it is - it isn't even mentioned - it is terribly hard to do. I think that a person like Bill Lieberman would remember. I think Bill Lieberman would remember. But anyhow, this letter came. And Alfred stayed in the house without getting dressed for at least a whole month writing answers. Some day when I tidy up the papers in our house I may find the innumerable letters and answers that Alfred attempted to write to Stephen Clark and never, never sent. He never dressed. It was nearly impossible to make him eat. There was Prohibition and all this. We never did used to drink; at most some sherry. At this time, in order to make him eat I invented making Old-Fashioneds. I still remember seeing him lying on the couch in the living room - still everything is exactly <sup>in</sup> the same place in our house to this day - lying on the couch at the end of a day of absolute despair, always in his pajamas and bathrobe. I remember kneeling beside him and offering him an Old-Fashioned in order to make him drink something so that he would eat something. It was unbelievable. And then people began to get involved in this affair, especially Jim Soby who is still alive. You see, the whole cabal had been started by a person called Dick Abbott who had been made - I don't know what <sup>he</sup> ~~it~~ was called - oh, God - business manager of the Museum? - I don't know. And he had a strong hold on Stephen Clark. He was at that time the husband of Iris Barry who worked in the *Litken Library*

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PC In the Film --

MB In the Museum library and then in the movie section of the Museum. And Dick Abbott was power hungry to a fantastic degree and he worked on Stephen Clark to unseat Alfred, I think.

PC Let me say it is May 13, 1974 and this is side 3. In 1939 it

END OF SIDE 2 (Tape 1, Side 2)

MB The opening of the new building?

PC Right. How did that --?

MB Wait a moment. Excuse me for interrupting you, but have we spoken of the exhibition at the Jeu de Paume in Paris?

(reading) "Construction of new building under way" You see, it wasn't open in 1939. Oh, 1939? Are you looking at 1939? Or are you looking at 1938?

PC 1939.

MB Are you, by chance, looking at the show that the Museum sent to Paris - "Three Centuries of American Art" - at the Jeu de Paume? Did we do anything with that?

PC I think just briefly. That was 1938 - right?

MB Did we do anything with that?

PC No. Is there something special about that that you think you should say?

MB Oh, it was <sup>really</sup> very funny. It certainly was.

PC It was the first time they would have seen a lot of these things?

MB It was the first time. We sent these - many very interesting things were sent from America with our insurance. And not only Alfred and I went to Paris, but Conger Goodyear, who was still the president of the Museum, and a charming young man

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TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ALFRED H. BARR, JR. - TAPE 2

DATE: MAY 13, 1974

SIDE 3

PC Let me say it is May 13, 1974 and this is Side 3. In 1939 it was the tenth anniversary --

MB The opening of the new building?

PC Right. How did that --?

MB Wait a moment. Excuse me for interrupting you, but have we spoken of the exhibition at the Jeu de Paume in Paris?

[reading] "Construction of new building under way" You see, it wasn't open in 193<sup>8</sup>. Oh, 1939? Are you looking at 1939? Or are you looking at 1938?

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called Allen Porter who wanted so much to go that he was willing to work the movie camera with which they showed masterpieces of architecture. We all went off to Paris. The director of the Jeu de Paume was called, I think, ~~Andre~~ <sup>Andre</sup> but certainly Dezarrois. He was an extraordinarily conventional and disagreeable man. He had a most marvelous assistant called Rose Vallon<sup>ant</sup>. She helped us ~~out~~ to put on the show. It was incredibly difficult because they had no real crew. The same people, the guards that were used for the security when the Museum was open were used for purposes of hanging. They did not ever put nails in the walls so that they hung the pictures from -- "TRINGLES". (French word)

PC Oh, from the rods.

MB From the moldings with heavy, heavy steel rods that were called <sup>? tringles</sup> ~~trangs~~. These guards would whip <sup>around</sup> ~~xxxxxxx~~ these <sup>tringles</sup> ~~trangs~~ in these enormous rooms and they were just like steel whips and could cut the canvases in two. They had no care or attention whatsoever <sup>in</sup> to handling the works of art ~~with any~~ <sup>no</sup> kind of respect. One of the boxes of pictures that was ~~king~~ being delivered to the Jeu de Paume <sup>fell</sup> ~~fall~~ off a truck on the rue de Rivoli and heaven knows how it was rescued. Then finally, the exhibition was opened with the President of the Republic, I think, and various people. We were very alarmed because this opening was going to take place in the morning. We asked Rose Vallon<sup>ant</sup> what one was supposed to wear. She said, ~~xx~~ "En jaquette." <sup>En jaquette</sup> We asked, "What does that mean?" She said, "Black tie." So we had to get ourselves into black tie.

JACQUETTE

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Alfred warned Mr. Goodyear that this gala opening would occur probably at half-past eleven or twelve on ~~some~~<sup>a</sup> given morning in black tie. He said, "~~Hum~~<sup>Hum</sup>." And he appeared considerably later in a handsome tweed jacket with his two ~~Silian~~<sup>Syrian</sup> dogs, ~~and~~<sup>see Cyhan</sup> and the present Mrs. Bliss Parkinson (who was the daughter of Cornelius Bliss), and Mrs. ~~Bliss~~<sup>Cornelius</sup>, and a great friend of theirs ~~who was called something-or-other~~<sup>Bliss</sup> Cushing, but I've forgotten her first name. They all arrived in a happy little group in morning clothes with the two dogs. This shocked the other officials a great deal. Then we were asked to an official dinner at M. Dezarrois'. I still remember with the greatest amusement... Of course, I had been to official meals in Paris before. You must remember that the important people are placed in the center of a longitudinal table and the small fry, the unimportant people, are ~~left~~<sup>put</sup> at the two ends. And thus it was. It was a remarkable dinner. Very dull, but very good. Then Mr. Goodyear had to give an official dinner, which he did - a luncheon in the Salon des Aigles ~~in~~<sup>at</sup> the ~~CRILLON~~<sup>CRILLON</sup> ~~Trian~~<sup>Trian</sup> for the same people. And what did the French like? They liked, above all, the naïve pictures and they liked that picture called American Gothic - help me - who is it by?

PC Grant Wood.

MB By Grant Wood, yes. That's what they liked.

PC Really?

MB Yes.

PC That's fascinating.

MB So that's the end of that. Mr. Goodyear previously had

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borrowed Whistler's "Mother" for The Museum of Modern Art.

The French felt that they had made an enormous concession in allowing The Museum of Modern Art to borrow it, and they felt that The Museum of Modern Art had made a great deal of money by showing it, *and had not put them in adequate perspective*

PC Oh, really?

MB Yes. So now let's pass on to the next.

PC Did they in fact? They couldn't have, could they?

MB I cannot remember. I don't know.

PC Well, are there any other reactions that you remember about that exhibition in Paris?

MB~~PC~~ No, but other people might. I know that it was a terrific job and that Mr. Dezarrois took it as a completely mechanical operation. Later during - well, never mind - during the war he collaborated with the Germans. He was an odious man. But I can't remember; I know that there were rather snide reviews of <sup>the show</sup> it in the papers.

PC Getting back to 1939 -- what about --?

MB 1939 - now the opening of The Museum of Modern Art.

PC Right. The new building and the tenth anniversary. The Museum still really functioned with a fairly small staff, didn't it?

MB Oh, far smaller than it is now, but it was increasing.

[Machine turned off] It was a very great occasion. I know that there was a big dinner upstairs in the penthouse, and that Sandy Calder was commissioned to make a charming silver chandeliers to hold <sup>the</sup> candles - that is, a chandelier in the sense of a candle holder, not anything that hangs from the

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ceiling. Everything was very gala. Mrs. Rockefeller wore a very beautiful dress which even Russell Lynes has mentioned. It was a red Lanvin, a beautiful, beautiful dress. Everything went very nicely. Except that - well, I cannot remember, but I suppose Russell Lynes goes into it - Mr. Goodyear was very disturbed <sup>because</sup> by ~~situations~~ with Nelson Rockefeller, <sup>slighted him and he</sup> ~~and Mr. Good-~~ ~~year~~ resigned. And this was really rather bad. Mr. Goodyear had given a very great deal of time to the Museum. He had been a difficult president to work under, quite difficult, but, nevertheless, he had really been the propelling force during the first ten years of the Museum.

PC Right.

MB It was just too bad that he should have left in such a huff. And then his resentment toward the Museum continued; although by and by he seemed to like Alfred much more than he had during his tenure. But the truth of it is that he didn't leave his crucial pictures to the Museum. Which we had very much hoped he would do. Especially his very great Gauguin The Spirit of the Dead Matches, which, if I'm not mistaken, he left to Buffalo. Whereas when he came to be president of The Museum of Modern Art he was in a terrible huff with Buffalo. And then, instead, he ended by leaving it to Buffalo.

PC One of the things that I'm curious about, and that I suppose is important, is Nelson Rockefeller's growing activity with the Museum because it was a family interest.

MB Well, it is too hard for me to reconstruct, but I think that in a general way one should say that Nelson came to it

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gradually; he came to it, first, because of his particular devotion to his mother. I don't know how devoted any of those Rockefeller brothers are to their mother, but we've always felt that Nelson was particularly devoted to her. She always wanted to win him over to an interest in the Museum. And it gradually came upon him and then, as you know, he became a violent collector. But it didn't happen as quickly and as soon as she would have liked, I think.

PC But the other brothers were never involved, were they, with contemporary things the way he's been, or the way he was?

MB David now has a considerable collection of, I would say, the more conventional and expensive modern pictures - what one calls "modern" if you still can call van Gogh, Gauguin and Cézanne modern. He has remarkable pictures. I don't know whether he is buying in the more contemporary field. I really don't know. I think that now Bill Rubin advises him, but I don't know whether he's still buying.

PC I don't know either. One thing ~~that is~~ more about you, I guess. You've taught at Spence School for quite a while, haven't you?

MB I've taught at Spence for centuries.

PC How did that happen? What do you teach there?

MB I don't know why you should ask me because that really is of no interest. You see, I very much disliked not working. But when Alfred and I married it was not possible for me to carry any kind of job because of having to go off to Europe for so many months every year. Just before we married I was under contract to go to teach at Smith College and then would eventually have been given the museum at Smith. At the time Mr. <sup>Church</sup> ~~Smith~~ was

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director of the museum, and the idea was that it would be passed on to me when he had to resign because of age. Most interesting. Well, all this had to be given up when I married Alfred. During the winter months I had no official job of any kind. I continued to try to take courses at New York University where I was endeavoring to take a Ph.D., but there was just no continuity to it all. Because make it <sup>in</sup> April, or in May at the latest, we would go off to Europe to assemble these shows. And at that time I really was useful. I never worked for Alfred in the winter. He had secretaries and things. But in the summer I did all his translating, interpreting and letters. I knew languages. He never managed very well in French; he managed slightly better in German. But he was intensely bored by languages, really bored. So in those months I really was useful. Then when we were through with these things that we called 'campaigns', that is, collecting exhibitions, I had to go down to Rome to see my mother who was still residing in Rome; and he had to come back here and make contact with the Museum, and then go to Vermont to see his mother. Then at the end of the summer we would unite, come back to New York and begin again. By and by the war broke out. Well, in 1937 I had a daughter. Then, as <sup>I told you</sup> ~~you see~~, we went in 1938 and 1939 and then the war broke out and there were no more 'campaigns' and we were stuck in America. One fine day a Mrs. Osborne, a woman that I didn't know in the least, <sup>and</sup> who, strangely enough, turned out to be related to Alfred's family, came to dinner to our house with her husband. We were living at 2 Beekman Place. She was the headmistress of Spence. During that summer, which would have

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been the summer of 1943, she wrote ~~to~~<sup>to</sup> me while we were in Vermont to see if I would come to teach at Spence. I was of two or three minds. It humiliated me a great deal to go and teach in a school because I had taught at Vassar and I didn't really want to go and teach in a school. But it was a convenient idea because the school was only five blocks from our house - ~~96th~~<sup>96th</sup> Street - and the school is at 91st Street. I consulted a friend of mine by telephone. She said, "You must take it or you will never work again." This frightened me. So I took it. And I've been teaching there ever after. Which is phenomenal - 1943 to 1973.

PC That's fantastic.

MB And the headmaster keeps me.

PC What classes do you have there?

MB Now I teach only seniors. For a while I taught juniors and seniors. And it has created a sort of name for the girls that have taken this course. A lot of them have made a career in one way or another out of having it. <sup>13</sup>

PC Oh, terrific. That's fantastic.

Has it affected your other activities? Have you been able to --?  
reason

MB The ~~Reason~~<sup>There</sup> why I was able to cling to it is that when the war finished we started going off to Europe again. We went again for the first time in 1948 to assemble an exhibition of Italian painting. Then I came in awfully useful linguistically. Then we went on various other affairs. Then we went to Russia in 1959.

~~There~~ The good thing about this school - and no other school (Brearley especially wouldn't have done it) - if you ask for a leave of absence in totally conventional schools they say,

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"Well, if you want to leave in April, <sup>let's say</sup> just good-bye, we'll get somebody else." Whereas Spence allowed me to pay for a substitute and took me back. This is the reason why I've stuck to it.

PC ~~That's terrific.~~ It's been very useful.

MB No other school that I know of would have done this.

PC ~~There would be that six months or whatever --~~

MB If I paid for a substitute they'd let me go. And I think that even if I wanted to do this now they would give me time off just so long as I paid for a substitute.

PC One thing that you had mentioned briefly before - and I think Russell Lynes mentions it in his book - was the activity during the war of getting people out of Europe and into this country.

MB Oh! Oh, goodness! Didn't we speak about this?

PC Well, it's just that chronologically we haven't really come up to it yet.

MB You must try to remember the date of when the Germans went into Paris. Was it 1941? or 1940? Can you remember?

PC I think it must have been 1940.

MB The phony war began in September 1939 and it lasted for about ten months. So the Germans probably went into Paris in the fall of 1940, don't you think? Well anyway, the situation was that the Museum was understaffed, and that Alfred was beginning to get letters of extraordinary intensity begging for help, letters from artists who were begging for help to be allowed into the United States. Extraordinarily difficult papers had to be procured from the State Department. It was an extremely laborious operation. There was nobody in the Museum that had the time to do this. By this time my daughter would have been three-and-a-

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quarter years old or something like that and I was more or less nailed into the house, though we had a nurse. Alfred came home and said, "There's nobody in the Museum that can do it. Will you do it?" And so I undertook this job. Which was extraordinarily boring, frustrating and laborious. The State Department wanted true proof that none of the artists who were requesting entry was in any way tainted by Communism. They never, never inquired whether they were Fascist, but they were terrified that they might be Communists. By hook or by crook we managed to get papers for: Lipchitz, Masson, Tanguy, Max Ernst - I can't remember who else. Sometimes I try to reconstruct this --

PC Léger came over at one point.

MB Léger I did not clear. No, I can't remember who else.

PC Did Chagall come over at that time?

MB Chagall indeed! That's a good question. They came. They probably were particularly difficult because not only did you have to clear their papers, but also you had to find \$400 for each one, and also you had to organize so that somebody or other would guarantee that they would not become a charge to the state. The dealer who was most helpful was Curt Valentin who is now dead. Pierre Matisse was not particularly helpful. It is so strange because nowadays all these artists would have had innumerable contacts with the United States, whereas instead at that time Alfred and the Museum were the only American people of any kind of caliber that they knew. They didn't have connections with collectors, wealthy collectors and all that who would have helped them. It just had to be the Museum and nobody else. What I was trying to say is that you had to find

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\$400 each and then a guarantee for each one. This we managed to do for all of them except for Max Ernst. Miraculously, Max Ernst made contact with Peggy Guggenheim in Europe so that by and by she flew him in so that we didn't have to find passage for him. And then, as you may remember, they briefly were married because she wanted to help him out so far as his permanent papers were concerned. But this marriage didn't last very long.

PC No. Where did Varian Fry come into all this?

MB Varian Fry was absolutely extraordinarily useful. We used to work with the Joint - oh, dear me --  
*Rescue Committee*

PC There was a committee, wasn't there?

MB Joint So-and-So Committee - Joint-Refugee? - No - there's another word - Jewish Joint? - Do you think it might be here?

[pages turning]

PC I don't know.

MB A splendid girl who was then a Warburg - but again I've forgotten her name...We've tried ever so often to re-find all the papers that pertain to this operation. There must have been a voluminous amount of papers on the subject. Poor Varian Fry in the end wanted to write a book about it and we couldn't find the papers any more. I have no idea where they are. They're not in Alfred's files; they're not in our house; they're gone. Well anyway... Oh! it was called Joint Rescue Committee!

PC Right.

MB Varian Fry went over to Europe and helped them. I have photographs of Varian Fry with Breton, Max Ernst and all that in

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Marseilles. This was the high romantic moment in Varian Fry's life. I don't know whether you knew him.

PC No. *transcendently little communication there was between Europe*

MB You didn't? He did a marvelous job and helped them from that end. I don't know whether he was doing any kind of espionage work. What else he was doing I have no idea. I greatly doubt it. And then he finally got the - he became Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur. We went to a small ceremony in his honor here at the French Cultural office. And now, unfortunately, he's dead.

PC One of the other things that is fascinating is your being a part of, but separate from, and yet associated with all of these people and the Museum and everything and it's --

MB I think that there's one more thing to say about this question of the refugee artists. It's not only the ones that I've mentioned that came, but also, for instance, Matta and Breton, whom I did not help out... And they got all involved with Gorky, and Léger got involved with these people and they were <sup>a</sup> the tremendous leaven in the group of American artists that they associated with and had a very great influence on them. (14)

PC Ultimately.

MB Also I should say that during these years of suspense - because the rescuing operation could have continued indefinitely - there was no reason for it to occur precisely in 1940, going into 1941 - it could have gone on and on. We kept always thinking, would Picasso want to come? And also closely allied with Picasso was the marvelous poet Paul Eluard who had been the second prophet of Surrealism in the twenties with Breton. And instead

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they never asked to come. Of course, we now know why Picasso didn't come. But, you see, it's extremely hard now to realize how tremendously little communication there was between Europe and the United States during the war. There was just no knowing what was happening to whom. We didn't know where they were. We didn't know that Picasso was being left untouched by the Germans. We didn't know, for instance, what Marcel Duchamp was doing going in and out of the - what zone was it?

PC Vichy?

MB Yes. He was going in and out of that during the war with great cleverness. But we never knew any of these things. And these people did not ask for help. We were very worried about them, too.

PC When did the Rescue Committee stop? Was that for just about a year or so? (15)

MB It petered out. Yes. In one way or another the ones that wanted to get out may or may not have succeeded in getting out. The others stayed or invented other solutions. Like Giacometti going back to Switzerland and things like that.

PC Just in looking at Mr. Barr's bibliography, or the part of it that you just showed me, how did he find time to write, as well as be at the Museum and talk and see and --?

MB It all depends on what years you're thinking of.

PC You mean it changed over the years? - some years he wrote more than others? It was easier? more difficult?

MB I would have to look at the... I myself was really astounded at the bibliography preceding the <sup>year</sup> 1943. But --

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PC Would he have a regular writing schedule?

MB Not at all. He was always extraordinarily absorbed. You never knew what would be coming up next or what he would want to do next. Then, of course, he had to work on all these museum catalogues. I mean, for instance, the Cubism and Abstract art was a tremendous operation. I remember that all the photographs were laid out on the floor of our apartment at 2 Beekman Place. We had a cat at that time so it was really rather difficult. The cat would disorder the things. He always wanted enormous surfaces to put down photographs. I just now did that little lecture, you know, on Picasso, of which I gave you a Xerox copy. When he was selecting the Picasso show we were doing all the show on the floor of Paul Rosenberg, as I told in the... <sup>lecture</sup> He always wanted huge surfaces <sup>photo for jobs</sup> to put ~~things~~ down. But I don't know how he managed to do the writings that preceded his famous firing of 1943. But when he was fired, these good people felt that the only thing he was good at was writing and so he was demoted from his normal office in the Museum. A little cubbyhole had to be sliced out of a corner of the library, which at that time was on the fourth floor of the Museum looking toward 54th Street. They sliced out a closet-~~size~~ <sup>size</sup> little office with a desk. That's where he wrote, first: Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art. And then he began perhaps to write the Matisse. But this clausturation of his did not last indefinitely so that the greater part of the Matisse was written in our house.

PC would he ever discuss things that he was writing with you?

MB would he talk about things? Would he try out ideas?

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MB No. No. The book in which he tried out ideas like mad was What is Modern Painting?

PC Oh, yes. We've talked about that. He had people read it.

MB Then he would make everybody read it so as to be sure that it was comprehensible. But for the rest, he was very much his own art critic so far as his writing was concerned. He wrote extraordinarily slowly and he wrote and rewrote because of this insistence on good writing combined with absolute understandability. He hated being obscure. In fact, he never did think in those terms. But, nevertheless, he was constantly improving and polishing what he was writing. The pieces of foolscap that were used were unimaginable because it was rewritten and rewritten and then typed with spaces and corrected. It was an extremely slow and laborious process.

PC But how did he find time to do the research, you know, what with the slow writing plus the administration and the scene and --?

MB Well, you see, he did have somewhat less administration when he ceased being director. I don't know what year he was made Director of the Collections. I'll try to find it here. [pages turning] "Director of Collections 1947-1967". This is really useful.

PC Right. But now when he took that position, everything --?

MB Of course, that entailed buying, seeing an enormous amount of works of art, going to masses of exhibitions. And then, of course, all through he had always made a point of seeing every exhibition worth seeing while we were in Paris or in London.

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Throughout, and especially in later years, he always used to insist on seeing the Venice Biennales or the Dokumenta. He'd go through these exhibitions with catalogue in hand, of course, meditating and discerning the pictures that interested him, and then going to the purchase bureau and transacting to buy them. I remember this perfectly. I am terrified that now nobody goes to Dokumenta, that nobody goes to these big shows. I don't know whether anyone does; I don't know whether anyone looks or selects or chooses from them. But Alfred was terribly interested in the Museum's being extremely international in nature. We went to the Biennale in Sao Paulo. He was always hunting for people that we hadn't heard of that were interesting and trying to buy them and putting them into the collection. I think a lot of these pictures are now<sup>†</sup> shown now.

PC Well, there is a huge collection there.

MB There is a huge collection and a lot of it is in the reserve now. The trustees and other people on the staff, many people on the staff, felt that his last hanging of the collections that he bought through the year 1967 was too crowded, that the space was too chopped up. Of course, the more you chop it, the more walls you have. You see, it's built so that you can put up lots of partitions and have subdivisions of rooms. It was hung with extraordinary attention to chronology, to movements, to countries, to every kind of scholarly aspect of the collection so that it would make sense as a sort of panorama in history and of an international nature. But now they prefer to have opened-out space and to hang the collection decoratively. And if you hang that way, you lose an enormous amount

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of space. I overheard Rubin showing his rehangings of the collection, at least showing the first rooms of it, and he was terribly interested in perspective, in having the galleries opened out so that the eye could wander through crucial pictures that he had spaced all the way down to the back of the building. It's a totally different concept of hanging. But the result is that there is a tremendous amount that is not hanging now.

PC Oh, I remember the old exhibitions when they were just filled with marvelous things, it was like going through a garden - all those things.

MB Alfred and I have talked about this twenty million times. My crucial example is this one: Let us imagine that Alfred and I are in Basel for twenty-four hours. What do we prefer: to see everything or as much as possible that is in the Basel museum? or do we want to see the Basel museum hung decoratively so that it looks handsome? Now you know exactly what our answer would be. We want it hung showing as much as they have. And if the museum is too small, well then, it's just too bad that it looks crowded, but at least we see everything. Now if you want to hang it decoratively, instead of showing fifteen Klees, you show five and put the others in reserve. There's no answer to that one. There's no answer.

PC Well, you need a contrast --

MB You know that until the finances of the whole country began to go to pieces, there was a tremendous desire to enlarge the Museum immensely and there were all sorts of projects about it, among them building a skyscraper on top of the museum, or

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rebuilding the garden on the second floor and making more space underneath, or else moving everything to the East Side. I still remember Philip Johnson's saying, "All the future of New York is around the United Nations and it is in that region that we should buy land and sell this land, which is extremely expensive, and buy and build a big, big building there so that we can show everything." Well, all these things, perhaps mercifully... I think too big a museum is very disconcerting and exhausting.

PC True.

MB So all these projects died for lack of money.

PC One thing that somebody along the line said that I should ask you about was the kind of social life and the entertaining and the dinners and all of this kind of business; you know, that you cooked so well for everybody.

MB We did a very bad job. We did a very bad job. Well, it makes my mind race instantly and wonder what Dick Oldenburg is doing.

I know that Dick Oldenburg has to go out a tremendous amount, tremendous. I like him very much. I do not have the pleasure of being a friend of his, but I do know that they go out terribly much and that he works fantastically hard. Now we want out. It used to tire Alfred a lot, but we did go out and we did go out in evening clothes. And at the beginning we did sometimes - even if it is extraordinary to me - we did ask people to tea, of all things. I remember our asking Mrs. Murray Crane to tea. Unthinkable nowadays. But we did. But we retributed excessively. First of all, we didn't have much money, you know. I never learned to have caterers. I never learned to

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have people to serve. Every time I had people to serve they ruined what I had cooked. When we were living on Beekman Place we did have a cook and sometimes they managed. But we never had more than six in all. And we never did it in a really elegant way at all. Now I do wonder whether we were right or wrong. But it all had to do with the economics of it. I don't know whether I explained to you - and stop me if I did - that when we went to Europe in all those years we had no per diem. Did I tell you that?

PC Yes, you did.

MB Everything was tabulated, every taxi, every ~~XXXXXX~~ meal.

PC Even after the war in the late forties, or fifties?

MB Never! Never did we have a per diem! Never! Never!

PC That's fantastic.

MB We never had any entertainment fund; any; any. I remember talking about it many times with Philip Johnson who at that time was very much more intimate with us than he is now. He would say, "My dear woman, if you entertain in the house you cannot take it off your income tax." And then he would say, or somebody else would say, "If you're going to have a dinner, then you get the butcher to give you a slip, you get the grocer to give you a slip, and you get this one to give you a slip, and you put them all together and you say how many people you entertained and you put it all together and you calculate." Well, life is too short to do this kind of thing. And it really never paid for my labor or loss of time or anything. Alfred always insisted that in our house we did not belong to clubs. So he would not belong to the Century Club, he would not belong to

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the University Club, Mrs. Rockefeller from the very first year of our marriage wanted me to join the Cosmopolitan Club. Alfred said, "No. No. In our house we do not belong to clubs."

PC I wonder why? Why was that?

MB It was just the way he felt.

PC Fascinating. So there was just no outside place --?

MB I suppose if we had... Not that I'm particularly thrilled if somebody asks me to dinner at the Cosmopolitan Club or anywhere, but still it would have been a solution because then at least you got a chit and you could take it off. But I don't think that any of the people that he needed to entertain would have liked to come to such places. It would not have been a suitable retribution.

PC What kind of people did you entertain then? One would think of the artists or the trustees or dealers or critics, writers.

MB No, we only saw friends.

PC Really? There was no --

MB We never had what one would call an intellectual salon or anything of the kind. Nothing. Well, you see, when finally Alfred would come home he was too tired; and he came home later and later and later as the years went on. So it would just be a casual person that was going through New York, or two people that we particularly wanted to see. But never any intelligent get-together. I would have liked very much to be able to do something of the kind. It would have amused me. But it wouldn't have amused Alfred. He was too tired.

PC It would just be more work.

MB He always has been very, very anxious when people came to the

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house. It makes him very anxious. I have ~~gimm~~ given lots of cocktail parties, rather amusing ones, I think. He'd arrive rather late on the day, but then he'd begin to move the pictures and to arrange everything in a sort of anxious, housewifely way. <sup>It created</sup> He'd-~~create~~ a sort of anxiety. And then he was always terribly anxious because he would say, "When are they going to leave?" I would say, "My God, Alfred, what does it matter?" And he never has fallen in with the system that the last people all go out to dinner together. He wouldn't stand for that.

PC It's interesting. I don't know him, of course I've met him maybe four times or something, but in seeing him - one would always see him in the Museum <sup>on the</sup> ~~at~~ different ~~xxxx~~ floors, as I wander around there a lot - and I always got the feeling that there was, you know, different ~~Alfreds~~ Alfred Barrs, like the Alfred Barr of the Museum and that when he went home he was - that was another part of his life and they were compartmentalized or something.

MB I don't -- <sup>ing to fight to get their helpers to get</sup>

PC It's just that somehow I always get that feeling. <sup>what</sup>

MB I think he knew enormously well what he was doing within the Museum when he had his staff and everything was going along. Everybody was susceptible to his charm, I think. Women loved to work with him. But men less so. He and René d'Harnoncourt worked together beautifully, beautifully. They understood each other. René always took seriously what Alfred said. Very often when René did not do what Alfred said needed to be done it was always done without any kind of rancor or

PC Yes. Well, I think the Museum in those early - well, say

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irascibility. It all went absolutely beautifully. They worked together extremely well.

PC Sometimes in talking to some of the other people - not to d'Harnoncourt - but some of the other people felt there was a certain competitive spirit from the younger curators and some of the other people who came in.

MB It may well be. It may well be. It may well be.

PC Yes. Whereas I don't think with d'Harnoncourt there was. I mean he was not that kind of --

MB Well, I think that all in all it was rather pleasant to work in the Museum at that time. The only person who had his difficulties with René was Edgar Kaufmann. But all in all, I think it worked rather harmoniously. And I think that a great many people were not intent on whether they were making a great deal of money or not. I know that René had it very much on his mind. And Alfred, too. Every time the budget came up in June they'd be trying to fight to get their helpers to get a little bit more money. I was particularly <sup>upset</sup> at the time of the strike last fall. The wife of Professor Colin Eisler who teaches at the Institute of Fine Arts was doing a sort of reportage on Channel 13 on the strike and at a certain moment she said something that upset me a lot. She said, "Well, of course, the staff of The Museum of Modern Art in previous years was terribly underpaid and more fool they." This really hurt me. Of course, we were infinitely less well paid than the staff that's working there now. "Peanuts" as Oldenburg says.

PC Yes. Well, I think the Museum in those early - well, say

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up until  
after 1950 - sort of attracted people who were more involved with  
the Museum, more interested in the Museum.

MB You mean the trustees?

PC No. The people who worked there, the staff people who had a  
greater commitment to *the ideals*

MB It was more idea-making.

PC Yes.

MB Oh, much more.

PC Yes. And then it became a career step, you know.

MB I don't know. Unfortunately, I do regret that I have no con-  
tact now with the intelligent young people that are working  
there. And now that Betsy Jones is leaving --

PC Is she leaving too?

MB Yes, she's leaving at the end of July, I think. She's leaving  
because she says it's not fun to work in the Museum any more.

PC Everybody there has been saying that for the last few years.

MB It's just terrible, you know, because she was in charge of the  
entire permanent collection and she's been given curator rank  
and a good salary. I don't know what to think.

PC It's another regime, another generation. Were there problems,  
or good things, in terms of certain trustees? Were there  
trustees who kind of always backed Mr. Barr's activities? Or  
were there some trustees who one always had to persuade?

MB I suppose that Alfred had to persuade them many times to do  
things that they didn't particularly want to do. Philip John-  
son used to like very much to go to trustees meetings when Al-  
fred was holding forth, and always seconded him, or else would

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buy whatever Alfred thought should be bought if the trustees didn't want to buy it. At trustees meetings Alfred always seemed to feel that something or other should be thought up or devised that would interest the trustees. I do not know whether anyone does this now. He used to really give it a great deal of thought so that they should feel that they were part of things and his reasons for wanting this or that work of art. I don't know whether anyone does this now.

PC That's a problem all institutions have these days, I think. One thing we didn't talk about that you said I should mention was the fire.

MB The ~~famous~~ famous fire.

PC The famous fire. Now is the time to --

MB I was working for McGraw-Hill Publishing Company which was publishing an Encyclopedïa of World Art. And from 1957 until - I don't know -

PC That went on for a couple of years.

MB 1958? 1959? - I worked there for about the better part of two years in one way or another. They hired me as translation editor. This book was more or less being translated from the Italian but there were innumerable articles that were coming in in other languages. And I know lots of languages and can manage many that I don't know. McGraw-Hill at that time had owned a building on 41st Street between Fifth and Madison. I needed to track down the name of a potential translator and therefore needed to speak to at least a secretary of Robert Goldwater in the Museum of Primitive Art to unearth the name of this translator. So I made my inquiry by telephone. The

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person who answered said, "Mrs. Barr, I'm sorry to tell you that The Museum of Modern Art is on fire." There I was. It was precisely April 15, 1958. I had announced that I wasn't going out to lunch. I had on a suit with a fairly tight skirt - which is important - and I walked out into the street. Fifth Avenue was still two-way. I called a taxi and asked, "Can you change a ten?" He said, "No, I can't." So I lost that taxi. The street was so full of people that I figured that I would get there faster on foot. As I began to rush up Fifth Avenue with this tight skirt on, on unbelievably crowded sidewalks, the fire engines began to go in the direction of the Museum. When I got myself to the level of Rockefeller ~~Center~~<sup>Plaza Center</sup>, I began to veer leftwards, you know, to go through the Esso Building and that section so as to get off the Avenue. At the building that is called - dear me - 50 Rockefeller ~~Center~~<sup>Plaza</sup> there used to be a ticker tape --

PC Oh, yes, right.

MB And on the ticker tape as I rushed by I saw, "Museum of <sup>Modern</sup> Art on Fire." I went through the Esso Building and there I had the first view of the Museum. The hook and ladder was up. There were women with beautiful hats on up in the penthouse screaming and yelling and looking down. The firemen were beginning to slash the windows. So I rushed toward the Whitney Museum and at 54th Street they let me in and I got myself into the garden. And then the firemen were also on the 54th Street side <sup>slashing</sup> the windows. There were members of the staff who were carrying out pictures. I think there was a Juan Gris show besides a

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Seurat show and the Seurat Grande Jatte was in there.

PC Right.

MB And there I was in the garden spellbound. There is a sculptor called Lipton --

PC Yes, Seymour Lipton. Right.

MB Seymour Lipton. Seymour Lipton was standing there with me and he said, "When you think that the greater part of my work is in that museum at the moment in the basement!" I felt like saying, "Good God! I do admit, but, after all, the Seurat Grande Jatte is slightly more important." Then it occurred to me, where is Alfred, where is Alfred? I started asking everybody, "Where is Alfred? Where is Alfred?" nobody could tell me. I think I saw his secretary, a certain <sup>Marie</sup> ~~Kitty~~ Alexander. Nobody knew where Alfred was. Suddenly terrified, I said, "The only thing for me to do is to get out of here. I can't do a thing; I cannot." And I ran away and went up to the Institute of Fine Arts because I was listening to a course. Around five o'clock I came down again and found Alfred. Alfred had been on the fifth floor in the office of a splendid treasurer called Sarah Rubenstein who had the last office on the fifth floor on the Fifth Avenue side. This office had a side window there; in other words, these windows looked out onto 53rd Street. Then there was a side window and it was wired <sup>wire mesh</sup> for fire and that window overlooked what was known as the Prentice house because that belonged to a member of the Rockefeller family called the 'old Mrs. Prentice.' Now that's rebuilt and it's the new section of the Museum because she left the house. Okay. So the place was invaded by smoke because

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it was all caused by smoke - it was caused by a fire that had started where workmen were installing the new air conditioning system. Therefore, all the smoke went freely through the entire museum. They were suffocating with smoke. They shut the door. I don't know how many of the staff were in there but certainly Sarah Rubenstein, Alfred, and at least one other younger man. With the strength of God knows what, they smashed the wired window and started yelling down to the Prentice House, "Give us a ladder! Give us a ladder!" The butler said, "I have no orders." I know that Alfred yelled, "We're on fire, Man! Get a ladder!" And they all crawled out that window ~~into~~ Sarah Rubenstein's. And then, of course poor Dan Rich was still director of the Chicago Museum and by the time I got back Dan Rich had flown in from Chicago. He was so worried about the Grande Jatte. You know the rest and the things that did and did not happen, that were and were not damaged. The whole place was a madhouse, you know, what with smoke and water and things being lifted off walls and put into other rooms. It was incredible.

PC That was astounding.

MB The Monets were in a partition, you see, they had put up - they were so big to move that they had put up a partition and the Monets were, so to say, abutting against the walls that overlook 53rd Street. They were sandwiched in there. I think I ---- [Machine turned off]

END OF SIDE 3 - (Tape 2, Side 1)

END OF INTERVIEW

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NOTES BY MRS. ALFRED H. BARR, Jr.  
July 1979

1. Classical education consists of five years of Ginnasio and three years of Liceo.
2. Professors assigned the subject of a thesis and left the students to manage by themselves. They gave ~~me~~<sup>no</sup> guidance or advice. I was supposed to write on the "International Style" in the fifteenth century in Italy.
3. Arthur McComb taught Italian Painting; he gave a general course and seminars.
4. By the time I got to my M.A. thesis Arthur McComb had left Vassar.
5. I am alluding to the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University in the Duke House at 1 East 78th St.
6. To continue to take courses in a concentrated way. I hoped especially to work in the Italian field under Prof. Richard Offner. Actually in 1927-28 and in '28-29 I taught my full schedule at Vassar, I taught at Sarah Lawrence in Bronxville and took two graduate courses ~~for the~~<sup>per</sup> semester at N.Y.U. in other words I slept in three places every week.
7. I think that in 1963 or '64 Alfred hung ~~our~~<sup>a</sup> gallery with pictures very close and "skied", two or three, one above the other, to dramatize the Museum's need for more space. He was dismayed because few people noticed the change and those who did, liked it. However, Philip Johnson deplored the many partitions that Alfred put up to get more hanging space and to subdivide the paintings by School or period. He said that the galleries looked like a department store. The

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minute Alfred retired his hanging of the permanent collection was dismantled and all later hangings were planned "decoratively" so that the visitors found themselves in ampler spaces.

Alfred's last ground plan and hanging scheme are reproduced in his last "Paintings and Sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art: 1929-1967", 1977.

In conversation he and I said again and again "Supposing you had one day in Basel - would you prefer to see the Museum grandly arranged with its most important pictures - or would you like to see as much as possible of what it owns?" It's funny because we said this so often and we always used Basel as an example.

8. When I say "do his correspondences" I mean two different things. I took dictation but I also wrote many borrowing letters in assorted languages.
9. If Alfred had heard this remark he would have been extremely annoyed. He hated the label taste-maker which, I think, was invented by John Canaday.
10. Several stories by Katherine Mansfield take place in German pensions. As a matter of fact I think Alfred met her once on a boat but did not find her interesting.
11. Charles Rufus Morey. I think that my remarks are unfair about Morey. I had him in graduate courses at a time when I had already experienced a sprightlier teacher<sup>s</sup>. Also I had come to dislike Early Christian and Early Medieval material so I was prejudiced. I think that in 1918-1919-192<sup>0</sup> Morey was giving introductory courses (it ought to be possible to look up old

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- catalogues) and it must have been thrilling for Alfred who was so visual to be exposed academically to works of art. I know for sure that the first course with Morey made him abandon palaeontology for art history. Alfred took courses with all the professors in the art department and he came to like Frank Jewett Mather very much. I think it is he who first exposed Alfred to "modern art". Frankie Mather was a free spirit, his eye roamed into every field disciplined by a taste for quality. He was liberal in thought, warm-hearted, he treated the students as equals.
12. Russian icons, While in Russia~~l~~ Alfred wanted to read up on Russian icons. Books on the subject in western languages were few (see footnotes in Russian Diary<sup>\*</sup>). He wrote the Russian Icon article<sup>\*\*</sup> to satisfy himself, in a way, because in all things of the mind he wanted discipline and neatness; this accounts for the charts in the catalogue of the Italian Exhibition (1939)<sup>(and</sup> the one in Cubism and Abstract Art. Actually his layout of the permanent collection in its successive hangings depended on his demand for intellectual discipline. When we spent some months in Rome in 1932-33 he was intent on arranging the whole course of Italian baroque painting in his mind and as we looked and looked in museums and churches I could see the restlessness and searchings that would have lead up to another logical chart of dates and influences. With stamps, butterflies and

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birds as well as with works of art his mind was tidy.

13. I see no point in elaborating this. Alfred taught me to see and above all to love works of art. I taught the girls in my own way with no direct influence from him. You can only go so far with high school seniors.
14. When once the artists got here we did not follow them closely. <sup>They</sup> This missed café life. In the village they picked out the Jumble Shop - perhaps on West 8th Street - they called it "Le Jumble". Breton and Tanguy refused to learn English.
15. The Joint Rescue Committee never petered out. I should have said that the number of artists who solicited the Museum's help petered out.

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place an exhibition would be able to  
 MB No. But Alfred used to... I saw him selecting this first show  
 of his - well, <sup>no,</sup> ~~I don't know,~~ he must have selected various other  
 shows in that year going from 1929-1930. If we had the catalogue  
 we would be able to see. But the truth of it is that his system  
 of collecting an exhibition had to do with preparing himself  
 violently out of books so as to select the best pictures by  
 these two -- by the painter or painters that he was going to  
 show. He never even asked for whatever else one could borrow,  
 the general idea being to have a <sup>very</sup> selective show. Whereas even  
 up to this day, most of the shows - oh, I'm thinking even of  
 the very recent shows of Picasso and Matisse in these later  
 years - are selected on the basis of: let us put in everything  
 that we can borrow. Whereas he always borrowed by quality.  
 He never even asked for secondary pictures that he didn't want.

PC That was right from the beginning, wasn't it?

MB He always selected that way; always selected by quality; never  
 asked for whatever you could get easily. And then there was -  
 but this is of no importance - a picture was stolen out of that  
 first exhibition that he did of Corot-Daumier. But he did --

*Strollers  
by Daumier  
owned by  
Jord  
Bourgeois*

PC Oh, really?

MB If I only had the - if I only had -

PC You mean the exhibition chronology?

MB Yes - that's at the back of the Russell Lynes book. I could  
 tell you the other exhibitions of that year. They were very  
 interesting exhibitions. They were always hung on this system,  
 selected on this system and hung on this system. Now the other  
 thing that I thought of telling you was that } in all the years  
 that he functioned in Paris, which means 1930 to 1939, and

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until  
 then again beginning 1948 ~~to~~ - I can't remember - Alfred retired  
 in 1967 - I can't remember how many other shows he selected be-  
 cause in 1943 he had been fired as director. So I would still  
 have to have a chronology of the exhibitions. But there were  
 two things I wanted to say: first, that in that long spell of  
 1930 to 1939 we had no per diem of any kind. <sup>(in later years)</sup> All the other  
 major people that went to Europe to select exhibitions for the  
 Museum had a per diem. Whereas we crossed at that time on boats  
 sometimes third-class. I remember perfectly crossing third-  
 class on the Bremen to spare the Museum money, and we had no  
 per diem. I used to write down every taxi ride. We stayed in  
 acceptable hotels exclusively in order to have decent telephone  
 service. We first stayed in the St. James <sup>and</sup> ~~in~~ Albany which had  
 appalling telephone service. Then we stayed in the Continental  
 on the rue Royale; it had mediocre, not good telephone service.  
 Then we ended up in the Matignon on the rue Matignon which had  
 quite good telephone service. And we always stayed in minute  
 rooms with no working space. I kept every record of every taxi  
 ride and of every lunch. And we would lunch in shopkeepers'  
 restaurants and truck drivers' restaurants in order to <sup>spare</sup> ~~save~~ the  
 Museum money. We never, never lunched in a decent restaurant  
 or dined in a decent restaurant unless we had to entertain some-  
 body. And when <sup>after the war</sup> we began to hear that there were other people  
 of the Museum that had a twenty-five dollar a day per diem we  
 were astounded!

PC When did that start - the daily stipend or whatever?

MB After the war.

PC Oh, in the forties.

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MB Peter Selz for a while was in the painting department of the Museum and we overlapped with him in Paris. He was staying at the St. James <sup>and</sup> Albany and he had a per diem of twenty-five dollars a day. We were amazed! Amazed! This had never happened to us.

PC That's fantastic.

MB We never had any entertainment fund. We had to entertain quite a bit for the Museum. We had successively an apartment at 2 Beekman Place and then moved to 49 East 96th Street where there was this beautiful dining room because we knew we would always have to entertain. We used to talk about this with friends who said that if we entertained in the house we could not get any kind of facilitation unless we kept every separate bill of every butcher and grocer and everybody. Which was just too much work. We never had any entertainment fund of any kind.

PC How extraordinary. Why was that, do you think?

MB Because the Museum was always broke. And because Alfred was passionately devoted to the Museum. That's the way it was. I mean later people that worked in the Museum didn't see it in that light. But that's the way he saw it.

PC That's fantastic. Now it's just sort of standard practice.

MB Yes. Well, I don't know how they manage now. I don't know whether the ~~most~~ <sup>director Dick</sup> charming (Oldenburg entertains, whether he has a per diem when he goes abroad; I don't know anything about this. But, for instance, I do know that when they hired Bates Lowry he insisted on having a large apartment which the Museum bought for him. He felt that he would have to entertain. Whether he did or not I don't know. But he certainly would

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P. 8, 12,  
19, 20

on showing young people  
how to see in Museums:  
could talk about A.'s  
ideas on this later on.  
i.e. how do the  
susceptible become in-  
formed? <sup>not to the point</sup>  
<sub>in this interview</sub>  
from p. 8

fr. p. 19

À propos of this: Maysa, did you  
notice that Maysa Libs changed green  
brocade walls on 2nd floor to neutral  
color for the Michelangelo show?  
no I did not. I didn't notice R.

Didn't you meet A. at the  
opening of the ISY exhibit?  
no. quite a bit later  
from p. 12

Didn't A. "sky" pgs before  
huge fund-raising effort was to  
be undertaken - such as 35<sup>th</sup>  
anniversary since before MoMA  
was closed for several months -  
@ 1963-4? reel 7 p. 20

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p 34-36  
37

know  
this is the best I would  
like to find from (P. 30)

Hebo - I know I've seen it & will  
seriously attempt to unear it next wk  
(as/then...)

Manq - Also tried the Nation &  
Yale U. Press, didn't he?  
p36 Anywhere else? Don't know  
what his new Refs are

Do you want to further explain  
AHB → Katherine Mansfield?  
M.D. p.34

Yet didn't A.'s contemporaries  
at Princeton find Hux very  
exciting & intellectually stimulating?  
(see note 11) p. p. 37  
(bottom)

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Would you like to explain  
the list. All items of work  
related - direct to the artist  
they have to be read as  
background only - in order  
to connect with the work  
of a painting for the whole of  
which I had a copy.

Rona  
This is the list I would  
like to find. From (P. 30)

He too - I know I've seen it & will  
seriously attempt to acquire it next wk  
(25 there...)

There is a copy  
of this list  
968 - 2/2/50

MSB/1/1/1/1/1  
P. 30  
1/1/1/1/1

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would you care to explain  
further A's ideas of wall  
labels - didn't he feel  
they were to be read as  
background only - in order  
to enhance aesthetic appreciation  
of a feeling for the wk. of art?  
I think I said enough

version of  
re wall labels  
from p. 19

There is a copy  
of this here on  
96 St in the file,

re: MSB's lecture on  
Picasso  
(from p. 24)

verso

recto

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Would you care to explain  
further A's ideas of wall  
label - didn't he feel  
they were to be read as  
background only - in order  
to enhance aesthetic appreciation  
of a feeling for the wk. of art?  
I think I said enough

There is a copy  
of this here on  
96 St in the files

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TC: wall labels  
from p. 19

TC: MSB's lecture on  
Picasso  
(from p. 24)

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verso  
Maga  
- Probably more like in  
millions of copies!  
you correct if you like R.

verso  
P. 36  
2011 Frances Keech - how  
of these sold?

verso  
Did he "discover" icons in  
Russia or did he know about  
them before they left?

verso  
P. 38  
2011 Frances Keech  
(see p. 37)