THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **EDWARD M.M. WARBURG (EW)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: Let me start by asking you where and when you were born and just a little bit about your family background.

EW: Okay. [PAUSE]

SZ: Go ahead.

EW: Are you ready?

SZ: I'm ready. I'm just going to listen and make sure I can hear you as you start to talk.

EW: I was born in 1908, which makes me the last member of my family alive of my generation. We were four boys...and one girl. My sister was the oldest; she later became Mrs. Walter Rothschild. My brothers,...going down the steps: the top one was...Frederick Warburg, and the next one was Gerald, the next...was Paul. And then I came in, with great excitement.... There was a general feeling that the only reason my family had me was purely for tax purposes [LAUGHING]. But they my brothers found me poisonous, and their one ambition was to get me off their tail, and

my one ambition was to be included with the bunch.... All the things they wanted to do, I wanted to do, too; but my family, my mother [Frieda] particularly, decided that I was a special child and I should be taken care of. I always had a nurse or a governess or somebody on the other end of the leash taking care of my safety. I resented this, and I really don't know how I grew up even halfway normal, because we were treated with such care, under such unusual circumstances. My son, now a man of forty years old, I took him one time to see the old family house [at] 1109 Fifth Avenue, which is now the Jewish Museum. My mother gave it to...the Jewish Theological Seminary after my father [Felix] died. She wanted the building to be continued; it played such a role in the history of, particularly, the Jewish community. Almost everything of importance was hammered out at the meetings downstairs in the "etching room"--i.e., the Federation of Jewish Philanthropic Societies, for local needs, and the Council of Jewish Welfare Funds, really the collection of all the local federations, and last but not least, Father had insisted that Mother, the children and any advisors she may want would constitute themselves into a fund or foundation for Mother to use for her philanthropy. Father refused to sit in on those meetings as this was all conceived as a mechanism to go into action and be helpful for Mother after Father was no longer there to advise. This actually came into being and worked out just as Father had visualized it. The meetings were centered around a big family tea table with excellent sandwiches, etc., and the banter among the children was often hilarious. Through these meetings all appeals to the family were acted upon, and even though for many years I was a "minor," my opinion was still tolerantly listened to, and as the years went by, my opinion was given more and more consideration. Father said about us that if he had known what kind of children that he was going to have he never would have built the house that he did. The house is extraordinarily elaborate: five floors going up in Gothic glories, and a stairwell running down the center of it. That stairwell played a great part, because we could peek through the balustrade--it was all trefoils and things--and we used to be able to spit down from the fifth floor down into an amphora at the ground floor, where visiting cards were

collected after each season, and they never got a chance to dry up. We experimented with windage and all kinds of tactical maneuvers.

SZ: To your father this was not appropriate behavior for this....

EW: My father made the remark about us to mother in our presence, "Frieda, why is it that your children have so many problems and mine are such fun?"... Mother was always very much concerned that we wouldn't live up to the standards, particularly, of her father. He was a very authoritarian type and not much of a sense of humor. He was also the only true conformist in any religious sense, and that didn't make life easier. He came and blessed us every Friday evening, and my father had to do the same too, just to be polite, but Pop wasn't the kind that was interested in that kind of observance. We had a special table with all the pictures of the recently departed, people who had died; there also were the Sabbath candles. We all held hands, in a circle.... Good American youngsters don't hold hands, not brothers. The constant thing was to tweak...and get a squeal out of me, which would put me in the doghouse. "What are you making such funny noises for?".... Shortly afterwards, at the Parent-Teachers Association at Dalton School, a lady came up to me and said, "Are you Mr. Warburg?" And I said, "Yes." "Oh, I'm so glad to meet you." And I said, "That's very kind. Why?" And she said, "I get such a fascinating picture of you from your son." I thought, great God, what does he say? [She said,] "Well, the first thing he said is [that] you were born in a Jewish museum," and that became a subject of great merriment around. I wasn't born in a Jewish museum, I was born in White Plains,... the Woodlands, which was the family house out there in the country.... My father had an art collection which was a rather interestingly strange one. A great friend of his was a lawyer downtown by the name of William Ivins, and he collected, just as a hobby in his own life, North German and Dutch woodcuts and etchings. He got Father interested, and he said, "Felix, I've got to show you this...." He was a great "extra" man; he came to dinner quite often at the house, and he always came

with a briefcase in which were the latest things he'd seen at Keppel Gallery or one of the other well-known dealers.

They got interested particularly in different states of the same print. Father used to buy these things from Keppel. Prominent among others who were doing this kind of collecting was Paul J. Sachs. But at that time, Paul Sachs was doing duty as a member of his family, the Goldman, Sachs, and so he had to be a banker, and Father was doing likewise at Kohn, Loeb & Co. Jacob Schiff wanted his son-in-law in the firm. Father was considered by his own parents to be too stupid to be a member of their bank, the Warburg bank in Hamburg, so they sent him instead to study with his other grandparents, his mother's grandparents, the Oppenheims. He studied the jewelry business, and he was shipped around the whole of Germany with jewelry sewn into his clothes, as a salesman. In pictures of that period, he always seemed to have his hands folded across his chest. We kidded him about it: "What was that about?" And he said, "Well, very simply, I had these jewels sewn into my [clothes] and I thought I might doze off on the train going from one place to another, and this was to keep it from showing where he carried his jewels." Father taught us every sport we ever learned.... He played everything badly, but he taught us how to dance. We'd turn on the phonograph. It was a phonograph and not a record player. He built the house around--both houses, in New York as well as in the country--around a central squash court. It was squash..."tennis".... He developed gout in his wrist, and the pro who came to play with him, and he gave him lessons. He finally got a little tired of having Father bounce a racquet off his head, and so he gave up. But that squash court, both in the city and in the country, had many uses. With me, it was...I made it into an art gallery. But Father contained his etching collection down in the front hall of the 1109 Fifth Avenue [house], and I would go around with him when he was showing it to visitors from abroad. [They'd ask,] "Oh, wouldn't it be possible to see [it]?" Or, "Can I go on a tour?" So he'd take them, and I got to know the spiel pretty well about what was said in front of each one of these things. These people,

who were sometimes well-known art historians, they would say, "Well, yes, but the thing that's interesting is the fact that this is the one in which he did this or that...."

SZ: You heard all that, too?

EW: And I heard that, too. And then finally he got called on the damned telephone,...and he'd say to me, "I'm afraid I have to excuse myself now, I have to go off...; Edward, would you mind showing them the rest of these? You know what I generally show, and they'll be able to teach you more than me." So I became fairly fluent as a person describing the collection, which I'd heard him describe so many times. This came in handy in later life. Father became a great supporter of the Fogg Art Museum. The Fogg Art Museum was Paul Sachs. It was Edward Forbes and Paul Sachs, but Paul Sachs had the business connections in New York. He and Father together went around and put the bee on various people interested in artistic things. In fact, Paul Sachs had decided to leave the bank and go in there [to the Fogg], which tickled Father silly, because that's exactly what he'd liked to have done. And so I thought that he decided that he'd go in with them. This was at the same time that they were building the Harvard Business School. George Baker was getting involved in it, and that was also a business connection. And so all these things went together. Paul Sachs became, really, the director; he considered himself not academically trained to be a professor, but he became a professor. He was Professor Sachs and he always wore a big Phi Beta Kappa key on his fat tummy.

SZ: He was a small man, right?

EW: He was a very small man, but he had a fat tummy. And no sense of humor. But he was a very important person in the art game and had contacts in almost every city of the country, and also had students, as the years grew on, from his classes, who now out of St. Louis or somewhere else, and before you knew it they were on the boards

of these institutions or they became trained as being academic people in the field. So that he...created both the supply and the demand for the art world and the young people growing up under his tutelage became the art directors and the art trustees and the art personnel of most of these museums. He was always consulted by the various people as to did he have a good candidate for this position or that position. Well, I don't know why, but having been brought up by my father and his close connection..., and Sachs trying to butter up my father at any possible occasion, he decided that when I came to college I must come to Harvard, and that was accepted, I was delighted. But then he appointed himself as my tutor. Soon I hated his guts. We didn't get along.... He'd been a fixture around our house a lot. The fundraising was going on, and we used to go when the family came up to visit me at Harvard, the chances are that Father'd say, "Do you think you could wrangle luncheon up at Shady Hill?," which was the Charles Eliot Norton home that Sachs had bought and where he held his classes, and many of his own things were on the walls.... I should be so grateful to him to have taken me on as a tutorial kind of thing, and I felt that he was a pompous ass. Oh sure, fine, I'll do that, but I would not kiss the ring, pay obeisance to him. He also had an awful habit, and for students of his, all students who were going to Europe, he would send them letters of his that he had written, typed letters, to various collectors throughout Europe, saying, "I would like to introduce you to one of my foremost students, dah-dah-dah-dah-dah-dah." One of the most embarrassing things, too, for his students, was when the collector would say, "It's a very great pleasure meeting you," whoever the student was, "but would you tell us, who is this man Sachs?" But he got a kind of publicity out of it.... He became an international figure in the art world, and he was always...they returned the thing, sending their students to him at Harvard. In any case, we didn't get along. But....

SZ: But you always knew, from the time you started at Harvard, that you were going to study art?

EW: Yes, that I was interested in it. But the weird thing is...now we come into what you want to know.

SZ: No.... But what you're saying, then, is that started with your father's interest in the etchings....

EW: The etchings, and pulling me along; and then his connection with Sachs to start with, and then.... Listen, I didn't not get along.... When I graduated from Harvard I was elected class orator, and that meant that I was to make a speech in Memorial Hall, the serious content of which was so, so...I don't know what you want to call it...radical, it was so radical; and you were meant to say these were the four happiest years of your life. And I was damned if I was going to do all these things. So it appeared in The Nation--I don't know if that means anything to you--under the headline "Fair Harvard--Only Fair, Says Edward M.M. Warburg, Class Orator of the Class of 1930." [LAUGHING] And I attacked the hell out of the place. And there sitting in the front row was Paul Sachs and Father. Sachs was furious at me where, I mean, after all the good words...I was thankless, I was.... And Father thought it was terribly tactless to choose that occasion to criticize. I still would sign that document. My thesis was that one never got a chance to meet the real teachers, the real professors. What one got was you listened to lectures by them, or you read their books, but for the most part you were in the hands of young men who were studying, [who] were themselves tutors and would try to become more advanced up the family tree in the art world and finally get on the faculty. And Sachs had a kind of inverted snobbery.... He felt that anybody who wasn't a bookworm couldn't be a member of the faculty or couldn't be considered seriously for a post. I said that my feeling was that there were plenty of jobs around the art world that weren't that kind at all, that it would not have hurt at all to have some members of the board of trustees knowledgeable in the field of the arts, and to put somebody there and give him a

break in some post would be a sensible thing to do. Sachs couldn't see that at all. "Who is he, what has he published?" It was a sort of a Germanic silliness. I finally got to the point where, while at The Museum of Modern Art, I made a lecture at the time of the Matisse show. It was pretty much regurgitating what Alfred Barr had written in the catalogue; there was not overly much added that was of a great consequence, which was the great mental thinkings of Edward M.M. Warburg on the subject.... I went to Sachs after my oration and said I was fully aware that in a sense it was destructive criticism, and I would like to see if I couldn't make that constructive, and that I would like to volunteer my services as a tutor for a year or so, to show him what I meant could be done with what I called the kids that I grew up with in school and college, who were the kids who came mainly from the secondary schools that I knew....

Not that I had anything against the public school kids, but I thought it was such a ridiculous thing to go and punish them. There were people who went to Middlesex and Concord, not Harvard preparatory schools. And he said, "Listen, if you were [Bernard] Berenson or somebody like that, that would be one thing; but that is not as yet, and you will have to do what everybody else is and earn your spurs." So I went up to Agnes Mongan, my great friend, life-long friend, a delightful person, and I said, "I've got to earn my spurs, Ag, where the hell do I go?" And she said, "Well, the only place I can give you any help to get you on something, I can give you a letter to Georgianna Goddard King, who was the...head of the art department at Bryn Mawr, where she had gone to college. Maybe she can help find a place for you." So I went down on a Sunday, a hot Sunday, a July day, and had a meeting with Miss King. She met me at the bus stop after riding on a dusty, dirty Jersey Central train, and when I got there she said, "I take it you're Mr. Warburg." And I thought, well, I was the only one who got off at that bus stop, chances were, yes, I was. "Well, what I would like to know, Mr. Warburg, is, what did you come down here for anyway?" [LAUGHING] We hadn't even gotten into the house yet. I'd been told certain things

about here, and one of them was that she had a dog, a little white poodle with runny red eyes, and she was crazy about that dog. So I plunked the dog on my lap, patted it; figured that would be a good move. And she said, "What do you want from me?" And I said, "What I would really like to know is there any chance of getting some minor post on the staff of your art department." And she said, "Well, there's no room on the budget." I said, "Now that I understand. I have no great illusions as to whether I'm any good or bad. I've never done any teaching or lecturing, but I was perfectly willing to volunteer my services the first year or so and see if it turns into anything that you would be interested in. I'm sure we could come to terms." And she said, "Mr. Warburg, you don't seem to understand. I won't have you...in the art profession and working for nothing. Nobody works for nothing at Bryn Mawr." I said, "You tell me that you won't let me work for nothing and you have no room for me. I take it that's that." And she said, "Mmmmm, don't jump at conclusions." And I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "If I received a thousand dollars, that would go towards your salary." I said, "You want me to sign now?" [LAUGHING] And she said, "What is the hurry?".... Later, when she was overenthusiastic in her compliments regarding my course, I used as an exit line, "Well, then, if you feel that way about it, Miss King, I'll give myself a raise."--EW

SZ: That's how you got there?

EW: That's it.... So I went to Bryn Mawr, and she came to me and told me at the end of the year she was actually delighted the way my course had gone.... I later found out that her attempts at fundraisers for my salary consisted of her writing to my friends, asking them would they please contribute towards the fund to help save Mr. Warburg for Bryn Mawr, but in the Depression years there seemed other causes that had higher priority. When I got back after the first half year, [I was] traveling in Europe, I got to Jerusalem to get a letter from her, in which she deeply regrets to say that in spite of all her efforts she'd only been able to raise twenty-five dollars.

And so I said to hell with it, I'll give my lecture anyhow if anybody wants to listen to it. I've got it all lined up and I've spent so much effort on it, and I liked the thought of teaching it and maybe the experience of it. Well, she didn't make many strenuous attempts to do anything about raising the money for the next year, so that was the end of it. Then I came to The Museum of Modern Art.

SZ: Before we start that, backtrack a little, if you would, and tell me a little bit about the society the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art, because you said to me off-tape that that was, in fact, the forerunner, and I think also there you met some few people with whom you've had....

EW: Bull sessions.

SZ: [LAUGHING] Whatever.

EW: They were.

SZ: Tell me a little bit about what it was like.

EW: The freshman year in college.... Let me start over somewhere else. My brother-in-law Walter Rothschild, who married my sister, was associated with Lincoln Kirstein, who was Filene's Department Store in Boston, and Rothschild was Abraham & Straus in Brooklyn, and they were great buddies. Through him, he [Kirstein] found out in that freshman year at Harvard [that] I was going to be a freshman that year, and he said [to Rothschild], "Well, that's very amusing. My son, Lincoln Kirstein, is also going to be a freshman in that same class. He'll be concentrating in the art field too, they'll probably have a great deal in common." Well, that was all that was needed to make us stay miles away from each other. [LAUGHTER] But strangely enough, we did get eventually to meet each other, sort of snarling at each other, and

we used to have conversations in Lincoln's room in Gore Hall--we were both in the same hall. Gore Hall is now one of the colleges. The real basis of all of our discussions was what could be done on the American scene to enable artists, be they painters, musicians, sculptors or any one of the many aspects of art which appeared on the scene, how could they ever be made to be self-supporting, to eat regularly? Lincoln had mentally been going over that one with a fine-tooth comb, and the interesting thing that he found was what Diaghilev had accomplished in Europe [with the Ballets Russes], of having a common goal of musicians doing the composing of the music, painters doing lots of the scenery and décor and costume design and things, and the dancers doing the dancing. And that all this would be a joint effort centered around the earnings of a ballet company; it might be ballet, or music, operatic things.... [INTERRUPTION] That became a joint interest of ours, and Lincoln was miles ahead of any of us mentally. He was ahead of us academically as well. He'd taken a year out; he'd done stained-glass windows, he'd done all sorts of extraordinary stuff. Particularly, he became very interested in the literary end of it and scenarios, and he probably got to know a great many of the people in the Diaghilev group.... [INTERRUPTION] He started with his friend Varian Fry a magazine called the Hound and Horn, which was an outstanding student publication. And he, through...his sister was herself head of the English department at Smith, through that close connection with T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound and various other people, I don't know, he was sort of fascinated by this. The quality of the student magazine, which had sections in it on the arts in general and he would have photographs of van Vechten and...people like that as well.... Now, the Harvard Society was an extension--the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art.

SZ: Did you write anything for Hound and Horn?

EW: No. I didn't speak English well enough. [LAUGHING] But the Harvard Horn--its cover design was by Rockwell Kent, for instance--mainly it became a forum for exploring in

more and more detail what could be done, what should be done, about the arts. Now there was a great opposition up around Cambridge, including Sachs, to any contemporary show of contemporary art. So we jumped in there. Now....

SZ: Why was Sachs against that?

EW: It was a conservative feeling, mainly Denman Ross...sort of...set the pace. He considered most of the things done in the art world by the contemporaries, not quite obscene, but nutsy. You look worried....

SZ: No, I'm just going to turn it over.

END TAPE 1, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2

EW: Okay. You'll find in The Museum of Modern Art files, in the Library there, the criticisms of the very shows...the first [shows] at the Harvard Society, and the antagonistic feeling that there was about the ridiculousness of showing...it was as if we were the Fauves. It was the first showing of most of those people. Those are things you'll find interesting.... We set up above the Harvard Coop in two office rooms two galleries. We had desks in there, and one would be mine and one would be his [Kirstein's]. We'd think of what fields would be fun, and also, where did we have contacts. This would be artists, collectors, friends of the family, friends of ours. We tended to meet either in Boston or in New York, on a Saturday and tour the galleries and see what was up, and see what we could get to borrow to show the things. Then we did our homework in those galleries, just sitting there. We were furious when our efforts were being interrupted by some woman wanting to know, "What is that, young man?" So Lincoln and I decided to name these things,

irrespective of if they had names or not. We'd tell the lady it was The Absence of Mary Smith. [LAUGHTER] And she'd look at it with the lorgnette and all the rest of it, and finally the lady would decide that, obviously, Mary Smith was absent and shut up about it and not bother us. But we had a good time with it. This went on for about three years.

SZ: Which galleries did you frequent? Which galleries in New York, for instance?

EW: They were really the standard ones. Weyhe Gallery; Knoedler's was a little high-falutin' for us. By this time there was beginning to be museums connected to this field. When you realize that there weren't any van Goghs to be seen. Margaret Lewisohn was my cousin--Mrs. Sam Lewisohn--so things from the Lewisohn collection were available. Everybody was very kindly disposed to the young guys who were interested in doing this and putting their efforts into it, and they tended to let us have things way beyond that possibility of selling. Lincoln got interested in people like Sandy Calder and Bucky Fuller, and we had lectures and talks, and we had the "Circus" [Calder's Circus] show there and all the rest of...Sandy's work. Sandy came up.... See, these are the kinds of things that Russell Lynes claims that Sandy denies all this. I don't think he can very well, and who could now, anyhow: he's dead. The question came up of when were we going to pick up these pieces of sculpture that were going to be shown there. The Cadillac was all ready and everything else. And we expected...Lincoln said, "Eddie, you've got to bring your car and we'll go down to the station and pick this up." So we went down, and when we got there, there was Sandy, goofy as he was, with wire in one hand and a little suitcase in the other, in which he had pincers and things, and he got up to our rooms at the college and he put on his pajamas, and using his big toe as a vise would bend these wires around.

And before we were through, by suppertime, he had the exhibit lined up; he had little wooden planks.... He had the wires stuck through a plank, and it was on a platform. They were fascinating. He developed them.... He took a photograph of my father that was there and made me a gratuitous portrait of Father from the photograph on the desk. It wasn't long...in stages.... We were about to graduate from the college.... We wanted to keep the aspiration of going into the field of art patronage and were beginning to collect ourselves in minor ways: a drawing here, a drawing there, a little sketch by [Gaston] Lachaise or something like that.

SZ: That was something you had that you liked?

EW: Yes. Well, Lincoln had had himself done in the nude. I wasn't as avant-garde as that. But I did have a portrait done. I have it here.

SZ: Oh, you have. Nice.

EW: Nice head. I was eighteen years old....

SZ: I see that through all this you had developed a real taste for the aesthetic of contemporary art.

EW: Yes. I've always tried to figure out which came first, the horse or the carriage. Or the chicken or the egg, I don't know what the statement is. I was very much interested in finding out what it was that made a thing...this is a sacred work of art and this isn't. Why? Who says so? But it was a constant thing that I worried about and was interested in. I enjoyed the company of those who were struggling with the same problem, and they knew much more about it. The entrance fee that I paid was minimal, but I learned more from Lincoln Kirstein and my own contemporaries in the art field than I ever learned from the lectures at college of the profs, who would tell

you so-and-so was born at such-and-such a time, whose mistress was so-and-so. It's a crazy way of teaching. And why is that picture important? This great picture of The Rape of Europa in the [Isabella Stewart] Gardner collection--why is it great? It's a very uncomfortable picture; the poor lady is falling off...the bull. I thought it was ridiculous, and said so. And Lincoln would say, "Now, wait a second. You're not giving any attention at all in your talking about this picture as to the design of it, the placement of it in general; the colors used; the handwriting used by the artist in putting it onto the canvas." And he got me thinking in terms that there were other considerations in filling up the canvas. That was very basic.... But the whole question of what makes a thing a work of art and what makes it of distinction, what was it that fascinated me in it, what was it that I used to pile the girls into my car and take them into Philadelphia and see the collections at the museum and all that. All of this was part of the growing-up experience, which ended up...with working at The Museum of Modern Art, where I ran into pretty much the same kind of difficulty.... The trustees at The Museum of Modern Art, Mrs. Rock [Abby Aldrich Rockefeller] and all of them, and many of them were associates of mine in various ways, we were kids, but nevertheless, they wanted to involve us. They wanted to involve us because we were a good investment. We tend to pay our dues in one way or another. And they liked the idea of the younger crowd coming along. Nelson Rockefeller graduated about the same time that I did. He went from Dartmouth and I went from Harvard. Alfred Barr and Jere Abbott were the early leaders in the field, and the Heckscher Building was used as the first spaces for the galleries, and the trustees became very irritated when they began to realize that what Alfred was doing was showing works of which they didn't have a single example in their collections. And this was Gehort sich nicht: you didn't do that kind of thing. They scrambled around, and Mrs. Rockefeller and others, who were sweet, delightful people, had collected and couldn't understand why we had gone off into unknown fields so soon. Then the Museum moved from the Heckscher Building over to the Rockefeller....

SZ: The townhouse?

EW: Into those buildings they owned in that area. But the trustees meetings...there were those of us who became trustees, there were those of us who became members of committees, junior advisory committees and things. But it was all sort of fake, and nobody really wanted us from that standpoint. Lincoln was considered a great exponent of the contemporary scene, but he ended up being so conservative.... And he seems to have kept up some of it in terms of the Metropolitan Museum, and the sculpture, the [Augustus] Saint-Gaudens.... But he considered The Museum of Modern Art sort of a commercial...the values of things are judged according by their prices on the auction block, rather than on inherent qualities they might have. He became great followers of Lachaise and [Pavel] Tchelitchew, and his brother-in-law does very bland, cold YMCA-type pictures. Paul Cadmus's sister Feidela later became Lincoln's wife.

SZ: But what you're saying is that, being a young person at the Museum, early on, you felt that tension even then, because you're saying that the trustees--I assume what you're saying is that the trustees wanted exhibited some of the things that they had in their collections?

EW: Yes, sure. Lincoln collected...one of the things he collected was portraits of himself; he has, I think, about twelve. And he's not interested in whether they are good resemblances or not, he's interested in being able to sit there in a position, and I followed along. He got George L.K. Morris and a few of us to come along and commission Lachaise to do a head of me and do a head of a whole bunch of us--he has several bodies and heads that he [Lachaise] did. And he has them in his own house. By the strange...what do you call it...arrogance, he didn't consider it having to do with him..., he just sat for it. We all had the same experience, but with me, up in the eighties, sitting--the number of sittings I had with Lachaise were pretty tough, but

interesting. But the first day there was a complete thing in front of you, but he'd say, "No, something here needs to be done, and that something...," and he'd work a while, and all the different aspects of it. I've got one now on loan at the Wadsworth Athenaeum and one out here in the garden. But my children used to find it rather fun to clean the ears.

SZ: Getting back to the beginning of the Museum, when did you first meet Alfred Barr?

EW: At college. He was teaching at Wellesley, and we invited him to be our faculty adviser at the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art. We didn't, I didn't see much of him. Lincoln had a common ground much more than I did. I was amusing, I had a sense of humor.... Alfred used to get the giggles, especially when I'd tease him. It was a nice relationship, but I ended up finding Alfred Barr just a bore from the standpoint of his having to do everything himself. The sign "Men" on the men's room: he had to choose the type of paint that was to be used. His feelings were always being hurt because somebody hadn't..."Well, they didn't ask my opinion" about this and that.

SZ: Does that mean that he didn't trust anybody else with aesthetic judgments, or...?

EW: Yes. He had pals, but...Jere Abbott was one of them. He had Chick Austin and other people around whom he talked to, and he was a great admirer of Sachs's and there's a very interesting correspondence between them. And Sachs worshipped him. It was typical of Barr that he would put on a show downstairs, in the new building, of artists that he'd borrowed examples of, and asking us to rank them according to our preferences. And I, typically me, said, "Somebody's going to say that these are all the right names on all the wrong paintings," which was comparable to saying the king has no clothes on, because Alfred Barr selected them, after all. It got me crazy, because...I had the Blue Boy by Picasso, which I got on one of my

student trips to Germany at Flechtheim's. Curt Valentin showed it to me. It wasn't for sale, but the lady liked dollars anyhow. And there was a big Picasso show at the Tate Gallery, and Alfred was asked by a woman who was at the Tate to select the American Picassos for the exhibition. And I went over there to see that exhibition and they had endless photographs and postcards with the Blue Boy, but Blue Boy was not invited. And I said to Alfred when I got back, "Why did you want that if you thought highly enough of it?" And he said, "Oh, it's too pretty, it would have seduced the public."... He asked all of us to make a list of the objects in our collections which we suggested that if he wanted he could have them, eventually. We didn't ask him, he asked us. None of us were overkeen, especially in later years, when it was giving away your shirt to give away a work of art. But I had always wanted, sort of as a diplomat, to keep Alfred from blowing his top again and getting into a fight with Bill Lieberman. René d'Harnoncourt was the other great appeaser, and he was very good with Alfred. But....

SZ: In the early years, when he was a young man, he was, you just saw him as brilliant?

EW: Oh, everybody recognized that he was by far the leader in the field, but he just slowed up everything by...whether it was the photography committee, and he would come in and say, "Sorry to be late." Then he'd say "Why do you show that picture, why wouldn't it be this one?" And [John] Szarkowski would have a very good explanation, and Alfred would look like, you know, that pinched clerical face that he had.... He was not easy to work with, yet he would always say to me, "Tell me some good Jewish stories." A questionable kind of approach to it.... And Marga [Margaret Scolari Barr] wasn't easy either.

SZ: Let me just ask you, did you attend the first Museum of Modern Art exhibition in the Heckscher Building?

EW: Yes, yes. It was a completely different atmosphere from what they did before.

SZ: Describe that.

EW: Well, the table...I don't know, the table probably exists in some secretary's office, that had a drawer that went through both the sides. And the trustees were all the right names again, and Sam Lewisohn was there because Margaret [Lewisohn] wanted Sam to get active, and Sam had three hairs in his nose, and he used to sit there listening to discussions twiddling these three hairs, and they'd put him to sleep. Then someone would call on him for his opinion and he'd wake up with a start and make no sense at all in the response, and then go back to sleep again. He was.... I got into a fight with Mrs. Rockefeller, Abby, who was marvelous, wonderful. I said, "Listen, if you don't believe in what Alfred suggests, you see, that's his job to suggest some things, well, then, let's all get together and fire him. But I don't think we're here for our aesthetic judgment, as trustees. We might make suggestions and ask why. But our job is the security of the institution and to please go out and raise money to support it." And Mrs. Rockefeller hated that being brought up in that form, because she felt that she was more than a moneybag. I got used to being considered just a, well, not quite a Rockefeller moneybag, but a bit of a moneybag. She said, "I don't like this 'we' and 'they,' Eddie." And I said, "I think the realities of the situation just demand that they have their job and we have our job, and it should be recognized." The next fight I had with them [the board] was [when] I became the Regent of the State of New York. A regent--there's a Board of Regents. As such, we had certain interlocking things with the Museum, and one was the number of trustees and stuff like that. And they decided that because I was on the Board of Regents that I was no longer, I should no longer be a trustee. There was a conflict of interest, and I said, "May I point out that there's a fella by the name of Nelson Rockefeller who's governor of this state, and he didn't have to give up his post because of this." I felt that it would be.... I was perfectly ready to not make a quorum

or whatever it was and meet that..., but I did still think that I did have something to offer and felt it rather tactless on their part to press that. Well, when I came back they made me "emeritus," and then I'd sit up there sort of like a castrated old chicken.... Maybe it didn't end the usefulness I might be to the institution, and also, the meetings became godawfully boring, terrible....

SZ: Not like the early days?

EW: The early days were good and peppy. I mean, in the early days there was a spark flying and electricity in the air. Also, the old ladies who sat there...I'm having a hell of a time with names....

SZ: That's okay. Which...you mean....

EW: The old lady who had more of an interest than she was in anything else. And also, old Mrs....

SZ: You mean founders. Bliss, Lillie Bliss?

EW: No, but she really knew her stuff. Well, I'm think of...Mrs. Murray Crane. She gave nice teas. [LAUGHING] There are nice anecdotes--you seem to like them.

SZ: Yes, I do.

EW: At one point we got word that the meeting of the board would not be held in the board room upstairs but would be held at Mrs. Rockefeller's house, because she had been down to Williamsburg and done something to her ankle. "If it wouldn't be too much, would we mind...?" Of course, we were delighted; besides, it would give us a chance to see the house. Nelson arrived late, as always, and he gave his mother a

big smack. And he said to her--after the meeting was over she asked them all to sit for a while and have some tea--he said, "I didn't really hear the details. What happened in Williamsburg that caused all this?" She said, "They had a snowfall, an unusual event there, and stepping from the curb into the gutter there I didn't see the difference, the step, and I fell, and a very nice young man stopped in a foreign car and said, `Can I be of help?' So he got me to my feet. Now, the governor's palace was reserved for Mr. and Mrs. Rockefeller when they came down to visit the place. [When] he said, `Where can I take you?,' I said, `To the governor's palace, if you don't mind.' And he looked very strangely at me, and I said, `Yes, I am Mrs. Rockefeller, even if you did find me in the gutter.'" [LAUGHTER] It's sort of cute.

SZ: What was she like?

EW: She was opinionated and had rather good taste but was used to having her opinion followed, and I had to fight the battle for the staff, who kowtowed completely to her, to say, Listen, is that your department, [to have] a firm position on these things? And she was very nice. A tragic one was Blanchette [Rockefeller], because she kept getting iller and iller.... Well, it's five minutes to twelve. What is your pleasure? [PAUSE]

SZ: We've just come back from a lunch break. I wanted to ask you now about what you remember about the [Junior] Advisory Committee and how it all evolved from what you can recall.

EW: As near as I can make out, the Advisory Committee came together as several of the younger people were too young to go on the board as full-fledged board members, and the Advisory Committee was really sort of a junior committee [in] which Nelson Rockefeller played a very important role. He gathered around him people who had similar interests and were about the same age level. Nelson and I both came out of

college at about the same time, he from Dartmouth, I from...Harvard. Lincoln...and Nelson and I had known each other over the years. I think I knew Nelson better.... Lincoln was an oddity, but he soon, with his knowledge of the arts and his friendships with Barr and Jere Abbott and the literary people, had a niche cut out for himself. I don't think anybody but Lincoln knew the real details of the Sacco-Vanzetti case, and the scandal that erupted when...Ben Shahn was asked to do a mural in which A. Laurence Lowell and Lamont of Morgan Partners and everybody else.... And then great excitement came up on the regular board of the Museum as to whether how tactful was it for us to go and make fun of and divide leaders of Wall Street, ending the story of Sacco & Vanzetti as the background of the story....

END TAPE 1, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **EDWARD M.M. WARBURG (EW)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **WILTON, CONNECTICUT**

DATE: **FEBRUARY 11, 1991**

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1

EW: And there was a fight between.... Nelson had helped defend the actions of the subcommittee, of which he was the chairman--mainly defend Lincoln Kirstein, who was the one who suggested the theme [for the 1932 exhibition Murals and Photo-Murals by American Painters and Photographers], but the story of Sacco-Vanzetti was looking for trouble, and Ben Shahn delighted in goading the big shots of Wall Street. It had a later repercussion, when Nelson, around Lincoln Center....

SZ: Rockefeller Center.

EW: ...Rockefeller Center, cut out the Diego Rivera mural, which had another political orientation which was considered tactless.

SZ: Do you remember discussions about it at the time? It was an exhibition, the murals. It was an exhibition that was proposed--this is in the records, anyway--by the Advisory Committee, and then Lincoln put it together. I'm just asking if you remembered any discussion about it beforehand, what it would be...?

EW: No, no. It was approved by a closed shop as a performance. I mean, it was done by Lincoln and Ben Shahn, who he knew very well, and the more of a stink it made the

better, with the rationalization of it being: Should art be political? Yes, it should. Then came the arguments from there. But this didn't go well with the Conger Goodyears and, you know, John "Hey-Hey" Whitney [John Hay Whitney]. That's about all I know, not very much.

SZ: Do you remember seeing it?

EW: Yes. It's a strange style he has, and all his things are very much alike. But it was a coffin and bodies lying there and all the rest of it. It was pretty strong medicine. But then that dated, almost, Lincoln's breaking away from the MoMA, and he never really reappeared on the scene, and his friendships with Alfred and all the rest of us disappeared. But at the same time, he was very active in all the...not in the Museum things, but if Lincoln Kirstein hadn't been on the scene, you wouldn't have ever heard of Tchelitchew, you wouldn't have ever heard of...Paul Cadmus was the other name I was trying to think of. [PAUSE]

SZ: So you wouldn't have heard of Tchelitchew and you wouldn't have heard of....

EW: Well, Saint-Gaudens, and [Elie] Nadelman. And Lachaise. Not a bad record, dear.

SZ: You feel that that was Lincoln's main.... Well, let me back up and ask you, What do you think Lincoln's main contribution to the development of the Museum was?

EW: To The Museum of Modern Art?

SZ: Yes.

EW: I don't think except as...an implement. What do you call that?

SZ: As a catalyst? That's not what you mean.

EW: No, no, catalyst isn't it. But it's something to do with.... He was the enfant terrible, that's what he was. But it's hard to.... If you'd rephrase that question of yours, What was Lincoln's real contribution to the contemporary scene?, he represented the vanguard initially, rather brilliantly, then moved over and became a great advocate of the Civil War period, with the sculpture of Sheridan, and the big statue of the Negro soldiers and the cemetery art around Boston. And he maintained tremendously high standards all the way through.

SZ: What you're saying is, well, he was driven away from the Museum by....

EW: Well, I think he delighted in it. You can't make a martyr of him, because to him it was typical of the Museum to take a position that was so stick-in-the-mud. And he got very, very conservative. Lincoln's contemporary interests are people like [Andrew] Wyeth's son, Jamie Wyeth. Have you ever read Kirstein's first book, Flesh Is Heir? If you can get a copy of it--I haven't got a copy or I would lend it to you--Flesh Is Heir. And that's where Agnes's, the accidental reading at the funeral of Tchelitchew--none of them knowing that that was happening in front of their eyes, in Venice. Nick Weber's writing a very brilliant, brilliant chapter on that. More, more.

SZ: Tell me a little bit more about the Advisory Committee.

EW: There ain't much to tell.

SZ: Well, some of the people who were on it originally. Mrs. [Eliza Bliss Parkinson] Cobb. Who else?

EW: I don't even know who they were anymore.

SZ: Mrs. Cobb. Philip Johnson--when did you meet Philip, and how did you meet Philip?

EW: Philip was a couple of years older than me, and I really got to know him at the Museum on the staff. I was on the staff in a way, too. I don't know quite what my role was, but I was. I knew him because we both spoke German fluently, and he introduced a great deal to the Bauhaus picture [Oskar Schlemmer's Bauhaus Stairway, 1932], and through him I got to know [Paul] Klee and I bought two Paul Klees. Then he got interested in the Silvershirts organization--Philip and Alan Blackburn. That was Philip when he was being a professional enfant terrible too. He was an openly homosexual guy, and his German Hitler Youth all ties into that.... He became very close friends with the [Edgar] Bronfman family, got Mies [van der Rohe] the job there, and himself with part of the group that went around doing nothing but synagogues by way of repentance.

SZ: That was later. Well, you were at the Museum on staff at the time that he and Alan Blackburn left, right?

EW: Yes. Well, but I mean, no.... The periods and everything...we all wandered in and out of rooms; nobody knew who had a job doing what. We all met together and cursed out somebody and worshipped at some throne.... I think Blackburn was the sinister person in the whole thing. I think he led Philip down the garden path. I really don't know....

SZ: What was the staff's reaction when they left to do that?

EW: It was all during the war, I was away, I don't know.

SZ: No, they left to work for Huey Long in 1934.

EW: I don't know.

SZ: That's when he first left, and then he didn't come back.

EW: My main job has been, strangely enough.... I know quite very late Philip said to me, "You know, I did...the nuclear reactor for Israel. I designed it, but I've never seen it. Is there any chance of getting over there?" And I said, "Well, let me see if I can't find out from Teddy Kollock whether they wouldn't be glad to see you." Well, they were delighted to see him, and Nelson tried to get them...to accept plans--I think Nelson must have been paying for it--for the airstrip on the top, near Jerusalem there, near Bethlehem. But that never came into being. But he was a strange mixture of things. Arthur, Arthur--Philip's assistant, Arthur...Drexler came to Israel with us, with Philip and me, and Philip said, "He's more anti-Semitic than I am," and Arthur Drexler was Jewish. A strange mixture of things there. And Philip completely wowed the Israelis, and they were delighted to have him there and sit at his feet and learn something. But I don't think that goes into this.

SZ: In the early days when you were there, as you said, nobody knew who did what, you all just sort of did it together.

EW: Well, yes, but there wasn't a strong line between professionalism and volunteerism, and that made it even more complicated, because who would stand up to the brass in the form of [Frank] Crowninshield or something like that. And Stephen Clark. There was a very, very strange world there. I don't really know very much about it because I was away.

SZ: Away when?

EW: I was away in the Army.

SZ: Oh, during the war. You were overseas? Did you go overseas?

EW: Well, I finally went overseas. I was first at Governor's Island, first as a G.I. and then going to officers' candidate school at Fort Oglethorpe, and then back to Governor's Island in the First Army Command with General Drum, and then finally getting shipped overseas, having gone off to Fort Custer, [Michigan], which was the equivalent of going to a holding company in England.

SZ: What was it like, backing up before the war again, for you. You were a real participant, and seeing the institution grow and change....

EW: The thing that was amazing to me was that, when we first started off, there were very few places showing any of these people. The museums did not have representations of.... Gradually we began to collect, there was a feeling that the Museum should become a small holding company for the Metropolitan, and there was an attempt to work out a deal with Clark, who was at the Met, already there. And that didn't happen; it fell through. There was a Hearn Fund, which was for [the purchase of] American contemporaries. And The Museum of Modern Art was trying to get its hands on that money to use to buy American contemporaries, because the Met wasn't ever interested in American contemporaries very much, though they had this fund for it. No, that's about it. The Museum of Modern Art became much too much of a show-off place, and it had begun getting, in the same way the Metropolitan had, the "blockbuster" concept of having the big shows, with government sponsorship. I'd like to put it this way, that I think there's no question that the MoMA lost a great deal of the "first night" excitement that happens in the theater, when a bunch of amateurs come together and somehow what they're attempting....

END TAPE 2, SIDE 1

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **EDWARD M.M. WARBURG (EW)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **WILTON, CONNECTICUT**

DATE: **FEBRUARY 28, 1991**

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 1

SZ: This is an interview with Edward Warburg for The Museum of Modern Art oral history. It is February 28, 1991, and we are in....

EW: The day the war ended.

SZ: ...Wilton, Connecticut. The day the war ended. Yesterday. Today?

EW: I don't know; they haven't accepted it.

SZ: Who hasn't?

EW: The U.S. They're going on with the fighting.

SZ: That's not what I heard this morning. Is that right?

EW: Well, the thing is, the points in the...the various things that they agreed to were not the same things, and so they said they haven't to agreed to do this and that, and therefore, until they do, we'll still go on. But the score's over. They haven't got anything to fight with.

SZ: The Iraqis.

EW: They're fresh out.

SZ: Except they did save all those planes, didn't they? Didn't they take a lot of their planes to Iran?

EW: I guess so. They've got a lot of planes. I'm sure they've got a lot of things stashed away, but not compared to what they did have--tremendous losses, thank God. Crazy damn thing.

SZ: Something you know a lot about.

EW: The main thing that evolved from this experience that I find comparable is that people get the idea that when the skies open and all this stuff drops down, that each one of them is a casualty. Well, they're not. They fall on open fields, or they don't go off or some such thing. In other words, it is true that when you have a full-fledged, a flood of these darn things dropping out of the skies, your casualties are not equal to the number of bombs dropped. It's quite amazing to experience being under fire and seeing nobody get hurt. I mean, you don't see casualties, that's all. As a matter of fact, they would have had more had it been that part which was the ground...the last part, [in] which they didn't really confront each other at all--the army part [the ground war].

SZ: Well, but then there are the psychological casualties, right. Must be terrifying.

EW: Oh God, yes. Very terrifying. I tried to handle this humorously in my book, about where do you put your helmet. [LAUGHTER] But it is a crazy thing, that you can lie

in an open trench this way with everything dropping out of the...sky right over you. You better act protected.

SZ: But you don't really know either, do you?

EW: And then having to compete with the cows that come charging through your tent and knock it down. And there's nothing bigger than a cow. Boy, I can tell you that burying cows is the only time I used a gas mask. Awful.

SZ: Let me ask you this question. I thought about it particularly in relation to the description that you had given me last time, about the house in which you grew up, the description of the house in which you grew up--the apartment that was your first apartment, I assume, the apartment that Philip Johnson designed for you, was so opposite from what you were used to living in and seeing, so I was hoping you would tell me a little bit the story of that apartment, how it came about.

EW: The apartment that Philip did?

SZ: Yes.

EW: First of all, he couldn't sign the apartment; he couldn't sign the papers for it. It had to be under somebody else's name, because he hadn't gotten his, what do you call them, his authorization.

SZ: He wasn't an architect.

EW: He wasn't an architect. But Philip knew a great deal more technically than anybody did about the thing, especially the Mies van der Rohe influence, which he was very much--please don't quote my bad English--which he was very much under. His idea,

the discipline which controlled him, was a minimal use of decoration, and the emphasis on beautiful surfaces and beautiful textures, so that the apartment, which was on the fifth floor of this little brownstone house.... [PAUSE] My family took a very dim view of the resulting apartment, which was really a very violent execution of the Mies van der Rohe designs. My brother said that when you came in and you went into the bathroom you didn't expect to find the usual fixtures, you just expected to find a separator because it looked so much like a dairy. See, this is the trouble--I remember other stuff that.... I felt quite seriously that when I came into the apartment and opened that door and looked in there, I would spoil the composition. If a book was out of line on a table, well, if Philip came in he certainly straightened it; but generally, it was all at right angles to each other, and very beautiful in the austerity, but damned uncomfortable to live in. The box spring that was for the bed was on the floor and if you got up and put your feet on the ground and pushed, your bed was on the other side of the room, you had skidded on white linoleum, yellow linoleum, and all these closets went up to the ceiling. I have pictures downstairs of all of the thing. Also, the leather sofas gave you mat burns; you slid your arm on...I mean, you're not always fully dressed, and this bothered you, and it bothered me. I wasn't allowed to have anything but the simplest...all decoration was taken off the spoons, the knives, the forks....

SZ: It was the purest from inside out.

EW: Yes.

SZ: Did you enjoy it, the way it looked? Or....

EW: It was trick. I think the German word is best for it: Gemütlich. It was strained, it was too self-conscious. Everything, the chairs...that story about my father, who came up to visit me. The man already had a wiggly heart, and he climbed five flights of stairs

to come in there. He had no business doing that; I didn't know he was doing it, I would never have allowed him. And he sat down, and he got...it was a Mies van der Rohe chair, which you know, probably, the "S" chair. He said, "Do you mind if I use your phone a second?" And I said, "Of course not, go ahead." So he tipped forward [in the chair] this way and this part was on runners, and the damned thing went out from under him and his jaw hit the table and he was seeing stars. And I rushed at him and said, "Are you alright?" "Oh yes," he said, "but you know, that's what I like about modern art: it's so functional." Which was very sweet. There was a lot of functional stuff, and it'll get you crazy. If you call suddenly on the telephone, you find yourself doing this on the floor, what do you call it, skidding. You try to get around the corner and the floor is all slippery....

SZ: I notice that nothing about the house you're living in now....

EW: This is what I'm saying. Now this is very much, these things would of course be out at Philip's house, but most of the stuff is just plain; but it isn't....

SZ: Hard-edged, or whatever.

EW: Yes. You have the top of the railing here, mainly to keep the kids from going over the edge without knowing that they're doing it. If they never knew it anyhow, that's their problem.

SZ: You say. But it was an exercise for the time, I assume, as much a anything else.

EW: Yes. Let me do a scene that I now know what particular angle you want to play on this thing. Let me talk to you about the comparisons of the two houses. When I grew up in the house, first of all, the quote that is most often used is, my father used to say, if he knew what kind of children he was going to have, he would have had an

entirely different kind of a setup, and certainly without the grandiose balustered stairwell doing up five flights and things like that.

SZ: Because you were so active, or...?

EW: Because we were a bunch of such rough-house kids. And he said, "I didn't know that I was going to have a duplication of the Marx Brothers. Here they were practicing aerial bombing by spitting over the bannister into the amphora down below," where the visiting cards were kept. All the disciplines in that house...the fourth floor was the children's floor, all our bedrooms went off there. There was one maid for that floor, and we used to have a wind-up train that went in through the hall, out through the hall and into each bedroom and came around the corner and would usually surprise the maid when she was bent over or something, and she'd "Ooooh!," scream, and turn around and kick us, unawares...underwears....

SZ: All of the above.

EW: Father used to say to Mother, said in my hearing, "Frieda, why is it that your children have so many problems and mine are such fun?" And Pop was very much on our side, and Mother was very much terribly apprehensive of this house that she was living in, which even she was not used to living in that kind of a house. It was worse, it wasn't even good. And she felt terribly conscious of the fact that her father disapproved of the house--Jacob Schiff--and felt that it was out of style. You didn't build things in François Premier, you built things in Renaissance, or quiet, dignified, stately halls. And all the Gothic little fringes and stuff like that drove him crazy. But he nonetheless went along because it was her house. He used to come every Friday night and bless us. Well, now, that was just completely incongruous. My brothers and I never would hold hands. Boys just didn't hold hands. And we were made to hold hands while he blessed us. And of course they used to just twist the hell out of

my fingers in an attempt to get me to squeal and break up the show. My mother would [mutter]... She was hard of hearing, and there was always this conversation going on between the boys which was below her wavelength....

SZ: She couldn't hear it.

EW: She didn't hear it. Mother used to say when we were getting out of line, "Felix, the children." And that meant Pop would please take over and see that we would behave. My brothers knew this, and just before Pop was going to get his orders from Ma my brother Piggy--Paul was called Piggy--would hammer on the table, turn to father and say, "Felix, the children." [LAUGHING] There was always this thing, these religious services at 1109 [Fifth Avenue]. We being the youngest, we would have the job of asking the famous questions: "Ma mish ta hah ha lai lah ha zeh mi kol ha lai lot?" Why is this night different from any other night? And my brothers would say in the sub-voice, "We asked the same question last year. Can't we get on with this and get to the drinking part?" This was at a long family table, it was very long. My mother would not hear and my grandfather wouldn't. My grandfather watched to see when my lips stopped so he would ask the question, and back and forth. But he didn't hear well.

SZ: He couldn't hear.

EW: But he was very deaf. Most of the pictures you see of him, he was cupping his ear. That was a very different world. Then to come into, to go through schools and colleges where you had dormitory life, which was very cold and ascetic, and then to go and grow up in...I mean, we had the country place in the country, but the country place was almost like a hospital. I don't quite know why, but this was a time, just a few years, in which there was a tremendous fad about sleeping porches. Everybody slept out-of-doors, behind screened porches, and in the open. It was very

pleasant...I mean, it was cold as hell in the winter, but you bundled up for it. But the fresh air was wonderful, and certainly during the heat it was a delight to have a fresh breeze come through there. But there were four beds on the porch; four boys would be sleeping on those four beds. And then we always had guests. We were brought up constantly with invited people who shared our quarters. And there were pictures--this is not unlike it--there were pictures that we had taken or we were a part of things and we collected, picked up, that there were reminiscences of things that we enjoyed: college, Harvard, pictures of our pals and friends. The only pictures were the works of art in the apartment, and they were....

SZ: And the works of art were from a different period, too, you told me last time.

EW: Sure. The Blue Boy [by Picasso], the various things that became synonymous with me. And then when I took one off the wall, there was of course a mark on the wall where they had been.

SZ: But this modernist aesthetic was part of your generation, certainly was shared by the people with whom you were....

EW: Yes. Well, in a sense.... I think if you were writing my biography, God forbid, but I mean the idea that...the thing about it was that I wanted very much to be on the in, and I was in a sense--"Which Lachaise have you got?" Lincoln had one in the nude; I didn't ever get that far. But we all had pretty much the question of comparisons of competing in our aesthetic shopping. And we went around on Saturday mornings and enjoyed going to the galleries and comparing notes at lunch with a drink in hand. I probably thought of the exhibitions at...Julien Levy's, John Becker's, Weyhe--the group of places that were showing the things that we were interested in, and which later appeared in the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art. I wish there was some way in which we could solve that problem about who founded the Museum,

because it is a funny kind of thing, where [there is a] recollection, and I can't swear on Bibles that I remember that particular conversation, but I have a very clear picture that it was Mrs. [Abby Aldrich] Rockefeller and Mrs. Cornelius Bliss and Conger Goodyear, where, if it wasn't these words it was at least the gist: "Well, why don't we do this in New York en gros."

SZ: "En gros."

EW: Yes. And boy, they went, Oh, whoa. When you think about it, our little gallery was about the size of these rooms here. It was two...it was office space, and it was on the second floor of the Harvard Coop, the cooperative, which was where you bought your pads and pencils on Harvard Square.

SZ: They came, they were there?

EW: Yes.

SZ: And that's when they said, "Why don't we do this in New York en gros."

EW: Yes. And then they went to Sachs, who was across the street, practically, at the Harvard Art Museum, and said, Have you got somebody you could recommend as a director. And he recommended Barr, who was this white-haired boy who was teaching at Wellesley but was taking graduate courses at Harvard himself. For which there was a tremendous lot of material in the MoMA Library, of Sachs versus, well, discussing the merits of, the correspondence that there was between Alfred Barr and Paul Sachs. And Paul Sachs pretty much followed everything that Alfred suggested. Then Alfred included in there Jere Abbott...yes, Jere Abbott, and there was a great deal.... The early part of the Museum, when we were in the Heckscher Building on 57th Street at Fifth Avenue, you rode up in jammed elevators a couple of

floors, and there was...you were told this was the Modern Museum, these commercial spacings. They tried to doctor it up differently for each exhibition, but it was very recognizable and very inhospitable, no sense of going around in a sequence of any kind.

SZ: Because of the layout of the rooms.

EW: Yes. And suddenly something happened at the Museum, which was...suddenly there were pictures on the walls that had nothing to do with the collections simply of the trustees. The first ones were all borrowing from...they almost elected their trustees according to what they collected, or Alfred told them what to collect and they collected it and then they showed it. And there was the response [of the trustees to Alfred's show], "That isn't fair. You never told me to go and get one of these pictures, and now you're putting up...." Alfred had no intention of it being that kind of a thing. He was trying to get the best damned thing he could get. If he could get it earmarked for The Museum of Modern Art of the future, that was all to the good. But the trustees, at the trustees meetings there were discussion at which I was present in which [it was said] those aren't the things we're interested in. And I think one of the more violent conversations I had--I was a naughty boy--there were off-the-record conversations when the staff wasn't present in which there would be discussions about "I don't like that picture. I think we should tell Alfred that."

SZ: Who would say this?

EW: Well, Mrs. Rockefeller.

SZ: To you.

EW: To the group. And I had made the remark, "Look, I don't think it's up to us. We're not here for the aesthetic approval or disapproval of any work of art. Our job is to maintain the standards of quality and make sure that Alfred and his staff kept doing what they do best, which is putting on exhibitions, writing catalogues. That's their department. Our department is to raise the money and insure the stability of the institution." Well, Mrs. Rockefeller took violent exception to that. She expected her judgments to be considered, if not dominate. She was a nice lady, terribly nice, really wonderful. And she said as much as, "Eddie, I don't like you constantly talking about `we' and `they'"--we being the trustees and they being the staff. And I said, "Well, listen, if Alfred does stuff that you don't like and is going into a phase where you feel he no longer represents what you wanted to found a museum for, then fire him. But don't niggle him to death." And this was taken...this did not help me in my work. I was a fresh little upstart, who was I to tell her what to do. Well, as a matter of fact, you know, we weren't so damned impressed by the Rockefellers as <u>they</u> were. It isn't that we vied with the Rockefellers; we didn't treat them with awe. We paid them the compliment of treating them as equals. I spent an awful lot of time with the Rockefeller family..., and it was pathetic how they never really came in contact with reality, and it's almost the whole story of it.

SZ: Reality being...? You said they never came into contact with reality, and I'm saying, reality being...?

EW: Reality being everybody buttering them up and being polite with them all the time. There was really very little give and take on an equal basis.

SZ: What did this encounter which you had with her--which obviously was a peer exchange--what did that do to your relationship with her?

EW: Well, not very much, because she was very fond of me, and she got a kick out of the fact that Nelson came out of Dartmouth just about the same time that I came out of Harvard and we knew each other, but we didn't know each other well. And both...well, all along, my daughter went to Brearley School, and Alida [Rockefeller, Nelson's sister] went to Brearley School. And Alida was picked up by a car and taken to school every day in a car, and she hated it. Her ambition was to be in a bus with the kids. And, no. And one time we were summoned, Mary and I, to Blanchette and John's [John D. Rockefeller 3rd], and she was saying, listen, we're thinking of sending Alida to a camp up in Deer Island, Maine, the Chalet Français, where--two ladies from Philadelphia had inherited this farm, this camp--and it was to give them an outdoor life, [to] sleep in tents and all the rest of it. But it was mainly to enjoy the outdoors, baseball.... And these are the kinds of things I don't know whether to say or not to say. The key to this.... One time we went up there and found the kids and took them off overnight to a motel nearby.... [PAUSE] And Daphne [Warburg] said, "Dad, the most awful thing's happened. You know that little tiny turquoise ring which is my birthstone, which I always wear? I was wearing it the other day playing baseball, and the stone fell out, and I feel terribly about it." And I said, "It's not that valuable; it isn't a showpiece." And we went out to a movie or something in a local town, and the next morning the kids slept late because they were on vacation, a vacation from a vacation. [LAUGHTER] And when they came down to breakfast I said, "Daph, I got you a present." She said, "You got me a present? What do you mean, what?" So I said, "While you were snoring away, I stopped off and saw on the main highway one of these sport shops which has Scandinavian silverware and ski equipment and stuff, and among them they had some rings, and there was a ring there with a little tiny turquoise in it, and I had it fixed to your ring size." And "Oh," she said, "Dad, how wonderful, thank you ever so much." And Alida went to Mary and said, "Did you see what Mr. Warburg...he gave her another ring." Mary said, "Well, yes, but I don't think it really isn't a valuable ring." [Alida said,] "In our family, I would have had to pay that back out of the allowance I was given until I did."

Everything was deductible from those allowance schedules. Well, that kind of thing.... And the other thing, Nelson used to, one time said to me.... [PAUSE] Nelson said to me, "I understand you play tennis. Well, why is it you never come and play tennis with us?" I said I'd never been invited. He said, "Oh, for God's sake, come over anytime." I said, "Have you ever tried to get into your place?" He said, "Yeah, well, they know me, that isn't quite fair." Well, one time I was in tennis clothes, I had been playing tennis nearby, came upon the great gateways there, and I said to the man at the gate, "Look, you don't know me, I haven't got an appointment. My name is Edward Warburg, and I have this informal invitation, do come over sometime when you feel like playing some tennis, and I thought I'd see if Nelson was around. We've known each other for many, many years." And he said, "Well, Mr. Warburg, I don't think that it's any problem." I said, "Don't you want to search me?" And he said no. I said, "Oh, that's disappointing." And he said, "It so happens he's at the pool house right now, hitting the ball with somebody, I don't know who." So I went down there, and Nelson's little greeting to me was, "How the hell did you get in here?" And I said, "It's amazing what you can do with money." [LAUGHING]

SZ: Did he laugh?

EW: Yes, he laughed, and passed me through. And Nelson said, "Well, look, come on out here." Then I said, "Nelson, before we do anything, you grab hold of one handle and I'll grab hold of another and we'll roll this court. This court has not been rolled for weeks." He said, "That's quite true. The man is heading up a program of public things right now for the high school and getting things lined up, and we've let them have them to show them how to do it right." And I said, "Don't let them see this, because...." And we did, we rolled the thing. Then I said, "Now look, Nelson, I'm going to give you a present of four new tennis balls. We're not good enough to have new tennis balls every time we play, but these you can give back to the dog." And he laughed. He said, "The damn things floats entirely different." And I said, "Yes, it

does." Well, he didn't play very well. Okay, we played. Then he said, "Do you want to take a swim," and I said, "Well, look, I didn't bring any equipment," and he said, "Don't worry, I'd go in à la carte, if that doesn't bother you." I was a kid, I didn't care about that.... But I must say that when I saw...this was a Roman bath, stone by stone brought from Rome. Ice-cold water. God. And the whole thing was the discipline again. We made it short, but we did have our plunge. But I worked with him on so many different things, but he pulled me out of a reception line when I was a Regent and I was going by the reception line, and he said, "Watch the expression on these people as they walk by the modern paintings. They hoop and holler, they think it's so absurd." He was being a naughty boy, having fun. And of course, there was a fire up there, and some of the pictures, Averell Harriman's pictures, got burned, when Nelson was in charge.

SZ: Yes, that's right. You were one of the youngest, if not the youngest trustee in the early days.

EW: Yes, I guess I was. Yes, certainly, I think that that's a good way of putting it. I was one of them, certainly, but whether I was the one, I wouldn't know. Lincoln was older than I was, and Liza [Eliza Bliss Parkinson Cobb], I don't know what her age was....

SZ: She wasn't made a trustee til later.

EW: Well, I wasn't made a trustee...we all were on that committee [the Junior Advisory Committee].

SZ: But you were made a trustee early on.

EW: Yes. Probably.

SZ: Now tell me about the Film Department. Had you had a great love of film to start with?

EW: Well, the Film Department really grew up, not around me, but around....

END TAPE 3, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 2

EW: ...Film Department grew up, not around me, but around...what's her name?

SZ: Iris Barry.

EW: Iris Barry, who had established a film department in London prior to that, along with Montague. And she knew all of the films that she wanted to get and everything else, and it was a question of getting them. Now, at the same time or very shortly afterwards, Jock Whitney came on the board. Now Jock wasn't the person who did things very much himself, he had them done for him. And when he and [Bill] Paley were very much mixed up with the one with Gone with the Wind,...[David O.] Selznick. And he borrowed things. I was on staff as just generally being helpful, trying to be, but mainly they used me for fundraising. When I got engaged to be married, I told somebody--I told Iris, I'm sure--"Look, I'm going out to Hollywood, because we're going out there for our honeymoon. Is there anything you want me to see if I can shake loose." And she said, "Well, listen, we haven't got any Chaplin pictures, and it would be marvelous if we could get some." So my friend out there was Walter Wanger, and he was a distant relative; in other words, he...what is the relationship? He was a cousin of my brother's wife-to-be.

Don't get mixed up into family things. And I'd met him before, I knew him quite well; I'd been out there, among various other things. And he invited Mary and Joan Bennett, with whom he was keeping company, for lunch with me. We had lunch there, and Joan took a tremendous shine, it wasn't very difficult, [to] Mary. And I came back, Wanger called me in the back where there were apples, and he said, "Listen, I thought you were a friend." I said, "What the hell are you talking about?" And he said, "Well, you know that I've been living with Joan all this time, and she says what the hell is this, after all, Wanger?" Wanger won't propose to Joan Bennett because she's not Jewish enough. [Joan said to Wanger,] "Well, Mary ain't Jewish. How about it, make up your mind." And so she said, "It's very simple. I'm not going to see you people until this is all resolved." And about two nights later, we got a telephone call from Wanger saying, "Well, alright, it's a Warburg production. We've gotten married." They ran off and got married. We came back and went through one of those awful things where we went out to dinner and all the cameras got to work, because the great news of the event was the fact that Mr. Wanger and Miss Bennett were making it official.... [PAUSE]

SZ: Okay. You had done some more things?

EW: Yes. In the Film Library, and Lincoln had already with his Hound and Horn up at Harvard and later on with the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art, of which I was on board--I was not in the film, in the Hound and Horn--but there was a great discussion of film. Mainly, the key things, [like] Que Viva Mexico! [directed by Sergei M. Eisenstein] about Mexico and things like that. And so that I had a certain background in it. But no, I didn't play a great part. The main part was that I was the office man with Iris Barry and tried to do what she was trying to do. I was mainly sort of a liaison with the board of trustees.

SZ: Well, how did they...was the concept of including film, number one, and then building a film library, was that a hard one to get through the board of trustees?

EW: No, it was one of the basic tenets of Alfred Barr, but it was one of the first museums that showed them. And then they got into kind of a funny conflict with Lincoln Center when that came into being, because then a film library came out of there, of which Rockefeller--which Rockefeller?--that one was done more by Nelson.

SZ: What, Lincoln Center?

EW: Lincoln Center.

SZ: No, that was John.

EW: John. Well, yes, but I'm talking about the film library part of it. I think who can tell you most about that is Philip Johnson. But that is a very definite conflict, because they began to want directly competitive things. Typical that, "Listen, we wanted it and you wanted it, well, come on, there's enough for both of us" attitude towards it.

SZ: Before the Museum moved into its own building in 1939, where were the films shown? They weren't shown in that brownstone at 11 West 53rd Street, were they?

EW: I'm a trouble knowing that. Don't know it.

SZ: Do you remember the building, moving from the Heckscher Building into the building at 11 West 53rd, which was a townhouse, I guess.

EW: Yes. It was the place as...

SZ: ...where the Museum is now.

EW: Yes, the same physical location. Yes, but you always had...there were films shown in the basement, they had theaters there.... There was one up in the library, which was sort of a viewing room, where you could take things and bring them out there, but they weren't for the public, generally; they were mainly for us to decide whether we wanted this one or that one, or did we think this was a good one to show in contrast to that one.

SZ: Did you like Iris Barry?

EW: Very much. She was a wonderful gal. She married Dick Abbott, who was running the Museum....

SZ: What was he like?

EW: He was very good, but he...then came along the whole thing with [Alan] Blackburn, and Blackburn was my idea of something awful. And Blackburn got Philip involved in the...not Father something....

SZ: Father Coughlin.

EW: Father Coughlin, and the Silvershirts organization down there. And then also, that led to, through various glandular paths, to the parades in London and in Germany, where there are actual photographs of Philip marching in the Hitler Jugend. And then I was always constantly brought in as the..."You don't have any feelings about using Philip as the head of the art department, the art and architecture department?"

SZ: You mean after the war? They would ask you?

EW: Yes. And if I'd have found it alright, it was alright. I was a kosher zettel--I stand for kosher....

SZ: How did you feel about what he'd done? Philip.

EW: I had the feeling about, whether it be Philip or whether it be any one of these guys who...that artists should be excused in their political beliefs, and they're just damned fools.... They haven't the basis for an opinion. They just play along when they think it's good for business. Too many of them were caught being buddies with Nazis. I never sought them out, but I don't think that Philip was anti-Semitic. I think Philip was a homosexual who was damned attracted by the Hitler youth, and let it go at that. I never...I mean, he never went overboard and started everything had to be Jewish suddenly.

SZ: No, he did the synagogues....

EW: The synagogues, and the Bronfmans, playing around with her.

SZ: The last thing I wanted to ask you about today was the relationship, because you were there through, I think, pretty much that whole time, the relationship between Barr and Goodyear, and maybe tell me a little bit about Conger Goodyear as you knew him. I can't get the smile on the tape, I don't know how to do that. [LAUGHING]

EW: What do you do.... I've got to count on you being, allowing me...you helping me to....

SZ: Fix this?

EW: Take things out of this.

SZ: Oh, absolutely.

EW: Because there's no sense in it. Conger Goodyear and Shorty Knox [Seymour Knox] and those people up in the Buffalo set, had very definite opinions. Conger Goodyear was very pleased to be in the company of, and the company of being Mrs. Rockefeller. But Conger was really [the] escort of Bliss.

SZ: Mrs. Cobb's mother, right? He married Mrs. Cobb's mother.

EW: Yes. He married....

SZ: Mrs. Cornelius Bliss, when she was a....

EW: And Mr. Bliss, meantime, was....

SZ: [LAUGHING] You mean he wasn't dead!

EW: ...was the, what the hell, the singer, the soprano gal...what was her name...so that the influence of Conger was felt very much not only through official things but also the connection with Mrs. Parkinson, who was--you know who Mrs. Parkinson is?

SZ: Hmmm?

EW: You know who Mrs. Parkinson is?

SZ: Mrs. Cobb. Yes, sure.

EW: Yes, and she was number two lady at the Museum, and very much number one lady with Mr. René d'Harnoncourt. Now how complicated do you want to get it?

SZ: Go back and...so tell me about the relationship between Barr and Goodyear.

EW: Straight out, outright competitive. And Conger liked to think of himself as a pro. He liked to think that his pictures and his judgment was just as good as Barr's.

SZ: And?

EW: It wasn't. I don't know.... But he ran into fights more with Clark than he did with Barr, Stephen Clark. And there was a good deal of feeling about whether one couldn't work out a bigger merger of some kind with the Met, where the Hearn bequest that the Met administered, which was the great big bequest for funds for American artists, contemporary artists, which have suited [the Museum] very nicely to have that fund. But no, the Met turned it down. I don't know that I can...I really wasn't in.... After all, at that kind of thing, I was a youngster, and they were the old wizened guys. Conger liked Lincoln and he liked me, mainly because he was sort of young, too, and he felt that we were useful, that we dared speak up and tell the things at meetings.

SZ: Which you were delighted to do. [LAUGHING]

EW: Yes. I don't recall the meetings as being anything...the meetings were a question of saying "aye to.... Have you ever sat through a meeting at the Modern Museum?

SZ: Yes.

EW: Well, you know, it's a bloody bore. "All those in favor please say aye." "Aye." And you just cover off points on that damned agenda that's been worked out by....

SZ: So it's like a rubber stamp thing.

EW: Yes. And the only time there was any real discussion was socially, if you spend an evening together, sitting around the coffee table after dinner or something, Nelson would say, "Did you like that?" It was none of my business to like it.

SZ: Was that an important part of your association with the Museum in those early years, the social....

EW: It wasn't important...I never was...first of all, I didn't even go to a lot of functions, I wanted to eat good food. [LAUGHING] No, we didn't eat out much with each other, but we saw each other an awful lot because we were on so many boards together. But I think Lincoln had more to do with Nelson, particularly around the time of getting Philip Johnson to do the New York City....

SZ: New York State.

EW: ...the New York State Theater, and to stop the monopoly that Wally Harrison had. Poor Wally was such a sweet man, everybody adored him and liked him, but he wasn't up to it architecturally. He was the court architect for Nelson, and Nelson really didn't know much about it [architecture], but Nelson liked to play with it, and that became....

SZ: They ended up having a falling out, of course.

EW: Did they? I don't know.

SZ: When Nelson built the Mall in Albany, which Harrison designed. But anyway, that's another story.

EW: Yes, but I never knew that that was pro one and anti-other. Who was for it? Was that Nelson's?

SZ: That was Nelson's, Nelson did it. Have you ever seen it in Albany?

EW: Oh God, I worked in it. But that was Nelson's design?

SZ: ...Harrison designed it.

EW: Under orders, you mean.

SZ: Yes. Well, anyway.

EW: I don't know. I wouldn't know that.

SZ: But you knew Harrison anyway, because he was also on the board at the Modern.

EW: Yes, that's where I knew him. That damn circular building too, up there, which they never found a use for. It's very hard to know where Nelson's taste was. I mean, his collection had some awful clinkers in it too. He got--Alfred Barr's old girlfriend, what the hell....

SZ: Dorothy? Who?

EW: Dorothy Miller. He would call up Dorothy and say, "Send me up some of the stuff. What have I got?" and this kind of thing. And Dorothy would come to him via Alfred or direct and say, "Don't you think we should get a first-class this and a first-class that," and then there would be candidates and things looked at. I mean, when you look at the Modern Museum you have an awful lot of time wondering why they chose the particular picture they did, because sure, you should have a Tchelitchew, but how about having a good one? Well, they have the "cache cache," but they don't have a really good one. It was a very highly political set-up.

SZ: In what way?

EW: People had influence because of who they were instead of what they knew.

SZ: Except for Barr.

EW: Barr was supremely above it all, but Barr himself was a very, in my mind, a very stultifying thing to the Museum, because Barr.... Well, I had an experience with Barr which drove me nuts. Barr was requested by the Tate Gallery to select the American Picassos for the big Picasso show that they were putting on at the Tate, and I was rather surprised that the Blue Boy wasn't included; there was no obligation to do so, but it seemed to me a natural. And when I got over to the Tate it was even funnier, because all the postcards were of the Blue Boy.

SZ: And it wasn't there. [LAUGHTER]

EW: It wasn't there. So I said to Alfred, "Look, why wasn't...are you anti-Semitic or something? I won't spend any of my time defending you." And he said, "Oh no, no, Eddie, but listen, it didn't belong in that show." And I said, "Why?" Well, he says, "It's too pretty, it would have seduced the public." And I said, "Oh, for God's sakes, that's

crazy." But that was the feeling he had. If it was a likable thing, then by definition of being likable it was a popular picture and not a serious picture. He did the same thing with Adele [Mrs. David] Levy's picture of the lady with a hat, the Degas. He turned that down when they offered it as a present to him. [Alfred] Frankfurter was her guide. But this is all so gossipy. I mean, everything's gossipy.

SZ: Everything is. [LAUGHTER]

EW: Yes.

SZ: That's all I have for today. Shall I turn it off?

EW: Yes.

END TAPE 3, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **EDWARD M.M. WARBURG (EW)**

INTERVIEWER: **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

LOCATION: **WILTON, CONNECTICUT**

DATE: **MAY 29, 1991**

BEGIN TAPE 4, SIDE 1

SZ: I threw out a few topics to you before. I thought we'd have some fun, and I'm just going to let you talk [LAUGHING]. How's that?

EW: Okay. But you're not going to listen?

SZ: I'm going to listen....

EW: You know what you're doing, I don't.

SZ: Just go ahead.

EW: Alright. In all the things that have been written by me and supposedly by me, and previous recordings, it's never been quite clear where The Museum of Modern Art started. A small, tight little group tenaciously holds onto the idea that it all started with the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art, which in turn came into being due to conversations between Lincoln Kirstein, John Walker and myself in our rooms in Gore Hall in the freshman dormitories. These were freshman dormitories only for a short time, because within a period of a couple of years, all these dorms ceased to be dorms but became colleges. We, as freshmen, were not in that. We were not in

Gore Hall as freshmen, is what I'm trying to say. I could not see what all the fuss was made by the faculty at the Fogg Art Museum, who were lecturing at various stages of collections and collectors in the proximity of Cambridge. One of the favorite subjects was the Gardner collection, which was so easily accessible. Invariably, The Rape of Europa, by Titian, came onto the slide screen, whereupon whoever was doing the lecturing would go into ecstasies. And I allowed myself to say to Lincoln one time, "Why in heaven's name does anybody say anything good about that painting? The lady is a voluptuous tank of a person who's sliding off the rear end of a bull, and the bull isn't even very virile, he seems completely uninterested in the whole ceremony." And Lincoln said, "Now, we're going to have to start way back, and talk about the organization of the area known as the canvas on which this painting was painted. What are the predominant colors? How are they painted? In jagged or smooth surfaces? What is the overall impression?" Well, I'm not going into describing what I think the overall impression is, because I've already mentioned that. To me, it was very unsatisfactory. Lincoln went along, but he didn't like the painting very much, but not for the reasons I didn't like it.

Soon, it became apparent to both of us that there were many ways of looking at a painting and many ways in which paintings were conceived and came into being that were highly unsatisfactory to the general public. As I think I have indicated in some of the texts that I dictated, my beginnings were due to my father's collection of Rembrandt and Dürer etchings. Certainly nothing in The Rape of Europa resembled this in any way. My training, so to speak, in going around with Father and hearing him and his guests visiting his collection talk about the collection, was no training for the experience of going through the Gardner collection. But Lincoln Kirstein, who I always have to say, without question, taught me much more than I ever learnt from the faculty of Harvard or from courses that I had taken or attended at the Fogg museum, Lincoln began to take apart a picture and show me the elements that went into its construction. He eventually came to the point where he said, "What we need

here"--up at Harvard, up at Cambridge--"is a contemporary art society, where we could borrow from dealers and collectors, among our friends, among people in New York who had well-known collections and [with] whom we had contacts." And that is where the Harvard Society started. We had as an advisor, just to give us a certain respectability, a young member of the faculty at Wellesley who was doing grad work at the Fogg. This was Alfred Barr. Alfred Barr was a golden-haired boy to Paul Sachs, and whenever anybody was looking for somebody who would be a very good man to advise on modern painting things, Alfred always came to mind, and so he did with us. When we wanted to find somebody to advise us, we called Sachs, and Sachs recommended Barr.

SZ: Did you like him then? Was he personable?

EW: This was a very strange man. I'll continue as if you hadn't said anything.

SZ: Thank you. I'll just sit here quietly. [LAUGHTER]

EW: Are you going to get in competition with the birds?

SZ: No.

EW: I think it's rather fine having the birds.

SZ: It's lovely.

EW: Alfred Barr, I don't think in the many years I worked alongside of him, if not with him, never seemed to enjoy a picture. He simply catalogued it in his.... He never hung pictures in such a way as to show them off or to let them, quote, sing, unquote. They were, instead, displayed in a sequence having to do with chronologies of one kind or

another, but somehow, there was no zing in the display--zing, z-i-n-g, an old Spanish word [LAUGHING]. Alfred also felt that he was responsible for whatever the institution was he was connected with at that time, and that everything, but I mean everything, in that institution must pass his okay. This went to the extremes of how the word "men" and the word "women" was to be painted on the restrooms of the Museum. He attended every one of the subcommittees' meetings, and usually found himself in disagreement with the curatorial individual who was in charge of that particular section. But that didn't disturb him in the least. It might ruffle the feathers of the young man who differed with Alfred, because that was one thing that was not to be done: you didn't differ with Alfred. On one occasion, Alfred had turned to the trustees and said, "I've hung some paintings downstairs from our new acquisitions, and I think it would be a very interesting exercise if all of you went down and listed in terms of your favorite ones which ones you liked and which ones you didn't like." As usual, I was in the minority who did not find that everything that Alfred liked was good and everything he didn't like was bad, and I would not hold back my opinions for very long. I remember one time saying to him, "Somebody has to say to you, Alfred, that the king has no clothes on." His feeling was that that wasn't important. It always seemed to me that he had all the right names of the interesting artists of our time, but not necessarily the right works. He was simply cataloguing what was before him and bringing it to the attention of the viewer.

SZ: He was late on the [New York School]. Do you remember that?

EW: No.

SZ: That it was something that he apparently didn't have a great feeling for.

EW: What's your point? You agree or what?

SZ: ...I really was just wondering whether you remembered what I think was something of a controversy, where some trustees were interested in some of these works long before Barr was, and that's why it took the Museum a long time to build up their collection of those because it was not something that he cared for....

EW: No, I don't remember that incident.... I think I've said this somewhere in the text before, that the trustees were rather startled when the Museum opened up in the Heckscher Building and began, without any warning, to include artists that were not in the collections of the trustees. To that extent, he was leading them into new fields and as yet not recognized or sanctified works of art. It bothered the public but it didn't bother Alfred. Alfred had alongside of him in the beginning...Jere Abbott, who was a great friend of Alfred's. They worked very well together, Jere Abbott at Smith and then, eventually, more and more at The Museum of Modern Art. There were all kinds of issues that were confusing and that were questioned by the trustees as well as by the staff. When we moved for the eighty-eighth time to new quarters into the now present building done by...[Cesar] Pelli, we suddenly found that for reasons unknown to all but a few, the Klees, Paul Klees, were exhibited in different galleries, depending as to whether they were considered drawings or whether they were considered paintings. There seemed to be a general idea also, irrespective of the artist's intent, to take the frames off the Seurats and some of the artists and to frame them with nondescript frames. Well, if anyone knows anything about the point of this movement, you realize that the point of these frames were part of the painting, and it was extraordinary to see them suddenly discarded without so much as an apology to the artist and a nondescript substitute put in its place. To me, Alfred was outstanding as an author of catalogues, and the texts are brilliant and invariably open up new ground to the person being introduced to this display. I have been often asked by others who knew that I was rather free with my judgments, did I think that The Museum of Modern Art collection, as such, was outstanding. I said that I wasn't sure that they had the right paintings. I think that there are still a great many voids, in

Mexican painting, in German Expressionist painting and in the highways and byways of the art world, which have never been thoroughly digested for the public by having been included in the exhibitions. I don't think the Klees are the most outstanding collection of Klee I know, and I don't think that the Tchelitchews are the outstanding Tchelitchews I know. The numerous Picasso Cubist paintings are there mainly because they are Cubist or Picasso, but not because they're that outstanding. Once in a while, as in the great Demoiselles d'Avignon, they both happen to be by the well-known artist and happen to be an outstanding work as well.

SZ: So you're intimating that a mistake was made in deciding just to collect, to have quantity over quality, is that what you're saying? Or was it just a mistake in eye?

EW: No. It was a mistake in just putting together well-known names, court favorites. Of course, a great deal was overcome by the introduction as his colleague in the person of René d'Harnoncourt. René was a boulevardier who enjoyed people and enjoyed paintings. His installations of an exhibition would not be the academic compilation that Alfred Barr would give you, but a general cheerful romp through a field in which he had enjoyed, and was enjoying, the delightful scenery, the delightful excitement of exposing new [PAUSE] attitudes and new delights, in the tasting of new flavors that had not been overdigested. I think that's about as good as I can get, and leave it. In any case, Lincoln and I and a few others rather delighted in the shock waves that we caused to be experienced by the art world in the things that we advocated and had on the front burner. It is interesting to note that while Lincoln was considered a member of the vanguard, he somehow started rather suddenly to step into the wings rather than the stage of the exhibits, and in fact, even the deprecator of the modern in contrast to the academic. Lincoln became much more an admirer of the quality exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum than he did at MoMA, and though he had his selection even in that group, he liked the academic form of American sculpture, Saint-Gaudens...and the photography of Walker Evans, as well as rather

extraordinary collections of Oriental, Japanese and Chinese, prints. He is now in the process of writing a book on Tchelitchew, who's again being restudied from another angle, by Lincoln. He accomplished in the Harvard Society and in the work of the ballet an opening up of new fields, which undoubtedly, along with [George] Balanchine, made history....

SZ: May I ask you a question?

EW: You may ask me a question.

SZ: Thank you. Just a little bit of description that you've given me of Barr and of d'Harnoncourt makes me think that these were two clearly different personalities.

EW: Yes.

SZ: You were still active during a number of years where they were both strongly on the scene. I just was going to ask how you saw that time; how did they work together?

EW: I was an admirer of the incredible knowledge of an Alfred Barr, but I was a fellow conspirator with René d'Harnoncourt on the impish delights he took in showing up as well as off in the things he chose to exhibit.

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SZ: I've heard a number of things. I've heard that Alfred was terrible to René. I've heard that René really respected Alfred and that he used everything that he could do.

EW: I think you can hear all kinds of attitudes. Certainly, René was not a substitute for Alfred, but at the same time, from a p.r. standpoint, René was a great host to those who were interested in and enjoyed pictures. I don't think you could ever say that about Alfred....

SZ: What about today, do you think it's true--some people say that the Museum is still Alfred Barr?

EW: Well, I don't know that it's Alfred Barr. What I do know is, it's still not really interested in exhibiting the exciting things of our times. It's interested in spectacular, interesting paintings, but not necessarily enjoyable ones. It's hard to say. I don't think that I would consider the collection of the MoMA the greatest collection of modern painting.

SZ: What do you think is?

EW: Something like the Jeu de Paume in Paris. But, of course, it's a different period. It is interesting to see, having just come away from having revisited after many years of not having been back, having revisited the Pennsylvania Museum in Philadelphia, and having them take four artists and give them special handling in exposition.... The Brancusi exhibit there is outstanding. The Marcel Duchamp--outstanding. They're spotted. They are the result, obviously, of Anne d'Harnoncourt, the daughter of René, having known these artists at home and enjoyed them. I feel that we're wandering here.

SZ: I'm ready to turn it off, except I was going to ask you, you said you knew the story of getting some of the artists out of Europe?

EW: In a sense. I'm not sure of all my facts in it. One of the associates of Lincoln Kirstein's early days at Harvard was Varian Fry, who was a Quaker working in Portugal and in France to try and help those who wanted to get out to get out. Many of those who did get out owe their break by the ingenuity and financial assistance that came through the Quaker organizations and other art friends and their contacts. A lot of the people like Bill Paley, like Ed...the great broadcaster....

SZ: Murrow.

EW: Ed Murrow, and all the ones who were connected with broadcasting and with the media, and some of the doctors who got out of Vienna, the whole group who had escaped from the anti-Freudian schools, Freudian and Jungian schools, and who came and were placed in little, small institutions scattered throughout the United States, only to flourish at a much later date.... Interestingly enough, most of the escapees came along the routes well-established in past years by religious followers. The Quakers were one, the Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish group....

SZ: Okay. Thank you.

END TAPE 4, SIDE 2

END INTERVIEW