**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**INTERVIEW WITH:** **EMILIO AMBASZ (EA)**

**INTERVIEWER:** **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

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**BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1**

SZ: We'll start the way I always do and ask you where and when you were born and a little bit about your family background, and then go on from there.

EA: I was born in Argentina, June 13, 1943. I brought up my parents very well, so they let me come to America to study at Princeton University.

SZ: But you came to Princeton as a graduate.

EA: No, I came as an undergraduate. I came in as a freshman; I had completed my high school in Argentina, and then I got a scholarship from Princeton and came to Princeton. I did college in one year.

SZ: That speaks, I suppose, for the Argentinean system of education?

EA: That speaks for two things. Number one, yes, the Argentinean education because I cheated and lied like any of our best military heroes; it speaks very highly of Princeton's generosity or recklessness--your label. The second year I was in graduate school and the third year I was teaching at Princeton. I remained teaching at Princeton for, I think, three years, until the week they made me a professor--I think I had a little title; I was called Philip Freneau Bicentennial Professor of Architecture--and that was the week that Arthur Drexler offered me to come to the Museum to

work.

SZ: You're going too fast. I wanted to ask you a couple of questions. Princeton as a place to study architecture...?

EA: I went as an undergraduate, then I got my graduate degree at Princeton, a Master of Fine Arts in Architecture from Princeton.

SZ: Was Princeton a well-known architectural...?

EA: Princeton is a sublime undergraduate university. It has a good architecture school. At that time it was rather interesting. They had Peter Eisenmann and Michael Graves; the first year Peter was teaching, I think, and the second, Michael Graves. They were quite decisive and kind of bamboozled the college into promoting me to graduate student, something on that sort.

SZ: When you came to Princeton, did you know that was what you were going to study?

EA: When I came to Princeton I thought I was coming to the Institute for Advanced Studies. I was so fully convinced that when they put me in Commons with all the freshman and started serving me their food, I couldn't stand it, so I felt the only way I could get out of that place was to get through college in one year. Years later, I offered them a grant to endow a cook, but they refused to accept the money.

SZ: Is that true?

EA: Perhaps so. I don't tell lies. That's a problem with me.

SZ: I recently had lunch at the Institute, and they have a fine cook--from Germany, I believe--now.

EA: [Laughing] Well, you see, they know how to treat themselves. From Germany--so they don't treat themselves terribly well [laughter], but it's better than what we had gotten at Commons. At any rate, the university refused my offer; they thought I was being disrespectful.

SZ: I'm still fishing. Was it at Princeton that you discovered your...?

EA: No, I had been interested in architecture since I was eleven years old. My first architectural project I did, I must have been fifteen, was for neighbors across the street, a couple of school teachers, and I designed a house for them. I didn't know anything about Le Corbusier or anything like that, but it ended up being a very cubistic kind of house. I always wanted to be an architect. I was a child of very few ideas and quite fixed, idée fixe, as they say. When I was fifteen I wanted to come to America, and that's it, that's what I worked for.

SZ: You wanted to come to stay.

EA: I wanted to come here because it was the stage of the world at that time--at that time [laughing].

SZ: What was Argentina like at that time?

EA: Argentina is a marvelous place. Argentines are great bankers of information. They import information; if someone sneezes in Milan or in New York they clean their faces very fast there. They re-elaborate these ideas and provide theoretical

structures much faster than in their original locales. At the time, Andy Warhol was doing Pop art in New York and artists paying attention to him, already there were people doing Pop art in Buenos Aires with a few months' delay. It's an extremely sensitive echo chamber. At the same time, it is a very faraway place where the sky is heavy in stars. At night when you go out on the balcony and you look out, the stars are very prominent, and your loneliness is very perceptible. You have the feeling that you are really at the other end of the world and that the historical moment is passing you by. At the same time, you have a people who have, on the one hand, a great high level of awareness, of what is historically possible from social-political-cultural viewpoint; on the other hand, they have this extraordinarily undernourished economy that does not allow them to put into practice what they know could be. So you have a people who live mentally on one historical dimension and physically or economically on another. That creates a great amount of tension, which in proper Argentine way we solve by inner-directing our violence. In other countries people shoot each other; in Argentina we eat ourselves from the inside.

SZ: So [going to America] was to escape this and other....

EA: To escape this and other little numbers. When I was fifteen, I wanted to do a show of American architecture, and I went to see the cultural attaché of the American embassy, who told me that, oh, miracles, a Museum of Modern Art show was offered to him if he could arrange to bring it down. Then I went to see the mayor of the city and asked him if he would lend me a large place which belonged to the city--I had a friend who knew the mayor, so I could do it--and he said, yes, yes, of course. So I went to see the military attaché at the American embassy and asked if I could get a Buckminster Fuller--at fifteen I thought Buckminster Fuller was God's gift to architecture; I grew out of him to expand my definition of "God's gift" and of architecture, too--so they said yes, and the exhibition came, the Buckminster Fuller

domes came because they were part of the military equipment that the American army was using, probably for Antarctica. The site which was offered by the mayor of the city--which only had to make the site available, nothing else; I was not asking him for more--was not made available. So I then asked my friend if he would arrange for me to meet the mayor again. I went to see the mayor and I told him that a country where the mayor can lie to a fifteen-year-old is a country not worth living in. I just wanted him to know that I was going to leave that country.

SZ: And you did.

EA: Of course. I have a sense of justice of which you can really make a zealot out of. They burn them on a stake--if they don't disgrace themselves [laughter]. Now I wear three-piece suits to do the same thing. I don't let them know I'm coming with the torches.

SZ: In terms of architecture, from Buckminster Fuller, and at Princeton, Michael Graves and Peter Eisenmann, what was your view in your early years? Did you really have one that was distinctively your own?

EA: No, I.... Yes, some of the projects I did were still within a certain, very strongly modernistic...but it was almost like an explosion of the modern...to me the modern movement had already said so many things and the context that gave it meaning had decayed, but only a number of fragments had survived. Therefore, I was mainly interested in operating with the fragments of the modern movement--I'm [talking about] 1967, '66--what you would now call deconstructivism; at that time it was called something else in several projects I did. In fact, one of the projects I did in 1966 working together with Peter Eisenmann for the same client, which was a theological seminary; he did one building, I did another one, but mine was what we would now

call a deconstructivist building. I stayed at Princeton teaching really for one reason alone, which I never told anybody. Aside from this fact, which may be obvious to everybody and needs not to be said, I became very interested, as I got into teaching. I later became appointed professor on the basis of teaching, not on the basis of publishing--although I did publish one thing that was quite important. It was a philosophic critique on the need for a design discourse, it was published in Yale's perspecta, but that, I don't think, was the reason why that got me to be a professor; it was just the students revolting. When I started teaching architecture I started a very interesting course. The results were quite fascinating. Using sophomore students to get better results than the graduate school was getting out of them by teaching in a different way, and I became extremely concerned by the fact that I was becoming responsible for all those kids, and that in reality the way architecture was being taught in universities, the structure of the university did not really allow for dealing with the problems of architecture in the proper institutional context. For me, there was a need to invent a new type of university, what was once known as the universitas, which is where the word university comes [from]; universitas is the whole. One had to redefine it, and I was very concerned about doing a redefinition of universitas. We have had the philosophic academies from the time of the Greeks and by, say, the early 1800s, we had Von Humboldt and company in Germany defining the notion of the scientific university. I was very interested, not in creating a scientific universitas, I was interested in defining the notion of a universitas that would deal with the problems of designing and managing the manmade milieu that we have invented and it has now become to occupy a place next to the natural milieu, the natural environment.

SZ: That was a sort of politically progressive point of view, was it not at that time?

EA: In a curious way, no. In a curious way it might be said to be very unprogressive,

because maybe what I was saying was that the university should concern itself with the design and management of the manmade milieu could also be construed as a reformulation of the notion of the philosopher king; it could be seen both ways. It was at the time, I thought, the proper definition, and perhaps it came from my two great idols, one of them Francis Bacon--not the painter but the philosopher--and Thomas Jefferson; both of them had been interested in creating universities. But I felt very strongly that we needed to create such a university and I hoped The Museum of Modern Art would provide me with the proper waspy institution from where I could go and raise the funds and do that project, and that's really what I did. That's a subject for another question later, so I'll shut up now. The reason I am telling you that is because I was not a curator by training; I was not a historian nor anything of that sort. The position was offered to me, it was perhaps Arthur's biggest blunder. I don't know what seduced him in me, probably the fact that when he asked me about what did I think about Mies van der Rohe I told him that I found it so ironic that here was the most olympic of all architects who only would build for princes, but he provided the architectural methodology to make all the developers rich, because his architecture could be mass-produced in the cheapest possible terms on a square-foot basis. Who knows what attracted him to me? I had never met him before. I was called in by him because I think Peter Eisenmann suggested my name to Arthur. That's the way he came to interview me, as he must have interviewed many other people. Then he offered me the job. I came in on a fifty-percent basis of my time at The Museum of Modern Art and a fifty-percent basis to be the associate director of the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, [for] which I had years before really written the by-laws. As a matter of fact, when Peter proposed that idea to Arthur, I was still a student at Princeton, and Peter used to come on the bus back from New York and I would wait for him and he would tell me what he discussed with Arthur Drexler and I would then go and sit and write the by-laws for what this institution, the Institute, would become. As you know, the Institute was really created with Arthur's

support; there's no question Arthur went all out on a limb to help Peter Eisenmann to create that institution.

SZ: I don't know how well known that is.

EA: It's unfair and unjust, because Arthur really, really, not only supported it then.... It was really Peter's idea; Peter talked to me about it. Peter is a very forceful man, I'm much more shy, and Peter proposed that idea to Arthur. Arthur went out and got Armand Bartos to provide funds, he went and got a gentleman, George Dudley...who was a very nice man who I believe had married a Rockefeller and was also an architect. There was also Gibson Danes, who was at that time the dean of Cornell and who also supported the idea. He then got a very fine gentleman who was also involved with the State University of New York. His name was Adonalfi, who was Nelson Rockefeller's man. He helped the State University of New York from the viewpoint of the financial ideas and later he became the man who was the first president, I think--check me on that--of the UDC, the Urban Development Corporation. Arthur got other people to support it. He got Lily Auchincloss to provide money. She provided the first funds for the Institute's first installation, which I think was East 47th Street it might have been, 11 East or 13 East 47th, between Madison and Fifth. That's the way it started, and Arthur was completely, strongly behind that; without Arthur's support it would not have happened. René [d'Harnoncourt] at that time was still the director, and René allowed things to go ahead. No, no, it should be known, it's fair to Arthur. God knows that there were moments when I felt that if Arthur died a natural death, I would be the prime suspect [laughter]. You can quote me, but at the same time he was a brilliant man and I would hate immensely not to be fair to him.

SZ: When you went up to interview for this position, I guess you did tell me what really

attracted you to it, because you were enjoying the teaching.

EA: I was enjoying teaching. I must also tell you that I taught myself English by trying to read the books of the American embassy in Argentina; by that time, we were not allowed to study English in Argentina because it was Péron's time, so unless you took private classes that were handled with a certain amount of delicacy, the situation wasn't a very good one. I taught myself by trying to read Alfred Barr's book; I know every page, backwards and forwards, I can tell you where the photos are on the right page or on the left page. So that's the way I taught myself. When I came here, my English was very poor; in fact, my first American girlfriend said I spoke like Gary Cooper, because I taught myself English by repeating his statements on Argentine television, which did not have subtitles.

SZ: How resourceful of you [laughing].

EA: I used expressions like "How do you like them apples?," which have not been used in New York in eighty years, and I thought they were just the summa of chic [laughing]. Anyway, back to the ranch. I was mainly interested, honestly, in doing that project, but when I came to the Museum, as it is such an important church, after all, one becomes very seduced by the church, and as I started working part of my time in the Institute and part of my time in the Museum, one can almost say that I was a servant of two masters. It was Henry II on the Institute--I don't remember if it was Henry II or whatever his title was, a Plantagenet he was, I remember, and a Henry he was--and a higher calling at the Museum. I got immensely seduced by the Museum, and I discovered I had a certain little gift, and the little gift was not to be a curator or what I called a farmer who knows his seeds and knows the seasons and will label and will plant and will know behaviors, and when he collects and harvests will then do marmalade and all the things that are necessary and classified--I am not

an agricultural curator, I am a hunter curator. That's what I discovered I was. Normally, curators should really be farmers, because they depend on the artists to produce the work; there have considerable amounts of controversy lately about whether a curator is as good an artist as an artist by formulating certain positions and making a taxonomic cartography of a domain yet to be filled by artists, à la Bonito Oliva, but that's a subject for another moment. In my field, which is architecture and design, the curator who sits and waits for the designer or architect to produce something is a very reasonable and acceptable position, but, given the social context, the economic circumstances under which an architect or designer has to work, I thought that the Museum could provide institutional support, to actually become an impresario and trigger certain types of projects. That was the case of the Taxi project and that was, in a certain way, the case of Italy: The New Domestic Landscape, which was earlier. As a matter of fact, I started doing Italy: The New Domestic Landscape as a very simple-minded idea, completely ignorant of the subject matter, fascinated with Italian design and production; but I thought we would just go, collect beautiful, pure products and bring them and show them. As I went to Italy, I started realizing that the subject matter was much deeper, there was a great amount of controversy, there were a number of designers who felt that it was impossible to do any design until the social conditions and the political terms were changed, there were other designers that felt, just as designers they can only deal with products but that's not the scale on which they should be working, they should be working on a much larger environmental scale. So then I tried to provide a larger context in our specific case, of the show Italy: The New Domestic Landscape. I provided twelve Italian designers with an institutional cover of protection, so that they could actually make an environmental statement. Their proposals ranged from the political to the actual large-scale project like in the container turned into a mobile home you could see in that show. Shall I shut up for a second?

SZ: No.

EA: I'll manage to come back to what I want to say, anyway [laughing]....

SZ: It was clear that that was the kind of thing you wanted to do, because that's what you had told Arthur that was interesting to you about going to the Museum.

EA: I didn't tell Arthur that I was interested or not. I told Arthur that I was fascinated by the act of invention and that's what fascinates me and I thought that the curator's position was that of finding someone and providing him with water and making him bloom.... I felt it was quite important to bring up to a level of consciousness the ideas and the emotions which are embodied in the objects which man makes, so that the public can somehow take joy or pleasure in that, because they help reveal meanings and values of the culture. Products are to me iconic entities which I am very fascinated in deciphering, almost like an anthropologist or an archeologist is trying to do, and I have great pleasure in showing it to the public and I also have great pleasure in celebrating whoever has invented then, and by doing that, encourage them to grow further. That was the case with some projects, little projects we did. We did, I think, the first modern architectural drawings show ever done, and that was with Barbara Jakobson at the Junior Council--at that time it was called the Junior Council. We did the architectural drawings show at the Museum's restaurant. I think it was the very first show ever done of architectural drawings, because at that time architects didn't have any work. But we picked up a number of very unknown architects, unknown to the general public and even unknown to the profession, like Rodolfo, who is a very good architect. Also unknown then was John Hejduk, who has bloomed since then (at that time was not as very well known as he is now). By that time, already, Raymond Abraham was known because Arthur had done a show of his work, but we picked up a number of people who later became very known, and it

was one way of encouraging them, and that gave me an immense amount of joy. I could fancy myself the prince: you can bestow certain princely favors on people in doing that, and the main thing was just to get them to grow. But back to the point. The point is, my secret plan, which I didn't tell Arthur, was the Universitas project; that I didn't tell Arthur, not because I was hiding it from him, but just because I had to form it in my mind and credit be given to him that when I got around to telling him that and I said I would like to raise funds for that, he liked the idea immensely and we went ahead and we did it. I raised the funds and we did it, and it was a very important event. To this day...it happened, I think, in January 1971. Dick Oldenburg was sitting there; at that time he was director of Publications, and he was indeed very moved, and at that time he was very sincere. He was there, and what we did was very interesting. Before that, we worked a whole year to produce what I called--and mind you, everything I say is quotable; if I'm going to go to hell, let it be on my own petard [laughter].... What we did is, we worked for a year....

SZ: "We" being you and Arthur together?

EA: No, Arthur really did not. Arthur let me raise the funds and I hired an assistant by the name of Gilbert Perez, who was at that time a doctor in theoretical physics but was already a burned-out case at twenty-five; he had done all his important work in theoretical physics and he was not interested in anything else except in cinema criticism. He was a great stylist, I thought, as only foreigners can be...only foreigners can be stylists in that way, all right? They are, but the style of the foreigners has a certain way to it. Anyway, he was a brilliant fellow. Now he's a professor of cinema at Sarah Lawrence.... Anyway, he worked with me, but what he did is he rewrote my wooly-minded thoughts, with a tremendous amount of rigor, so it was a marvelous arrangement. But what I proposed there was the notion that we have to reformulate the notion of what would be this type of new university concerned with the design of

the manmade environment--the design and management of that. What we did is we had a number of consultants who were extremely brilliant, marvelous people--one of them, for example Ronald Dworkin, who is now this sublime person in legal philosophy; he was a chair at that time of philosophy at Yale--not legal, law--and then he went to take Blackmoor's chair at Oxford, and he's now teaching at NYU. He's the man who wrote the important legal [treatise] on [civil] disobedience during the Vietnam period and has just now written the one on abortion.... At that time he was very young. It was 1970, twenty-something years ago. Robert Nozick worked also on that. He hated every notion that I had in mind, but he has a great, great mind--he's a libertarian philosopher--because to him I was proposing the notion of the philosopher king, acting from the university, and that he didn't like. We had people like....

SZ: It was a bad time for that notion.

EA: Yes! And that's why I chickened out and later lost nerve and didn't publish it, but we had everything; we have the black book, we have all the papers that every one of the consultants wrote--when I saw "we have," I mean the Publications department has it on file. Then what we did, which was, I thought, the best idea was we invited a number of people to write criticisms to the black book. We invited Hannah Arendt--that was Arthur's suggestion; I invited a man because I adored him but I'd never met him, a man by the name of Rexford Tugwell. Rexford Tugwell by that time was close to eighty; he had been a Roosevelt "Brain Truster," and what I was interested in was the need to reformulate the American constitution from an agricultural constitution to an urban constitution.... You know, when I do a university, why stop at the university....

SZ: Just change the whole thing! [laughing]

EA: Right [laughing]. You have to define your context. I thought the constitution needed to be redefined. Anyway, we had very good people. Henri Lefebvre and Alain Touraine. I invited at that time a man who has since become very, very well known, a French sociologist, Jean Baudrillard; he's now become very famous, but at that time he was completely unknown. This was really a very remarkable group. Manual Castels, a very interesting Spanish sociologist. Octavio Paz I invited, to give the opening address. We didn't open it to the public. The key idea was not that they should just write a paper. That was the way everybody did it. What we told them is that their paper would be criticized by two other highly reputed people, so that they had to operate on a high level--we told them who would be reviewing their paper--and that they did. We got money, a considerable amount of money I raised--I think David Rockefeller used to call me the General Patton of fundraising, usually because I used to march onto his own terrain and trample on his carefully cultivated flowers and pluck them out before he could sniff them [laughing]. Anyway, à la guerre comme la guerre--money is money. I don't care.... It was for the Museum, after all. Anyway, to come back to the story, what we did is, we got everybody's paper, then we invited everybody to come for a full three-day weekend, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Everybody had already read the criticism that had been written on their papers, so they knew they would be able to reply. It was closed to the public, only open by invitation. We only invited several people in foundations. I remember among the people invited Robert Silvers, who was coeditor of The New York Review of Books, and he was maddeningly impressed with us, genuinely impressed. The performance was on such a high level, it was absolutely extraordinary. Then we had a very clever man by the name of Jivan Tabibian, who was a summarizer, because I needed, after each of the sessions, to summarize it, and he had a great syncretic capacity to actually summarize ideas, which is very important. So after every one of those meetings we had, morning and afternoon, he would summarize what they said and present their positions and their differences, and that was very good, because it

allowed us to encapsulate and really proceed on a high level, because you need to create a certain amount of encapsulations, so that you can really distill what happened. But there were many other people who participated, and I'm being unfair to all the other people who attended and were extremely interesting. But then we got their papers, and the black book, and the contributions of the consultants, and their critical papers--and then the transcripts of these symposia. The idea was to really go further, because what I had developed was an idea to create, really, a true university and to locate it within the State University of New York. At that time, Nelson Rockefeller was still the governor, and what I discovered was that one could use the Land Grant Act, which created the scientific universities in the nineteenth century and which was still valid, and we could therefore use that as an antecedent for an urban grant university, and, say, 70,000 acres could have been granted to that university, which would then create a new town of 30,000 people, where we could experiment with transportation systems, preventive health care, technologies--everything which I felt really didn't have only to do with the design of the physical environment, it also had to do with the design of a quality-of-life situation. We discussed it with the president of the State University of New York and with Nelson, and with the Chase Manhattan Bank, because I'd brought in one man of theirs, I don't remember his name, a brilliant man with a Swedish name--I can try to remember his name--because I wanted to provide this universitas with a proper financial arm. It's very important that it have a proper financial aim, so we'd be properly endowed. They wouldn't sell the land, they would lease the land, so the income from that would allow them to experiment. We had at that time a great amount of input from the Urban Development Corporation. That was the main idea, and that idea fell by the wayside when Nelson became Vice President; then, everything that he had really built in a certain way started to be dismantled. There was no more support for that idea and it couldn't be carried out. What I really wanted to do was create a new type of universitas. Now my shame is that I lost nerve and

didn't get it published. We got Sheldon Wolin, a political philosopher at that time at UCLA, to be very adamantly opposed to the notion of a university dealing with the design of the manmade environment. He believed it could only do monitoring activities. I felt a university had to do not only monitoring but also evaluate ones and, more important, that is where I think intellectuals are to be blamed. They have to have diagnostic and prognostic capability. They had to propose solutions. They were the only structure that had the sufficient institutional scope to be able to deal with a problem of great magnitude and the intellectual capital that you needed to actually do it. It couldn't be done any other way. I felt that was one of the tasks. That's why I left Princeton, because I felt teaching students at that little architecture school, when I felt that the scale of problems was far beyond what the architects could do and seeing them getting interested just in becoming amateur politicians or amateur sociologists, rather poorly at that, and underequipped intellectually, was not the way to go. My feeling was that architects had one mission, which was to invent architecture. They have to invent forms, which of course synthesize a number of social and political factors. That they shouldn't do sociology or poor politics, as I saw so many do in the late '60s and the '70s, which is really what later, in '74 or '75, got me around to do the Luis Barragan show. I got so sick and tired of kiddies doing poor sociology, method idolatry in schools, that I felt that one had to bring them back to one faith, that architecture...architecture moves the heart and brings you back to what is the root of architecture, which is to creat a place. Never mind what aesthetic device, what stylistic elements the artist uses: it is to create a place, and it has to touch the heart. That's why I picked Barragan, because he was very simple but very profound, very deep, and the images were very moving. I did that show really to seduce the students. I'll do anything for seduction [laughing].

SZ: We'll take that out, too [laughing].

EA: I have a few witnesses.

SZ: Back to the three-day symposium, you did that out of the Museum. Was the Museum cosponsor?

EA: The Museum was the sponsor, the very sponsor, and we had the meeting in the trustees room, the old trustees room, catered in the other room. We invited John Szarkowski and of course Arthur. We had the directors of the departments. Dick was there, because he was a man who was interested in reading books, so we invited him. We invited a few trustees. David Rockefeller couldn't come, but he sent Rick Salomon, who was indeed terribly impressed with it. We invited very few people of the press, but it was really like New York Review of Books-type of press. We didn't want anybody to talk about it; we just wanted a serious undertaking. My shame, as I've said, is that we didn't publish it, and now I wish I could correct it. The material is all there, twenty-some years old, and it is still very valid, in a curious way; the notion is still a valid notion.

SZ: Why don't you?

EA: I might do it. I might give them the money to do it. That will be one of the things...and I can now certainly afford to do it. So your next undertaking, if you survive all the noise.... [laughter].

SZ: I want to go back to you coming to the Museum, and maybe tell me a little bit about how you saw the institution. You talked about how you saw what you felt you wanted to do. Just describe a little bit about your early interaction with Arthur.

EA: Arthur had a super intellect, there's absolutely no question. Of course, now that he's

gone, it is much easier to say nice things about him. But that is something I always said about him to his face: he was a superlative editor, the most intelligent editor I ever ran into. Even people who hated his guts would agree to that, in your department, in the Publications department...Miss Franc, Helen Franc, a brilliant woman but very difficult in her own way, but she would agree. She hated him because he didn't produce his books on time, but when he wrote, it was a delight. Arthur is also in a curious way a strange mixture of somebody very courageous--if you read his early writings, he was politically very progressive--and in a curious way nothing spoiled such an intelligent and subtle man more than not being provided certainty by the institution. I think that institution spoiled two people--Bill Lieberman and Arthur--ruined them badly. Someone like Bill Rubin is beyond spoiling, because he came already from home in that way, that is like a brat. But somebody like Bill Lieberman, if you read Bill's writings, early ones, when he was young, and you read Arthur's writings, they were superb writings. That uncertainty that the institution created by not assuring them of continuity, by keeping them always unstable.

SZ: Do you think Arthur felt unstable?

EA: Yes. Arthur felt tremendously insecure in that institution. He had a political grip almost like a Cicero, I don't know, a grand politician would have had it. It was completely wasted, and there was no need. Many a time I told him, "Arthur, there's no need for so much political [?sphering out] in the institution." In the end he ended up doing shows or producing projects because he felt it was politically interesting to the trustees. I always used to tell him, "Arthur, by the time the show gets done"--like African Textiles and Decorative Arts--"the trustees whom you think you're pleasing will have forgotten why it was all done. There is only one way of pleasing them, which is to enrapture them. If the show is not political, it doesn't matter. What matters is if it can excite them, if it can get their heads to turn...."

SZ: But he was afraid of....

EA: At the end, at the end. What I mean by the end, is what came after René stopped protecting him because René left, and René had protected him. So all during the years René was protecting him, he felt that he could do what he wanted [and] René would take care of handling his case to the trustees. He bloomed, he flourished. But when René left and then Bates Lowry came and then much worse than that--[John] Hightower, with whom he had such a tremendous row and he fired him and Arthur refused to go, and that was confirmed by the trustees. From that moment on, a very hard change came.

SZ: Another little-known fact.

EA: That was what did it. I only judge what I can read. Arthur could talk to me and I can say what I want, but you can perfectly well read what he wrote during the time of René d'Harnoncourt and you can read what he wrote afterward, and you will see what a different man he was. The writing's still glorious.

SZ: So his relationship with René was a good one.

EA: It was a marvelous one. I never met them, the two together, I never knew Mr. d'Harnoncourt, but from reading those things, it is obvious he was like the father he never had, or the father he wanted to have, or the father he invented. René was not, but he was intelligent to let Arthur dwell in that paternal fiction, because that allowed Arthur really to prosper.

SZ: What part in this do you think Philip's [Philip Johnson] history and presence played,

certainly in terms of Arthur's decisions to be adventuresome or timid.

EA: Arthur was always adventuresome on his own, and he always found a way to getting Philip to go along with him. He knew exactly what to tell Philip. Philip is considered a political devil; I consider him politically very naive. No, the real devils are the ones you do not know are devils. The Lucifers are the real ones. No, Arthur was not adventuresome or timid to please Philip. He did a few truly unnecessary shows, like the Three New Skyscrapers one with Gordon Bunshaft and Norman Foster in order to show Philip's building. At that time, he wanted to flatter Philip because he needed his support; also, the Museum had treated Philip shabbily by giving the tower to César Pelli. But, my goodness, that show needn't have happened, and if it was to happen, Philip's building had no reason to be in that show.

SZ: Except for this one that you're positing.

EA: Yes. There was no architectural reason. My goodness, if something was dim, it was Philip's work, and it gives you an idea of Philip's blindness to himself, that he allowed it to be shown. He's such a self-knowing man, he's so erudite, he has such a high critical capacity. He doesn't fool himself about himself at all. It was a sheer case of cynicism that just forms part of Philip's tragic view of life, which is, if you can get away with that, then you get away with that, and then you can laugh at night when all by yourself. People may be laughing at you, but the last laugh is yours, because in whose museum were you while they were laughing? In theirs. Whose catalogue can you show to the next client? Theirs.

**END SIDE 1, TAPE 1**

**BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1**

EA: Philip was not the reason for Arthur's self-censorship. Arthur's reason for self-censorship was his excessive amount of editing his own work. I think he had a low opinion of most of the board. He only invented two or three fictional characters on the board who he believed protected him.

SZ: And these were?

EA: No, that would be unethical, because they did protect him, in a curious way. They observed him in his need for having that fear. Usually they were women, and they protected him, so they lived up to his...in that way he was seductive to them. So they delivered what he needed, but he did not have a concern for the board intellectually, he only had a concern for the board financially, and that really happened after René. It's not only that René disappeared. The great situation of the trustees having a George Hamilton, having an intellectual, having a scholar as a trustee started disappearing. You started having Walter Bareiss, who would call in the [Cresap, McCormick and Paget management] group to analyze the Museum, other people like that. He then started becoming almost like a poor student of business administration--I mean Arthur--and for that he didn't have talent. He had talent for other things. He had a very good nose for architecture and a tremendously high nose for quality. The man put in the Anderson chair, the one which is all kind of spilled polyurethane; that was an anti-object. You can say that Arthur hated objects; perhaps that formed part of his immense interest in objects, but it was a very contradictory feeling. He adored extremely beautiful objects and he adored extremely destructive objects that were in some way the antithesis of the beautiful objects. The beautiful and the deformed glass vases, both things attracted him; but for that he had a very good sense. If you look at the Museum's collection, we have gaps, mainly in the crafts We have gaps in many areas, but in the industrial, production, there are not that many gaps. There are

many historical pieces that perhaps we don't have, some Horta, Ashby, Van de Velde, things like that, that Arthur didn't have the money to buy; those things had become expensive. But he had a grand sense of quality. I felt that sometimes he would collect too many products. When he allowed me one year to be the one collecting things, I collected only five products, and I presented them to the board of trustees--the acquisitions committee, not the board--in the following way. I said these are five products. They are all American technology, but look how curious. The first product was the Bang and Olufsen parallel tracking-arm record player; it uses electronics that they buy from American for $14.95, perhaps. They elaborate this in Denmark, they sell it wholesale for $250, it gets to the public for $700. But it's American technology; labor is Danish. The second product was a lamp designed by Richard Sapper. The first one was a Jacob Jensen design, the second was Sapper's Tizio lamp for Artemide. Its bulb was a Sylvania or GE quartz light. Again, American technology, made in Italy, it was selling for $80; the bulb was about two to three dollars. The third product was one of those vacuum valve electronic cube clocks made by Rita Italora, also designed by Sapper. Again, American technology, Italian production. I can't remember the fourth. The fifth was an American product, 100 percent. It was a paper thermometer. You could put it in your mouth and after ten seconds you could read the temperature, but of course you would have to throw it into the garbage. The point I tried to make to the trustees was several ones. One is that American technology was being used to create labor value-added, which was what designers can make, but it was being made outside of the United States. My point made to the acquisitions committee was, whoever would find ways of making these products in America should be given the Nobel prize for social peace, because he would invent ways of creating labor, jobs, in America, which I felt was a very preoccupying concern--not for a curator of The Museum of Modern Art, but still, a very revealing trend and a very interesting one. I'm sorry I can't remember the fourth one, because it was also American technology and made in Italy. It's in the files of

the registrar, it must be there, during the years of my tenure. Anyway, I tried to make the point, and I didn't want to collect too many objects. I said I am concentrating on five because these projects are very handsome, very beautiful. The Tizio lamp became a classic and many things of that sort. The Bang and Olufsen is as beautiful a product as anything done in electronics. But the only American product in a curious way almost required a definition: What do we do with something that is so reduced in size that it is just a little piece of paper? Is it beautiful? It's extremely clever. Is it aesthetically attractive? And it was so reduced it was almost immaterial. As soon as we deal with surfaces, which is of course the subject of aesthetics, how are we going to judge it? And it really created a number of problems. We are miniaturizing products electronically and no longer does the shape depend on the innards. It's almost becoming graphic; the smaller and smaller the product becomes, the more graphic design they became and less industrial design. Anyway, there were a number of problems that I wanted to put to the acquisitions committee and make the point, and I think that when we made the exhibition--I can't remember when I wrote the wall labels whether I said it or not--but anyway, it was one of the arguments we made. I felt the Museum had that type of activity. We could in a curious way forecast events happening, and if we couldn't forecast them with the proper diagnostic [methods], then we could certainly make it a revelation, that there was a certain state, if not of malaise, at least of...a cultural phenomenon was occurring, which, of course, had aesthetic reflections, first of all, our area of concern, but it also had social and cultural meanings, and we could actually bring it out. It started making me more and more think that we needed to add an anthropological domain of concern to the aesthetic domain of concern. I felt very uncomfortable, really, in a way. We were even being loyal to the original Alfred Barr notion, which is a 100-percent aesthetic one, because we were presenting the furniture, for example, in total lack of connection to painting, photography, other sources. We would put up our collection of products which was born supposedly of a community of ideas in the arts.

SZ: But it wasn't being looked at.

EA: We weren't presenting things in that way, and that bothered me greatly in the case of the style that in many other such cases that we had, certainly in the '30s, and it bothered me now in the contemporary situation because we were having objects with new form and we were having Conceptual art being created and we were having a number of things that could allow us to show that, curiously, there was a community of aesthetic concerns even if they did not have a formal embodiment, but the conceptual embodiments were quite close to each other.

SZ: It's fairly antithetical to the history of that department.

EA: That department and other departments, because every institution--remember, cockroaches and bureaucrats are the only two races that have managed to survive without changing their skin. Every institution starts defending their departmental turf, and it became impossible. I wrote a paper to Arthur saying that we should do a Viennese show. One of the people we brought for this symposium was Carl Schorske, and he liked very much Carl Schorske's presentation--and he was really in the audience, he wasn't even a participant, but he spoke from the audience and it was an extremely brilliant presentation. So he [Arthur] knew him and was very impressed with him and wanted to meet him again and we arranged a dinner with him. So Carl Schorske was a scholar on the period--1900 Vienna--I proposed to Arthur that we do a show--and I'm saying 1974, 1973--and I am not in any way saying it to claim it, because that show must have been proposed twenty times throughout the history of the Museum because it's such an obvious thing to be done. But my concern was that--not my concern, my goal--was I said here; we have it all in-house; we don't have to go to the Kunst der Jahrhundertwende and borrow too many

things from that. We could do it with almost all coming from the collection--if we borrowed, of course, we would be able to fill quite a few gaps, but we could do it from the collection. But the Museum had become terribly feudalized. Probably that was the way René could maintain a certain amount of domain, or whatever it is in his realm of those fighting barons, and it became later very institutionalized. You can give any type of simple-minded explanation, and I am certainly not beyond providing you a simple-minded explanation, but one of my simple-minded explanations as to why this feudalization and compartmentalization without any permeability between one department and another occurred has to do with the fact that our Museum really had very few exhibition spaces, and they were fighting like maniacs for that. It was not a matter of geopolitics, but believe me, there were so few places that each department had, of course, one great artist that it wanted to celebrate, and to do a[n inter]departmental show, which required [154], if we had had more space, maybe these problems would not...maybe. As I say, I am making my contribution to stupidity by saying that, but I believe it was a factor, a definite factor, in that their physical resources, liebensraum, were so small that it created such a situation. Of course, as you saw, the moment they had a larger museum, with what did they open it but with a Vienna show, because they felt that they now had the space to start with interdepartmental shows. Now they need more space. Anyway, it's a subject for another moment.

SZ: A lot's been written about how the department's having been founded essentially by Philip and having a certain view of architecture and design, all those things, as art that stands on its own, I want you to tell me if that is....

EA: I was not alive when it was created, nor was I there until the moment I arrived. My reconstruction, which is subject, of course, to verification because it is my reconstruction, was that there were two brilliant people there, Philip--I'm sorry, three

brilliant people--Philip, of course, in his own way; Arthur, whom he got in as a very young editor of Progressive Architecture, without even a college degree but a brilliant mind and truly self-taught; and Edgar Kaufmann. In order to have peace in that impossible situation, he, Philip, invented this division within the department between architecture and design, and a more intellectually artificial division I have yet to find. It incremented the notion, which should never have been allowed, that you can have people who will be industrial designers and operate on a vacuum and there in turn will be some great industrialist that will provide them their support and together they will bring about marvelous products that will bring joy and happiness to everybody. Well, that might have been halfway true with Peter Burns and [182], A.G., but one's power does not make spring. But it really misled a whole, if not two generations of designers. It was a very wrong intellectual division of labor--of intellectual labor. It later became in a curious way subsided and corrected, de facto, by the fact that there was a Department of Architecture and Design, and by the fact that I, for example, being appointed curator of design--remember, I was curator of design and was only supposed to work with design--I did also architecture things, and it didn't occurred to me, and glory to us, he never told me, "Stay on your own turf," and also to Ludwig Glaeser, who by that time was a curator of architecture, who did not bother me and did not get upset and who was in many ways quite collaborative with me and quite generous with his knowledge.

SZ: Although I do think that when you left and Stuart Johnson came, it kind of went back....

EA: But Stuart is a man who came with a very definite department of knowledge. He is a great scholar in nineteenth-century, early twentieth-century design and architecture, mainly design, and that was his domain. I was very happy when Arthur appointed him. I resigned twice, once Arthur knew about--I knew Arthur knew about [it] and told

me not to--in 1974. I just wanted to resign, not because I was upset--on the contrary, I was quite happy--but I didn't want to be a curator. I said you need other types of curators. I am the curator-hunter; I'm the one that has an idea, goes out and raises funds, brings about institutional protection and makes it happen, but that's not the way a curator should work. All that which I was doing extracurricularly should be done by the trustees. They should provide the funds or they should go to the foundations and raise the funds. The curators should be curating, and I don't want them to get the idea that every curator has to do that which I do because I had a flair for doing it and also, remember, it was easier for me, I was going to industry, I was in with products; it's a relatively easier situation. And perhaps I had found a formula, which is I never collected money, I never raised funds on the basis of guilt or that you have to give us the money, I did it on the basis of self-interest and vanity. And that was a great device to raise funds. If you say, "Volvo, put up two million dollars to do a new type of taxi because then you are going to have credits and you'll be in the Museum and there will be publicity and all that," it's not a bad thing to say. It's a very genuine product to sell and the Museum is not in any way soiled by that, and it's paying with the right, legitimate coin with which you can pay back for contributions and it gets much more than what it gives back to the donors. To come back to the point here, I really wanted to resign in 1974, as I said before, but Arthur said it was a mistake, I should still do something. But when they started doing the plans for the new building and the Museum was going to be closed for three years and there would be no shows, and at that time I was thirty-three and I thought that four years at thirty-three was absurd, and I had done what I had done. In a curious way, people were immensely generous and were remembering the Italian Landscape show to be a much better show than it actually was, that was the moment for me to get out while I was still winning. I felt that I should get out and do my own work. Also, I had an idea of how I would like to practice. I told Arthur one of the reasons I wanted to get out was I was getting very tired and very sick, really, of getting invited to dinner because

I was a curator of design. I would rather be invited to breakfast because I was a good architect. I told that to Arthur. That type of dinner started sitting very badly on my stomach.

SZ: How did it sit with Arthur?

EA: He believed it. He believed every word....

SZ: I was just asking how those kinds of dinners sat with Arthur.

EA: I don't know. I never asked Arthur that. I only once told Arthur, and that was after I left the Museum, it was not that I didn't have the courage, I felt after all that he had his own hell. There was no need for me to provide him with other little doses of that while I was still there. When I left, I said, "Arthur, you're such a remarkable man. You could be running a foundation, you could be doing other things. Why do you let yourself be frustrated to such an extent in the Museum? You must really recognize that there are better places than the Museum. Arthur, you remind me of the Russian saying, which is that the worm sits in a rotten tree and thinks there is no better place anywhere else." That was lunch at the Dorset. "Ah," he said, "but when the tree falls, it's a bridge to somewhere else." "Yes, Arthur," I said, "but he will still be a worm when walking on the bridge." That hit him. He knew that I was very honest with him, always, and I never flattered him, and if I said something good about him it was really that I meant it. My rages with him are quite known all over the Museum, so you can trust it. He was very concerned, I think, that somebody must have told him that I wanted his job. He once came to Milan when I was doing the Italian design show in 1971, the first of December, he descended on Milan.... He told me that someone, and I don't want to give you the name, had told him that I wanted his job--the one that really tried to get him, later, into tremendous trouble. That was such a man; it

was unthinkable what that person did to him, because Arthur was godfather, even, to his child. Anyway, he came to Milan and told me this story very frankly, and I said, "Arthur, why are you coming? The show is going to arrive," I told him everything we were doing, I said the funds are all right, I took him to visit all the different shops, we had about eight shops building environments, everything was on time, the audio-visual was being produced. He was immensely impressed by that; he was very frightened that we wouldn't do it on time, and that's fair, he had other responsibilities, and I had never done such a big show and I was twenty-something at that time. So that did not bother me, that he came to inspect it. But we finished the tour and he said, "Now I'll tell you the story of why I came, really." He told me, and I said, "Arthur, take a look, you have to come to ask me about that when I am having so much fun. You have to sit in the Museum and hold the trustees' hands. I have the better job of the two of us. Why would I want your job? Why would I want your job? Thank God that you exist, because if not, I would have to deal with that bunch of monkeys that you have to deal with now." He was silent, then he said, "I believe you. I was a fool." And from that moment, he completely changed.

SZ: With you?

EA: Yes. No problem. He'd really changed. He realized that in reality I was...when he saw the show I put together, it was obvious that my fascination was with doing that, not with running around. But I did tell him at the end, "Arthur, I am much more interested in someday having poetical power. I am not interested in political power. You have to deal with people; it's material that disintegrates. I'd rather deal with one transcendental moment or two in my life, and that is the only thing. That's it." So when I told him I wanted to resign to do that, he didn't say, "You're crazy," he just said, "Fine, all right." Then he told me how I should resign, how I should do it, in how much time I should do it, etcetera, and it was done in an extremely handsome way.

He wanted to do a party in the end, and I said, "No, I don't like parties, because I never allowed even my parents to give me a birthday when I was a small kid." He said, "Why?" I said, "Because they would be one year older, and I thought that they would make them sad, and I wanted to protect them from that sadness." So he said, "No, I must do this party for you. If not, everyone will think I am upset with you and that we have a bad relation. I don't want that to be." I said, "In that case we should of course do it, I never thought of it in those terms." So he gave me a very nice, quiet party. Then I used to come in, and we would have the most sincere conversations constantly. He was immensely happy with my work--I used to show him once in a while--and he wanted to go to my show. As a matter of fact, I had nothing to do with Stuart [Wrede]. He didn't even tell me he was interviewing anybody for Stuart's position. He didn't tell me he had hired Stuart, okay?

SZ: Stuart...?

EA: Stuart Johnson. When he hired him, he told me, and I said fine, and during the time that Stuart was working there he would sometimes tell me, he sometimes had problems, and he and I would discuss it, but my attitude is that my comments have only to do with what could be constructively used by the department. I am not interested in criticizing. To me, if I close a door, it's closed. I'm not interested in coming back and meddling. Anyway, I thought that Stuart Johnson's show of graphic design, which went to Japan, was an ill-organized show, while his other undertakings were extremely good and his contributions of products for the department were very good, especially the area that certainly I had neglected, which is nineteenth century and early twentieth century, where he was immensely knowledgeable and he knew all the dealers and collectors and he really got very good things. When he hired Stuart, and he hired him without telling me anything, he then told me after that. I said, "What attracted you to him?" he said that when he asked Stuart, among many other

questions--Stuart Wrede--what he would do as a show, Stuart said he was interested in doing a show of young architects, and when he asked him who were the young architects, he mentioned he was interested in a show of my work. Since Arthur had already said he wanted very much to do a show of my work, he said, "We will wait until the San Antonio Botanical Garden is constructed, because if not, you would have a show with only projects and nothing built, and it will not be a good show for you. We will wait until it is finished." By the time it was finished, Arthur was no longer in good health. By that time, Stuart was there and Stuart took it on.... There are other things which cannot be said. If I can tell it to you off the record, I will.

SZ: I'll turn it off, sure. [Tape interruption]

EA: It won't be the same thing.

SZ: No. Are you asking me that?

EA: No. It will not be the same thing. I'm telling you: second parts are never the same. Sylvester Stallone notwithstanding.

SZ: Sometimes they're better [laughing].

EA: I wouldn't even consider it, the second part, except there's too much to do--in my mind, anyway, for one day.

SZ: The department, the whole department as it was structured when you came in, it was Arthur, you, and Mildred Constantine was there....

EA: Mildred resigned to become Bates Lowry's....

SZ: Just at the time you came in?

EA: No, I came in because she resigned. She was to become, Arthur said, that her position when she resigned as curator of design to become Bates Lowry's consultant or assistant became available. That's the one that I took. But Mildred was in the Museum all the time while I was there, and I had a very good relationship with her. She was also quite helpful with many things.

SZ: Wilder [Green]?

EA: Wilder was at that time, yes, but Wilder was the director of exhibitions, and Wilder was a man quite responsible for one simple thing. When I did the Italian design show, I borrowed $4,000 from Wilder's budget, and the idea was that with $4,000 I would raise the funds to do the Italian design show, and we raised immense amounts of money. He once said, "I'm not going to accept seventy dollars for flowers." I said, "Wilder, when I raise the funds, let me raise the funds, and they have to be raised. Seventy dollars for flowers go for Mrs. [Brion] in Italy. They have to be sent. They form part of what we have to do." He said all right. I raised the funds...with the $4,000 they lent me. They lent me $5,000 to do the Universitas project, and Mrs. Brion was the one that gave me the first $40,000 to do the Universitas project--she was the first great sponsor we had.

SZ: Did you know you were a good fundraiser?

EA: No. I didn't know I was a good curator. I knew I was the greatest fake. I had to fake it all the time.

SZ: So you just faked it in those two areas.

EA: Yes. You know, you can raise funds if you have ideas. With an idea you can seduce people; you cannot trap them. Granted, if The Museum of Modern Art is behind you, that's a very marvelous platform that you're providing, so it makes it much, much easier.... But even the Museum is not enough. You need an idea and the Museum, and then....

SZ: You need a way to express it.

EA: You need a way to express it. I've never asked for private money, because private money I'm not comfortable with. I asked usually for corporate money, and I could explain to them what would be the corporate advantages to them, and then they could go to the board and justify [it]. But I need that man, the president, to go to his board, so he has to have a feeling that he's a little bit bored with his daily life, his daily activities, and he is going to enter into the domain, which perhaps he has never looked into, and that is the domain of ideas or images, outside of the social possibilities The Museum of Modern Art gives then. But most of the people I went and talked to were really in proper positions where they can meet anybody they want in The Museum of Modern Art without needing to make a contribution. They were in a curious way fascinated by the project. So the idea is that you just fascinate people with ideas.

SZ: And there was no development department at that time?

EA: The development department started with another name about the time after the time of my Italian design show. We didn't have that; after that, they started, and then they started coordinating. But in my case, they always let me alone.

SZ: And Arthur did his [own fundraising], too, I think.

EA: Arthur did his own fundraising, absolutely. Arthur liked much more to do fundraising with people. He felt more comfortable raising funds with people or with some foundations where he knew people. I felt more comfortable in a corporate situation where I didn't know the person, just knew the corporation.

SZ: I want to ask you one other question, then we'll stop for today, since we've spent a lot of time talking about Arthur.

EA: Why not?

SZ: It's been said to me that Arthur had his own political ambitions within the Museum, beyond keeping his position as director of the department. Do you think [that's true]?

EA: That is very true. Arthur was asked by the department and a committee of trustees to draft an idea of what the Museum should become. Arthur started thinking, I think for the first time, on a large scale, and perhaps felt...and I'm not confident [of this], because that was the moment I came in. It was very early, [and] I was truly naive. I didn't know him well enough to judge him, and I have to judge people intuitively, so at that time I was intuitively not judging that. I observed him, yes. I was consciously observing him becoming interested in becoming the director of the Museum and starting to create an alliance of trustees that would support it.

SZ: Do you think he would have been a good director?

EA: No. Strongly, no, but he would have been a much more knowledgeable director of

the Museum than Bates. Let me put it how I would have made Arthur a good director of the Museum. I would have told Arthur that, "Look, Arthur, you are fifty. I'll give you a ten-year contract; at sixty you retire. There's absolutely no renewal. You have ten years. Nothing can happen unless you really run over the budget or run away with or go molesting children in the lobby, then you're going to be fired. Do what you feel has to be done. Don't try to second-guess any of the trustees." He would still have needed someone not to let him produce his usual brinkmanship productions. He was very given to brinkmanship, to bring a show to the catastrophic moment so that he could himself create a cathartic situation and save himself at the last moment. When I started observing that, I saw him intervening a little bit. But that, yes, he would have needed that, because he would have done it. He had it in him; he had a certain self-destructive tendency. But, since no perfect solutions exist, only control problems, if we had known that he would have had that as part of his problematics, it could have been possible. Had René not died, it might have been possible to have René on the board exercising that type of guidance. Would he have been my ideal director? No, because my ideal director would have been concerned not with administering the inherited capital, but it would have been somebody concerned with increasing and renewing the intellectual capital, which by that time was getting exhausted. It required somebody who could really take great joy in what was being produced, and Arthur really was not that terribly interested in contemporary art, and that is in my view his main flaw for that position--merely interested, not fascinated, no. Curious he was not. I cannot imagine any director to be worthwhile who is not genuinely concerned with art. He doesn't have to be a scholar, he doesn't have to be an art historian, but it has to move him, it has to interest him, genuinely. That's it. With that extraordinarily clear formula, they now know whom to get [laughter].

**END SIDE 2, TAPE 1**

**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**INTERVIEW WITH:** **EMILIO AMBASZ (EA)**

**INTERVIEWER:** **SHARON ZANE (SZ)**

**LOCATION:** **NEW YORK, NEW YORK**

**DATE:** **JANUARY 6, 1994**

**BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1**

EA: What would be the questions now that you've read the notes? I should have read the notes before I said one more word.

SZ: Why?

EA: Because I'm trembling in my boots!

SZ: I have lots of notes. One thing I had circled because you probably just barely touched about it but I wanted to ask you about it in the context of Arthur, what you thought of his installation abilities because he has had a reputation.... This is, of course, your [opinion].

EA: Like every designer, Arthur had some very favorite tricks and stylistic ways of presenting things. I would say that Arthur was far more successful in his installations of exhibitions than he was in the installation of the collection. I think that the last installation of the design collection, the one we now have on view, is sad, mainly because, in spite of any stylistic disagreements we had--which I had with him quite often--there was also the fact that I thought finally we are getting a chance to show

design objects in a context of painting, in a context of architecture. Of course, we cannot build the rooms, regrettably, as they do in the Met, but at least you could have photographs of the space. We have the Barcelona chair. You could have the Barcelona [tape interruption]...enact the splendor of that. But there are ways of suggesting, especially if you show a chair of Mackintosh with some decorations on the backrest without making reference to the total room, of which it was an integral ornamental part, then it makes no sense. It may be very pretty in itself, but it's a fragment that by the absence of the context happens not to be as strong as the content would have been. So that part of his installation was, I thought, not that terribly successful. Installations of his exhibitions, some of them were pretty memorable. He had in a certain way, I would imagine, a certain attitude which he inherited directly from Alfred: he did not care to explain to the public anything. He would write a wall panel because it was usually taken from the introduction to the catalogue, which was usually late, but he didn't care, really, to in any way introduce the public. The objects the were, they were supposed to make you levitate, but in no way were they presented with any kind of educational treatment. I don't remember one occasion where Arthur would really produce labels which were long and detailed to explain each of the things. They were just identifying labels.

SZ: So one would think that the concept behind this was just to present an object totally out of context?

EA: You levitate, then you go to the next one, which is directly inherited, I think, from Alfred Barr's notion that he wouldn't allow painting to be explained in any way. It is on one side something [with] which I sympathize, myself; I must say that at a certain age for a certain type of public that label is all-important if it is explicatory. Anybody who does not care for labels could perfectly well not read them [laughing]. The guards are not there to force you [laughing]. So I didn't agree with that. I said,

"Arthur, people who do know and don't want to bother themselves just won't read it. The rest of the public, younger people, it will be so terribly helpful, to get them to understand it." "No, no," he said, "it has to be visual." I said, "Yes, but until they can walk on their own visually, they need a certain amount of connection and reference and hand-holding for a while." But the installations physically were very attractive, very clever. The ones that I saw I thought were quite successful. Architecture to show is one of the worst things in the world. You're going to see the case now with Terry Riley; he's going to have a tremendously difficult time showing Frank Lloyd Wright because nothing can in any way enact the glory of the space except the space, and frankly, the show is a few miles away down at the Met, in that single room they have. It's there. Anyway, back to the ranch.

SZ: This might be a good place to ask you about some of the exhibitions you did, because certainly I think that you had a special imprint on them, how things were presented and what you were doing. I was thinking particularly of...well, you talked a little bit about Italy....

EA: That was one show. One that I thought was an interesting situation was the Mackintosh, the chairs that are Mackintosh, because I only had $3,000 and that money was there to paint a room, and since Mackintosh chairs were very linearly designed, we put in a screen fabric and put light behind the screen fabric so that you could read the chairs in outline. Then, my only great contribution to the art of exhibition was lighting the chairs in such a way that the shadows projected by the chairs would become a decorative element in the room, and also use color in a way that would create this kind of heliotrope ambiance that you have with Mackintosh. The proof was, not knowing that the trustees on their usual Wednesday meeting, after the meeting, would come to see the show, I finished the show before that by putting a 100-watt naked bulb, and when they walked into the gallery, I said, "No, no,

wait, it's not finished," and they said, "Sorry, sorry, sorry," and turned around and they walked back. Then I said, "No, now you can come back." I had just pulled down that 100-watt [bulb], and that was enough to ruin the whole effect of the show. When that was turned off or removed, the room was illuminated by only the light coming through the screen fabric; it was very honey-colored light, you could read the chairs in that way, and you would then see the shadows and the shapes projected by the backrests of the chairs--I have photographs of that--and it was a very impressive presentation that you can do an exhibition when you are only using lighting, and that's how I got them to give me about $12,000 to $14,000 to buy proper equipment [laughing].

SZ: This is one of your great fundraising tricks?

EA: Yes, tricks that got me that nickname--I think it was David Rockefeller who called me this--the General Patton of fundraising, yes [laughter], probably because I shot myself in the foot constantly [laughing].

SZ: You got that money for lighting the galleries?

EA: Just to have proper lighting. I said, "We need to do lighting. You have at present only lights that are good for painting but not for objects. We need a different kind of lighting." That was the example I used. In any case, The New Domestic Landscape. That was a very complicated presentation because, number one, there was a problem with making value judgments on objects presented, but number zero, we have a fact that we did not have a roof over the objects, because we presented all the objects in the garden and all the environments in the inside. So for the objects we made as boxes that look like just packing boxes. The season was in the summer in 1977 and there would have been sun there, but I wanted to make a shadow of

shade. So at first I worked with Renzo Piano, to see whether we could make a cloud, a big constructed cloud, but when we started testing the idea we discovered there was great amount of updrafts and downdrafts, mainly from Canada House next door, so that was just not possible to design it for the updrafts. So I gave it up and I then designed myself the boxes in such a way that the boxes would travel, because it was supposed to be a traveling show, from museum to museum, and the boxes would have a better flap; the flap would be hinged on top on four sides. So there were four such flaps hinged on top, and when they traveled they would come down and protect the boxes. So all those writings and such things would just be on that one side. When it came to the exhibition place, they would be lifted up 180 degrees, and then all the contents would remain inside. The key thing was that they would become towers, and then the towers would cast a shade. So that's the way we did it. The great difficulty, which I was lucky to find an idea to do it, was how to bring electricity on the terrace. What we did was we removed all the tar that was between the marble slabs and we ran all the wires and then re-tarred it, so people wouldn't be tripping. So that's the way we could light it. It was quite a big production, and we had the boxes made in Philadelphia and I said it was supposed to be like traveling exhibition cases and the main idea was that in order not to have a long label we used photo...[tape interruption]...to try to pick up that view of the object that would explain to the public visually why that object had been selected. But it was also, I think that Arthur, with his usual wit, described it properly. He called "Supermarket at Karnak" [laughing], then he told that to Ada Louise Huxtable, who wrote it down in The New York Times without giving him credit--left him anonymous. I thought it was such a good description [laughing]. In this Supermarket at Karnak there was really a very minimal sculpture, because you had, I don't know, I don't remember at this moment how many there were, probably thirty-some boxes laid out on a grid, and you could walk in any way; there was no indication of right or left, north or south, so the public would just walk around and look at the objects. But it was elementally a very fun way.

We of course had to align the boxes in a certain way, number one, to avoid congestion, so we would be alternating them to avoid congestion on each of the aisles, also to avoid direct sun, so you had two things to be considered. But it was a pretty remarkable view, because we got to keep the Museum open late in the summer. They were celebrating; at that time I think Mobil Oil [Company] was paying for the garden to be kept open.

SZ: Summergarden.

EA: So we had the lights coming from inside the boxes; it was quite a spectacle up on the upper terrace and also on the lower terrace. The upper terrace was laid out in a very minimal pattern, just a very simple grid; the lower terrace, because they had such complex traffic patterns, with people having to go up the steps, it was laid out in a much more empirical way. So I used to make a joke that we had the high city and the low city; the low city was the one that was organized empirically, and the high city was organized mentally or ideally, and other such important things, which, of course, didn't escape any visitor to the Museum [laughing].

SZ: Had you conceived of those objects? Was the garden an integral part of the original thought, or were you there because there was no other space?

EA: No, we were there because there was no other space. Because the show grew. We only had the d'Harnoncourt Galleries, at that time about 10,000 square feet, and that was not enough whatsoever for the environments. So then they gave me the other gallery. So we had the two big galleries on the ground floor and that still was not enough, so we had the two big galleries for the environments, and the environments, of course, could not be weather-protected, they had to be within the building. So we thought that we could just do it in the garden.

SZ: And in the end you felt that it was even probably better?

EA: It ended up being part of the amusement of the show. I was very lucky. I got a collaboration of quite a few photographers and film people, and we did a number of films, where each environment had a film. The Gaetano Pesce was an extraordinary stroke of luck that I had the service elevator. It was a terribly small room, but he had invented a subterranean underground city, so we put it inside a shaft. We sent the cab of the elevator up so that it would disappear, and we used the shaft so the public could look down, all the way down, and presented the thing down there. So it was a tiny little room, tiny space, but it was the most effective environment of the show, the most moving one. We had a superlative film, an extraordinary film, done by a Swiss filmmaker, Mr. Zugg. After that, I thought I could graduate into Hollywood production [laughter].

SZ: How did the press receive it?

EA: It was a extraordinary success. I am extremely lucky, because twenty-some years after that people only remember the good points of it and have been very kind in forgetting all of the mistakes [laughing].

SZ: Which you still remember.

EA: [Laughter]. I have somebody at home saying I should stop self-deprecating myself.

SZ: It was a pretty hard thing, I think, for them. They hadn't had anything like that in quite a while.

EA: They hadn't had anything like it. When I had to go to the board of trustees and asked them to let me distribute...one of the groups I invited, a group of designers from Torino, the Gruppo Sturm, very politically-minded people, and they wanted to distribute 360,000 magazines, 120,000 of each issue--there were three different ones--and, of course, they were printed with the money from Fiat, and naturally, on the cover of one of them it had Agnelli saying "Capitalist," so of course the board got very uncomfortable with that and I told them, "Look, Agnelli is a capitalist, he doesn't mind it, he is financing it, and it is part of the cultural process we are describing." So it went out.

SZ: Did you find that you frequently had that kind of either real or imagined opposition to things?

EA: No, the opposition came to me usually via Arthur, who would deal with the trustees, so he would be the one telling me. He was really quite good. He went back to the board and told them this little story about Agnelli the capitalist, and he fought them off quite well. I didn't really have to once meet with them.

SZ: And it never got to the point where you could not do something you wanted to do?

EA: No, never, never in the Museum. That was the only occasion in all my years there where I got any indication that they were uncomfortable. I think that they were uncomfortable because they did not know that he was paying for that; they thought that he would be offended. I said, "No, because he is actually, as a matter of fact, Fiat Corporation is paying for that, and you may be very sure that this thing is not done without his knowing it." No, it was only a matter of their just being careful. The only other case that I had, very remotely, was with Mr. [William] Paley and Mr. Rockefeller--David. The idea was that we would not do the Taxi show if we could not

get the participation of the American automobile industry. But after I raised two million dollars from the Department of Transportation and I went to see Chrysler myself and Mr. Rockefeller, I think, wrote to General Motors, at that time it was Mr. Gerstenberg, and I don't know what Mr. Paley did, but we were all told...they didn't tell me what I wanted, but they told Mr. Rockefeller that here, dear David, 50,000 cars are sold annually as taxis in America, and General Motors sells them as such, "Why is your museum bothering itself with something that is truly unnecessary; why don't you go out and run your bank better?" It really came out sounding very close to that. And then, there was no collaboration. Even though we offered to advance them the money, they couldn't care less. So then I went to the board of trustees and I said, "Look, they are not participating. You have tried to get them. I think we should go ahead." So we got the two million dollars and two small laboratories in Houston to produce the demonstration vehicles; one of them is a steam-powered car, that I can recall. Detroit was being so recalcitrant, even when funds are being given to them, they are not willing to participate, then the Museum has done everything possible to help American industry. Well, don't worry: when we published the catalogue, I wrote in the introduction the story about that.... In the catalogue it says, of course, that General Motors said that and that and this and this. I said that General Motors was completely unwilling to participate and that and that, and so we got a letter from the general counsel to General Motors, threatening to sue us. So then we sent them back a copy of the letter Mr. Rockefeller got from Gerstenberg. Never heard from them again. They had told us. We didn't in any way invent or paraphrase it; I just copied [tape interruption]...and gypsum, which is a traditional type of material.... I said, "Fine. You may have a little problem, however. When they go and open the door of a Volkswagen or they open the door of a Volvo, there will be a real car inside. But if you make yours in gypsum, they will realize that Detroit cannot sell a real car, it can only sell a three-dimensional model--a kit, but not working. So it's not going to be very good for you." And now that the money is here.... But they said no, we don't

care for that. They had no interest whatsoever in that. And they thought that they could dictate conditions. But don't think that they were the worst. The worst were the taxi union association. When we opened the show, notwithstanding the fact that we maintained many meetings with the taxi drivers, fleet taxi drivers as well as independent taxi drivers, that when we wrote the program for the exhibition, together with DOT and the Taxi and Limousine Commission, the union sent a number of goons for the day of the opening, and they would go around shaking the prototypes that we had there and screaming, "Those cars, if they went through the tunnel it would not come together. Can you imagine, madame, if this car were on a bridge, it would tumble!" It was tall because we made the taxis tall to allow people in wheelchairs to get up in there. They had been sent by the taxi union itself. Why? Because the taxi union was a great financier of the fleets. The pension funds of the taxi unions went to finance the fleet owners. So our efforts to try to give to the poor taxi driver a more decent seat were being completely berated by the labor leaders. Perhaps I should tell you a little story. We couldn't get the union of taxi drivers to participate as a sponsor, as a patron. Anyway, we didn't ask them for money, just to be.... So finally, I got Nelson Rockefeller's office to arrange a meeting with Harry van Arsdale, Jr.--he should rest in peace; wherever he is, he should stay there--and he says, "What the hell does The Museum of Modern Art have any business to do with this thing?" I explained matters to him and he said, "No! This is absolutely silly, we don't need anything like that." I said, "Mr. van Arsdale, allow me to tell you a little story. In Buenos Aires, every union has its own hospital, and the people in the taxi drivers' union's hospital have noticed that taxi drivers have been complaining in a very high percentage, above the norm, of impotency. When they looked deep and carefully into that and they called other hospitals, they found out that that percentage was very high indeed. They called up the railroad people, whatever. They discovered that was happening because a taxi driver sat all long, never got out of the car, never did any exercise, had problems with renal fluid retention. So in order to avoid

embarrassment but to get them to really do a little bit of tiny exercise, they started a campaign saying, 'We have the cleanest taxies in the world, and anytime any passenger gets out of the car, you park the car and let him see how you're cleaning it and walk around and try to clean the windows and that do. And that's one way of getting people just a little bit to get up and straightened out their backs. Mr. van Arsdale, would you like me to tell that story to a newspaper?" So he said, "You son of a bitch." I said, "You would know one when you talk to one. Are you participating, yes or no?" He said, "Yes."

SZ: You hooked him.

EA: I hooked him [laughter]. Held him by the neck. Oh, the stories that cannot be told! Like when all the containers came for the Italian design show and there was a port strike and we couldn't get them out. Somehow, I got the brokers who were helping us to put me in touch to somebody who said, "I can help." I said, "Uh-huh. But you know we're a museum." He said, "Yes, but there is something I want that the Museum can do. Can you show the show to my mother and her friends?" I said, "Oh, yes." He said, "My mother's Italian. She speaks English fine." I said, "We'll do it specially. We'll close the Museum for her, so she can bring her friends and she can be very comfortable and move around at her leisure." He said, "Is that a word?" I said, "That's a word." "Fine." One day, at five in the morning, I got a telephone call saying, "Make sure the doors are open at the Museum, because in two hours the containers will be arriving." And they arrived. And we did not have to close the Museum; I was a little bit exaggerating. We just used Wednesday, when it was closed, to show it to his mother. Anything to open the show [laughing].

SZ: Anything else about the Taxi show, why you felt it was an important show to do at that time?

EA: Important in the sense that I felt very strongly that the Museum should do what I told you last time, which is adopt an impresario attitude. We couldn't sit and wait for the taxis to occur. We thought that with the Museum's institutional presence we could somehow invite companies to do it. At that time, there was a Taxi and Limousine Commission, and I felt very strongly that we could not only get a vehicle presented at the Museum, we could even get it to be built. A great amount of my work, really, doing the show, was to try to see where we could get the Department of Transportation, not to give money, because that would require Congressional approval, but to lend money, because then in the books they could keep it as a capital...to people all around Detroit that could just buy a chassis, say, from Dodge, and a diesel engine, say, from Perkins, and assemble their own vehicle, because in those years, in 1970, there were still so many body builders around Detroit that could have made it. It wasn't a job for General Motors; it was a job for the independent body builders. So if the DOT could make money available in low-interest loans, say, $12,000, $15,000, we thought we could really, actually do it. That was really the main interest, to make realistic taxis. So I insisted that any of the prototypes built had to use an existing chassis, because that is one thing you cannot really make anew, it's a very heavy investment, and an available engine. The body, the metalwork, that can really be done by a body builder. Of course, there is upholstery inside. And that's the way it was. The main intent was to do that. Of course, I convinced at that time a gentleman, a Mr. Petrocelli, I think that was his name, and he was quite convinced that the Department of Transportation that it would be marvelous, that those taxis would carry the badge of the Department of Transportation, everybody would see it, so that politically it was a very nice little number for them. Regrettably, when Vice President Ford became President, that situation was created, then he took Nelson over, and that created many changes, so that man left the Department of Transportation. So it just finished the story. But that was really the attempt. The attempt was not only to present at the Museum and show that indeed Volvo really

could make it, but also to make vehicles using available parts and show that with a little bit of effort, small- and medium-size body builders could do it. The attempt is that we built the cars, we built two of each, and one of them was tested by the Department of Transportation, we tested them to see whether they were crash-worthy, and indeed, all of them came back with crash-warranty certificates--Volvo and the Volkswagen one.

SZ: Did you expect that something would come of it?

EA: I expected it because I felt that if funds are available for taxi drivers, say that a taxi driver normally will spend $8,000 or $9,000 at a time to buy a car and he got a $15,000 or a $14,000 loan at four-percent interest it would really make sense for him, because at four percent he would be paying monthly the same amount as he was paying to a commercial bank with an $8,000 capital investment. So it made sense to do it in that way. So I thought that would favor development, because for a Detroit body builder, if he was making, say, 500 cars a month, it would be a very decent number. There were so many of those; they've disappeared since. All that craftsmanship is lost; at that time it still existed. I remember very well talking to then-Chrysler then owned a body builder in Torino and they can use that, and they were going to close the factory. The same thing with Ford; Ford owned Ghia in Torino, and that was the manufacturer of 2,000 cars a year. So they were going to close it also, and I said, "Here's a chance. You can actually produce something to sell, something specialized"--what now we call a niche; I didn't have that word at the time. Of course, a complete failure--failed miserably with all of Detroit.... Well, the powerful have been humbled, and we still don't have a taxi [laughing]. So, poetic justice always come back. It walks with a limping foot! The angel of justice will come down, he will just limp a little bit.

SZ: As an exhibition, it really captured the public's imagination, didn't it?

EA: It was a very great success, tremendous.

SZ: And unbelievable press.

EA: It was great press, it was also...they did a mistake, the goons. They really started doing that little number in front of Betty Furness, and she was recording it for the newscasting, so she understood immediately what they were doing, so she became ferocious about advertising the show. So it had a very good press. It was really a show; indeed, the media could do, and it validated the point that the Museum could use its institutional position to actually bring about something. That was my position, and that's what I meant when I started talking back time, that there are farmer-curators and there are hunter-curators, and we need both. I was the hunter-curator. I was trying to go around catching the tiger, whether with salt or by the tail. I don't believe the Museum should be based on that type of behavior, but since I was there at that time, that was my nature and I was acting according to my nature, and I felt very strongly that if we sit and wait, which I felt was the proper position for my colleague in Painting and Sculpture, it was not the proper position for me in Architecture and Design.

SZ: That's why you left?

EA: I left because I was already an old man, I was close to thirty-three, and the Museum was going to close for four years or three years for construction, and what was I going to do? Invent myself some artificial projects, that I would be traveling around? No, I just decided to find something else. I had another idea.

SZ: I don't think last time I asked you about that show Low-rise Housing Alternatives.

EA: That was Arthur's show, yes. That was a show that was proposed to Arthur by Peter Eisenmann, and it was really kind of the beginning of the way how Peter got to know Arthur and to demonstrate that it was possible for the Museum to do a type of impresario thing. I think that Arthur very genuinely thought that he could bring about some things using the UDC, the Urban Development Corporation. At that time Adonalfi was involved in that. I think one of the projects--and I cannot remember which one, but I think it was the one that Kenneth Frampton was involved in--got housing built, but you would have to check it; I really don't remember. That was before my time. It must have been 1967, about that time--1966 or '67, if not a bit earlier.

SZ: You did share some of your impressions with me about the changes in leadership during the time of the political upheavals. I don't think we talked very much, if at all, about the unionization and the strike, whether you had any feeling about a place for that within the Museum.

EA: I had very conflicting feelings about it, because I had all my sympathies for PASTA [Professional and Administrative Staff Association]. At the same time, I was made a curator, so I couldn't really participate. So I got very sick. I had to stay at home.

SZ: You wouldn't cross the [picket line]?

EA: I was very sick, how could I? [laughter] In my own bed! I don't think I convinced anybody, all right? But I insisted. It wasn't appreciated, but it didn't really bother me too much--inside the Museum. If I thought they were going to bother me, I was such a maniac that it was a pointless...they just knew they couldn't rely on me. I was not

managerial material.

SZ: Even though you were given....

EA: The position of curator. Yes, I was curatorial material, perhaps [laughing].

SZ: It's been suggested that the way the union formed, the split that it really forced down the staff, that that was really not a good thing.

EA: It wasn't wise on the part of the staff to handle it like that. And also always because this Museum had of course a very patrician type of tradition, in which they would take care of the staff, usually because the staff could take care of itself, because there was usually a trust for everybody set up. But they grew up, they grew so much, that that situation had changed. They were graceless in the way they dealt with management. Management, regrettably, in America has a very bad tradition, a very adversarial way of dealing, and while the trustees were indeed very friendly, the hired staff, the hired managerial staff, I think came--I'm talking about legal counsel and people like that--came from a tradition of adversarial ways of dealing with labor. So that, I thought, was the second mistake. PASTA, being completely immature and not understanding that you have to live with them after the strike, to them it was like, after the strike there was no romance left--not because they hated each other, but because there was no romance left in everyone's life; nothing could be as exciting as being on strike. But also, the lawyers that were advising the Museum were really, in my opinion, which I told quite a few people, were advising them in a way which was very adversarial. My point was that you have to live with the people after the strike is over. No strike lasts a thousand years; how are you going to deal with them if you treat them like that? So it was unwise on both sides, the staff being immature and the trustees relying too much on the help they had hired. That was the time that the

trustees were hiring McKinsey [& Co.] to give them a report on how to improve the performance of the Museum. So they brought in a labor lawyer. They should have brought in a justice of the peace, or a marital counselor. So, like in every war, you find yourself caught in the middle of a shooting game--I got very sick.... Ulcers.

SZ: The problem of the two Bills [William Rubin and William Lieberman]?

EA: That never affected me. I don't truly know. That was something that Arthur had to cope with constantly, certainly, but it never affected me. My relation with them was perfectly all right. No, I was not in any way affected. I was a little more affected by the fact, of course, that the more junior curatorial staff in the Painting and Sculpture department was, of course, always bringing in gripes and complaints and they had taken one position or another position. It also made it hard in the one case alone where I was interested in doing an interdepartmental show, which was the Vienna one I proposed. Then, when I started talking to Kynaston [McShine], it became clear to me that Kynaston could not do things, he really had to go to Bill, and it was really complicated. It was really one of those situations that there was no desire.

SZ: I guess before too long it was resolved.

EA: It was resolved when Kirk came in and then there was another director. Kirk Varnedoe did the Vienna show, so as a director, we cannot say we're not going to lend our teakettles and furniture if the Painting and Sculpture department comes to us, but the Painting and Sculpture department can pretty much say, "No, because you're going to disrupt the way that we have arranged the galleries." It's an educational problem that the public has to go through.

SZ: Acquisitions--didn't it change from one big committee to departmental committees

while you were there?

EA: Yes.... When I started dealing [with the committee], it was already one committee for the program of architecture and design.

SZ: You did, last time, describe some of that.

EA: Some of what went on, and I told you about the five products that I acquired....

SZ: They must have just proceeded to change that.

EA: When I came in, I was completely so unaware I wasn't even noticing what was before.

SZ: One other thing: anything else that you can tell me about the importance of your doing your own fundraising, or how you did it? You related it to a few instances, but you've made it clear that you had to do that.

EA: Yes. I told you about the few cases in which I did it. I've borrowed money from the Museum, I don't know whether it was four or five thousand, depending on the show, and I went around and did fundraising, and the fundraising, basically, my attitude was, I would invite people to take part in an intellectual adventure and see the shape of tomorrow morning--after all, the captains of industry don't care to see the shape of tomorrow afternoon, that's too far away for them, but tomorrow morning interests them--and I never did it on the basis that they owe anything to The Museum of Modern Art. I just came in and told them what they would get out of that that was advantageous to their corporations and what we could genuinely and in all good faith give them back for their contribution, and evidently, I tried to seduce them, and, as I

told you, I think, before, that with The Museum of Modern Art behind [you], it's not that hard to get the door open, at least, to make a presentation. It's certainly a very visible platform. So my fundraising is...the only case where I felt I did some fundraising that is beyond my belief is when I got the money from Volvo to put up $2 million to do Taxi, but that was 1973, '74, that was a great oil crisis and Volvo was selling nothing; as a matter of fact, it had sold zero cars in Germany in two or three months, nothing was being sold. So to convince Volvo to put in the $2 million was a miracle; really, I thought that I had failed. I was fairly impressed that they themselves had felt that two year's hence they better have something to show; the crisis will be over, or Volvo will be finished anyway, so what does it matter? But at least either crisis would be over and things would have gone to a certain semblance of normality, then they had to show that they had something new, and that to me was a great lesson on how they think long term. That was the one case when I was astonished I got the funds.

SZ: What about among trustees?

EA: I have never raised funds from the trustees; that was always Arthur. Whenever he would need money in small amounts, say, five, ten, five, twenty [thousand dollars], he would take care of it. I never, no never, asked for a cent from any trustee--that was Arthur's department. Even for my own shows, he would get them from the trustees.

SZ: So any relationships you had with trustees were just relationships that grew up over interest?

EA: Yes, long-term friendships that became in that way, but I never in any way asked them. The only time I think I've asked for some funds were much, much, much later,

and that's very recently, when Lily Auchincloss was very kind to give us money to rearrange the exhibition space at the Museum that the Department of Architecture had, where Arthur had put up the models and that I originally wanted to be for temporary shows and they came back to the end. That's the one time. She immediately came through. But I was no longer at the Museum. I always went for the large money. It's much easier to raise millions [laughing].

SZ: How do you see the Museum's place today? It had this reputation of being America's tastemaker for a while; certainly your department did.

EA: It's certainly not the case now whatsoever. By now it has entered, in the culture it's completely semantic, it's not longer operating on any level of symbolism. There are so many magazines dealing with lifestyle, as we call it in America, or costume or habits and patterns of performance, that immediately every cultural phenomenon is very fastly dissected and presented to the public in a much more pervasive and penetrating way than the Museum can ever achieve. So that figure of personifying or cultural colonization has been superseded by the magazines. So I don't think that I would put the Museum in that game. I would put the Museum on a very different level of operation now. It's no longer the educational role for the masses. In my opinion, there is a very important educational role for decisionmakers, and that's what we did, at The Museum of Modern Art at my seminar. One thing that I wanted to do and we never did, was to try to invite about a 100 presidents of companies who could benefit from introducing better design into their products, and have them listen not to designers--please, that's the last thing in the world you want--but to a few chiefs of industry that have become very successful on the basis of design. We thought of inviting Klaus Jurgen Maack of Germany, and the president of Herman Miller and the people of Bang and Olufsen, just to show who they were when they started, how they didn't have capital, they didn't know how the electronic domain or distribution

were important, but they had this idea that they could defend themselves if their products had design, and that's the gamble on which they put their wager and on which they won.... So my idea was really to talk to the top of industry and not so much to the public. To pressurize the public into demanding design was, I thought, an extremely expensive educational procedure that an institution like The Museum of Modern Art could not undertake. I thought that with very limited economical resources you would like to make a small investment, which then would reverberate throughout the fabric of the society and the economy by talking to the people who could really make a decision.

**END SIDE 1, TAPE 2**

**BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2**

EA: So I would be, again, interested in a museum which is an immensely elitist institution. How do you like them apples [laughing]? It has always been dealing with the elite; artists are nothing but the elite....

SZ: That's what it should be.

EA: I'm sorry. It may be misunderstood, but I'm interested in the Museum dealing on a highly symbolic level, that is to say on the level of where things are not immediately understood, where the phenomenon occurs and the meaning is not yet accessible, but there exists this institution that number one, presents the phenomenon, two, invites interpretations of the cultural phenomena and see what meanings it has for the culture. It cannot operate on a mass level; it has to operate on a very reduced level. An elite museum, dealing really with complex problems and assuming responsibility. You can say that that is undemocratic--yes, indeed, it is. But the point

is, that democracy is an idea that must occur in one man's head and then permeate through a group of them and then implement it. The same thing here. I believe that the museum that decides that it will go mass market because it is one way of actually surviving--of course, mass marketing means you have to package it and sell it at the one--it's one perfectly legitimate and honorable position. I would go the other way. I would have a museum dealing with the mystery of culture and artistic invention. We would not have that many followers, and probably would not need to have such a big institution, because a great amount of the business of the Museum could be performed by others.

SZ: You're saying that in some way this ought to be its role throughout. You're not just talking about Architecture and Design.

EA: No, I'm talking about throughout culture. I'm interested in a monitoring institution, in an evaluatory institution, certainly not a prescriptive [institution]; you cannot do that, cannot in any way propose a solution, but you can monitor what are the meanings embodied in the works of art--the possible meanings. To me the actual meaning is hermetic, it's in the work of art itself. But you would like in some way to make a certain projection of meanings, see how it expands language, see how it expands perception, see how it in some way suggests ways of acting on reality and modifying it. I mean it not only in architecture and design; I mean it in painting. First images, then thought....

SZ: So what do you think the chances are of anything like that...?

EA: A new institution will be created. I don't think the Museum will change; it already has too many...there is already a built-in structure, an organism, certain perpetrating functions. Even if you change it, there will be so many vestiges of archaic functions

that will be going around--like navels [laughing], each one doesn't know what they are for.... No, no, I think a new institution would be created. And I am delighted. Oh, no, no, no, no. I will only send them a check. I will make my images; let them figure out what it means. I've been the curator once. Never twice. As I told you, everything in my life happened backwards. I was a professor at twenty-five, a curator at twenty-seven, I'll be infantile at sixty [laughing].

SZ: You have a way to go [laughing].

EA: To sixty, not that long! Infantalism, I'm sure to get there! [laughter] Anyway, enough of this ego trip.

SZ: The expansion, the new building--how do you think that works, as an architect?

EA: I am concerned...when I see the public being very disoriented. As I come into the Museum and I see people coming into the lobby, I think the lobby is very poorly resolved. I think that it is very hard for people to understand how to move around in the Museum. Also, I think the transition from the street to the Museum lacks a certain amount of grandeur of entering into a public institution. Certainly, the Metropolitan has the steps. Grand steps ascend, arrival to a grand lobby....

SZ: It never did have that.

EA: It's about time it should have it. The modern movement has lost that sense of scale and that sense of proportion; I think the building lacks it in a certain way. So from an orientation viewpoint, I think it's very hard to understand how to reorient yourself. The lobby that bisects the Museum so that you have a to the right and to the left confuses people; that doesn't help too much, either. I think that that is one area where they

really should do their very best to find a different solution. I had myself not thought very seriously about that. Regrettably, they are greatly hindered by the tremendous costs of going lower, but I would by all means try to get space out of the present coat room and send the coat room vertically. As you send the coats horizontally, nothing says that you cannot send the coats vertically, make it much smaller and gain that amount of space for, perhaps, an introductory gallery or something else that has the public...several shows that happen in the Museum, but they need a tiny bit of that. In its own crazy way, the public is very willing to let themselves get lost in the Met, but in the Modern you would really hope that some of it were easier. Also, you could introduce people to the shows and tell them what is happening. Naturally, the Museum needs the bookstore, so that is another space that, regrettably, cannot be given up. The coat rooms, yes, the bookstore cannot; you need that location because it's too relevant to the revenues. But that was one problem. The other thing is that the Museum lost a grand, grand opportunity because they insisted on one thing which I thought was a great mistake: the maintenance of the garden, which is Philip's, perhaps, best creation. My suggestion to Philip, and he really was not opposed to that, but you know, he changes his mind every fifteen minutes--I don't know what he would say now--is to lift the whole garden one full floor, so then when you enter you would enter under the garden, and that would have solved a tremendous number of problems. It would have allowed entrance from 54th, it would have allowed a number of things. It would have allowed a large exhibition space on the ground floor and not divide the Museum as it is now. One could have even gotten the view from the lobby onto a certain amount of light without actually blocking it fully; a courtyard could have been created, and then you exit onto that smaller corridor for the courtyard and there you go up to the garden. I am sure Philip would have been willing to redesign his garden, make the smaller changes that were needed, but I would have lifted it; it would have really done a great amount of miracles.

SZ: One wonders whether the feeling was that the garden was just too sacrosanct.

EA: I don't know. They probably looked into that. There must be some reasons I do not know. I certainly know that the subways do not run on that side; they do run on the side of 53rd Street, but not on 54th. It would have allowed many things. It would have allowed also property advantages; it would have been easier to handle quite a few things.

SZ: So you have no great reverence for the original building or for the stairway...?

EA: Please remember one thing, that the way the building was originally designed...Nelson was doing Rockefeller Center, so there was supposed to be a street coming in and that end of it would really be the end of the axis of the street; that never came about. So the Museum was going to have a foreground; this was the price. All right, the original building didn't have a grand foreground or an entrance because it was going to be provided by the street. But this was an occasion to actually create a foreground. The other alternative I proposed was just to reverse the entrance and make the entrance on 54th. If you want to keep the garden, keep the garden, and let the people enter from the garden side. That would have allowed a much more interesting way of entering, allow them to handle quite a few things, awaiting people to exhibitions, to many other situations of that sort; but it would have allowed us, really, to modify it very strongly, the lobby entrance, and to really work there.

SZ: Anything else from your time there? Have I neglected something?

EA: No, you have neglected nothing. I have forgotten many things, for I treat myself too well [laughter].

SZ: Maybe, then, just for the record, if you want to just say a little bit about what you did once you left.

EA: All right. I left the Museum because I wanted because I wanted to do my own architecture and industrial design, and I had the idea that the designer should recover for himself a certain activity which he had given up to industry in that never-fulfilled promise that the gifted designer would find an enlightened captain of industry. Probably true of Peter Behrens and Reuter at A.G. in Germany, but commonly not very true. I thought the designer should no longer design a product but engineer it and find ways to even tool up. So that's the way I worked in the beginning. I designed a product and I tooled it up and engineered it and was able to present it almost like a turn-key basis product. So it allowed me to control the quality of the product, it allowed me to control the way the thing was done. I didn't have to listen to many engineers telling me it couldn't be done because I had done it myself, and I didn't have to listen to too many marketing people telling me it would be a great failure, because I did it myself anyway. That is where my knowledge of Italy came in very handy, because I was able to deal with many craftsman and people who are small industrialists who were willing to collaborate and make the tools and the dies and whatever is needed for the first product. After that succeeded, I went into a certain amount of architecture. My thought with architecture slowly evolved into being concerned with a certain type of architecture where land and the building are one and the same and inventing a few buildings where it is possible to build buildings within the city and not give up green. So this is really mainly what I've been working on, inventing certain forms of doing architecture which are outside the economical tradition of architecture but show that in an urban context you can still do buildings and not lose nature. Of course, nature is no longer rural nature, it is completely manmade, so it presents a very difficult philosophical questions, which is what is

going to be this new manmade nature, where nature has been domesticated. As buildings are a matter of artifice, so is nature now a matter of artifice. An example of that is Tuscany, where there is not a tree or a stone which is there because someone didn't place it there or someone didn't leave it there. It's completely manmade, its charm. So my main interest in architecture is really to find a different way of making architecture because it means, perhaps, going back to its origins. But that is a subject for another moment. I was immensely gratified that the Museum had a show of my work. Naturally, I think it's the first one of many to come. You can quote me [laughter]. I can't wait for the next ten years to present the next show.

SZ: And the show that's in Mexico City now?

EA: You mean the show that's in Mexico City. My show at MoMA was in the winter of '89 [Emilio Ambasz/Steven Holl]. The show in Mexico City was really an outgrowth of The Museum of Modern Art show, which was greatly expanded in the La Jolla Museum; that was '89, also. But the people in Japan, the Tokyo Station Gallery, expanded it and made a very large show; it's very close to 10,000 square feet. And that's the show that's now going to Mexico, the Japanese show. I think that's enough nonsense. You should give room to somebody else.

**END INTERVIEW**

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