

DAVID HOFFMAN MOMA HISTORY INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH: DAVID ROCKEFELLER, JR. (DRJ)
INTERVIEWERS: CARL COLBY (CC); RUTH CUMMINGS (RC)
LOCATION: JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER, JR.'S FORMER OFFICE
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CC: A smaller, much smaller, more intimate place to something now that's much bigger, and I just want to know what your feeling was, because you're probably associated, [or] at least visited, et cetera, early on.

DRJ: Right. I don't know; I think I ought to put my own perspective in a certain context. I've only been a trustee for a couple of years, and that's the only period during which I've been, for example, aware of their budgets, and the size of their board, and really who's on it and how the institution runs itself. And prior to that, I was a visitor and a member of the family of one of the founding families, and my father had been chairman for a long time, but he was chairman of a lot of things, so that didn't necessarily mean that I had his perception of it or certainly not any degree of factual information about the Museum. So really, I went from a kind of special viewer to a trustee a couple of years ago, and it's true that I knew René d'Harnoncourt and Alfred Barr because they came home when I was living there, now [that was] 30 years ago, so I saw these people as wonderful and very strong characters, and lending themselves, in fact, to marvelous caricature. Just the two of them, I think of their shapes in almost kind of [Honoré] Daumier contrast of the burly d'Harnoncourt and the wiry bespectacled Barr. They made a big impression on me as a child. I think that then the way that I came to it, I came to it in a time when the Museum was in great financial trouble, and for the first time of course that was very shocking to them because they had been so well supported for a long time. I think it took the public by surprise as well as some of the Trustees, really, just what the magnitude of the problem was. And I think probably that has shifted the attention of the Board, and also caused the character of the Board to change itself, because going from concerns about, let's

say, mainly art and leadership—because certainly they had lots of leadership questions in the preceding decades—to primarily concerns about how to finance this institution. And given that that was the shift in focus, it meant a shift in the kind of people they tried to get on the Board, both people who had financial acumen, so that they could develop the earned income on the one hand, and produce a tighter ship on the expense side, and also, obviously, raise a lot more money from more people, including the Trustees, who were—typically with big New York institutions, they will be a large part of the support. So you find a very large board; in my own view, it's too large. It's cumbersome. It doesn't really act well as a board. Some of the Committees function well, but I mean, you have 50 members on the Board; it's like a meeting.

CC: It's not a discussion.

DRJ: It's not a discussion; that's right. So I think that's one of the sacrifices that has been made in order to refocus upon the financial. You have more people so that you have more intimate supporters and more intimate advisors on financial matters as well as artistic. You don't want to leave; you don't want to fire all the architects and collectors in order to bring in the financiers and the sort of people who might want to make a name for themselves by giving a room or something. So I think Beth's[?] point is good, that you, if I understood it, that you sacrifice something in a period of this sort of growth, and I think the challenge for the Museum will be to keep its eye on a kind of aesthetic target as it searches around for survival. I think one of the problems in survival mode is that it's very tempting to be opportunistic and to look for the channels of support that might contribute to the overhead, but might also take you down paths that you don't necessarily want to go. I'm not saying I think the Museum is doing that, but I think it's a real challenge. I don't think it's clear, really, which way the Museum will go. The new wing has not opened; you don't know what the balance will look like. And it's all tremendously exciting, and very innovative what they've done with their air rights. And now you read that other institutions, including many in New York, are scheming about what to do with the foot-pounds of atmospheric pressure above their heads.

CC: That's really one of the—you addressing it yourself, giving us a sense of some skepticism as to the direction, is something that we felt—to go back earlier and to

answer your question. I mean, I didn't mean to alarm you by, that the Museum—it wouldn't be a positive portrait of the Museum.

DRJ: Oh, it didn't alarm me. I just was interested in your dilemma and how you would handle that.

CC: Because we felt that we would be in an awfully tough bind if we told a very affectionate story from the beginning about this family and the history, and then just said, well it's all wonderful, a bit like a lot of corporate films look like, and everyone is together—

DRJ: Sure. America the Beautiful and the deep bass voice and all, and then you're in the Nebraska corn fields.

CC: Because then you're in awful big trouble because people say, "What about this?" or "What about him?" or "What about the air [rights]?" "What about the new building?" And if you address all those problems yourself, if you totally disarm—or you may not disarm, or you at least deflate, diffuse, some of the criticism, only because you address the problems yourself.

DRJ: Right.

CC: You say, I'm aware of it, I know that by doubling our size, by being so big and so important to the world now rather than simply a small innovative little place that really was quite extraordinary but now it's a much, much larger place, you realize [and] you recognize those problems. Some of the questions I might ask you, I may know the answers to, in a sense, but I wanted to get your response because depending, really, on how you—

DRJ: You probably know more than I do. [Laughter]

CC: I don't know.

RC: We have spoken to a lot of people.

DRJ: Oh sure, there's a lot of things I don't know.

CC: One question might be—we wanted to get a feeling for the character of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller as a person, as someone who was committed to modern art

and not just that, but, I read the biography [*Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*] by [Mary Ellen] Chase—

DRJ: Yes.

CC: And a couple of other books, and what's extraordinary about it is, it seems to be that she wasn't simply drawn by an aesthetic interest. It wasn't simply something of imagery, it seemed much more emotional and heartfelt.

RC: She had a mission, like Alfred did.

CC: That it would better people, really.

DRJ: Yes.

CC: And that's very extraordinary and something you don't see—people don't believe like that anymore, it seems. I don't know. But maybe you could expound on that a bit. What was it about her?

DRJ: I'll just go through some papers while I'm talking to you because I had a wonderful, wonderful quote I was keeping in a file of mine, from her, and I wonder what I did with it. I'm afraid I may have filed it somewhere. But I'll try to get it out for you because it addresses that particular issue and it relates to a speech that she made. And a friend of mine dug up the speech. I think the speech might have been at Williamsburg, because I know he was in Williamsburg when he sent me this comment. It may be very common, or it may be very rare, and I'll be glad to pass it on to you. Alas, I didn't know her very well. I was eight when she died, so, my recollections of her are thin and childlike and secondhand, as that kind of thing goes because I heard a lot more about her, in a way, than I remember directly and freshly.

CC: But your father and your uncles, they were obviously very taken by her and very much directed [by her].

DRJ: She was a very, very powerful influence in their lives. And it's interesting—there's a portrait gallery in one of the buildings out in Pocantico, and Nelson and David are on either side of their mother, and Lawrence and John are on either side of their father. And I think [to] myself that it didn't just sort of happen that way by lottery. And it so happens that Nelson and David were the two who were

most touched by the kind of art that touched her. Now John also had this strong interest in oriental, which was the other side of her aesthetic. But she obviously had a strong impact on the boys in many ways. And like many mothers at that time, she had a much more human presence and impact in their lives than the father did, who was more remote. He was both traditional from fathers of that time perhaps, and also I think just his personality was that way. And this was Grandfather's office at one time, and it used to be dark paneling with—and in fact its preserved in the archives in Tarrytown, which you probably should visit sometime.

CC: Is it in Tarrytown?

DRJ: Yes; to get a sense of how things have changed, just by looking at these white walls and the art around, and then what he had in his space. But—so, one has a sort of view of her as having a lot of humor, a lot of human warmth, and a very kind of natural and somewhat scampy person, at times. I mean, she had a twinkle that I think was very refreshing and even characterizes many of the women who have married somewhat more austere males in the family. But alas, I don't remember ever talking to her about art or anything that would have been that germane.

CC: We spoke to—I think it was Monroe Wheeler who said, or maybe even Eddie Warburg,¹ that it's interesting to see that in America, if you look back [to] the early part of this century, it appears to be that certain American women, well-educated or self-taught, or however—I think Mrs. John D. III [who] said as a Vassar woman it was really ingrained in her from the beginning that she be of service, that she do something, that she—

RC: Pass on her good education in some form.

CC: Make use of her aesthetic and what she's learned. And if you were to compare how collections were formed in Europe, or what the public—what people gave in Europe; if there were fortunes made, how were these transferred? And it appears to be that in Europe it was very much more inside and very much more selfish, almost, whereas in the early part of this century in the United States, it's really an extraordinary amount of generosity. There was a great generous spirit

¹ Lawrence Alloway.

afoot, and a lot of it was charged by certain women who did more than—and men, too, but what your family did, for instance, instead of simply doing a bit and then taking a rest, it was doing a lot more than lending names to something.

DRJ: Yes.

CC: It was giving great amounts of things, really dispersing it in a way that hasn't been seen for four or five centuries. And along with that, it's interesting to see that she not only committed to a modern art movement, modern art museum, but that it was a museum and not simply a gallery. It could have easily been a little exhibition space, an extra building—oh let's try it for a season, like people do at the Armory or whatever.

DRJ: Because they started large, you're saying. Yes, it was very daring.

CC: They seem to start with a commitment.

DRJ: Yes.

RC: They really did, with a mission to accomplish.

DRJ: Yes.

CC: They went after a smart man who would be at the head, young and untried, but it seemed they got along and that he could do the right thing. And it just seemed to be a great commitment from the word go. And that kind of thing is very daring, especially at a time when I'm sure people used to come to the house and "What's that?" and laugh.

RC: Not only that, but then [it was also] the Depression, and there were all these factors that just didn't warrant a big success story.

DRJ: Yes. It was a counter-force.

RC: Force; right.

CC: Especially nowadays when you see that there's almost an emperor's clothes feeling about modern art now. People will go and they'll look at almost anything, and they'll suspend judgment or presume it's okay, it's good, it's worthy. In those years, it was exactly the opposite.

DRJ: Yes.

CC: Everything was an object of derision.

DRJ: Guilty until proven innocent.

RC: That's right.

CC: Jay Leyda, the film historian, said that people used to come to the Museum, go through the galleries, hoot and holler, and then even stop in the Film Department and watch a Russian film or whatever and start hooting and hollering about it. People would actually come sometimes, he felt, to just hoot and be derisive as to what they were seeing.

DRJ: Yes.

CC: And that's gone. You still feel a bit of that here or there, but now it's very much the opposite.

DRJ: Maybe too much. I'm reading this wonderful book by Carol Bly called *Letters From the Country*. Have you ever heard of it?

CC: No.

DRJ: She's written for the *New Yorker*. She's a Minnesotan, and her thought, which is particularly in reference to Madison, Minnesota, is that we don't have strong enough opinions these days; we're too accepting; we don't really want to get involved. I think it is true. It's a very touching book. And I think it's true that an awful lot of people now feel as though modern art is something they *ought* to like and they need to look to the magazines and the number of stars on restaurants to tell whether they liked it, that kind of thing. And I think that's too bad, and I also think that it addresses a large issue for the Museum which is the one that I'm particularly interested in because I have been very close to a number of visual artists in my life, including having been married to one and having seen a lot of them socially. So my big question for the Museum is not a unique one but, how does the Museum relate to art that's being created now, and what impact does it have as a kind of institutional imprimatur or not for those people? How important is that? It's the old issue, did modern art stop in 1960—or whatever date you might want to pick—and if it did, then do you let others become museums of contemporary art and you curate and delete and add from a particular time? I think, personally, that that would be against the grain of the

original intent of the institution, and I think the institution tends to feel that way, although the balance is really a question. How much do you celebrate [or] do something like the Atget, the [Eugène] Atget collection? What you are doing is illuminating a great bulk of work that was very little known, and so in a sense, you're introducing something new. It's new because it wasn't seen, but it isn't new because it was done recently. So, should that be developed?

CC: Right. It's scholarship, but it's—

DRJ: Yes.

CC: We were interviewing John Szarkowski and he jumped up in the middle of it, and he had a big wall full of little prints of Atget for a book they were putting together, and he compared one being the negative image of another, and that kind of thing—we are going to use visual arts as punctuation in the film. Let's say we're speaking to [Beaumont] Newhall or Szarkowski, whatever—

DRJ: Right.

CC: And we're addressing this very problem of how do you stay contemporary, and he might speak about an exhibition, then as he talks about, say, Atget, and he put it very amusingly, he said the French, they ignored him, and he was considered as a simple itinerant photographer, really of no great value, and he really labored all on his own. And when he died, if it wasn't for Berenice Abbott, probably all the glass negatives would have been thrown out.

DRJ: Yes.

CC: So, you can have him tell that story as to what they've preserved and why, and then perhaps at the end of his statement, show four or five or six of the images that he talks about, and perhaps even have him give you a little quick visual lesson of this matches that and do you see how this goes to that.

DRJ: Right.

CC: Just as [William] Rubin or Sidney Janis [did] in talking about particular pictures or the acquisition of a picture, how they got it; something like [Henri] Rousseau's [*The Dream*](#), we might show that at the end of a piece.

DRJ: Sure.

CC: Just to give it a little personality, but not have the pictures there for their own sake, but to illustrate something.

DRJ: Mm-hm, to be demonstrative.

CC: So you're in part of that debate, then.

RC: Certainly on the Board, there are different voices on the Board, and we've perceived that there are two camps.

CC: Rubin felt that—we had a long chat with him. He felt that—and I'll say, he almost convinced us; he's quite persuasive. [Laughing]

DRJ: He's his own character, yes.

RC: Which is great for the Museum; it would be great if they had a few other voices as strong.

DRJ: Right.

RC: With different points of view.

DRJ: Yes. What did he say?

CC: Well, he put it that he felt that the unique thing of the Modern Museum was the collection, to fill in the collection; that if he was to compete with every other institution and little gallery and public space in town, that he'd be just another little head popping up out of the water; you wouldn't be serving any better, any great purpose. He thought he could do it by simply having the [Projects](#), and he really shocked me because—

RC: He couldn't possibly cover as much as there is out there now.

DRJ: Right.

RC: That there are galleries—I mean, it's so explosive.

DRJ: Yes. You have to look at what New York was like in 1930.

RC: Exactly. It was coverable, much more manageable then. And also, we've heard this from a lot of people, Barr's dictum of a respectable distance back from the front.

DRJ: Right.

RC: And if you choose one in 10 that's pretty good. But nowadays, how can you buy 10? You could probably buy one?

CC: Those two quotes are contradictory, though, so it's a little bit difficult. We read on one side, the proper place for a museum director or a curator is to be a few steps behind the gallery or the artists, just to give a little breath, a little reason, to the selection you make of pictures. And then the other side of it, there'll be that quote where he said, if one in 10—

RC: That really is hard to apply nowadays.

CC: —is worthy in 10 or 20 years, then we're doing a pretty good job. [Laughing]

DRJ: You're right.

CC: You really can't do that, and at these prices, you can't go out and buy 10 or 20 or 30 contemporary painters and then hope that one will last.

DRJ: Of course, purchase is one thing, and exhibition is another.

RC: Yes, that's true.

CC: I haven't seen all the plans, but I would think the Museum would be able to do that, and they don't need to annex another space.

DRJ: Yes.

CC: They could just have a lot of contemporary shows. And if, as you say, if they don't work out—if a certain artist, if in 10 years' time you look back and you think, 'Oh, how could we ever have had that show? That person is a disaster.'

RC: It was just an exhibition.

CC: So what? If it was an exhibition of 10 artists or 16 or 14—

DRJ: Right.

CC: Like Dorothy Miller had; no one even remembers the proper number or the names of the shows.

RC: Just that she had these series of artists.

DRJ: Yes.

CC: They just remember that half or more than half of the artists were certainly worthy of notice then, and really, those artists became—Jasper Johns and a number of other people—they were noted after that. So I think that's worth considering.

RC: I think that one of the hard things is the fact that Rubin is who Rubin is, and has such a weighty point of view.

DRJ: Right.

RC: And it's one that nobody really needs to argue with in terms of the collection; he's absolutely right, I think.

DRJ: Right.

RC: But as far as others who could contend or have the support that he has, to foray out into the contemporary scene, that's difficult. And people on the outside have commented on that.

DRJ: Sure.

RC: They've said, look, well, Rubin's there; that's a tough act to follow. And Kynaston [McShine], though he's collecting for this show [[An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture](#)], he was so nervous talking to us.

CC: Trying to pin him down was like trying to catch a rat in a corner.

RC: He's really in the hot seat.

DRJ: I see.

RC: And people are looking to him—well, if you're going to show something contemporary, let's see what it is, and he's scouring the country trying to find it. But that's so difficult, because now it's not only New York with its 300-and-some-odd galleries or however many there are.

DRJ: Right.

RC: Every city now has several galleries that are showing things.

DRJ: That's right. Yes.

RC: So it's a tough job. And then, in speaking to Marcia Tucker at the New Museum, she said the Modern, she said it stopped being modern 20 years ago. And she said, that's fine; now, I'm trying to fill the gap with my museum to be of contemporary, modern art.

DRJ: Right.

RC: And every 10 years she'll have formed a collection, then sell it off. And she's following right in Barr's footsteps, and she feels closely allied to his vision. We'll see if she can do it.

CC: I think a lot of institutions in the early years looked like that: her office was chaos and 12 people in the same office. [Laughter]

RC: 15 people in this small space.

DRJ: Right.

CC: But now she's moving this summer to a much bigger place in Soho, and we'll see how that develops.

DRJ: Yes.

CC: Barr himself wanted to get rid of things, and he proposed those first few pictures to the Met. Supposedly it just tore his heart out to be giving those pictures away; he cut the deal after *Woman in White* and a number of other pictures went to the Metropolitan. He just thought, oh, forget it; we're raping our collection; let's just stop this and keep it as is.

RC: I don't think anybody would really argue—well, I don't know. We spoke to Bill Lieberman [laughing] and he said he'd like to see the first 20 years of the Museum's collection over to the Met, and give them [MoMA] a little more breathing space on this end of the collection.

DRJ: That's interesting.

RC: I don't know if that would ever come to pass. Good luck with that. [Laughing]

DRJ: Well, it depends how much sense of nostalgia you have about the specific works being in this specific space. And I think when you've worked [as] hard as Alfred had on collecting them, then they're part of the family. Then the question is; well,

to what extent are they important from the public's point of view, and how much stability and sense of place and time do you want for them, versus capacity to grow and change? And of course, doubling the exhibition space will now give you some of the capacity to stretch. That's a very hard one for me. I haven't worked long enough that—I don't come in with a big sort of weighty museum perspective about the morality or immorality of selling off. I have a kind of an open mind about that. I don't yet have a strong opinion about how much a museum should be allowed to or ought to shift the work that it owns.

CC: I think Rubin is particularly keen on doing what you had said before, though, that he has a unique collection so he can rediscover things in the collection and have exhibitions that relate directly to it. For instance, one of his ideas was, he said he's just in the last stages now of trying to secure a number of Gustav Klimt pictures from Vienna. [Tape break at 0:26:40] Show business aesthetic necessarily.

DRJ: Yes.

CC: People, even Marcia Tucker, at the [New] Museum and other people have said that there are really two kinds of museums now. One is the one that is ruled by the scholarly aesthetic direction, and she feels The Museum of Modern Art sets that standard.

DRJ: Yes.

CC: And the others are ones who now have become show business oriented. They just put on big retrospectives or traveling shows.

DRJ: Yes.

RC: Blockbuster shows.

DRJ: Yes.

RC: In fact, you voiced your concern about that issue earlier. In speaking to some of the Trustees who are business members, [they] said, well, what do you say to Kynaston, to John Elderfield, the people in the Museum whose certain shows may not have the taste for a corporation, because they still are wringing their hands saying we don't have the money to mount this show and that show which,

we want to, we need to, it's our responsibility to. And it's still a problem. And just by raising that—just by having trustees saying, we're doing really well but there are areas that we can't cover, the public needs to hear that so they know, hey, just to have our full Museum, we do have to contribute. And that, I think, would be one real positive aspect without having to hit people over the head.

DRJ: Right.

RC: But just to present all these issues that, as healthy as the Museum is as far as stopping their financial problems with the Tower and so forth, there are areas of the real Museum—

DRJ: Right.

RC: The place that we go to, to see certain things that we may not see. Nobody found fault with the Picasso [[Pablo Picasso: A Retrospective](#)] exhibit, but you wouldn't always want to see that; it's like mind-boggling.

DRJ: Yes.

RC: You want a fine, small show where you want to go see something new. I mean, I love the Projects gallery, and I missed that whole—I hope there's more of that. I hope there's a larger space to accommodate those kind of shows and just relegate it to them.

DRJ: Mm-hm; mm-hm. A lot of different choices.

CC: In the influence that your family has over the Museum, do you feel that you're in a position now of having to voluntarily, not let go, but allow—

DRJ: We as a family, not just me as an individual?

CC: Right. Allow those responsibilities to be taken up by others now? This is one of the tasks that you have to do, is to have other people match your efforts, or match your interest? And this is something that is happening over the last 10, 20 years, that you've had to, in a sense, pass the baton, without delegating responsibility to someone else, but having to encourage others to share the responsibilities?

DRJ: Mm-hm; well, I guess there are different aspects to that. One is, in the early phases of an institution, it's maybe even desirable to have it associated, identified, in the public mind, with a few individuals. And then as it becomes a more broadly established institution, particularly as the costs rise and so forth, you may find that that's self-defeating. And I think also, times have changed somewhat, to some extent. It seems to me that when my grandmother and her associates founded the Museum, it was, I would judge, a lot more acceptable for individuals to have a very strong role in "public" institutions. And it was also possible in those days for a few people to do a lot more and to support those institutions. Now I think that there is more of a feeling in the public that these public institutions *really* ought to be public institutions and not the kind of private preserve of any individuals or small group of individuals. And so, I think in terms of public relations, it probably works better to have these institutions viewed as publicly owned, which I think is also the truth of the matter. I mean, the support is very broad; we have 20,000 members, I think. It's a lot of people who are members, and millions of people who see something like the *Picasso*. It's incredible. And then I think there is, as I said, the financial reality that we're now an enormous institution, and no one family or a few families can support it. So, I think I come into it at a time when it's maybe even important for the institution to reduce its identification particularly with my family, so that as you were saying before, it becomes clearer to the public that the need is real and that the support needs to be broadly based, both corporate and individual and so forth, or it really can't go forward. So it creates an interesting question for me personally: What is the role that I can play in the Museum? On the one hand, you might say it would be better if I and my contemporaries in the family had a fairly low-profile role, and in fact, had others like Don [Marron] and John [Parkinson] coming forward into leadership positions. And I think a good argument could be made for that. And then the question is, what does a family member do? What is the positive part of the family relationship that should also be maintained, and how can you architect that at the same time that you're reducing the public image of the ownership and direction of the Museum? As long as Blanchette is president, obviously that keeps a certain presence there, and it's very real. The presidency in her hands is a very active presidency. So that's not something that I need to determine right away, but it's an interesting question.

CC: We touched on it before about how Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and your father and uncles, obviously—what it is about the family or what those qualities were, or what direction was given to you in terms of performing public service, of being intent on—could you speak a little bit to that ethic?

DRJ: Yes, sure, that's easy. That was always strongly ingrained in a kind of familiar phrase that wealth bears responsibility as one of its accoutrements, and that part of that responsibility is giving money, and part of it is giving time and thought to public institutions. So there's obviously a very strong tradition of service and determination for each individual as to what areas interest them and what areas have need. And it's interesting, I think, some members of my family, notably John Rockefeller, were able to spend immense amounts of time in institutions where their personal interest wasn't the first factor; it was the sense of social responsibility that was the first factor. For me, there are so many opportunities to serve, that I make it a personal rule to always start with interest, because I feel if I don't have the interest, then the service is perhaps half-hearted. It would be, just in my case. I think with John and Lincoln Center, music was never something that interested him at the gut. I think he almost could have done without it. And yet, he built Lincoln Center. Not he alone, but I mean, he was one of the major forces. And I think that's really remarkable; that doesn't happen to be how I work. And interest in the visual arts is very deep for me and transmitted through my family as well as friends and other relatives. I'm not sure that I'm answering your questioning exactly.

CC: I think you are. I was struck by—I think it was in the Mary Ellen Chase book—how your grandmother at one time had, across the river, had gotten the Standard Oil plant called Bayway—how she went over and started a whole community center, a community house, and she was building really a model house. Well, it turned out the house was so terrific—it wasn't architecturally that much different; it was nice and well appointed—so that became the community house and everybody was rushing in. And then they built a bigger one, and everyone was very excited, and it really was doing an awful lot. They were having dances and baking bread, and she encouraged everyone to keep their ethnic identity, to go ahead and bake that bread, don't get rid of those recipes, and that sort of thing.

DRJ: Right. None of this melting pot business.

CC: And then she was at a dinner and the man who was the manager or president of that division of Standard Oil, he asked her, 'You must be very excited about how your community house is going along?' And she said, 'It's going quite well, but I think, isn't it *your* community house?' to him. And it was very interesting because she had started it and she may have funded it and given it the initial impetus, but it was *his* responsibility to take it all on himself now. And I think just that little story to me illustrated how she would give time, she would give money and energy and direction, but other people were meant to carry the ball a bit themselves.

DRJ: Yes. Well, that's certainly happening at MoMA, you know. I mean, if that was her vision for MoMA—I don't know what her vision was in terms of the leadership—it really is happening. And although the family has maintained a very strong role, especially now, in the hands of Blanche, less my father, it's very diffuse and there are a lot of people who, as you have identified, both the curatorial personalities and the board personalities, who have impacted on that institution. And of course, it already *is* something, so to the extent some group may want to change it, it has a lot of mass to move, and it couldn't just be anything [INAUDIBLE: 0:38:34].

CC: And as you said, one of your choices might be that you could let go and let someone else take that space, but at the same time, because it's not really a void that needs to be filled anymore; it's not like it was in the late twenties when no one else was doing it. And as a matter of fact, now, unfortunately, it carries a certain social cachet and all to it and it elevates people whereas 50 years ago this was the very opposite; people were considered mad to be interested.

DRJ: Yes. It's sort of sad that it's lost that; I'd much rather be associated with creative madness.

RC: That's why I think there's hope. If you hang in there, you might be just that one to change the direction, or keep the initial spirit going.

CC: I think John Parkinson thought about that, too. He must have. His family has been involved since the early days.

DRJ: That's right.

CC: And frankly, was it his aunt?

RC: His aunt.

CC: His great aunt was the one responsible for actually establishing it—

RC: With her collection.

CC: In '31,'32, putting that collection that they had to then match with a million dollars. Well, they didn't get a million, but [they got \\$600,000](#), and then the executor thought, 'Well, that's enough.' It at least appears that they're serious enough if they can raise \$600,000—

DRJ: Yes.

CC: —that they're ready to go, and then that sort of launched things. And he keeps a relatively low profile in the sense of not being a bombastic flamboyant character—

DRJ: Right.

CC: But he certainly appears to give very good service in terms of his financial expertise and time—

DRJ: Yes.

CC: —which is really the most valuable asset.

RC: I think he also is interested in seeing it move forward into more contemporary fields.

CC: The most unlikely people, sometimes. Walter Thayer was—

DRJ: Oh really?

CC: [Laughing] We thought—well, we probably know what his mind would be.

DRJ: Yes, right.

RC: But at the very end he said, "Yes, I'm right behind Barbara Jakobson and we're going to—" He likes to go to Soho and see the [INAUDIBLE: 0:40:35] and we thought, oh, great.

CC: He's really constantly—

DRJ: Yes; right.

CC: And other people say, well, he owns *Art in America*, so that explains it.

DRJ: Ah.

RC: It's not just the younger people.

CC: But I don't know, I think he also has a personal—

RC: It seemed like he had a genuine interest in it.

CC: His offices had a lot of new things in it. If that's an ongoing debate.

DRJ: Sure.

CC: But it's interesting to see someone a bit older to be still very keen on taking chances.

DRJ: That's good. I don't happen to know him at all, but I think one other thing that I'd say is that the Museum, like it or not, does have an imprimatur effect, and I view it, I feel that they can't ignore that, whatever they do. I mean, Bill Rubin can say, well look, all the galleries are doing that and so we don't need to, or Marcia Tucker is doing it and we ought to do what we do best. I think the fact is that they still do have a strong stamp in the public mind as to what is acceptable. And I think after all, if you look at some of the work of [Joseph] Cornell and think of the impact on what's happening today with contemporary art and how it's still struggling to find its place between two and three dimensional, and what's the role of the canvas, and all the things that [Frank] Stella is doing, moving off the canvas. I think that the Cornell show [\[Joseph Cornell\]](#) was very important to give us some perspective on what the struggle is in that regard today, as well as some of the elements of Dadaism that persisted in art. But I think that the Museum has an impact, whether it likes it or not, and therefore, I don't see how it can simply retreat to its collection and stop it and polish it and refine it and still keep that sense of excitement and education of the public. So I hope that it will always have some role as a commentator upon the current scene, and maybe that doesn't mean the last two years, but it certainly ought to mean something in the last decade.

CC: I don't think it should voluntarily give up the imprimatur. I mean, it used to be down to the very watches people would buy.

DRJ: Yes.

CC: Do you remember those days?

DRJ: Yes.

CC: Watches and clocks and everything.

DRJ: Yes, sure; that's right.

CC: People like Ivan Chermayeff, for instance, he's concerned. He had an interesting perspective. He didn't want it to get too fashion faddish conscious.

DRJ: Right.

CC: He was upset about that. He knows that you wouldn't have a Good Design show now. Conran's and Pottery Barn; there's your good design shows.

RC: It's been accepted.

CC: It's really—the battle's been won, in that sense.

DRJ: Yes.

CC: And he felt that the competition now is with Bloomingdale's and other places. It's tough. You build a big museum with escalators and lots of shows—

RC: And two-story restaurants and bookstores, like a shopping mall; he said he doesn't want that.

CC: And he's concerned that it be too faddish yet he's very keen on the education function. He thinks that that is just extraordinary.

DRJ: Yes, me too.

CC: And I really think that the hidden pleasure of the Museum and where you're going to really feel it when the Museum opens, in terms of reviews and critical commentary will be, number one, they'll say the collection is finally able to be seen. But number two and really more importantly, each department now will be open. And if you're a photographer coming in from Houston and you go to the

Museum, it's not potluck as to whether or not you're going to see a photography show.

DRJ: Yes.

CC: You *will* see a photography show. You go in, the walls will be filled in that department. You can go right up, and I imagine with some notice you can study things, and they'll be there.

DRJ: Right.

CC: And I think that is just such a novel way of operating the Museum. I think it'll go back to that original function; it'll be much wider and much richer. Because instead of simply going to a gallery and walking through halls with pictures on them, it'll be a much deeper or richer or more enriching experience to be able to actually go up and study this and that and then to see that there are many, many books on each subject. In the Photography Department, they'll have its own library and that sort of thing. And I think that kind of—

DRJ: It'll have a really different feel to it.

CC: I think it'll feel like a real—like an English university museum or a—it just feels it has that extra edge, rather than just going in and seeing a Stella, a [Mark] Rothko, or whatever. A little bit more, more direction to it. And I think it'll even give it more of a stamp that it has aesthetic direction, that it is committed to the scholarly aesthetic line rather than simply putting on exhibitions.

DRJ: Yes, the big show.

CC: Well, thank you for your comments. Would you be willing to speak in front of a camera for the film, when we make our edited version?

DRJ: Sure.

CC: Because a couple of things you said, particularly, the concern with contemporary, but also the business of service. You may think these are very common and big marshmallow questions, but to two or three million people out there, we may know the answers, but they don't. And a lot of these questions are never addressed and never asked. And frankly, I feel that even if 10 or 15 people, after the film, go to the Museum, and when they pay their three dollars don't ask and

don't think any more, "Oh well, the Rockefellers will pay for the rest; it's their museum—"

DRJ: Yes.

RC: That would be a great service of the film.

CC: Then you've really done a great benefit, because frankly, it's tough to handle that very subject, and I think people are in a bit of a fog as to who supports places like that

DRJ: Yes.

CC: And why. They just think it's done, and I think that's very wrong, particularly in these times, to suppose that government or corporations or certain families or individuals are just supporting for god knows what reason. I think to hear about Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, to know why she did what she did, to know that there was this very big-hearted person who really did this not for herself. I mean, it was an awful tough atmosphere. I'm sure a lot of her friends would call her up and write her notes and say, "Why don't you stop it and let's go to Europe," or "Let's go to Maine and forget it."

RC: Eddie Warburg had some great stories—

END OF INTERVIEW at 0:47:23