

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: WILDER GREEN (WG)

INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SZ: Wilder, tell me where and when you were born and a little bit about your family background.

WG: I was born on April 17th, 1927, in Paris, France, of American parents. My father was there on business, so those circumstances explain why I happen to have been born there.

SZ: It was quite a time to be there.

WG: Yes, indeed. We came back when I was four, in '31, and my father worked for another branch of the company he had worked for, an American company, in France and other places. Then we moved to a town called Loudonville, New York, which is a suburb of Albany. There we lived until I went away to school, which would have been at the age of thirteen; I guess it would have been about 1940. I went away to a pre-prep school, Fessenden School, for a year and then to a prep school, Deerfield Academy.

SZ: Had your father gone to Deerfield too?

WG: No, this was not a family thing. A cousin had gone there. After that, I went to Yale College for two years as an undergraduate. I had wanted to go and study under Frank Lloyd Wright; I was a very avid architect from a young age. My father wisely persuaded me that I should wait for a year or two. We had a kind of a deal that I would go to Yale for a year, and if I still....

SZ: He persuaded you, not not to be an architect but....

WG: ...not to go study under Frank Lloyd Wright, at the moment, anyway. So it turned out I stayed at Yale two years, then I became restless and I went to Chicago for a combination studying and working there. I studied at the Institute of Design and the Illinois Institute of Technology. The architecture department of the institute was headed by Mies van der Rohe. I had changed my architectural loyalties somewhat [LAUGHTER], but I worked under an architect, William Deknatel, who had trained under Frank Lloyd Wright. I also studied at a school called the Institute of Design, which was the transfer of the Bauhaus to this country. I stayed there for a year, maybe a little more, and then I came back and went to Yale's architectural school, from which I was graduated in 1952. That was my only degree, a Bachelor of Architecture. I did not get an undergraduate degree.

SZ: Which I guess you could do at that time.

WG: Which you could do at that time, exactly. Two years of college and five years of architectural school, so it was a good stint.

SZ: You entered Yale as an undergraduate in what year?

WG: That would have been the fall of '45, so I was there the years of '45-'47. I left in '47.

SZ: So you escaped the war.

WG: I was 4F during the war. I was later in the army, but that's another story.

SZ: You were too young, anyway.

WG: No, I was eighteen. I could have gone in '45.

SZ: It was almost over.

WG: Yes, but they were still drafting people. Yes, I escaped the war. I could have been drafted though, yes. When I went to Yale, in '45, there were only three colleges open in the east--Yale, Princeton and Harvard--and they were filled, still, with special training programs for officers. But Yale, Harvard and Princeton were open to undergraduates. That was the first session.

SZ: Let's go back a little. Your father was a businessman with a company that did business with...?

WG: He was with a company called the Norton Company, which headquartered in Worcester, Mass. My father came from Worcester. He had worked for them in Worcester. In 1920 he was sent to head the plant in Paris, partially by default; I don't mean he wasn't capable, but he was not that senior in the company and others in the company did not want to go and live in Paris. That was right after the war, but my mother and father jumped at the chance and lived there for eleven years.

SZ: You don't have much of a memory of it?

WG: I have scattered memories, yes. I spoke only French the first four years of my life and then forgot it in about two months. That was the way children do. My brother, who is deceased now, and my two sisters all speak French fluently, and they went to school there up to high-school age.

SZ: So you were the baby.

WG: I was the baby, right. But France, French culture and all that, were imprinted on me by the enthusiasm of my parents for it. My father was very interested in the arts. He was a very thorough and solid businessman, but his enthusiasm was not really in it; he was in it for practical reasons.

SZ: What about this interest in architecture and visual things?

WG: That started at a very young age. I recall drawing plans at eight or nine years old, things of that sort. I was always fascinated by it. Riding around in the car, all I saw were the buildings going by, so it was a very early interest. My father was somewhat interested in architecture too, so he was actually very encouraging.

SZ: Do you remember your first trip to the city?

WG: Here?

SZ: Yes.

WG: I'm trying to remember when that would have been. I know I came down here a number of times when I was about the age of thirteen or fourteen because I had

some medical problems, back problems, and I came to a doctor here in New York so I would come down frequently. That would have been, let's say, I was born in '27 so that would have been about 1940. I also probably came in the late '30s. I know we came to the World's Fair, for instance, in 1939, and I'm sure I'd come before that. I remember the first play I saw in New York was Abe Lincoln in Illinois; I don't remember what the dates were, but it was a very exciting moment, to go to the theater. So I probably came down with my parents in the late '30s.

SZ: I was just wondering in terms of whatever was here in the way of architecture at that time.

WG: Yes, well, the World's Fair, Rockefeller Center, all those things. The Museum of Modern Art was here; this building would have been here in '39. Probably I came here before it was finished and afterwards. The Museum was founded in '29 but this was '39 that they moved in, so I probably came to New York before the building was occupied. I wasn't brought here by my parents. They were not particularly interested in modern art. However, I had an uncle, my father's brother-in-law, who was head of the Norton Company. He was a very, very brilliant businessman, an inventor, a collector of modern and historical art, and a major patron of the Worcester Art Museum.

SZ: What was his name?

WG: Aldus Higgins. He was very enthusiastic. He had built a very distinguished Jacobean-style house in Worcester by an architect by the name of Grosvenor Atterbury, a very prominent architect of that time. It was filled with furniture and decorative arts that were appropriate to the period. Then he began collecting modern art, and he would go to Paris. A woman named Jeanne Bucher, who was a

dealer in Paris at that time, was one of his advisors. For me, not only was the architecture of the house fascinating but the modern art and everything...I was just thrilled by the whole thing. My uncle loved architecture. None of his own children had any interest in the arts particularly, so we used to have long talks.

SZ: He was happy that you were.

WG: Yes, exactly. I learned at that time, kind of by osmosis, what it was to be a patron to a museum, how a man was a leader in a community, etc. He was a chief mentor to Francis Henry Taylor, who was the museum director in Worcester before he came to the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art], and then went back to Worcester after he had his tenure at the Met. There were a couple of other people who became prominent in the museum world. I'm trying to remember the name of the man who went to Chicago. I'll think of his name. He was the director of the Art Institute of Chicago.

SZ: When we had the fire? Daniel Catton Rich?

WG: Dan Rich, exactly. You're right, that's true. He was at Worcester after that. At any rate, the Worcester Art Museum was my first introduction to the museum world. It was, and is, a very fine institution.

SZ: What about going out to Chicago? That must have been a very interesting time.

WG: It was. It was very interesting. I had a sister who was living there and studying at the time, so that was a kind of drawing card, but also, Chicago was a very fascinating city at that time. There was a great deal of building going on. It had tremendous spirit as a city; it still does. Architecture is a very important thing in Chicago, was and is. Van der Rohe was there. So it was a very lively time.

SZ: Did you study under him? Did you get to know him?

WG: No one really studied under him [LAUGHTER]. That was one reason I left. I thought I would study directly under van der Rohe. Well, he was a mythic and distant figure. I had taken many courses at Yale when I was there for those two years in art history and architecture. I was all geared up to go! So I knew a good deal about these subjects and I went out to Chicago thinking I would study under van der Rohe. He was surrounded by a group of disciples who were absolutely mesmerized by him and his theories, and saw no other architecture, no other way of doing things--all loyal to the prophet, so to speak. I became very discouraged by that, and that was one of the reasons I went back to Yale to study, which was much more open. Also, while I was there, for a number of years Louis Kahn was one of the principal teachers, and I became a great admirer of Kahn. In fact, the first exhibition I did here at the Museum independently was a small show on Louis Kahn--the first show the Museum did on Kahn [Richards Medical Research Building--Louis I. Kahn, Architect, 1961].

SZ: I didn't know that. But you did study under him?

WG: I did study under him, yes.

SZ: Tell me a little bit more about the Yale School of Architecture.

WG: Yale was intellectually a very open school at that time, I would say. Harvard was under [Walter] Gropius and the Bauhaus influence. Illinois Institute of Technology was under Mies van der Rohe. Pennsylvania, I think, was still quite academic. Princeton I don't think at that time had a first-string architectural school. One of the

directors at Yale while I was there was George Howe, who came from Philadelphia. George was a highly sophisticated, intelligent, cultivated man, an architect of considerable merit; he started as a rather posh residential architect but was eventually the architect, with [William] Lescaze, of the Pennsylvania Savings Fund building, PSFS, which was one of the first really modern buildings in this country, so he was intellectually very supportive of modern architecture. I think he knew the whole crowd here in New York, [Philip] Goodwin and so forth and so on. George was head of the school, but he did not have any intention of putting a personal stamp or style on the school. He did everything he could to attract a wide variety of teachers. He and Louis Kahn were an astounding combination, because George Howe was urbane, sophisticated (to a degree, hedonistic), and Kahn was an incredibly intense, dedicated, serious man. I think Howe admired Kahn very much, but they were very different as individuals. I'm sure Kahn appreciated the fact that Howe opened lots of doors for him. So Yale was interesting at that time. There were many other teachers. Another person who was often teaching there was Philip Johnson and I got to know Philip very well. I worked in his office on two or three different occasions.

SZ: While you were in school?

WG: Yes. I worked for him one summer in New York when he had an office on 42nd Street.

SZ: That would have been before '49?

WG: It would have been after I returned from Chicago. It would have probably been the summer of '47 or '48. I worked for him that summer and then I worked with him again in New Canaan, and then again after I finished architectural school.

SZ: Did he have interesting work at that time?

WG: Yes, he had interesting work. He was a close disciple of van der Rohe at that time, of course, but with his own variations. He was extremely articulate about everything he was doing. The office was rather like an atelier more than a tough business office, except it did have a very good person there to help run it, a couple of people. It was fascinating because he was very open and direct with everyone who worked there, and as he was struggling with a design problem he was very articulate, so you really felt you were in on the process. He's a very engaging man. You've probably interviewed him, so you know. So he was another person who was a very active teacher at Yale during that time.

SZ: Did that happen a lot, that architects that came up to Yale would find students whom they felt had talent and then hire them in their offices?

WG: Yes, and I did the same thing in working for Paul Rudolph after architectural school, which was a direct result of meeting him there as a teacher. I went to work for him when he was still in Florida. So I would characterize Yale at that time as very stimulating. Vincent Scully was pushing the slides and fighting the good fight and delivering very, very dynamic lectures. Then, another person who was very important in my training there was George [Heard] Hamilton, who was a professor in twentieth-century art. Hamilton was very dynamic too, and I relished his courses; he was a fascinating teacher.

SZ: So it was an exciting program.

WG: For me, yes, it was very exciting.

SZ: Wally Harrison--did he come up there too?

WG: He did, but not very much. He was not as prominent a figure there. In my own experience I'd say Howe and Johnson and Kahn and Rudolph were the most influential. There were also many other architects who came through the school as teachers at that time. It was very loosely structured. The idea was to introduce architectural students to a number of different figures and teachers rather than to limit them to a very strict system.

SZ: So by the time you graduated in '52, under whose influence would you say you were the most, in terms of design?

WG: I would say I'd moved away from the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright, although the work I did at first when I went back to Yale after Chicago was very Wrightian, much to the horror of a lot of the younger teachers there who grudgingly said, "Well, you're a good planner, at least," but stylistically they were opposed to it. I would say the International Style, with variations. I admired van der Rohe, Johnson, Rudolph, and, intellectually, Kahn. In June of '52 I went to Sarasota, Florida, and worked for Paul Rudolph for a year. I was the only person in the office. He had an office about two-thirds of the size of this room, and he lived at the back of it. Almost the day I arrived, he left to teach somewhere and left the office in my hands, practically. So it was marvelous training, but it was kind of a baptism by fire. I learned a lot in that year--in the scale of what he was building, which wasn't that big.

SZ: What was he building at that time?

WG: He was building houses primarily, but not exclusively. He was building several houses but he was also gradually getting involved in small office buildings and he

was also working on a kind of a marine mini Disneyland structure in Florida. He was very active in teaching at Pennsylvania and Yale.

SZ: That was a lot of traveling he had to do.

WG: All the time. He was trying to get out of Florida as much as he could.

SZ: What was he like to work for?

WG: Very high-strung, ambitious, brilliant, in many ways unsure of himself I think would be the best way to describe him. He had a very short fuse, and yet, if you did something right he definitely gave you credit, he was appreciative. He had a complex combination of human characteristics, but he was extremely talented, and I learned a lot from him. Then, from there, Philip Johnson asked me to come and work on a particular project, a very big house that he had been commissioned to do on Nantucket, and I was to come to the office to work on the working drawings and then go to Nantucket to supervise the construction.

SZ: So you didn't have any problem leaving Paul Rudolph in Florida?

WG: No. It had been a year and it was the right time. My father had died in the interim and actually my mother was very ill, terminally ill, so there were family reasons as well to come north and work.

SZ: You were really wanting this kind of a career?

WG: Oh, yes, that was my total intention, to become an architect. This Johnson house project did not go through. It ended almost simultaneously with the time I was, much

to my surprise, drafted into the army, at whatever age I was, twenty-five, twenty-six.

SZ: It was the Korean War.

WG: Yes, but I didn't go to the Korean War at all. I went through basic training, then went to a communications intelligence school at Fort Devins, outside of Boston, and then I went to Eritrea, Ethiopia, for almost a year. I loved it; it was fascinating, at least for a short period. I never would have gone there otherwise.

SZ: They sent you there just as an intelligence officer?

WG: I was in something called the Army Security Agency. We were snoops, really, communications snoops. We were listening into coded messages from the Middle East and Russia, all that area. It was very boring work.

SZ: What was Ethiopia like at that time?

WG: I was in Eritrea, in a town called Asmara. It was peaceful. Haile Selassie was the emperor. All the tensions that broke out later between Ethiopia and Eritrea were not evident. There was still a large Italian population there which, although they had no really legal rights, ran most of the businesses and so forth.

SZ: They stayed for a while, I guess.

WG: A lot of them couldn't go back to Italy, they weren't allowed to go back, so they had to stay there, they were caught there. It was a very quiet place, and there didn't seem to be the tensions which obviously surfaced later. There was some talk then about Eritrea becoming independent, but it wasn't a real issue. I think Haile Selassie

and his whole regime held things pretty much under control and fairly calm. He used to come up, I remember, to the post to have milkshakes. [LAUGHTER] He'd arrive in his bottle-green Rolls Royce, and he loved American milkshakes. It was a wonderful experience. The work was very dull, and we were very independent because our officers were not in the Army Security Agency. I was an enlisted man.

SZ: You were, but they weren't.

WG: They weren't in the Army Security Agency. They were line officers, so any time they started pushing us around and telling us we had to get up early for drill and do all these things, suddenly the communications information would go down and they'd hear from Washington, so in an ironic way the enlisted men had the most power. It was easy duty, but dull. So I decided I was going to do something and I started teaching school there, teaching mathematics, in off hours, to Eritrean teachers. That was a wonderful experience. I was usually only one page ahead of them in the math book, but it was wonderful! Then I came back and moved to New York in September 1956. I had been offered a job teaching part-time at Yale in the architectural school.

SZ: Which you did?

WG: I did, for a year. This was the fall of '56. I lived in New York and picked up on all my contacts here. Shortly after that, during that fall sometime, Arthur Drexler talked to me about coming to the Department of Architecture here as the assistant director.

SZ: So you knew him.

WG: I knew him. I had met him through Philip Johnson. There was no question that Philip also was supportive of me, but Arthur was very determined to make this decision on

his own, as he should have. He asked me to come, but for budget reasons there was no chance for me to come until the next spring. In the meantime, I was living and only teaching two or three days a week in New Haven. Porter McCray, who was head of the International Program (you probably have learned how they operated quite independently of each other) offered me part-time work on a couple of projects in the area of architecture and design that he was doing.... Originally, my intention was to do this job in the architecture department for only a limited time, but I thought it was a wonderful way to get back to New York and meet people. My intention at that point was to shift over and begin some kind of an architectural practice here in New York.

SZ: Before that time, tell me a little bit about the contact you had with the Museum. Did you come here to see exhibitions and what were they like?

WG: It was a very, very different kind of organization. It was much smaller--intense, intimate internally, but very authoritative in the sense that its direction seemed absolutely clear. It was still in its era of almost messianic education of people in the arts. Alfred Barr, of course...I don't remember exactly what year it was that Alfred stepped down as director, but he was by this time, when I came here, he had been pushed out as director, whatever you want, and was director of collections and René d'Harnoncourt was director of the Museum.... I came here in '56. Fall of '56 was when I started with Porter, and it was sometime in the spring of '57 I formally joined the architecture department.

SZ: You had always been a follower of the Museum's....

WG: Oh, yes, but I didn't live in New York, you see. I'd come down from New Haven and see the exhibitions that were here and elsewhere, but my connection to the Museum

was more through the architecture department rather than the painting and sculpture department or film or photography, because that was my main interest. Definitely it was an important and highly respected place in my mind.

SZ: What about the project that you did for Porter?

WG: I don't remember what it was. I suppose we can find out, but I can't recall. It was a strange kind of situation. Porter was a good friend of mine, actually, and a very brilliant man, but there was, as you have undoubtedly learned, often a competitive spirit going on between programs that he was doing for the International Council and those at the Museum proper. Many of these were being done by other curators.

SZ: You could see that yourself when you were here?

WG: Oh, yes, I saw that, absolutely. One of the people he was most competitive with was Arthur Drexler. This may sound rather strange, but I think I was useful to Porter at that time. He was demonstrating his independence in a way. There was tension between them, there's no question but Arthur had hired me. I saw this friction more after I was here, but I was kind of innocent of it before.

SZ: Do you think Porter was aware of that competitive spirit or the nature of what was happening?

WG: Yes, I think so. I mean, how...well, after listening to all these hearings [Congressional hearings to confirm Clarence Thomas as a Supreme Court Justice], you sometimes don't know who believes what about themselves, but there was no question that Porter was independent. He hired many very brilliant people in his department and did excellent programs. In many ways he was a wonderful donkey in

the stable. I mean, some of the most brilliant people were in his department or started there and moved on--Frank O'Hara as an example. I think he was aware there was competition; how much he could articulate it or how much he would come out and say it is another matter. He was critical and supportive, back and forth, of many different people.

SZ: Do you think it was detrimental to....

WG: ...the institution?

SZ: Yes, either then or now.

WG: Not then, because the International Program was in high gear. This was America out on the ramparts of the world in the '50s. There was seemingly plenty of money, money to spread the tenets of American culture and so forth. In architecture a tremendous amount of building had been done in the modern style; design had grown; in painting and sculpture, it was the great Abstract Expressionist period. All the arts in America had grown enormously, and it was one of the tenets of the Museum not to be just on 53rd Street or in this country, and the International Program was one of its glamorous wings, there's no question. Later, more tensions grew, clearly. There were curatorial tensions. Many curators felt that the International Council should be more directly under control of the curatorial departments, and they did resent that he hired many outside people.

SZ: This was, in effect, another curatorial department.

WG: Exactly. Many of them [the MoMA curators] were happy at times that he was the practical instrument for some of their exhibitions, but there was simultaneously also

often a resentment of his hiring outside people who were gifted in areas of the curatorial departments. This varied from time to time and from curator to curator, but as far as architecture was concerned, Porter and Arthur were never close. I mean, I don't think they ever had lunch; if there were discussions, they were quite formal. They were very different people, with different priorities.

SZ: I was going to ask you if that was what it came out of, rather than having different views.

WG: Intellectual views?

SZ: Yes.

WG: It was a combination. I think they had many differing intellectual views, but I think much of it was simply personality. I came to MoMA after Edgar Kaufmann had been here, and I gather there were differences there also. (Kaufmann did all the Good Design shows.) By the time I got here, the architecture department was directed by Arthur. Philip Johnson was a very strong figure in the background. He'd say, "I'm going to leave you alone, you just do whatever you want," but.... [LAUGHING]

SZ: That was not the case.

WG: Philip had a lot of respect for Arthur, and Arthur was constantly battling to assert his independence, and yet he was very dependent on Philip. It was like a father-son situation: I'll criticize you, but let anybody else criticize you and I'll defend you immediately.

SZ: It's been said that Philip felt it was his department, his museum.

WG: His section of the Museum.

SZ: Yes.

WG: Absolutely. No question. And I think there's no question that as its first director and as a trustee of the institution...well, the department might easily have waned if it had not been for Philip--and Alfred Barr. I could imagine that in certain economic crunches the department might have been whittled away. But it wasn't, even though its public was limited.

SZ: Not necessarily its influence.

WG: No, not its influence, but it didn't bring in the droves of people like the film program and painting and sculpture exhibitions.

END TAPE 1, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2

SZ: I was going to ask you about Arthur in the early days, so tell me a little bit about him. He was young....

WG: He was young, a brilliant man, extremely articulate, self-educated--he went to the High School of Music and Art here, and that was the end of his formal education. He came from, not an impoverished family, but one without many advantages. He was a very homely-looking person, which was another thing he had to bear. He was, basically, good to work for. At first, it was really a student-teacher relationship; he

was just enough older and more experienced and sophisticated that I deferred to him. We had a very good communication, and we talked, and I enjoyed the years working with him enormously. There came a time when I became restless, but it was very exciting. Every day was stimulating, working here; there were always new projects afoot. He was very supportive of me, but he ran the department, there was no question about that, and I was still very much in the learning process and my skills were very different from his.

SZ: When you came in, you came in with what title?

WG: I was assistant director of the department. The other people in the department were Mildred ["Connie"] Constantine and Greta Daniel. Connie, I think, would have liked a bigger position in the department, which in a way she had; she didn't have the title, but she had the influence. Greta was more modest in her ambitions anyway.

SZ: What do you mean by Connie's influence?

WG: She was a stronger personality, she had more influence with Arthur. They had a running, I wouldn't say love/hate, but a close/distant relationship. I think Connie viewed Arthur as her student in a way; not literally, but she was older, more mature, more sophisticated and had broader connections. Arthur's reaction to Connie was one of extreme frustration at times because Connie was full of ideas and connections and talk, but very often projects would end up in a mess, and had to be pulled out of the fire and resolved by him.

SZ: You mean that Arthur didn't always share her enthusiasm for certain...?

WG: No. He always edited her projects very carefully. Connie at that time had a pattern of

carrying things to a certain point, leaving a lot unresolved about the details. Deadlines would come for exhibitions and publications and she would be very late. Arthur would get very exercised by this.

SZ: Her area of expertise was more....

WG: Graphic design, really. She was in charge of the poster collection. Greta Daniel was head of the design collection. But Connie, you've interviewed her, so you know hers is a very enquiring and broad mind, so she was knowledgeable about many things. But, graphic design was her post in the department.

SZ: Tell me a little bit about Greta Daniel.

WG: Greta was a German refugee.

SZ: I noticed you smiled when I asked you. I'm just going to read that into the record.

WG: She was a charming person. I also should tell you about Connie, too, a little more. Greta was a German-Jewish refugee from Germany, was a very lovely human being, very hardworking, ardent in the design field. I don't know that she was ever at the Bauhaus, but she carried much of the Bauhaus training to this country. She had many connections in the design world, both here and in Europe, Germany, primarily. People in the profession were very fond of Greta. She was in a way nonthreatening; she had her own agenda and her own personal life. She was very supportive of Arthur. They worked well together, but Arthur was also very strong in editing Greta's work. Greta would have included a lot more than Arthur. Arthur was very, very strict about aesthetic decisions. Greta was an active participant in the department, but I would say that she was really more of a keeper of the collection than an exhibition

innovator. She was not a good writer. Greta was very supportive of and added information and knowledge to design exhibitions, but they were really spearheaded by Arthur; whereas Connie was more independent in ideas, had more ideas, and Arthur's job there, as he saw it, was editing and also keeping her on track. Connie and I became very friendly in the department. Her maternal instincts came out and to this day we remain great friends. Through her I learned much about the history of the Museum, I think some accurate, some maybe not totally accurate [LAUGHING].

SZ: You mean as you came in.

WG: Yes. She was very welcoming, although I imagine she wondered who this person was coming into the department, and what did this mean about her role.

SZ: How was that for you?

WG: It didn't bother me because it all seemed to work smoothly and Arthur supported me very strongly. Also, after a while, Connie and I became very good friends.

SZ: Then Greta got sick not too long after, right?

WG: I'm trying to remember when Greta died. She was there for a number of years before I appeared. I can't remember.

SZ: Let me just go back to something, since you mentioned it, and ask you a little bit about this whole issue of building the design collection, because you said Greta was the eye, the first?

WG: Philip Johnson was, I guess, the first eye--Philip and a range of people he was in

contact with. I don't remember who worked with him on the design collection. Eliot Noyes was here for a while. He was a Harvard architectural school graduate. He was a curator, a curator in both architecture and graphic design; then he went on to practice architecture. Then at one point--and the exact dynamics I'm not quite positive of--Edgar Kaufmann came in. He had an independent program, which was the Good Design program. I don't know how many years that lasted, but it started with two shows a year done in conjunction with the Merchandise Mart in Chicago. A very ambitious program. Edgar would hire architects and designers from the outside to do the installations, so they were quite spectacular, some of them, drew a lot of attention and were very popular. Then he left and I don't quite know what all the reasons were, but obviously there was a split somewhere. I don't think there was too much love lost between Philip and Edgar Kaufmann. I think they were very competitive. Philip was a trustee and very in with the other trustees, so.... Not that I know that Edgar Kaufmann had ambitions to be head of the department; I don't really know. I never knew Edgar that well. I got to know him a little later. He was always a very discreet person; I wouldn't say secretive, but he didn't talk a great deal. Connie was quite friendly [with him]. Connie had a great ability to make all these bridges; she was very, very skillful, very good at that. It was very valuable for the department, because Arthur tended to stick to himself pretty much.

SZ: He did do that.

WG: Yes. I think he had a great feeling that he had to keep himself shielded to protect the high aesthetic quality; it was a personality thing, I suppose.

SZ: Was that also not easy for him, that kind of...?

WG: It wasn't as easy as it was for Connie, no. Socializing was not easy for Arthur.

SZ: Which can leave you at a disadvantage in this milieu.

WG: Yes, although he was extremely articulate when he talked. He had his great admirers, both on the board and outside.

SZ: My question was more directed toward, when you talked about Greta Daniel and how she continued building the collection, how that would actually work?

WG: Greta kept building the collection by continuously bringing objects in for consideration.

SZ: It was her eye, then. She would find things that she thought....

WG: Yes, and then Arthur would edit it. But then, Arthur was also looking for things. They would sometimes look for things together. But Greta was less rigorous in her selection. Greta and Connie were perhaps (each in their own way) much less rigorous in their selection. Arthur may have been too much so, so that it often ended up with a tension, with Arthur editing heavily. I remember one of Arthur's favorite phrases was, he'd hold up an object and he'd say, "Is this the most of its kind? We only want the most of its kind in the collection." Whereas Connie and Greta would say, "Well, these are two or three things that have an interesting relationship to that." It was a different kind of mentality, so Arthur's selection could sometimes be very, very restrictive, but very strong. Of course, now there's a lot of reaction against a lot of that selection here.

SZ: Can you give me an example?

WG: No. I mean, there have been statements recently by the new curators. What's the name of the new curator in the design department that's just been named?

SZ: The new curator, not the director?

WG: No, not the director. We're talking about the design collection. I can't remember his name now [Terry Riley]. I'll think of it in just a moment. Some of his statements in interviews in the newspaper were clearly indicative that he was going to be more open, more postmodern, more whatever in the design collection. I think Stuart Wrede, too, has opened up, showing a lot of work of interesting people, as have other curators in the department. I have virtually no connection with the department today at all. I left here twenty years ago. But I always come to the exhibitions and am always very interested.

SZ: I was just wondering, having been a part of the Museum in that department when it stood for something very specific, how do you feel about that kind of change?

WG: I think I was often pressing Arthur to be broader in some of the things we did. Although I admired him very much and always felt the products that he did choose were absolutely first-rate, I constantly had a feeling that he was fearful of branching out too much. For example, I did the first show on Louis Kahn. He okayed it; he almost had to. But it was a very small show on one building. I was always anxious for us to do a major Kahn show, as well as one on [Alvar] Aalto.

SZ: That came later.

WG: Yes. Well, we've never done a great big Aalto show, or an enormous Kahn show. There's one that's going to be opening in Philadelphia soon and it will come to

MoMA. I think there are interesting figures that one could have done more reporting on, and Arthur was constrained about doing that.

SZ: Was that frustrating for you?

WG: A little, yes, but I was kind of anxious to go on and do other things anyway, so it all worked out, as you can see by the history of what happened to me here at the Museum.

SZ: What was your perception of that department's place in the Museum hierarchy at the time you came?

WG: In what sense? Well, I don't think there was any question that painting and sculpture were the "big guys." Photography, film and architecture and design, well, they were much more than tolerated, but not quite the "same league."

SZ: No, but you mentioned before that it was your perception that had things gotten really tough that that would have been....

WG: That was a speculation of mine.

SZ: Yes, but it says something about how you saw things or thought of them.

WG: Yes. Maybe I overstated that, but there's no question that painting and sculpture was the major department and attracted most of the trustees. It was the "big time," so to speak. The other departments were important because Alfred and René told them they were. Some of the trustees were directly, personally very interested, but they were not considered quite in the same league. I think that's fair to say. The directors

of each of those departments, to varying degrees, had uphill fights to keep their departments in the forefront. You know some of the various personalities. [Edward] Steichen, of course, was such a hero that you couldn't possibly say yes or no to him; he was a kind of mythical figure almost and had such connections and influence that I think the photography department was always okay. Then John Szarkowski, when he came in, really fought very hard to develop that department, and each year he became more articulate and firm in his beliefs. Then the film department, I was here during both Willard van Dyke's and Mary Lea Bandy's tenure. I can't remember the year that Willard came, but I think the department was somewhat floating in terms of direction the first years I was here. Earlier, there had been Iris Barry and Richard Griffith as directors. I think he was not well, but, the first positive thing that I recall was Willard's arrival. Willard fought like a terrier to build up the department, no question. He was very good.

SZ: I know that photography had one or two trustees who were very solidly behind it.

WG: Absolutely, and architecture and design did too, and film did, too.

SZ: Who were those trustees for architecture and design, can you remember?

WG: Philip Johnson, of course. Let me see, who else? [Philip L.] Goodwin, he was still here of course, and then, later, people like Gordon Bunshaft. René, of course, was strongly for it. Alfred would defend the department, there's no question, but his heart was in painting and sculpture; most of his energies went in to fight in that area. Let's see, who else?

SZ: Wally Harrison was on the board.

WG: He was not that active in the department. Part of the problem, I think, was that the department did not hold Wally Harrison in as high esteem as an architect as some of the others, and that was difficult. It was always an effort to find things of Wally's to show, let's put it that way. I remember one of the exhibitions we did while I was here was of a church in Stamford, Connecticut. Arthur was very happy to find a building of Harrison's that he really thought was good. Harrison was definitely on the board and prominent. William Burden defended the architecture and design department, or the architecture section. He was a patron of architecture as well as painting and sculpture. He hired Philip Johnson to do work for him, and he liked airplanes. He would, in his own way, defend the department. Those are the people I mainly remember, but then, I wasn't involved in trustee meetings or acquisitions meetings when I was in the architecture and design department because I wasn't really in charge of a collection. Arthur would present it and then Connie and Greta would come for a specific few minutes to defend a particular object.

SZ: How well did you know Alfred?

WG: Not too well. Alfred was very aloof. He wasn't unfriendly, but Alfred was a very difficult person to get to know. By the time I came here, Alfred was very much director of the collections. He had his coterie of people around here. I think Philip and Arthur probably said good things about me, so Alfred said, well, fine, he's okay, but we didn't really have much communication, and I found it somewhat difficult to communicate with him anyway. Alfred was intimidating in his own way. Then, as time went on and my role at the Museum changed, I was much more closely identified with working with René, so that didn't help the situation.

SZ: That's an interesting comment, because I get all kinds of views on what that relationship was like.

WG: You mean the Barr-d'Harnoncourt relationship.

SZ: Yes.

WG: Well, of course I see it more from d'Harnoncourt's point of view. I think that Alfred was really the father of the institution, wrote the constitution for it, so to speak, and did the major collecting of everything, particularly painting and sculpture. He's responsible for the fact that there are architecture and design, film and photography departments. When he resigned, he resigned under pressure, and from what I can gather, it was primarily because of tension with certain trustees. He was a scholar and not a great administrator, and as the Museum grew and as some of the trustees also wanted to flex their muscles a little bit, Alfred may have seemed quite intimidating to them. Although I think all of them held him in the greatest esteem (and he also helped many of them to build their collections), the rich don't like to be told what to do. René was a very different kind of figure. He was extremely diplomatic but not in any sense obsequious. He was brought up in the European courtier tradition, and he saw himself in that role. His friendship with Nelson [Rockefeller] and their mutual interest in primitive art was very important. René was very adept with the trustees. He was brought in by Nelson after Alfred had been kind of squirreled away. According to what I heard and what René told me, René realized that Alfred was an extraordinary asset to the institution in terms of his knowledge and brilliance. Alfred really didn't want to go anywhere else, this was his life, and René was the one who really pressed for the establishment of the collections department with Alfred as its head. Now, I'm hearing it from René's point of view, but I think that Alfred always felt, not that René had usurped his position, directly, personally, but that he had been forced out and that this other person was in the role where he should be. I also think that at any moment Alfred was more relaxed about

this issue, his wife [Margaret Scolari Barr] was there fanning the conflict. It was tense. René was constantly working with Alfred, trying to work it out. He was marvelous about it, and I don't think there's any question that he genuinely admired Alfred, but he found him very difficult to work with. They were such entirely different types of personalities, there's no question about it, and Alfred was very stubborn, stubborn and often evasive.

SZ: You got to know René, obviously, very well.

WG: Very well. It started when it was announced that there was going to be a new building program, for the east wing, the first of the additions (other than the "21" building). It was in my mind, it was in Arthur's and it was in René's mind, almost all at once, that having worked for Philip Johnson, being an architect and René needing someone on staff to be a liaison, that I would be a logical candidate for it. I had already, at that point, although I was still in the architecture department, started working with other curators on installations and exhibitions. Arthur let me do this, but I think he had reservations about my doing it.

SZ: Why?

WG: Well, I think he wanted me to stay in the department, and I was becoming restless to move on.

SZ: So you were doing it as a learning thing? They saw that you had a good eye?

WG: Yes, and I was good at installation and that I could work well with others. I worked with Peter Selz on several shows; I worked with Bill Lieberman on installations; I worked with Victor D'Amico; and I worked often with Frank O'Hara. I did many

exhibition installations, and I loved it. As I wasn't doing very much architectural work (I was doing a little on the outside, but not a great deal), this was an outlet and something I could sort of get my teeth into. So in a way I had already started moving out of the department.

SZ: When this thing came up.

WG: Yes.

SZ: I think this is a good place to stop.

WG: Yes.

END TAPE 1, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: WILDER GREEN (WG)

INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)

**LOCATION: THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
NEW YORK CITY**

DATE: OCTOBER 21, 1991

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1

SZ: In my asking you for some of your recollections and impressions of people at the Museum at that time, I did not bring up the name of Monroe Wheeler, and I'd like you to do that for me if you could.

WG: Monroe Wheeler was a very important part of the staff at that point. I wouldn't say so in a curatorial or everyday administrative way, but he was a roving diplomat for the Museum. A very charming, very polished, very diplomatic man. He, titularly, headed the exhibitions and publications departments but had very good people working for him so that they pretty well ran on their own, I would say. Monroe operated quite independently, traveled extensively for the Museum and moved in a very elegant strata of the New York art and social worlds, as well as the intellectual world. I had a good relationship with him. He was always very kind to me, and supportive. Later on, I took over some of his functions when I became director of exhibitions. He always joked and said that it took two people to fill his place, because someone else became responsible for MoMA publications. At any rate, I always had a very cordial relationship with him, lunched with him, even visited a couple of times at his house in the country. I think that pretty well covers it, unless you have more specific questions.

SZ: That's nice, but what I'd also like is a little bit of an understanding of how, at that time, he fit into the hierarchy and the way decisions were made here--what you knew about that, anyway.

WG: There was an undertow of resentment and envy and competitiveness that went on among some of the hierarchy. For example, I don't think Alfred Barr thought particularly highly of Monroe. I think he felt that his attitude and his life were not very serious. I don't think he had enormous respect for his judgment on works of art. On the other hand, Alfred had a bit of a chip on his shoulder about many things at that time. It really was you're either on my side or you're not.

SZ: I guess what you're saying is that he didn't feel Monroe Wheeler was on his side.

WG: I think he felt Monroe was not his enemy, but not on his side. On the other hand, Monroe treated Alfred with his usual diplomatic finesse and complimented him, not only to his face, but to other people, saying how important Alfred was and so forth and so on, but there was a somewhat tense undercurrent there. René d'Harnoncourt, I think, regarded Monroe from a much more distant and objective viewpoint. René regarded many of the Museum staff and trustees almost like a court, in the sense that each person had their niche or role; he was not plus or minus about people, unless they were obviously incompetent or destructive or negative. I think he thought Monroe was very useful to the institution in terms of certain areas he functioned in. Again, I don't think he held him in the highest respect, but, on the other hand, I think he realized exactly what his attributes were and how they fit into the whole scheme. Also, Monroe was brought in and was well entrenched and very close to a number of the trustees, no question about that. He was a good friend of theirs, moved with them socially and charmed them. He was very adept at that. And

an institution as complex as The Museum of Modern Art was then and is now, needed that. It wasn't a simple little country outfit by any means; it was a complex organization, and Monroe had many sophisticated friends here and abroad very useful to MoMA.

SZ: What seems to come up a lot is that there was, as it developed, an increasing sharing of power and that that caused a lot of....

WG: Sharing of power.... Alfred had his world. Porter was building his department and his camp and his own little museum, in a way, not a museum that collected but a museum of activities. Each curatorial department was, to one degree or another, building its own world. Then Monroe was extending his world, but Monroe's ambitions were not curatorial in any way. His ambitions were, I would say, social, diplomatic--more in that area. René was very adept at balancing all these elements.

SZ: Do you think Monroe would have liked to have been director of the Museum?

WG: I think maybe at one point, but I don't think later on.

SZ: By the time you got here.

WG: No, no. With all due respect, Monroe was quite lazy [LAUGHING], and I think he realized that it would have been a very stressful job. Certainly he "had it made," and I assume he was very content. He had a position. He had entree to all the trustees and his title carried weight outside the Museum. So he was fine, he did well. But I must say, he was always constructive about supporting the activities at the Museum and supporting the various curators--certainly on the surface and to the outside world. If there were some tensions, they were usually worked out inside. For

example, Monroe and Arthur [Drexler] were really oil and water. They were just very different people. Alfred and Monroe were in some areas quite competitive, but I think Alfred was, underneath it all, actually disdainful of Monroe.

SZ: Because of the lack of intellectual depth?

WG: Yes, I guess so. That is not to say that Monroe Wheeler was not an extremely intelligent man, well-versed and had, in his own way, a good eye, but he was just a very different kind of personality. Alfred was embittered, generally, I think. It was felt throughout. With René it was more of a real tug because I think underneath it all Alfred had a great deal of respect for René, even a certain appreciation. He knew that René was the one that went to the trustees and pushed very hard for Alfred to be director of the collections. From what I've heard, after Alfred had been forced out of his post as director, he wouldn't leave the Museum; he just moved into an office somewhere and stayed. I don't know whether he was being paid a salary or if he had any specific role(s).

SZ: I think Russell Lynes wrote that there was also the issue of the fact that most of the staff was so behind Alfred.

WG: Yes, that's true. I don't think there's much question of that. Or at least many of the staff. I think they were shocked, from what I gather. I wasn't here then.

SZ: But you knew René pretty well.

WG: Yes.

SZ: Do you think that he realized that he needed Alfred, or did he feel it was the

diplomatic thing to do?

WG: I think he felt the Museum needed Alfred. René's respect for Alfred's knowledge--his genius, really--was unqualified. He might have thought that Alfred was stronger in certain areas and weaker in others, but I don't think there was any question that René believed Alfred was extraordinary, if not a genius, and that for the Museum to lose him would be a great loss. I don't think it was diplomatic; I think he was very happy to find a constructive solution, that he could give Alfred a position of dignity. I don't think he ever did it just to deal with the problem. It did deal with the problem, yes, but simply to find a niche for Alfred for purely diplomatic or strategic purposes, no.

SZ: Although it's said that he was a wonderful diplomat.

WG: Oh, no question about that. The way he brought it about was very diplomatic, but the fact that he did it, and his respect for Alfred, was beyond diplomacy. That showed, I think, great wisdom, and it eventually proved to be absolutely correct, what he did. He may have also felt that it was important to hold the staff together.

SZ: That's also certainly implied. You just mentioned Porter.

WG: We talked about Porter.

SZ: Did we talk about what happened to him, or did I ask you what happened? I don't think I did.

WG: What happened to Porter, at least as I saw it, is that the politicians began to get more active. I'm trying to remember what year Porter actually left the Museum.

SZ: That summer meeting in Maine was in 1959, and I think it actually took him a little more than a year to leave.

WG: I remember René going on and on about what the name of the International Council should be. Should it be the International Council at The Museum of Modern Art or the International Council of The Museum of Modern Art. René, who I think almost saw Porter as his possible successor at certain times....

SZ: You think René thought that?

WG: Yes, he actually mentioned it. He felt Porter had the kind of intelligence and devotion.... But it got to the point that René felt very strongly that it must be of The Museum of Modern Art, and he felt Porter was leaning it toward at The Museum of Modern Art. You gather the distinction. I think it just got to the point that the consensus was that Porter was sailing his own ship too much. I think Porter was kind of blockheaded about it in certain ways, and stubborn.

SZ: You mean he didn't sort of see the storm brewing?

WG: He must have seen it coming, but Porter is an extraordinary man. He's a very principled person, and sometimes people like that can also be a little blockheaded. Even to this day when I talk to Porter, his versions are the same, the same villains, etc. There's no question that there was a lot of politics going on. Arthur Drexler was in the midst of it, spurred on by Elizabeth Shaw, who was the director of publicity and a charming but kind of machiavellian woman in many ways. Arthur had decided that maybe he should be the next director of The Museum of Modern Art, and Liz was politicking for him. I never could understand how Arthur, with all his intelligence,

could have those illusions. He knew what the job entailed, he knew Alfred, he knew René, he knew all the other people, and with all his intelligence and with all his abilities, that would not have been a role for him. He would have been terrible.

SZ: The directorship wasn't up, but what you're saying is that if René saw Porter as a successor, that could have....

WG: The politicking had already started. René was going to retire; I think he announced it in '59? Was that when Porter left?

SZ: In '61 he left.

WG: Well, maybe I am jumping the gun a little bit. Maybe Arthur's actual campaign for the directorship started later, because René died in '68, and he left in '68 of course. I guess the politicking started by Liz and Arthur about Porter started earlier, and then, later, they again joined forces about the directorship.

SZ: Tell me if this sounds right: that there was an issue that Porter didn't use Liz's services, that Porter was using Helen Franc to do a lot of his publicity.

WG: As I recall, he did have his own publicity person, he had his own guest curators of photography, painting and sculpture, architecture and design exhibitions; he had his own registrar. It really was a separate entity, and it overlapped some with the Museum's, but it was going more and more in its separate direction. Porter's complaint was always that the registrars never gave him equal priority, and so he would get his own. With Liz I think it was just that he wasn't using her publicity services. Liz was very interested in power. She wanted power and she, in her position, wielded the getting of publicity as a tool. She had her favorites curatorially,

and several of the curators courted her because she had a skill at getting publicity and would favor them. It was not a happy situation in many ways.

SZ: One of those curators for whom she worked especially well was Arthur?

WG: Yes, and different people at different times. She played up to Alfred, she played up to each of them in a different way. She did it to René too. What the antagonism between Porter and Liz was, I don't know. I think Liz probably realized that Porter saw through her, and yet he socially would entertain her. It was just a tense field at that time, not unlike a lot of other places.

SZ: Were you at that Maine meeting?

WG: No. I was still basically, at that point in '59, in Arthur's department. I heard all about it from Arthur.

SZ: You did hear about it.

WG: Yes. His edited version of it. He didn't really tell me too much, just how tense it had gotten. I heard that Arthur had been quieted down many times at the meeting. He didn't tell me that, but I gathered from others that it really got quite out of hand at moments. It was at the [William A.M.] Burdens's place in Maine.

SZ: And Porter's reaction?

WG: I never really talk to him much about it. I think Porter feels he was very mistreated, and I think in many ways he was. But, I think he also has a slight blind spot that he was or seemed to be building his own empire, seeing his own ambitions clearly,

which is not inhuman. So even to this day I think he feels victimized by the whole situation and that he really was doing what was important to be done. And, I think many people would agree with that, that if he hadn't stepped out on his own and been more independent, he would have been more of a tool of the curatorial staff and would have not built the kind of programs that he did. I think that's true. His ambitions there had a very positive effect. I don't think, for instance, that the big Abstract Expressionist show that went to Europe and created such a stir would have been done by the curatorial staff without Porter's pushing for it and raising money for it.

SZ: That raises an interesting question, because when one looks back on the history of the Museum, that is clearly....

WG: ...a very important moment. Absolutely. Absolutely, there's no question. To a degree, some of the tension that went on was good; it brought out a lot of very positive accomplishments. There was no question that Porter ran a very vibrant program, and after he left, it never was the same again.

SZ: But that was a decision, clearly, that was made, that that was the trade-off. Am I right?

WG: I'm not sure everyone was aware that that would be the trade-off. I'm not sure. That would be a very interesting thing to confront people directly with, whether they realized that. [PAUSE]

SZ: I had asked you, in talking about Porter's departure, we were talking about the trade-off and what that meant, and then I threw out an idea that the founding of the International Program really came, in great measure, from Nelson Rockefeller's

interest....

WG: And René's. They were great buddies.

SZ: ...and that I think it was about the same time he became governor that Porter started running into trouble.

WG: I don't really know. I think much of Porter's trouble was simply internal, by building his own program so strongly and independently. I cite again this issue that came up of the International Council at or of The Museum of Modern Art. I think that's it in a nutshell. Porter had obviously walked on a lot of curatorial toes here, and the department heads were very protective of their own turf. So I think it was very difficult. Then there was a lot of running up and down the corridors and politicking about it as well by other people.

SZ: He didn't leave immediately after this meeting.

WG: No. I don't think it was exactly resolved. It's really difficult for me to chart back exactly the whole sequence. He didn't leave for about a year?

SZ: A year and a half, I think. I know it was in 1961 that he left, as I recall.

WG: Maybe René thought he could resolve it. René was a great one for letting time heal many conflicts. Sometimes that meant things drifted but sometimes that meant that things did get cured, or at least patched. Maybe he thought Porter would change and adjust to it. He also admired and liked Porter a great deal and I don't think was anxious to set him adrift. Porter, also, is not someone to walk out in a huff. He might have huffed and puffed a lot and talked a lot about it, but he wasn't one to just leave.

He also probably had strong support from certain trustees. When he left, he traveled for a year and had a number of little projects; I think half of them were real and half of them were made up for him. Then, when he came back, he was not formally working for a long time; then, finally, he went to be head of the JDR 3rd Fund. But he was adrift for a while in that sense. Whether d'Harnoncourt and the trustees and the rest of the staff foresaw the kind of decline in the vibrancy of the International Program with Porter's departure is hard to say. I'm sure they expected it to have a hiatus. It was really too early historically for it to shift down because American influence in the art world was still extraordinarily important. If it had quieted down a decade or so later, it might have run parallel with history, but it was too early. I don't think funding it was a fundamental problem. René and the trustees and others found members of the International Council very useful, financially, diplomatically, internationally, socially, in all ways. It was a very wealthy group of people; they contributed heavily to the fund-raising campaigns as well as to the International Council programs. There were very good reasons to keep them closely aligned and working on the Museum's behalf.

SZ: Just one last question on this. Porter resigned?

WG: I guess he resigned. A formality. I don't think it was a voluntary resignation, and I don't know how René actually handled that. That may have been one of the reasons it was a year and a half. I think he may have been hopeful Porter would go to another job.

SZ: After having experienced this attack in Maine.

WG: Yes. And there's no question that the "[Young] Turks," as they were called, were very hostile about it, and very unkind. It was very vicious at times. I don't know how

many descriptions you've heard of the actual event. Is there anyone that's still alive that was there at the time that you've talked to directly, or not?

SZ: I think so. Russell Lynes said that Arthur was then surprised that Porter left or was forced out. He was surprised at the denouement. Do you think that's accurate?

WG: You see, I would have been out of Arthur's department at that time.

SZ: Yes, you were.

WG: I think Arthur may have been, well, surprised by the denouement. I don't know what he really expected in terms of Porter's actions. I think Russell Lynes may have been correct that Arthur was, by that point, surprised and maybe even a little guilty. Arthur had a good, strong sense of moral guilt on his shoulders.

SZ: He did.

WG: Oh, indeed. Sometimes, when he was at his most articulate and angry, there was guilt behind it, in one form or another. That may be the case. I think another thing's important about Russell Lynes's book on the Museum: all the appointments of who Russell talked to were basically set up by Liz Shaw, and I think she steered him. For instance--and maybe this sounds petty--but I was never interviewed by Russell Lynes. I think even if it had been a short interview, it would have been appropriate. And there were many others who were not. I think it's an edited history of the Museum--and not Russell Lynes's fault, but how he was guided.

SZ: That's interesting, because I think the allure of that book is that it was unauthorized, but you're telling me that, in fact, that's not entirely the case.

WG: It was unauthorized, formally, but he certainly did interview some people and didn't interview others, and I think a lot of it was shaped. Maybe he turned to Liz for advice and guidance on it and she was only too ready to have it written as she saw things.

SZ: In the end, it is the only thing.

WG: It's the only one existing, yes, it is, but....

SZ: It's time.

WG: It's time, and it will be interesting, too, to have it written about from a different vantage point.

SZ: You moved in '61.

WG: I guess it was '61. That was four years after I came to the Museum.

SZ: Maybe we can just fill in a little bit. I know that the fire was in '58.

WG: The day of the fire I was in Philadelphia with Arthur Drexler, seeing Louis Kahn.

SZ: So you missed it.

WG: We missed it. We heard about it and raced back, and there it was, puffing away.

SZ: You raced back the same day?

WG: Oh, yes. We never finished our appointment there, we came rushing back.

SZ: Because you were working on the show.

WG: Maybe we were. Maybe Arthur had come down with me to talk with Kahn about some of the final things I had selected, or to see the building. The show was a one-building show; it was the Richards Medical Research building, which Kahn had just completed and which was one of the first big buildings that he did in which his architectural theories were demonstrated. A very powerful building. We were down there the day of the fire and then came back. That was in '58 and I moved in '61, so I was in the department, then, for two or three more years.

SZ: I think what happened as a result of the fire was the whole expansion was thought of in much different terms.

WG: I think the expansion was necessary all along, and then the two houses next door became free. The Prentice Houses were left to the Museum, and so that property was available for the Museum to expand into. Before that, Mrs. Prentice was alive and couldn't be dislodged, but I think it was planned that they would come to the Museum eventually. At least all the Rockefeller brothers were working on it. (Mr. Prentice was an old codger. He once described himself as living between God on one side and Mammon on the other. That was his attitude about modern art.) Then, when the houses became available, the whole idea of expansion could go into gear.

SZ: It was a twenty-five-million-dollar, thirtieth-anniversary drive.

WG: Yes. I was soon so immersed, but not really in the drive. The money came in, I guess, quite easily at that time.

SZ: How did that all happen, that you got immersed in the building?

WG: There was going to be an expansion. Philip Johnson was going to be the architect. As I told you, I'd worked for Philip Johnson and admired his work and had a good rapport with him. René, I think, saw that he needed someone to work with him as a liaison with Philip Johnson, and with the rest of the curatorial staff on the building. I was an obvious choice. I don't know whether he even offered Arthur the job, but, if he did, I believe it would have been in a way to simply offer it as a token or as a courtesy.

SZ: Arthur wasn't an architect, anyway.

WG: He wasn't an architect. René also knew, I think, that Arthur's own ideas about the building would run into conflict with Philip's, as some of mine and René's did, too. I think René wanted to have a big role in it and saw me as a younger, probably more malleable person to work with in that role, which was very accurate. It all happened very quickly. The idea came to me, and, obviously, Arthur and René must have talked about it, because then it just kind of happened. I was thrilled, because I thought it would be fascinating to do. And indeed it was. And it meant that I would be working very closely with René, and, as a result, we got to know each other very well.

SZ: He had a lot of influence on it?

WG: Yes. Sometimes good, sometimes not.

SZ: You'll have to give me some examples.

WG: He played architect a little bit, sometimes in very good ways, in that he kept Philip away from some of his nuttier ideas [LAUGHING], and Johnson could get off on a track and not really pay attention to things a lot. I think the complications of the façade in the east wing are partially a result of René's complicating the issue, let me put it that way.

SZ: Which complications are you referring to?

WG: The rather elaborate and complex way of using steel in those complicated curved forms of the façades, which was very costly and complex to assemble. From a planning viewpoint, there wasn't much you could do but directly expand the gallery spaces into the new space. Then the architectural decisions involved the two façades: whether they would be like the original museum, whether they would be like the old "21" building was (did you ever see pictures of that?) or, would the façades be totally new in design.

SZ: It was here when I was here. Philip did that, too [the "21" building].

WG: Yes, he did, and that was a steel façade. It was thought then that probably that building ["21"] would remain, and that this would be a contrasting addition.

SZ: So it would be the old building and then they would have two very distinct-looking additions on either side of it.

WG: Exactly.

SZ: That was Philip's idea?

WG: It sort of developed. I think we all felt historically it shouldn't just be a continuation of the same façade. That wasn't the climate of architectural thinking at that time.

SZ: These are all important issues, but before we go on, do you know how it was decided that Philip would do the expansion?

WG: I don't think any other architect was considered, unlike the later expansion, when [César] Pelli did the whole thing [the Museum and tower], although another firm was brought in to do some overall planning at first. I think Philip's nose was very out of joint about this. He probably hoped that was going to come to him, too. For this east addition, I don't think there was any choice. He'd done the "21" building, so why shouldn't he do this one? I never heard the subject of considering another architect was even introduced. The only thing I remember thinking and discussing with Arthur Drexler at one time, was having Kahn do it.

SZ: Because you liked his work so.

WG: Yes, and we thought it would be a bold move for the Museum to do that.

SZ: But Philip had just finished the Seagram Building, is that right? I think that was in '61.

WG: With van der Rohe, right. But van der Rohe really designed that building and Philip did a lot of the interiors, and, of course, the restaurant. No question, that's Philip. The Seagram offices and the Four Seasons restaurant are very definitely Philip's aesthetic, no question.

END TAPE 2, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 2

WG: I can tell you a little bit about the evolution of the design. I spent a lot of time with Philip on it. At the outset, it was pretty well decided that the east wing was just going to be a continuation of the gallery spaces. There was no question of any changes in gallery ceiling heights. The only things to "play with," as Philip would say, were the room on the top, and the staircase leading up to the upper terrace, above the gallery wing. The restaurant was going to stay where it was, upstairs--remodeled, but essentially the same.

SZ: And the cafe was in the old Whitney building, as I remember.

WG: Yes, down on the ground floor. That was opened to the garden, and the members' penthouse was just refurbished. You went through that into the big two-story room on top of the east wing, which was intended to be an entertaining room, with two one-story private meeting rooms and a trustees room adjacent to it. The large room had complicated vaults and elaborate lighting. The façade that was originally proposed for the east wing building (which was my first choice) was to be a very simple structural reflection of what was going on inside. Because structurally it was a clear span, very large steel beams (with glass filled in between) were to span from one side to the other at each floor level. In materials (glass and steel), it would be harmonious with the "21" building, which was very vertical, but here the emphasis would be horizontal. At least that was my thinking on it. Philip backed this idea; at least, he seemed to. It was designed and presented to René, and I think René felt it was too plain. He kept saying how it didn't relate to the existing structures and didn't have any texture.

SZ: The "21" building was sort of a....

WG: ...mishmash, in a way. It was Philip doing a Mies façade. He was interested in the façade, the lobby and his very handsome office--the rest of the building was kind of "mushed" together. It wasn't very well-thought-out. René obviously felt that this first design for the east wing was too plain. I don't remember his exact language, but, obviously, the kind of direct structural aesthetic did not sit with him comfortably. The façade design went through scheme after scheme after scheme. The interior planning proceeded quite directly, because that fell into place. But, the façades and the large garden stairway leading to the upper terrace went through endless revisions, with René very involved. As a Viennese, he was particularly concerned about the staircase, and indeed, he did have a very keen knowledge of all sorts of historical staircases, which led us to try seemingly endless schemes.

SZ: You're talking about stairs for the public?

WG: The stairs that led from the lower garden to the upper terrace. There were more schemes than you can imagine about how those stairs would work and what material they'd be in. It finally got boiled down to the existing plan, which I think was a pretty satisfactory solution, except for the railing, which I have always found awkward and arbitrary. René involved himself a lot in such considerations. He was obviously having a very good time. He was playing client and royal prince and everything; he was having a very good time. Philip wanted to please him and we all wanted to bring it together into a good solution, but it did go back and forth and back and forth. There was also the pressure to get it designed, because they wanted to go ahead with the building and we couldn't fiddle around forever on it. On another level, there was another struggle going on, because each of the curatorial department heads saw this as the opportunity for their department to expand and get more space. I

was in endless meetings trying to balance those aspirations within limited space. Philip stayed out of that pretty much. René was in it when crises came up. Alfred was also involved, because he wanted as much space for the painting and sculpture collections as possible, so it was a struggle putting the puzzle together. There were in the end many compromises.

SZ: Some good, some bad, I assume.

WG: Yes.

SZ: What do you think worked well and what was a mistake?

WG: I think the first-floor galleries, as temporary exhibition spaces, considering the configuration that was forced on us, worked pretty well and could keep the program going. On the upper floors I think there were too many instances that you had to go through the painting and sculpture galleries to get to the other curatorial departments' galleries, the locations of which I thought were very arbitrary. For instance, the drawings and photography galleries got pushed way east into spaces with the highest ceilings, which was illogical. Actually, I ended up designing the interior of those galleries, with the linen walls. But it was a kind of forced way. They could have had galleries with lower ceilings and the same floor space, which would have been much better. Many of these decisions had to do with Alfred's predilections for the painting and sculpture galleries, which everyone ultimately deferred to. There was also a question of where the architectural galleries would go. I can't even remember now, exactly, how that all came out. I remember the struggles, and I got in the middle of a lot of those.

SZ: I was going to ask you if you often found yourself in the middle.

WG: Absolutely. At that point, one was young and resilient, so it was fine.

SZ: So it wasn't too difficult.

WG: No, and I always had René's support. In other words, if it really got too frustrating, he'd calm me down. So that was reassuring. I talked to Arthur a lot about it, too, although Arthur was halfway sympathetic and halfway campaigning for his own department, so I had to sort that out. The most difficult person, in a way, to talk to was Alfred, because he just would not discuss it. He was very difficult to communicate with.

SZ: Because he felt he knew what he wanted and that was it?

WG: He did. He also always prefaced each conversation with, "Architects are always trying to force you into a position." His design for the painting and sculpture galleries when they reopened was bizarre in its complexities. But I think René felt that he just had to turn that over to Alfred and not get involved in it. I did work with him some and persuaded him to simplify a few things that had really gotten so complex. But, basically, those were his galleries and he designed them in kind of a complicated version of what he always had done.

SZ: When we're saying "those were his galleries," you're not just talking about painting and sculpture.

WG: I'm talking about painting and sculpture collections galleries. The temporary exhibition galleries were going to be used interdepartmentally, and they were the first floor.

SZ: There was the new print gallery.

WG: There was a new print gallery, there was a new drawings gallery, there was a new photography gallery, painting and sculpture....

SZ: But those other galleries, Alfred didn't really [install those]?

WG: No. He had thoughts about where they should be located, but then once that was settled, he then stayed out of how they actually were installed. René worked very closely with John Szarkowski on the design of the photography gallery, I worked very closely with Bill Lieberman on the drawings gallery and Arthur designed the architecture and design galleries, of course. I worked some with the installation of the sculpture collection. I worked a lot on installation with Lieberman, and we seemed to work well. Since he liked my work, I essentially designed the galleries for circulation, and then he'd install within that context.

SZ: So that must have been interesting for you.

WG: It was, very interesting. The whole experience was. Then we started with contractors, and I worked a lot with the contractors, and there were the inevitable complications.

SZ: How were they chosen?

WG: It was the George Fuller Company. They had done a lot of work for the Rockefellers, and I think the Rockefellers thought they'd give the Museum a square deal. I think there was a lot of talk about their doing this a kind of a favor, so they were selected

at the beginning on a negotiated contract basis. I think they did a pretty good job, but I don't think they bent over backwards. Once they had the job, they weren't going to give the Rockefeller boys a gift! I think their feeling was, The Rockefellers are going to pay for it, why should we pay for it? That kind of thing. So that was a kind of a tussle back and forth. Then there were changes and costs went up. They started the construction quite quickly, before everything was settled, and a lot of decisions were made along the way.

SZ: Was that difficult?

WG: That was difficult, because a lot of people had to clear it and then the costs had to be arrived at, and there's nothing a contractor likes better than being in that kind of position.

SZ: What was that process like? Did you have to take things to the board a lot?

WG: No, not really. René handled the board on it--René and Philip together, because Philip was a trustee. I really had very little contact with the board on it, if any, as I remember, other than talking about it as we'd encounter each other.

SZ: Was the board heavily involved? You said that there were decisions that were changed along the way.

WG: Or that had not been made. To a degree, the board participated, but not a great deal. I do remember one very amusing meeting. [Ivan] Chermayeff had been hired to do all the graphics in the building, and he presented at a board meeting the idea for the vertical sign on the front of the building. There was a model there, and all the trustees flopped their heads this way to see if they would be able to read the sign

[LAUGHING]. It was just kind of a caricature of the whole thing. There was a great argument about that, and, finally, Bill Burden, I think, was president and he swore that he'd never be able to read the sign, but it went through. I actually thought it was an excellent solution.

SZ: I wanted to ask you also about the decision to change the entrance, because that had been a very distinctive part of the Goodwin building.

WG: Absolutely--the curve and everything. There were practical reasons. Something had to be done with the old lobby. It was not large enough to handle the crowds or the facilities that were necessary to be there. Although there were certain forces that were very strong about keeping the old lobby, it was obvious that had to be changed, because it wasn't functioning anymore. Finally, this new entrance and new canopy were accepted, with the much-enlarged lobby. I don't know if you remember the old lobby, but it was very intimate, it was distinctive and very much a piece of '30s curvilinear architecture, wonderful for its time, but the Museum was much too big and had to have bookstores and coat rooms and information desks of a scale that the old lobby could never have contained it. Another aspect of the lobby design that was much discussed (and I was involved in a lot of this with René) was the view through to the garden. I don't know if you remember, but a lot of the ground-floor space in the back was taken up with the changing exhibition galleries. Inevitably, the glass walls to the garden were sealed off, which resulted in a very narrow view. The garden was a very important part of the whole physical setup of the institution. It was very respected and liked and used. One of the other big arguments for changing the lobby was that it could open right through to the garden, and that would be a dramatic and effective use of it. As soon as the lobby was changed, then the whole issue of keeping the curvilinear canopy became redundant. But the façade of the original building was kept, above the ground level.

SZ: Was there a discussion about that?

WG: There was a discussion at one point about changing it, yes, resheeting it, taking away the glass, because the glass that was there was always covered over inside. It was, in effect, almost rebuilt, because structurally it needed so much work, but it was aesthetically kept the same.

SZ: You talked a little bit about it, but it really changed the garden, too, this expansion.

WG: Yes, it did, because the garden had gone all the way on one level to the east end. Then it was decided to raise the eastern section for a gallery underneath. The square footage of the garden was to be the same, but it would be on two levels now. The rest of the garden was in effect rebuilt at that time, too. The old stone paving had not really been put on a good, firm base, and the wall was built and raised.

SZ: Did you do all the scheduling, having to work with the Museum when...?

WG: I did a lot of that, in terms of working out between the contractors and the Museum when staff had to move out of their spaces and where they went. Yes, during the course of construction. I was also responsible for being in touch with the contractors, to try to keep them on schedule and find out what decisions they needed when, etc. Philip pretty much withdrew himself from those daily tasks, which was perfectly understandable. René also had many other things to do, so I'd often have to really dig information and decisions out of him, and if I felt there was a conflict with what Philip wanted, try to get that resolved. And then there were the various curators and department heads, too.

SZ: Were there any other issues that came up?

WG: Costs.

SZ: I was thinking more of where there were aesthetic differences.

WG: The main aesthetic problems were the façade of the east wing, the garden stairs, the lobby and the rooms on the top floor of the east wing.

SZ: You mean the trustees room.

WG: The trustees room, the meeting rooms, but most importantly, the large two-story Founders' Room, as it was called, where, I think, finally, everyone let Philip have his fling.

SZ: His fling in terms of...?

WG: The space of the room. Remember the big room there? That was really his.

SZ: Yes, but do you mean the fact that it was that large?

WG: Not that it was that large, but that it was decorated and designed in that way. I never thought the room was very successful, frankly. Philip wanted to do a grand room. That was it. It never really got much use. It was a funny room. You could have big dinner parties there, but then it stood empty a lot of the time. I very much remember what my vision of what the room should be.

SZ: What was that?

WG: My vision is that it was going to be on top, that it should be a big, tall room, that it should be skylighted, that it should have a stone floor and that it should be like simulating, almost, an outdoor courtyard and have sculpture and plants and the lighting system that could be used to change the atmosphere of it for entertaining, and maybe, if it was possible, some water. I had visions that it should be a modern version of a big, traditional museum room, and then the other rooms off it. Philip was playing with curved ceilings at that time, so we got the curved walls [LAUGHING].

SZ: That's right, isn't it? I was just thinking: Lincoln Center and the Amon Carter [Museum], and yes, he was. So you got them. [LAUGHTER]

WG: So we got curved ceilings. I don't know whether we're lucky or not.

SZ: Tell me about the opening.

WG: Of course, everything was late. Finally, there was an opening scheduled. It got delayed a couple of times, as I remember, and then finally it was firmly scheduled; we had to. Then there was a frantic effort to get everything done, for the contractors to get everything done. Alfred, I remember, was driving everyone crazy because he couldn't make up his mind about the installation, and he finally reinstalled the whole collection in six weeks. It was miraculous, but in the process everyone was biting their nails. Then there were all the other departments to get finished and installed, and the garden to get back in place.

SZ: It was really dug up, the garden?

WG: Oh, yes.

SZ: Not just that part of it, the whole thing?

WG: The whole thing.

SZ: And all the sculpture had been taken out?

WG: Absolutely. Trees had to be put in, sculpture reinstalled. It was a massive job. Lady Bird Johnson was to speak at the opening. (What did she say? Art is a mirror into man's soul? [LAUGHTER]) So she was coming, and that was a big do. Everything had to be finished, so we were all going insane. By the nick of our teeth, we did. I mean, if you opened some doors, it wasn't finished, but... [LAUGHING] Then there were all sorts of things discovered at the last minute; for instance, the air conditioning didn't work in certain galleries, and, finally, after an elaborate tracing down of everything, it was found that a workman had stuffed an old pair of pants in one of the ducts. Things of that sort. [LAUGHTER]

SZ: It was a cheap fix.

WG: It was a cheap fix, and those had to be found out and then the systems tested and everything, and of course they didn't test correctly and there were endless adjustments. It was built too quickly, but there was a tremendous pressure to get it open again. But we did.

SZ: And the party? What do you remember?

WG: I remember Lady Bird Johnson. It was kind of dizzying. I was exhausted by that time. I remember her being there and her statement and all the commotion of everything

going on, and that it came off, that the collections did get installed, but barely. The sculpture gallery, I think, did not; that was closed off, because that was too much to do, and there were other sections that didn't really get done. The strain on the working staff at the Museum was incredible. I always had a very good rapport with the installation people. They were often treated very badly, arrogantly, but I think all came to realize that a number of them were extraordinarily loyal and good and everyone was very dependent on them, particularly during those last hectic weeks. The actual party is kind of a blur.

SZ: It doesn't matter. If there was something there that you remembered....

WG: The only thing I do remember is the morning of the opening, walking around the garden with René, checking everything before the evening's festivities. As we were going back into the building, he said to me in his Austrian accent, "Well, you certainly brought home the bacon." [LAUGHTER]

SZ: Maybe on that one we'll stop for today. Thank you, that was great.

END TAPE 2, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: WILDER GREEN (WG)

INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)

**LOCATION: THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
NEW YORK CITY**

DATE: OCTOBER 31, 1991

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 1

SZ: Wilder, I think last time we stopped with the reopening of the Museum.

WG: That was the spring of '64. Either just before the opening or afterwards or at some point along that way, it became apparent that, although I had been on loan from the Department of Architecture for the building program, I wasn't going to go back to it. It was still a quandary in my mind, whether I really wanted to leave the Museum and take up architecture as a permanent career.

SZ: Because you really hadn't had a chance to do that, had you?

WG: I hadn't really done that, no. I had done some work on the side, some moonlighting work so to speak. I was the architect for the first big Marlborough Gallery here. Have I talked to you about this at all?

SZ: No.

WG: That was interesting. I was asked to do the job by Frank Lloyd, the fairly notorious director of the Marlborough Gallery who came to this country to open the New York

branch of a gallery that had been very, very successful in London. He had two partners. One was David Somerset, who was a British aristocrat who was very instrumental in giving him entree to the wealthy old houses of London. The other partner was a fellow Austrian who now runs the gallery in London whose name slips me at the moment. At any rate, Lloyd and this other partner had been Austrian Jews and had escaped from Austria and gone to England during the war, joined the British army and met, I guess, in the British army, became English citizens and right after the war started what became an extremely successful commercial art gallery. They were also very keen businessmen. They arrived here to open a gallery, which was to be the biggest and the best. I think that they were the first dealers to offer artists guaranteed monthly stipends. They really backed them financially.

SZ: The way [Leo] Castelli did afterwards.

WG: Castelli did later, no question. Marlborough was plucking off the top names, and to the still relatively idealistic New York art world at that time they seemed to be villains. I think they were viewed with some awe, but also as ruthless, which they were. I was asked to design the gallery. I think my affiliation with the Museum certainly entered into Frank Lloyd's decision in choosing me, even though I had done a couple of other private galleries here in New York, one for Howard Wise and one for Charles Slatkin, so that there was work that he'd seen. Well, it was a very, very elaborate project, and I loved doing it, even though I'd never worked for a more ruthless person. I think that René d'Harnoncourt and some of the Museum people here were somewhat unhappy about my doing it; in fact, I'm sure they were.

SZ: Because of conflict of interest?

WG: Possible conflict of interest, but more, they were antagonistic to Frank Lloyd and to

what the gallery was going to represent.

SZ: What was the gallery going to represent here?

WG: Not only was it going to pluck off all the best artists it could, the most prominent artists....

SZ: You're talking about contemporary artists.

WG: Yes, contemporary art, basically, but also they were a new mode of operation in terms of people like Curt Valentin or Sam Kootz or Sidney Janis, all of whom were very, very successful commercial galleries, but Lloyd and the Marlborough Gallery were very outspoken about their commercialism.

SZ: What you're saying is that that was something that didn't sit too well here.

WG: Yes, that didn't sit too well here at the Museum. They couldn't very well tell me not to do it, but I don't think they were too happy about it, the Museum people. On the other hand, in a strange way Marlborough represented a lot that was basically about to change in the American art market anyway, and I don't mean that as a rationalization, but they couldn't have succeeded in doing that unless the time was ripe and the ground was fertile for it. Indeed, the gallery opened with much hoopla and so forth, and a lot of artists joined the ranks there. They did a series of very elaborate shows and published very elaborate catalogues. At the beginning, Frank Lloyd associated with a man by the name of Otto Gerson. Otto Gerson and his wife had been dearly beloved gallery people here, known for their sincerity and their seriousness--mostly a sculpture gallery. Otto, I guess, had died, and Frank Lloyd had his widow join the gallery. At first it was called Marlborough-Gerson but in no

time she'd been absolutely pushed out; she'd been callously used and it was really pretty disgusting. The New York art world was changing very much at that time. The Museum was bigger, we had much more temporary exhibition space, and things were changing in terms of scale in the curatorial departments. I think at that point, when the new building opened, I was, as I said, torn about going on, but René really talked me into staying and offered me the position of director of the exhibitions program. Much as I'd been a director of the building program; I was to be, again, his liaison with the various curatorial departments' changing exhibitions program.

SZ: Hadn't that been something that Monroe Wheeler had responsibility for?

WG: He had. I can't remember exactly the year, but maybe Monroe was leaving at that time; I can't remember the year he left. Monroe had been director of exhibitions and publications.

SZ: I think he retired in 1969, but for a few years before that, from what I understand, you are telling me there was a sort of....

WG: Maybe I had a different, specific title; I can't remember. The records would show it. Whereas Monroe, as I think I mentioned before, was very much a roving diplomat for the Museum in many respects, I became the more activist person in terms of everyday functioning, working with the curators, working with René, and, also, working with Monroe. Because I do remember that, although Monroe was always very polite and helpful to me, and supportive, I don't remember him doing very much work, if you want to know the truth. There was a director of publications, too, a woman. I don't know if you've interviewed her. Her name is Françoise Boaz. She's someone you should consider interviewing. She was head of the publications program here, in effect under Monroe, and did almost all the work and is now on her

own.

SZ: What made you decide that you'd stay? What made you resolve that conflict?

WG: I think that I was really so fascinated in many ways with the Museum, and René was a very persuasive man. There just seemed so much excitement ahead, and I also think I could neatly rationalize to myself that I could delay it another year or two. I also, obviously, was attracted to it, because it was then a very exciting place. The scale, although expanded, was still not as large as it is now, and Alfred was still very active. I don't remember what year John Szarkowski came [1962], but he'd been here for a while. It was a strong cast of curators, which was both fascinating and not always easy. So basically I was in that role in a transitional way until René left, which was '68, so that was for four years, and Monroe didn't retire until the late '60s.

SZ: Alfred retired in '67, René in '68 and Monroe in '69.

WG: I think probably Monroe had become progressively less and less active in the everyday running of things, because I was really working with René and Monroe was away a lot. He had certain shows that he wanted to do and he did those--the [Pierre] Bonnard show, as an example [Bonnard and His Environment, 1964]. I did a very elaborate installation for that show with Monroe. I was doing installations with him, too, as well as with the other curators. It all worked quite smoothly. Then, when René left, a year or two before he left there'd been a lot of speculation, searching, about who was to be his successor. Finally, Bates Lowry was proposed, primarily by Philip Johnson and Eliza Parkinson. They had met him and introduced him as a possibility, because Philip was doing a building for Brown University--I guess it was an arts center--and Bates Lowry was head of the center there. Bates was brought in a year before René left, a year or six months. There was a definite extended period

of time that was worked out in which they would overlap, allowing Bates to gather wisdom from René and help in the transition. I think the plan was that René would continue to have an unofficial role. I think he wanted to; I know Nelson Rockefeller wanted him to, and a lot of the other trustees as well--not so much looking over Bates's shoulder, but as an advisor to the trustees. I remember René telling me that one reason he had decided to build a house in Key West, Florida, was that he liked the weather and the climate, but it was also, he said, a very quick flight up to New York, it wasn't like being out in the country. Six weeks after he retired, he was killed in an automobile accident. Actually, I saw him the Sunday before he died, because I was visiting some friends out in Wainscott on Long Island, Susan and Chris Herter. René and Sarah--I don't know where Anne was, but off, probably in London, wherever--came over from Greenport, where they always rented a little house. They came over for lunch and we had a wonderful time, and then I drove them back to the ferry and they went back to Greenport. I think it was something like two or three days, at most, after that that René was killed, at eleven in the morning by a woman with her two children who was unfortunately very drunk, as he was walking to the post office to pick up his mail. I always thought it was kind of remarkable in the way that Sarah d'Harnoncourt refused to press charges against this woman. I think she felt that the woman had already learned her lesson and it wasn't going to do any good anyway. It was a terrible blow to all of us here, because I think all of us had envisioned that René would remain in one way or another, either as part of the Museum, or most certainly, we all hoped, as part of our lives.

SZ: You were close with him?

WG: Very close. He was paternal to me in many ways. I was very close to him.

SZ: You worked very closely with him. What was he like to work for?

WG: He was marvelous. He had his own personality peculiarities, but he was a wonderful person to work with in that I always felt I was learning constantly when working with him. He was, of course, a fascinating person, had all sorts of stories. There was always a kind of calm and an assurance working with him. He was an extremely hard worker and absolutely dedicated, but he also saw the irony and humor about many situations and also had an extraordinary perspective about what was happening. He was very generous and kind. It was like an ongoing story being told, working with him. We used to go out and have lunch fairly often, have a martini or two, and we'd talk on and on and on about these various situations and problems. I think he felt quite comfortable with me. I was a student, in a way; it was flattering to him I think. He also included me in certain family situations, which was very nice. I went to their apartment on occasion, so it was a good bond. I was certainly very loyal, there's no question about that, but he was an amazing person that way. Things didn't always get settled quickly; decisions could be left hanging for a long time, and I think that René felt that many things were decided by simply not bringing them to vote. In many ways I learned a lesson from him in that, the impatience of many of us in this country who feel that a decision should be made; whether it's the right decision or the wrong decision, it should be made. René erred on the other side. He felt there was a broad perspective to history and time, and some things, indeed, fell of their own weight and didn't need to be confronted. On the other hand, there were some things....

SZ: I was going to ask you for an example of each.

WG: Let me see if I can think of specific examples. Philip Johnson, who you've probably met, is a personality with an idea a minute and the idea of the minute is the most important. He is often a most persuasive person in presenting it. Philip was

constantly coming up, throughout the whole building program, with one idea after another, several of them totally undigested, not thought out, one tumbling out on top of the other. Very often, René, rather than telling Philip that he thought this was a bad idea or that it contradicted something he'd said before, would just let it go. At the next meeting Philip would in effect have said, "The idea I had yesterday was really so dumb, now this is a better one." That's a minor example of how he let something fall by its own weight. I know he also, in certain dealings between people on the staff, when tensions would build up, he would, again, not feel that it had to be resolved at that moment; he'd let people sort it out themselves. Decisions on things that he deferred too long...well, it's hard to really pin that down. Certainly, I would think it would be fair to say that in questions of finance René was not fiscally irresponsible, but money was not his greatest interest in the world by any means, and he didn't see that balancing the budget at any expense was the be-all and end-all of the program. Things could drift financially, and sometimes it was difficult to get decisions out of him.

SZ: That must have been hard for you.

WG: It was at times, to try to get him to focus on something, to decide on it, and there was very often a tendency on René's part...he was not a person who said "Yes," "No," "I'll decide that tomorrow, I don't want to decide it now for these reasons." Usually, reaching a decision took time and a good deal of elaboration and stories about his cousin in Czechoslovakia and how he and Nelson did this and didn't do that and life in Mexico, everything, all of which were intriguing but sometimes very frustrating. At any rate, there is no question that I regard having worked with him as one of the great experiences of my life, and I feel very, very fortunate. I think most people who worked with René felt that. He really engendered that feeling.

SZ: So that decision you made was a happy decision.

WG: Well, yes, I think so. There are always regrets in life. Then life became more difficult here, of course, because Lowry arrived. I liked him very much, I must say. He was a very different sort of person.

SZ: What does that mean?

WG: He was much more academic. He was quite egocentric, not that René didn't have a perfectly healthy ego, but it was a very mature ego, if I can differentiate. Bates was less sure of himself, and ambitious, and quite dogmatic at moments. I think he also realized that he found himself in a very tough job, with a group of trustees who had been deeply committed to his predecessors, René and Alfred, each in different ways, who were often very close to some of the curatorial department heads and staffs. There was a series of trustees on the board who really were very close to the staff people, and they had their favorites. In a relatively structured way there was a fair amount of intermingling, which was also a very exciting aspect of working there. I think Bates had an awful lot of staff who were waiting for him to trip. That's being honest.

SZ: Because his style was not the style that they were accustomed to?

WG: There's no question that René reassured, supported and gave confidence to a lot of curators; he perfected them, in a funny way, in the best sense. As I mentioned before, Arthur wanted to be director. We touched on that, didn't we?

SZ: A little bit, in relationship to the conference in Maine, but then it popped up again.

WG: It did pop up again, and more and more actively. Arthur was also, which is interesting, very ambitious to be the architect of the remodeling of the Museum--the first go-round--and he did endless schemes. I think his dream was at that point that maybe he'd be the architect of the new building, and of course, when Philip was named, that was difficult for him to swallow, to say the least. Then he withdrew from it entirely and he was kind of soured slightly, although he and I frequently talked about it as it developed.

SZ: Your sense as a staff person the longer Bates stayed, what did you feel?

WG: I thought he was doing a lot of interesting things. I never understood quite what he was aiming at in establishing the so-called Institute [the International Study Center]and having brought Anne Hansen here from Yale--I think she even went back to Yale. I think that he was applying a set of academic conditions to this museum and creating tensions between the curators and the Institute. Conflict built up about who was the intellectual decision-maker in the various curatorial areas, between the Institute and the curator. At least a lot of the curators felt that their ground or their turf was being undercut. I think anyone who had come into that role would have been in an untenable position. I don't think Anne was, perhaps, the most adept at handling it, let's put it that way. She was pretty academic, and political in that sense, and very soon there was tension. That was felt all over. I think Bates was perhaps in certain ways insensitive to this. He also had a bit of a drinking problem at that point, and he played favoritism and I happened to be one on the favored team. He kind of forced people into it: Are you with me or against me?

SZ: So you mean that there were clearly adversarial relationships that anyone could perceive.

WG: When he was director here?

SZ: Yes.

WG: Yes, indeed, very much so.

SZ: When you say "drinking problem," did that just mean that he didn't function or was hostile?

WG: He would drink a fair amount in the evenings, as I recall, and I think he would come in hung over in the mornings sometimes. I think it affected his judgment on certain things. It may have come out in a certain hostility; it certainly came out in rashness in making certain decisions. It aggravated the whole situation. There were other people on the staff, too, who were healthy imbibers, but he, in his role at that particular time, needed all the cool judgment he could muster to get over what was a very, very difficult situation, much of which was not his doing. At this point, I was going off to Europe on some project for the Museum. Just before I left, he said, "You're going away, and I'd like you to consider becoming deputy director when you come back. I don't want you to make any decision now. Think about it and let me know when you come back." When I came back, he'd been fired, so that was that. Then he left quite quickly, as I recall.

SZ: Was he gone when you came back?

WG: No, he was still here.

SZ: Did he talk to you about what had happened to him?

WG: Not really, no. Nothing that remains pronounced in my memory. I don't think we discussed it very much. I think he was so sour and so bitter about the thing.... Another area in which I had ties with him which just occurs to me is that he had persuaded the trustees to buy him an apartment and then had asked me to redesign it, so I worked with Bates and his wife quite closely on that. He was quite ambitious about what he wanted there; I think he got himself in a little trouble with the trustees about that.

SZ: Were you surprised to hear that he had been fired?

WG: Yes, I was surprised that he'd been fired. I fully expected that there were some rough roads ahead, but I guess to the degree that I really thought about it or dealt on it, I thought he would probably make it. I also frankly feel, with both Bates and to a lesser degree with John Hightower--because I think John made some really foolish decisions--that almost any successor to René and Alfred was going to have an uncommonly difficult time. I've seen this repeated in other institutions and in other situations. It's frequently a person that is almost like a sacrificial cow in the transition. It's just one of those fatal things that often happens in institutions. People are criticized for being either too strong or too weak or too much like the predecessor or not enough like them, particularly if it's been a strong regime.

SZ: You've given a number of issues that surrounded his tenure. I think it was Russell Lynes who said that it was the staff of the Museum that did him in, so I'm interested in your opinion on it.

WG: I certainly think that there were a number of staff people who were there waiting for him to stumble and only too happy when he did and quite ready to report it to trustees. It was a period of lots of rumbling and dissent.

SZ: I think you indicated that Arthur was one.

WG: Arthur was definitely one.

SZ: And what about in painting and sculpture? Was there anyone there?

WG: Dorothy Miller was still here, and Dorothy certainly was not happy with Bates, but she wasn't happy with anyone but Alfred; she wasn't very happy with René, either, but I think more so with Bates. I would say the painting and sculpture department, which he decided he would rather strongly direct and head....

SZ: Well, he put it back together.

WG: He put it back together, yes. That's right, and he made himself, at one point, head of that department as well as director, didn't he?

SZ: Yes.

WG: I think everyone felt that was asking for trouble. Alfred had left by then, hadn't he?

SZ: Alfred was gone. What happened was that when Bates Lowry started, and I think he started in January of '68, six months before René retired in June of '68, Alfred was really not a presence anymore. My understanding is that the department had been divided, so that Alfred had collections and exhibitions....

WG: Painting and sculpture exhibitions. There were also Peter Selz and Bill Seitz.

SZ: Peter Selz and Bill Seitz were gone at this point, but Lowry did put the department back together.

WG: As [the department of] both collections and exhibitions, and he made himself director of it. That's right. I'd forgotten that. As a matter of fact, we really didn't even get into Peter Selz and Bill Seitz in this whole sequence. I worked fairly closely with Peter Selz on a number of exhibitions.

SZ: I figured that when we did the installations and exhibitions we'd do that.

WG: I think it was a bad judgment of Bates's to think that he could be director of a new, big department, the major department, really, in the Museum, and director of the Museum. I think that was the kind of misjudgment he made. I think he should have tried to look immediately for someone to come in or to elevate someone there. I think Bill Lieberman hoped to get the job; he became quite close to Bates and maybe he would have eventually, I don't know. But Monroe was not a candidate for that. I don't think he wanted it and he was pretty well on his way to retiring. After Bates left, of course, there was this tremendous gap. There was all the furor because of Bill Paley having fired him, Ralph Colin resigning, tension between the trustees about Paley, who was president of the Museum at that point, chairman of the executive committee. I don't think the firing had ever been taken to the full board, it was just announced to the board, and that added to the problem. For the staff, if one can say anything collectively, I would imagine there was a combination of feelings. For some it was triumphant and satisfying, but also a period of terrible misgivings about what was going to happen next. You've upset the apple cart, but there's nothing in its place. So into this lovely little situation David Rockefeller asked trustee Walter Bareiss to step in on a full-time basis to pull the pieces together. Walter asked Dick Koch, who had been director of administration, and myself, who I

think he saw as Dick's counterpart in the exhibitions/curatorial area, to form a group of three with him to run the Museum during this interim, because obviously there was a search committee to be set up and a new director to be found.

SZ: Had you had a relationship with Bareiss before that?

WG: Yes. I was friendly with him and his wife, Molly, and I probably had contact with him off and on, partly in my role in the building [expansion], but mostly in the program, and then through Bates, too; he'd become fairly closely to Bates, and I think I'd had a lot of contact with Bareiss at that time. I had much more, of course, as soon as this started; then it became daily. There was tremendous tension, not between us, but the tensions of the situation and the staff. It was really a tough, tough time.

SZ: And Dick Koch?

WG: Dick and I had always worked quite closely together too, and we'd become quite friendly. We used to meet and try to sort out the differences between administrative problems and curatorial problems. Part of my job was to try to act as a bridge back and forth between the finances of the institution and what the curators wanted to do. In that range, I made it my business to make sure Dick and I were on easily communicating terms, because otherwise it would have been more difficult than ever. Several of the curators found him, just because he was in administration and finances, a hurdle to be gotten over rather than as someone to try to work something out with. Dick had his blind spots, too.

SZ: Such as?

WG: He had a very orderly legal mind and things went from one to two to three to four,

which is in many ways very healthy. I think underneath it all he presumed that the curators were somehow something that had to be controlled or things would get out of hand, and that registered. It wasn't so much anything he'd say but something that emanated. Dick loved his associations with the trustees and things of that sort, and I think in institutions that's always a difficult situation. When I was up at the Met a couple of years ago, it was even worse there; it was really outrageous and horrible there, the things that were allowed to go on. Here it was going on, and it was difficult.

END TAPE 3, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 2

WG: I don't remember how long this went on, but it was the better part of a year, this period of this triumvirate.

SZ: How did it really work? Was Bareiss around?

WG: Bareiss was here a lot of the time. Bareiss is very much a personality that [says], "This is a meeting, these are the things we have to settle, and we're not going to leave this room until they're settled." He kept pushing things along. He was, at times, somewhat insensitive and impatient about it, but he realized that things had to move and that decisions had to be made. As a personality, he couldn't have been more different than René; he was just a very, very different sort of person. It was my impression that, although he had to go back to Germany for certain periods of time to take care of his business, he was here a lot. He saw to it that he spent plenty of time here. His mode of operation in the meetings with the staff and everything were not, by any means, universally appreciated. He was used to running a business in

which he was the boss and perhaps the only stockholder. He was very independent, and he wanted to get on with things. He'd been given this authority to do it and he was by nature a somewhat impatient person. He also, and I think everyone realized this, had a very fine eye for art. He'd proved on the battlegrounds of collecting that he knew about art, although I would say on the more conservative side. He was given a very tough job and relied on Dick and myself to help him get through these things. I think Dick and I could, but Dick and I were in an awkward situation because there was a good deal of speculation as to whether Dick or I was campaigning to be the next director and who were we representing and who were we loyal to, etcetera, etcetera. I found myself often in a very awkward position. It even came to the point that Arthur Tortellot, who was a special assistant to Bill Paley and his liaison to the Museum, and a secretary to the search committee, asked me directly, "Are you interested in being the next director?"--not offering me the job, just to find out. And I wasn't, I really wasn't, because I knew the complexities of the job and I also knew at that point, because of the history of the last year's events, how difficult it would be to turn the situation around so that it was right. So there was a lot of friction, a lot of complexities.

SZ: Did Dick Koch want to be director, do you think?

WG: I don't know. I can't believe that he really did. Maybe for moments the idea may have passed through his head, but he's an intelligent man and I cannot believe that he seriously entertained it. Maybe he would have liked to be asked.

SZ: Was Arthur a factor at this point?

WG: I'm trying to remember. Arthur was a factor on two other occasions.

SZ: One being in '59?

WG: Yes, and then also before Bates was named. Arthur was a factor about the building and Arthur was a factor at the meeting in Maine, Arthur was a factor in wanting to be director before Bates was named, and I think, if I remember clearly, Arthur may have thought that here again was a chance. In fact, I'm pretty sure that was the case, because I think I remember talking to Arthur about it, because he felt he could now finally convince the trustees that it had to be an insider, that nobody from the outside could possibly understand this institution.

SZ: What were the kinds of things that, as a ruling group, you had to deal with, and how did you work together?

WG: First of all, the exhibition program, the budgets. One of the most tense decisions that Bareiss had to make was who would be in charge of painting and sculpture. The two candidates were Bill Rubin and Bill Lieberman, and both are brilliant, each in their own way, and both were very ambitious to have the job. Walter had a preference for Bill Lieberman, because he knew him longer, he'd been on his drawings committee, they'd worked together a long time. He knew him, and Bill had always been very accommodating to Walter; he felt more comfortable with him. He put Bill in that position, which put Bill in the most impossible position, although Bill wanted it, there's not question, but practically no one in the painting and sculpture department wanted him there, so he was really very isolated there.

SZ: Because?

WG: It's not that they wanted Rubin, although Rubin was Alfred's choice and probably had an edge. How to put it? Bill [Lieberman] had come here in the mid '40s as an

assistant to Alfred. Alfred brought him, and the relationship between Alfred and Bill was a love-hate relationship, back and forth, and I think everyone else in the painting and sculpture department to one degree or another was jealous of this relationship. Bill had gone and really built up the drawings department and built his own bailiwick there and his own group of trustee supporters and his own group of people who supported the department. He also did a number of painting and sculpture shows. He was very good at it; in fact, Bill was often brought in to pull off a show quickly when someone else missed a deadline. He usually did it very well. There was often not a publication, because Bill didn't like to write and wasn't very good at it, but he knew the collection very well. So there was tension with the painting and sculpture department and all the staff people, every one of whom was fiercely loyal to Alfred, whether Alfred was there or wasn't there. So Bareiss put Bill in as head of the painting and sculpture department. I remember a scene, when that came out, with Walter and myself and Bill Rubin that I never want to go through again. I've never seen anyone behave...he screamed, he yelled, he cried. He was the prime example of a child that had everything taken away from him, and it was a grim scene. I'll never forget it. But Walter stood his ground, and I think he saw that for his purposes that he had to have Bill [Lieberman] in there in painting and sculpture because he knew he had an ally in Bill, I guess, and then after that, what happened would happen. That's the kind of situation that was going on; perhaps that was one of the most tense.

SZ: There was also a lot of social unrest.

WG: Yes, there was indeed. There was in Bates's time, too. The storming of the Museum by the artists' group. Yes, that's another whole incredible chapter. I remember that time that the artists stormed the garden and there were outposts on top of the building and radio communication back and forth, and all sorts of instructions about

what the retaliation was going to be if they really charged in and broke the glass of the lobby. Fortunately, they didn't. It was fortunate for them as well as for us, because it would have been an absolutely no-win situation; it was bad enough the way it was. Then the time that some artists came into the lobby and dropped a bag of red ink on the floor of the lobby and said it was blood, and things of that sort. I remember one occasion, and I don't remember if Bates was here or it was later, but Walter was away, and a guard called me, because I was regarded as the curatorial person, and said, "Mr. Green, there's a man down here standing in front of a [Kasimir] Malevich painting and he says he wants to destroy it. Would you come down and do something?" I thought, What am I going to do? As I was going down in the elevator a thought came to me, and I don't know how or why or where, but I came up to the man and he started yelling and screaming and I said, "Do you know anything about this painting? It's very hard to tell from a simple thing, but this was painted by a man as his statement of revolt against a system he found intolerable, that this was an artistic revolt. If you damage this painting, you're damaging the work of a colleague." Well, it did the trick, thank god. I think he was looking for an out; he didn't want to destroy the painting. Finally, everything calmed down, but I remember that I was shaking. I don't know what occurred to me to say that, but it worked. I don't know if you ever heard the story about what the same artists' group did during a meeting at the Metropolitan Museum. They somehow got into the trustees room while all the trustees at the Met were having a big meeting. They had a bag of some horrible type of insect that they managed to let loose all over the table.

SZ: What did you think at that time that the Museum's place ought to be in the political arena?

WG: That is one area that Dick Koch and I were in disagreement. He was very, very hard-headed about this, as were some of the other people, some of the trustees, that

there was no room for this kind of behavior, that they shouldn't be listened to--a typical hard-headed attitude. (Arthur Drexler was very ambivalent. He was passionate about the whole Vietnam thing, about the My Lai massacre. He was passionate about that and was one of the leaders in the Museum for the Museum's taking a stand on it.) I disagreed with Dick. I thought that there were tremendously serious problems that had to be addressed in terms of the art establishment. I also found that it was really pathetic that the artists who were the most radical and the most extreme were the artists that in many ways were venting their own personal frustration about their own creativity, so it was a very unreasonable kind of situation, as it was all over the country. It was just something that had to be lived through somehow. I was more on the liberal side. I remember when the staff was having its strike here I tended to side with the staff. Well, Dick didn't like that at all.

SZ: And Walter? Where did he fall in all this?

WG: I'm not sure that this was happening when Walter was here or not. Walter would have tended to be more hard-headed. We could check the dates.

SZ: The strike was after, as well as the formation of the union.

WG: PASTA/MoMA.

SZ: But I think the demands by some of these groups were more about the representation of black artists.

WG: It wasn't just racially divided. It was all kinds of things. The big criticism by this artist group was, among other things, that The Museum of Modern Art only collected the works of arrived artists, they didn't do this or do that. I do remember, and I can't

remember if this was under Bates or under Walter or under John or what, but when I was head of exhibitions, I guess, there was tremendous pressure from a black artists' group to allow us to have a black artists show in the big underground wing. I was very much for it. I finally, I think, was fairly instrumental in persuading them. I knew the quality wouldn't be there, but we did it; we let them have the gallery for a week and they hung it. Then, a couple of more militant blacks got in and started yelling that they hadn't had enough say in the selection. It was a no-win situation, I know, but for the Museum to adamantly say it could not happen would have been the worst decision to have made under those conditions, in my opinion. My memory of that period as a whole is that it was exciting, tense, filled with internal and external problems, and a wide variety of personalities with no one really getting along terribly smoothly. I think that my experience with René and my admiration for the way he handled dissent was something I so admired that I think I had tried to emulate that. I was prepared for it and I wanted to see myself in that role, and as a result I was able to help some. But it was a tough time. I think it was still going on when I left the Museum. I left at the end of '71. It wasn't still going on, but I think some of it went over into John Hightower's period.

SZ: The first strike happened while he was director. Hightower was still here when you were?

WG: I overlapped with Hightower. When did he start? He must have started about '69, '70.

SZ: He started in '70 and he was gone by the end of '71, because Dick [Richard E. Oldenburg] was made acting director in January of '72 and director in June of '72. So were you here for Hightower's demise, so to speak?

WG: Yes. It was nip and tuck. I left on December 1st, 1971.

SZ: You were not on the search committee?

WG: No. I don't think Walter was and I don't think Dick Koch was, to my knowledge. I don't even remember who was chairman of it. At any rate, it was apparent that John had done a very good job as the first director of the New York State Council on the Arts. He had caught Nelson's eye and he was one of the bright young team, and there's no question that Nelson...I don't say he dictated it, but he certainly said this is the right person and you'll have my full support--you know, the way Rockefellers can talk. And John was in. He was very young; I don't remember how old he was, but he was young, a very charming, attractive person, bright, but absolutely the wrong person for the job. In the first place, he was primarily interested, as far as the arts were concerned, in the performing arts. He had a very high social agenda for the arts. He was a person that liked to make very sweeping, abrupt decisions, and one of the first things he proposed to the trustees, and to this day I cannot imagine whatever possessed him, that they should disband the collection and have The Museum of Modern Art only a place for changing art activities. Well, putting aside the pros and cons of that argument, he was finished with that. He was absolutely finished, because here was a group of trustees who, after having gone over the battle of whether they were going to have a collection or not, had worked for years on building the collections, which were their great pride. Suddenly, for someone to come in and just abruptly say that this was what they should do...they were on a different wavelength from then on. John should have had enough sense to think twice before he announced that. He was a very abrupt operator. I remember one morning he walked down the hall and he said, "I want to fire someone today." The next thing I knew, Sarah Rubenstein, who had been head of finance for a long time, had been fired. Now, maybe Sarah should have gone, but.... There was no question

that before too long I was on John's list to go.

SZ: Why do you think that was?

WG: Because I think he wanted to clear the deck and I was a carry-over of another situation. I had some entrenched positions, friends, opinions and so forth, and I just wasn't part of his new team, so to speak. But he didn't move that quickly on it. At that point, even without this happening, I had come to the point where I thought my role at the Museum was over; I was weary of it and didn't know quite where I'd end up in a job or role there, but it wasn't going to be something that I thought was going to be terribly exciting or rewarding and I wanted to go on and do something else. So I had already started looking, but not really that specifically or actively. John wasn't even at the Museum for a year, I don't think.

SZ: A little longer.

WG: Was he? Did it last a year, a little more than a year?

SZ: Yes.

WG: It seemed to go like wildfire. And he left in December of '71?

SZ: Yes.

WG: Well, then he and I left within weeks of each other. I remember one day, I had been talking about leaving, and I think that was probably one reason why John didn't push because he knew I was moving in another direction, and I got a phone call from Blanchette Rockefeller, who asked if I'd have lunch with her. This must have been

that fall.

SZ: Was that an unusual kind of call?

WG: I may have had lunch with her in a group of other people, but I'd never been specifically called for the two of us to have lunch together alone. The message was basically, "I can't discuss it in detail, but please reconsider and don't leave. John will not be with us for long." So it had been decided, probably early that fall, and it was just a matter of how it was going to be done. I told her that I would rethink it but that I had been thinking of moving on, that I felt I'd been there for a long enough time. I guess what it amounts to is that after eight months John's goose was cooked and they were in the process of finding another solution, and finally they found it internally in Dick, so things worked out very well. I just remember the time with John as being a lot of turmoil with his kind of shooting from the hip all the time, and it was probably mixed with my own feelings that I was going to leave anyway. I was trying to re-decide what I was going to do.

SZ: One of the things he obviously dealt with was the staff unrest. The staff was wanting to, and did, become a union under Hightower, and then the first strike. Do you remember the strike?

WG: Yes, I do indeed. Some of these things get kind of kaleidoscoped in my memory, I must say. I'm glad you can remind me of the specifics [LAUGHING]. There was some kind of an outside committee or group, or some specialist...

SZ: There was a consultants' group, Cressup McCormick, brought in to....

WG: ...guide the trustees in how to handle the strike.

SZ: It wasn't so much the strike, it was figure out who should go and how they were going to tighten things up.

WG: Financially. It was a financial thing.

SZ: That's my understanding.

WG: Yes, that's correct. Probably by that time the deficits were beginning to appear, which were more dramatic and alarming. Under d'Harnoncourt, it was really funny, because there was always a deficit of some sort and there was always a kind of game about it, in that it always started out with a preliminary budget being put together, mainly through Sarah Rubenstein and her office; then René would have the first meeting, when all the figures were put together; then there would be a period of two weeks or so with René going, "What are we going to do, how am I going to explain this?" and all this and all that, and lots of eye-rubbing and looking to heaven and meetings with so and so and so; then Sarah always managed, somehow, to pull a rabbit out of the hat at the last minute [LAUGHING]. Even when there was still a deficit, it was never quite as serious. René knew this was going to happen every time, but this performance had to be gone through, and of course Sarah was a heroine for her brief fifteen minutes, but this went on and on and on. Then later, the deficits really began to get serious.

SZ: So that atmosphere in the last year you were here, how would you describe it?

WG: Lots of turmoil, a great deal of attention to things that were by necessity noncuratorial. I remember very little of the program during that period. I don't remember any active collecting. I know there were exhibitions going on, but....

SZ: That doesn't stand out in your mind.

WG: No. What stands out in my mind is the turmoil, John's mode of operation, the staff problems, and obviously, probably my own growing disenchantment and about what was happening to me personally in this situation. Almost more than that, a feeling that this experience was over, the best part of this experience.

SZ: We can stop today, but just tell me, when you left, what did you do?

WG: I was very fortunate. The American Federation of Arts [AFA] was looking for a new director. Bill Lieberman, who knew a man named Roy Neuberger who had been president of the place and is one of my favorite people in the world, suggested me. I went, and I had lunch with Roy, and within an hour he said, "You have the job." I said, "Roy, I have to meet some other people." He said, "Don't worry about that." Well, he did have to worry a little, but finally, within a very short time, I was the director. That was going on that fall, you see. It was at roughly the same time that Blanchette had talked to me.

SZ: So when she talked to you, and after that, you were not dissuaded because you really had something else that you....

WG: No, I don't think it was definite. I don't remember the exact sequence, but I was looking for something else and the AFA thing happened quite quickly. John had told me when he went to Europe during that fall that he hoped I was looking around for other opportunities. I told him I understood what he was saying, and he said, "You don't need to rush, but when I come back from Europe...." So I had the satisfaction, since John and I at the end weren't getting along all that well, of cabling to Europe

that I was resigning and had accepted this other job.

SZ: One last question. From what I've read it seems that he was a political person and involved in the political movement at the time. Do you think that that got him into trouble here with the trustees, with the staff?

WG: I think not because of his particular politics. I think it was because the politics of a situation were the first priority to him, and not the art. Do you follow what I mean? There was no more adroit politician, in a certain sense, than d'Harnoncourt, and others, but it was what the politics were serving. I think John had been involved in the arts as head of a state political agency. Although he hadn't had a political career, he saw a lot of the different arts programs and the ways of accomplishing things, and he had logically been trained to do it in a political manner.

SZ: I'm thinking in particular of something that I read about the Kent State massacre, which was in May of 1970--I don't know if this was true; I'm asking you if you remember--and he apparently, without consulting Paley, closed the Museum in memoriam. He made a very clear political statement.

WG: I think you're right.

SZ: That's what I meant by bringing in politics.

WG: There's no question that his politics in situations of this kind were different than William Paley's and a lot of the trustees, there's no question about that; but so were a lot of the staff's. I'm sure the trustees weren't happy about the My Lai demonstrations here and a lot of other things that have happened. I daresay to this day there is a different political stance between a lot of the staff and the trustees.

But I don't think in the end that was the reason why John didn't succeed at the job. Basically, his interest in art was very different from the rest of the staff. He saw art as a vehicle toward some other ends, and that just didn't jibe with the direction of the institution, that's all.

END TAPE 3, SIDE 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: WILDER GREEN (WG)

INTERVIEWER: SHARON ZANE (SZ)

**LOCATION: THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
NEW YORK CITY**

DATE: NOVEMBER 13, 1991

BEGIN TAPE 4, SIDE 1

SZ: Wilder, I thought we'd start today, as we discussed last time, with your talking a little bit about some of the exhibitions you either conceived of and put up or just installed, any things that you care to share about that.

WG: As I've told you, I started here full-time in the architecture department in the spring of '57, or maybe it was late winter. I see this list of exhibitions here, and the first one I see that I was somehow involved in, and only very peripherally, was a big exhibition Arthur Drexler did called Buildings for Business and Government. For that one I think I was really his assistant, running around and learning how all these pieces went together. That was in the spring of '57, when I first came here.

SZ: Was he a good teacher?

WG: He was an excellent teacher. Like all teachers, he had strengths and limitations, but Arthur really enjoyed the idea of instructing people and having them learn. The next exhibition I see here that I really played a fair part in within the architecture department was Gaudí, in December of '57 to February '58, which is a show that I really worked a lot with Arthur on, very closely, from the beginning, I was always very

shocked about that exhibition, that we did the show. I think it was fairly good; neither Arthur nor I had seen the work of the architect. Haven't still. Arthur hadn't, and he was really director of the show.

SZ: It was all photopanel?

WG: Photopanel, models, some reconstructions of furniture and sculptures from the buildings and so forth. It was very interesting and it came off very well in a small but fairly good publication.

SZ: Did you like it?

WG: Loved it.

SZ: And you haven't subsequently gone to see it?

WG: Never been there, so I've got to get there.

SZ: This is the year to go.

WG: Well, or not to go [LAUGHTER]. Following that were three exhibitions that the department did in '58 and '59: Architecture Worth Saving, which had to do with architectural conservation: the three catchwords for it were doomed, destroyed or delivered, which had to do with the saving of architecture and the beginning of that kind of preservation. It was a small show and, as I remember, it was down in the auditorium gallery. A big show that was very much Arthur's show but which the whole department worked on a lot was Twentieth Century Design from the Museum Collection. Following that, in spring of '59, was an exhibition called Architecture and

Imagery, which was four buildings. Let's see if I can remember them. One was the new opera house in Sydney [architect: Jorn Utzon]. They were all buildings that were idiosyncratic for architects; they weren't the International Style. It was the exhibition at which we were finally able to include a work by Wallace Harrison, which was the New Presbyterian Church in Stamford, Connecticut. At the moment I can't seem to remember the other two buildings, but those were the most notable ones [architects: Eero Saarinen and Guillaume Gillet].

SZ: These exhibitions were all conceived of by...?

WG: These were departmental exhibitions, so they really were Arthur's doing. I was working as the second person in the department. Then, in the fall of '59 Connie, Mildred Constantine, did a big show called The Package. She turned over the installation of that to me primarily, or at least I had a great deal to say about the installation. I remember we had a real hassle about that show, because Connie brought in every package you could ever think of that had any interest to her. It was the first time I'd encountered Arthur's way of editing Connie's initial selections, which was very strong. There was a give and take with considerable tension that existed between them about the selection process. Connie was inclined to be broader and more inclusive in her selection; Arthur, to be more rigid and limiting.

SZ: You mean interest other than aesthetic beauty?

WG: Her aesthetic was broader, let's put it that way, whereas Arthur's tended to be stronger, more edited. However, Connie had gathered too much material for the show, so editing was essential. I also remember that it was the first installation where I was able to make something of a statement as an installation designer. One of the things that we did was to cover the whole floor of the exhibition space with

white rubber matting, which was very beautiful but took constant maintenance; but it did make all the objects seem to float in this white light, so it was aesthetically very effective, but did have its practical problems. The next show I see here that I worked on in the department was the Buckminster Fuller show [Three Structures by Buckminster Fuller, 1959] with Arthur. The next thing I note here is Portraits in the Museum Collection [in 1960], which, as I recall, was a show done by Bill Lieberman and he asked me to help him on the installation, so this was probably one of the first times I started to move out of the department to do other things. Also, the [Jean] Tinguely show [Homage to New York, 1960] with Peter Selz, I was involved with him in that somewhat, not conceptually, but as a person who helped him install it. It was a project held in the garden, a machine that destroyed itself.

SZ: That was an unusual exhibition.

WG: Very unusual. It also indicated changes in my own career here--beginning to move out of the department and work with other curators.

SZ: That exhibition got a lot of press coverage. What was that like, to see it happen?

WG: It did, it got a lot of press coverage, both positive and negative. It was set up in the garden, turned on and started steaming, disintegrating and falling apart. It was a fairly avant-garde, intellectual statement at that time, and it was the kind of project that Selz was, in part, bringing into the program. I don't think Alfred Barr would have done that. Selz was a very hyper, hectic and productive person. He worked very hard, had constant ideas for shows, a lot of energy, but I think some on the staff thought some of his exhibitions were scattered, not as thoroughly thought through as they should be. Selz's attitude, which I think was healthy for the Museum at that time (and I think René did, too), was more adventurous and covering more ground. He

did not take each project as necessarily the final statement on a subject. The Tinguely [show] was obviously one of those. Next was the Art Nouveau exhibition, an architecture and design show on which I worked with Arthur, again, as an assistant. The next show I see here that I was really involved in was called New Spanish Painting and Sculpture, a project of the International Council; I designed the installation for Frank O'Hara, its curator. Going back, [there was] Visionary Architecture, which was one of Arthur's big shows in the '60s on which I worked. Then there were two projects dealing with the Children's [Art] Carnival. Victor D'Amico, head of the education department, had a [Buckminster] Fuller [geodesic] dome erected in the garden during the carnival. He asked me to design the installation for that show, which was very complex and contained material that I was quite unfamiliar with in terms of his teaching techniques. He was a very interesting man to work with.

SZ: The Children's Art Carnival was operating in the building at that time?

WG: I'm trying to remember how it operated. There were Saturday classes in a lower section of the east wing. This was an exhibition that was held for a month in the Fuller dome which was installed in the garden. If I'm not incorrect, this was done for the International Program and then traveled to India.

SZ: So you worked with Victor on that?

WG: I worked very closely with Victor on that, yes.

SZ: Were you close with him?

WG: Yes. I was getting a great kick at that time from working with all sorts of people at

the Museum. I enjoyed it. I think I was restless being in the department. Much as I was learning from Arthur, it was pretty much a one-man band. It wasn't until the next stage that I did a couple of things for which I was really quite independently responsible. I was restless and curious about all sorts of things that were going on in different media, and these were opportunities to expand.

SZ: And your sense of the Museum's education department and the thrust of it, the level of activity? Just anything that you can recall.

WG: It wasn't an area I was particularly interested in personally. I admired and respected it and thought Victor and Mabel, his wife, were extraordinary teachers. He had a devoted following, teachers and people that worked with him. More than devoted, sometimes almost slavish. He was the maestro. But I also remember René saying, "Victor really has a green thumb when it comes to those things." He was quite amazing and a leader in his time, very active and independent; not unlike the International Program, although different, he had his own sources of support and his own trustees who were particularly interested in his program, his own funding sources--his own little empire in a certain sense. Then I see another exhibition here that was done in '61 called Birds and Beasts from MoMA. It was an exhibition held out in Westbury [Long Island] at a gallery there. I think Mrs. Charles S. Payson was very interested and asked us to do an exhibition out there. I was asked to do the installation, with Alfred selecting the works for the exhibition. The space in this gallery was very run-down, not MoMA-esque in any way, so we ended up building a shell within the whole gallery, at their expense, and I designed all that. They kept the installation afterwards. Then there are two notations for [Mark] Rothko shows.

SZ: There was one in '61 [Mark Rothko].

WG: There was one in '61, but I think that was not the one I was involved in, because it was a later one that I did. I was still very much part of the Department of Architecture and Design, and when I was involved in the other I had already gone through the building program. There was a Max Ernst show that Bill Lieberman did in '61 that I know I talked with him about and helped him [Max Ernst]. Then, in '61, the first show that I really did completely conceive, propose, wrote the catalogue for and everything was the Richards Medical Research Building-- Louis I. Kahn, Architect, and that was the first show that I really independently did. It was a very small show, one building, in a small gallery off the lobby, and obviously it was not a show that was going to create gigantic attendance for the Museum, but it was the first show ever done on Kahn, and in that sense it was important.

SZ: What did you see in Kahn?

WG: In his work?

SZ: Yes, that made you want this to be your first show.

WG: I found Kahn at that time an architect whom I admired enormously. I had studied under him at the architecture school at Yale, and found his combination of discipline, imagination, articulateness, ruggedness and the morality with he approached his buildings very moving. I thought this building was the first time that he'd really been able to demonstrate very, very effectively many of his architectural theories about central and served spaces, about the integration of structure and utilities. It was just a very, very strong building.

SZ: Wasn't that around the same time that he was designing the Kimbell [Art Museum]?

WG: That was before.

SZ: Maybe just a year or two though.

WG: I think the Kimbell's a good deal later. Maybe he was working on it. He had first done the Yale Art Gallery, which I think looks very good in retrospective, but it's not one of his greatest buildings. It was his first big chance and it's a building filled with ideas, as Kahn's architecture always was. It's often a very difficult problem adding onto another building, but it's actually served very well as a gallery in the long run. I think it's successful, but I think a lot of museum people found it very insistent architecturally and not the kind of bland background that a lot of them were searching for. The Richards Medical Research Building, which was built on the University of Pennsylvania campus, was a building which was very successful. The Museum used to publish something called the Bulletin at that time. One of the issues of the Bulletin was turned over to me as the publication for this Kahn show. Arthur was very pleased with the results, and I think it's also, perhaps, the first time that René noticed my work at all, because he came up and spoke to me about it. Then the next project that I see here that I was very involved in was the Frank Lloyd Wright Drawings exhibition in 1962, a year later. I spent almost a month at Taliesen, the home and archives and workshop of Frank Lloyd Wright in Wisconsin, going through all the drawings, living there--two stints of two weeks each, and then also in Arizona for a stint. I did a preliminary selection of drawings from his whole career and brought back to New York about five to six hundred drawings. Then Arthur and I jointly edited them down to an exhibition of about two hundred works. It was a big show, and some of the drawings were very large. It was very interesting to be at Taliesen. I had wanted to go there when I was younger to study. But under these circumstances I was an honored guest, given prized living quarters and invited (with hushed reverence) to involve myself in all the different activities there. It was my first

real encounter with Mrs. Wright. Wright was dead at that point, of course, and she really ruled Taliesen in no uncertain terms. I remember once, when we had selected the drawings to take back to New York, I said, "Mrs. Wright, we're going to have to put some insurance evaluation on these drawings. They've never been on the market, and how are we going to establish an evaluation?" There was this long, long silence. She looked down and around, then she looked up at me and said, "Mr. Green, do you have any idea what the value of a Leonardo drawing is?" I said, "I really don't, but I think what we should do, since these are not for sale and we'll take very, very good care of them, we'll just have to establish an overall evaluation for the group of drawings."

SZ: Can I just interject something, since it seems somewhat relevant? Did you see the [New York] Times piece the other day about the troubles that they're having at the Guggenheim every time they take a piece of the roof off, they find all these structural things I guess they didn't expect or they hadn't seen in drawings?

WG: I'm not quite clear about it either. I think what they're finding is that a lot of things have been covered over or may have been built a little differently than from the drawings. I don't know beyond that what they're discovering. I think they're also finding that it's not a kind of remodeling that you can project in terms of time and cost as clearly or as simply as you can others. Remodeling under any circumstances is complex; you never quite know what you're going to open up, and when you have a building like that, it's crazy. I'm glad they are respecting the old building, there's no question about that. Next, there was a show called Design for Sport, I see here, which Arthur did in a garden pavilion, and I think it was one of the last things done in the garden before [the expansion], followed by The Art of the Asmat a little later.

SZ: Design for Sport, from what Connie told me, was that that was a show that Greta

Daniel had started on and then Greta died.

WG: And Arthur took over.

SZ: Or Connie. I think Connie said she took over.

WG: Maybe she did, from the design point of view; I think that may be the case. But there was no question that Arthur was heavily involved in the final selection. Arthur certainly installed it. It was sponsored with a grant from Sports Illustrated magazine. In retrospect, I think it's quite logical that with Greta's death, Connie would have stepped in as the main design person and done, for want of a better word, a lot of the legwork on it, and then Arthur would have swept in, edited and installed it. Did Greta die in '61?

SZ: I think it was '62.

WG: This was May to July of '62. I guess that was it. The other big project in the Museum garden was the following fall with The Art of the Asmat, which included work that Michael Rockefeller had collected in New Guinea and that Nelson sponsored, because Michael was lost there. That was a pavilion built; we had an outside architect who did a lot of the design on that, although René was very involved in the design of the pavilion and in the installation. I really didn't have too much to do with it except as an observer. We were already getting ready to start the construction of the building (in October). Shortly after that (I see here) there was a lobby exhibition of proposed building plans for the Museum. So I must have already been working with Johnson, because by October we had plans to show to the public, and the Asmat [exhibition] must have been the last thing in the garden. For the next two years, I was really so involved with the building program that there were only a few shows

that I worked on. In '64 I did the complete installation of a Bonnard show [Bonnard and His Environment] that Monroe Wheeler curated. It was fairly spectacular, one of the first shows in the new garden wing. Then, the next year, came the Giacometti show. I did the complete installation of that; Peter Selz was the curator, and I had been, and am, a great admirer of [Alberto] Giacometti's, so it was an exhibition that I was particularly intent to do. Peter gave me great freedom to install that show, and I think it was one of my most successful installations.

SZ: One reason being that you had great feeling for the artist?

WG: Oh, yes, great feeling for the artist, and I knew the work very well. Peter was on to other projects by that time and was really very glad to turn most of the installation over to me.

SZ: What is it about the work of Giacometti that appealed to you?

WG: I think it was his independence, his lack of being stylistically in any group, his haunting self-investigation, his tremendous skill as a sculptor, an incredible draughtsman and painter. I felt he was a very independent and powerful artist and had actually personally collected a number of his drawings. Again the next year, with Frank O'Hara, there was the big Robert Motherwell show, which I did the installation for. That was in '65, and in '66 I had a return engagement with Monroe Wheeler on the [J.M.W.] Turner show [Turner: Imagination and Reality]. (Lawrence Gowing was the curator, and author of the publication.)

SZ: Tell me about the Turner show.

WG: I'm trying to remember. It was late Turner, and at that time I think late Turner was

seen by some as having a relationship to Abstract Expressionism visually.

SZ: Did you feel that was stretching it, or was there a sense that that was stretching it?

WG: I think some people felt it was stretching it. Certainly the late Turner, visually, in its almost complete abstraction, the wash of color, and its loose brushwork, there was an argument that could be made. It would not have been so with the earlier work. I think there were enough people, enough artists and enough critics, who thought it was valid. There was a fair amount of criticism about it too. (I see here there was another Louis I. Kahn show in '66. I don't seem to remember that. It must have been a departmental show.) The next one in '66 was the Reuben Nakian show that I worked on with Frank O'Hara.

SZ: So you worked with Frank O'Hara quite a bit.

WG: I worked with him on New Spanish Painting and Sculpture, Robert Motherwell, Reuben Nakian, and then a couple of other smaller projects. I can't remember exactly the year that Frank was killed.

SZ: I think it was 1966.

WG: This closed in the fall of '66.

SZ: I think that's when he was killed. I'll check that.

WG: Anyway, that's the last thing I remember working on with him, unless it's The New Japanese Painting and Sculpture. I did the installation, and I don't remember who curated that [Dorothy C. Miller and William S. Lieberman, under International Council

auspices]. In '67 Bill Lieberman did a show called The Paul J. Sachs Collection, and I worked with him on the installation of that. What else. Then, in '68, there was a show and a publication called Frank O'Hara: In Memory of My Feelings. Bill Berkson, who had been working in the International Program, was a great friend and collaborator with Frank. He drew me into working on a very special publication of Frank's poetry, with illustrations by different artists. That work all culminated in a memorial exhibition. That was September of '68, so you're probably right, he probably died in 1966, because it would have taken at least a year to pull this together, I'm sure. I see here that in '68 The Sculpture of Picasso took place, which was the show that René d'Harnoncourt installed. I remember he became deeply involved in that. He was a brilliant installer, and he did drawings, little sketch drawings to scale, of each sculpture. I remember at that time many people complained that no one could get his attention for anything else, that the ship was foundering in the sea while René was sketching the Picassos, which is kind of ridiculous. He loved doing it, was very deeply involved, and it was a marvelous show. In '69 there was a big exhibition called The Machine As Seen at the End of the Mechanical Era, for which the guest curator was the director of the Modern Museum in Sweden [Moderna Museet, Stockholm], Pontus Hultén. Curatorially, it was very much Pontus's project, but I worked very closely with him as a liaison and did a lot of the design of the installation. I was his main connection to the Museum. It was interesting because he was both well-respected and resented by many of the curatorial people here. It was one of the first times that an outside person had been brought in to curate a major show. I won't say it was the first time, but it was certainly not a usual practice.

SZ: And that was the source of the resentment?

WG: I think partially. I think everyone respected him enormously, but Pontus is a very shy,

very quiet person. He's brilliant and his own man; he's not easy to communicate with, he's a very anxious man, a worrier. I found him a fascinating person and a person of great integrity. I enjoyed working with him enormously.

SZ: It was a time of some kind of dissension among the staff?

WG: No, but it was a time of tension because the show was November '68 to February '69 and René was getting ready to retire. Again, what year did he retire?

SZ: Sixty-eight.

WG: There was much thought that Pontus was a potential candidate for the new director of the Museum. Pontus was a very simple, unpretentious person. I remember he seemed amazed and didn't quite understand why suddenly there'd be a call and David Rockefeller's limousine would arrive to whisk him away somewhere. The staff wondered, Well, what's going on here? And so they watched him quite closely all during the development of this exhibition, which actually opened in the fall of '68 and René retired, what, the end of '68?

SZ: He retired in June and he was killed in August.

WG: That's right. This opened after he was killed, that was it, but, obviously, the exhibition was developed over a couple of years, so René was very much a part of it. He was quite fascinated with Pontus too. At any rate, at that time Bates Lowry was here, he must have been, and things were shifting over. There was a [Willem] de Kooning show I was involved in in '69, the installation, and Tamarind: Homage to Lithography too.

SZ: You did the installation on that?

WG: I worked on the installation closely with whoever was in charge. I had a big input, let's put it that way. I think by that time, which was '69, Bates was here and I was very involved in all the hassle and politics of that--Bates being fired, the interim and John Hightower coming in, and then finally I left at the end of '71. In summary, my exhibition career here was very mixed in terms of working on many different projects in different capacities. I enjoyed that enormously and found it very valuable. I learned a lot.

END TAPE 4, SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 4, SIDE 2

WG: It made me feel, when I finally did leave to become director of the American Federation of Arts (an organization that organized traveling exhibitions), I felt as though I were stepping right into something that was a logical follow-up. Also, I had always been interested here in the relationship of the exhibition program with other institutions around the country, so I had met many museum people, formed ties and helped set up negotiations for travel, which was to be invaluable in my new job.

SZ: I wanted to go back to the issue of installation, because it's something that you did a lot of, and maybe start by asking you if you had any guiding philosophy in that area, and then I want to compare it to some other methods.

WG: Whether it was a philosophy or not, it was certainly a direction I had, which was to have the installation have a definite architectural clarity. I felt strongly about that, not that the architecture should dominate the works of art, but there had to be a true

integration. The way people move through an exhibition, view the works of art, becomes an architectural as well as an installation problem. To me the architecture of the spaces was very important. I think that not everyone here agreed with me on that. One person who supported me a lot in this was Arthur Drexler.

SZ: So he had similar views?

WG: If not exactly the same views, certainly that installation was a very, very important aspect in the presentation of works of art and he had a great interest in designing those installations. He was designing for architectural and design shows, and I was designing often for painting and sculpture and drawings shows, so there were different problems. I think that was a tie with René, too, who was also very interested in installation and presentation and supported my doing these projects. Obviously, if he'd been opposed to it, there would have been some way he would have suggested to people that they use someone else. But there was a history, for instance, particularly with Edgar Kaufmann for bringing in architects, prominent and new architects and outside designers to do really quite elaborate installations for exhibitions and design shows--Paul Rudolph, Alexander Gerard, George Nelson, Eliot Noyes, etc. So there was a certain history of doing that, but mostly for the design shows. Arthur designed all his shows, with the possible exception of a show he did with Bernard Rudofsky called Architecture Without Architects. Bernard had a tremendous input on the design of that installation. I wouldn't really say that I had an installation philosophy, other than that I thought of it as an architect, and I wasn't happy if the installations didn't have a certain architectural clarity.

SZ: And tying it back to Barr's idea of how things should be presented?

WG: Barr developed the free-flowing, sequential installations that were on the second

floor here, and which you can see very much at the moment in all the painting and sculpture collections galleries. I find many of those installations quite contorted, with people often not quite knowing where they are. My inclination was to always make that clearer. I remember I was really fascinated by an idea René had at one point for a revised installation of the collections. (He and I had worked very hard at the time of the remodeling of the east wing on how to install the painting and sculpture collection.) It involved installing the collections in three categories or routes. The first, or the main artery, would be a selected number of major masterworks of the collection installed historically. People who were coming to the Museum for an hour to see the collection could see all the main icons and trace the history of modern art. The next category would be alcoves off that main artery where people could study any period or movement in greater depth (you might have half a dozen major Cubist works in the main artery and then in the side galleries you would fill it out with more Cubist works). Beyond that, in a third category, would be doors with access to storage of the rest of the collection. You might have had to start with a whole new building to be able to achieve that, but it was a very interesting idea intellectually. I remember I was fascinated with it, because it was so architectonic as well as so art historical and clear, and I thought it would be very innovative. René and I worked on that a lot, and I still think it would be a fascinating way to install certain collections.

SZ: You also said, and you're not the first person to say this to me, that René was a master of installation.

WG: Absolutely. He had a keen eye at studying the objects very carefully (often through drawings), and then knowing the scale and the relationships that would set them off best. He spent a great deal of time on it. He also had a flare for the dramatic; he didn't resist the dramatic. He had a good color sense, and an ability to modulate color subtly to best present the works of art. You could just tell with the installation

that he relished doing it, and that kind of transmitted itself. He was terribly good at it and developed some unique or somewhat specialized installation techniques.

SZ: Such as?

WG: He had a way of framing things. I think he developed this whole idea, which Kulick, I believe, later took over, of the frameless frame, the plastic box.

SZ: You said Arthur was good, too.

WG: Arthur was very good, really excellent, but Arthur had a tendency at times to over-design. His own desire to be an architect could be seen in that sometimes he over-complicated some of the installations. I think the present installation of the design collection is a demonstration of something which Arthur over-did, a continuation of an old technique he developed that here wasn't as effective as a lot of his earlier ideas. But some of the installations were fantastic, some of his ideas. It's very difficult to show architecture because you're not showing original works. You have to deal with another whole series of techniques, with models or photo blow-ups or fragments of buildings, so you have to develop a very different sense of imagination about how you present the building. He was very good in fact often brilliant at that.

SZ: Would you talk to some of the principals involved in planning an installation, or was it really yours? I'm thinking of Tamarind.

WG: I don't have too much memory of that, other than that I was a kind of liaison.

SZ: I'm just thinking about it because I know it was June [Wayne]'s studio and then she was here and then there was Bill Lieberman and then there was the installation, and

how that would work.

WG: And Ken Tyler was very involved. No, Ken Tyler was Gemini.

SZ: This was June Wayne's.

WG: Then I'm mistaken. It was the Gemini project that I was more involved in.

SZ: The specifics aren't important. What I'm asking is, in general, in planning an installation how independent were you in that vision?

WG: How independent?

SZ: How could you be in the vision of what you saw as the way to install a particular show and how much did you have to consult or collaborate?

WG: It varied from project to project. There were some, like the Giacometti show, that I virtually designed it and Selz okayed it, and that was that. Bill Lieberman was always a funny person to work with, because he would say, "Make it architecturally correct, Wilder, and then I'll install it." He has an almost traditional idea of installations--make the right kind of rooms and then he will two-dimensionally place the works on the walls. Bill has always been very adept at placing things on the wall. Even at the Met, those galleries are very, very difficult in many ways, the twentieth century galleries.

SZ: They're doing away with them now, right?

WG: I don't know what they're going to do. I think he's gradually changing them. With Frank O'Hara and me, it was a clear collaboration. He would ask me to come up with

ideas and then we would hash them over and adjust them. Also, with the Motherwell and Nakian [shows], the artists were involved.

SZ: I was going to say, how much different is it when you have a living artist who wants to...?

WG: It varies a lot with the artist. Robert Motherwell was deeply involved in the installation. Nakian was remarkably trusting and casual about it. Rothko was like going through major psychoanalysis, angst and torment.

SZ: You were getting paid for it.

WG: I was, that's true. [LAUGHTER] Not very much.

SZ: I was going to ask you about Frank O'Hara. What kind of person was he and how did he fit in here?

WG: Frank was, as you know, a poet, a friend of artists and a great follower of the world of painting and sculpture and Abstract Expressionism, that whole movement. He also was not a formal museum man; he was very flexible, the way he moved in the art world of New York, which was in one of its great heydays then, in the '50s and '60s. He was brought into the Museum, into the International Program, by Porter. He gradually worked his way up. It was soon realized that he was an exceptional person, brilliant and with very good connections to the art community. He was remarkably casual in style, almost a gypsy, very Irish, but if you knew him at all, you knew that he had a very strong central set of beliefs. He was extremely generous with people, drawing them into his sense of excitement about what was going on; he was really extraordinary that way. Although he was ambitious, it was a different type

of ambition than maybe some of the other curators here. He didn't see his whole life as a Museum life. He was also a remarkable poet and was into all sorts of activities in the community. I can't remember exactly how we hit it off. We were very different personalities. I was much more of a conformist, but it suddenly just clicked. We did four or five installations and it always seemed to work, to balance.

SZ: Yin and yang.

WG: Yin and yang, I guess, whatever. [LAUGHTER] I guess that was it, and of course I loved it, because he brought me in touch with many of the artists. I developed a long-term friendship with Robert Motherwell as a result of that, and then worked on several projects [with him] with the AFA. With Nakian, not so much so.

SZ: O'Hara was a popular personality.

WG: I think basically, yes. He got caught a little bit in the International Council of and at the Museum controversy, and he was very definitely part of Porter's world. He really had virtually no academic credentials. He had been to Harvard, but....

SZ: But....

WG: But he was not Dr. O'Hara. [LAUGHTER] He really did have no other museum career. But I think that the painting and sculpture curators and Alfred cautiously admired him. Several of his shows, although done for the International Council, were shown here. He was entrusted with several one-artist shows because he had the artist's support. He was certainly one of the most fascinating people around here.

SZ: Who else?

WG: There were lots of characters and personalities. Who else really intrigued me? John Szarkowski, when he first came here and before he became quite so...when he was younger and freer and wasn't, in a sense, as weighted by his position, I found him very intriguing and a person easy to approach and talk to and with a new enthusiasm. Arthur was certainly fascinating, and Connie certainly was. René. Porter was an intriguing person--complicated, but intriguing. When Willard van Dyke came in, he was a very feisty, strong person; he didn't want to cooperate at all, and it wasn't until later that I became much closer to him, when I went to the AFA and started an avant-garde film program there and brought Willard in. Then Willard and I became very good friends. Alfred Barr was, of course, an extraordinary person, but I felt, surprisingly, quite remote from him. I was not part of his clique, and he was very clique-y, very protective and protected. I was regarded as one of René's people, which meant that that was....

SZ: Doomed. [LAUGHING]

WG: Yes, it could be difficult.

SZ: Because one had a sense of that?

WG: Definitely, yes. Alfred had Dorothy and all the people who worked closely with him. I remember at the very end of her career here, Dorothy Miller (who really contributed tremendously to the Museum, there's no question about that, and whose relationship with Alfred was very complex), was working on the installation of the Nelson Rockefeller collection. I've forgotten whether René suggested to her that I help her coordinate it. I did, but it was a very complex situation because Dorothy really didn't want any collaboration. I think René encouraged her to do this project because of

Nelson Rockefeller, and because she had advised him for many years on his collection. She was extraordinarily difficult to keep on budget. One almost had the feeling that she was determined to make it difficult, that it was her rebellion against René. She certainly made you feel that she was on Alfred's side. Then there was Betsy Jones, and there was a lot of carping back and forth, which René tried to keep subdued.

SZ: I guess he succeeded?

WG: Basically, he did.

SZ: So when he died, it all....

WG: Of course. I don't think there was anyone that didn't respect René and who didn't realize, whether they agreed with him or not, that his loyalty to the institution was beyond question and that he was a very honest man.

SZ: The last thing I have on the list that I wanted to talk to you about, because it was one of the things we mentioned last time, was that you were going to tell me about Dick Palmer and Rosette [Bakish] and how they came into the department.

WG: I'll see how much I remember of it. My last role here, was as director of the exhibitions program. That was after the triumvirate, or whatever you want to call it.

SZ: Troika seems to be a favorite term.

WG: Troika's a little more ominous. [LAUGHTER] Maybe I'll call it triumvirate. I think that's a clear indication of how it was perceived and that people were apprehensive about

what it represented. Dick Palmer worked in the International Program as an assistant to Waldo Rasmussen. He really made himself very versed in all the mechanics and details of exhibition organization. He was getting frustrated in that role, and I needed someone to come and work with me in the department. I can't remember exactly how it happened or the date, but for at least a couple of years Dick and I worked together. I believe Rosette came with him. I also had an assistant/secretary whose name was Sheila Cobb; she was very good. Dick, I guess, often got the grubby part of the job--struggling with budgets, etc. When I left, he wasn't given the role for a long time, but he did a lot of the work. He's worked in that position, which is a tough job with Rosette ever since. Dick I always found an extremely conscientious, intelligent, capable person. His personal nature is reticent, but I think he's been really very valuable to the institution.

SZ: Anything else that you can think of?

WG: I can't at the moment. Maybe when I go over the notes.

SZ: We did talk about the relationship of trustees to the way things happen here?

WG: I think so. We touched on it, if not as a whole subject, it came up. I think I indicated there was often, with certain trustees, very close ties with staff members. There were many trustees who were quite remote, but I think that is the case in most institutions. I think there may have been closer trustee-staff relationships here, a greater intimacy, in a way, than in other institutions. That may have come from a sense of a common cause, almost a missionary aspect to some of the attitudes of the institution and its trustees.

SZ: I think now that you say that, that we did spend some time with that.

END TAPE 4, SIDE 2

END INTERVIEW