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Oral history interview with Daniel Varney Thompson, 1974 September 25-1976 November 2

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Daniel Varney Thompson on September 25, 1974 - November 2, 1976. The interview took place in Beverly Farms, Mass., and was conducted by Robert F. Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Corrections, additions, and suggestions made by Mark Clarke (Hamilton Kerr Institute, Cambridge) April 2007. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

[REVOLUTIONS 1 THROUGH 938 WERE RECORDED OVER OTHER MATERIAL AND ARE NOT TRANSCRIBEABLE]

ROBERT BROWN: These were pretty tumultuous times in Munich, weren't they?

DANIEL THOMPSON: Oh, they were terrible, terrible times. Very hard times, indeed. There was plenty of food in the country, but it didn't get into the city. Any how, I was getting very run down and the doctor said I better go somewhere where the food was better and the weather was warmer, so I made my way down to Italy. Then I was, I would say, not really convincing. Then there's much _____ (960) I needed to know about government, I needed to know about the---

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

MR. THOMPSON: .....came along and put an end to that dream. I had always hoped that someone in America would pick it up and help. He wouldn't sell any of the copies that he made, but he would, on occasion he would make a second copy and sell that. Somebody, now, I think has one-

[REVOLUTIONS 9 THROUGH 509 WERE RECORDED OVER OTHER MATERIAL AND ARE NOT TRANSCRIBEABLE]

MR. THOMPSON: ...that it was an original Leonardo. And an announcement of this appeared in the paper and a reporter in New York [went to Lord Duveen] and said, "Is it true that [the....is in the Kansas City] museum?" "Nonsense," said [Duveen], "It's in the Louvre. That's copy and this is the original." [Duveen] said, of course, it must be an imposter. So New York's I-don't-know, whatever it was, cane out with headlines saying, "Noted Art Expert (which might be questioned) Declares Kansas City Painting a Forgery." So Hans proceeded to slap a suit on [Duveen] for slanderous title and [Duveen] answered by calling together all the art experts in the country, including Edward Forbes, Harold Egel, I can't remember who else. They were interviewed by Hans' lawyers and Hans' lawyers said, "When did you last see the picture in the Louvre?" And it was unanimously felt it wasn't a Leonardo, never was a Leonardo, couldn't possibly be a Leonardo.

MR. BROWN: In Kansas City?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes. "When did you last see the picture in the Louvre? Was it last week or last month or two years ago or something like that? You mean you can carry an impression so clearly in your mind that you can judge between two paintings?" So their evidence was unacceptable and [Duveen] found that he was just going to have to get the two pictures together. The Louvre has an unbreakable rule that the Louvre will never be involved in any private litigation, on no account in any private litigation, make no answer to any address, comments on paintings; the Louvre won't pay any attention to anything at all. But [Duveen] -they say any city can be taken that has a gateway large enough to allow an ox load to pass through it. [Duveen] built a set of new galleries or something, I've forgotten what the Louvre asked to pay for it in return. [So, Schmidt-Degener,] who [was] the head of the [Rijks] museum in Amsterdam, and Dr. [Laurie], and Laffin Douglas, and I can't think who all, there were about a dozen of us-met at seven o'clock in the morning or something of that sort, went to the Louvre, and were greeted [formally] by a _____ who _____ (571) maybe not to allow any patriotic motives to weigh with me. Seemed to think that I might be a champion of the-I can't remember off-hand who all the people were. [Berenson] was not present at the confrontation. [Laurie] and I had taken a traveling microscope and went over the painting very carefully, made some interesting observations. The painting obviously had nothing to do with Leonardo; it wasn't even Italian, in my opinion. It had ribbons which were quite green, definitely green-in the Louvre picture, they were brown. Leonardo [---] (593) was using [Verdigris] which turns brown, so this was obviously, I think [t]his painting , a copy of the Louvre painting made by someone who had used a mixed green and not a pigment. Leonardo and everybody used, was inordinately fond of [verdigris] (604). That wasn't very

conclusive but a pretty strong indication that it wasn't Leonardo. This confrontation was followed by several weeks of _____ (610) and I stayed for that. Evidence was taken, very harmful, very harmful to me as a matter of fact.

MR. BROWN: That was continued in Paris at that time?

MR. THOMPSON: It was just in Paris. [Berenson] came up after I'd gone back to Harvard, [Berenson] was in France and he gave his little thing on _____ (619) Lovely name, Constant Primrose-very good fellow, I used to see a lot of him, very often had a drink together or occasionally dinner, all very informal. And Primrose said, "Mr. [Berenson], would you maintain that opinion in the face of contrary testimony of all the experts of the Louvre?" [Berenson] said, "There are no experts at the Louvre." _____ (633) withdrew _____ (635) in Paris.

MR. BROWN: Withdrew then?

MR. THOMPSON: Um. The inquiry went on for years and years and years. Later-I can't remember when it was-but it finally came up in the Supreme Court in New York. I was in the middle of a class at Yale, I was called to the telephone. _____ (644) [Duveen]'s lawyer said, "I want you to come immediately and be prepared to give testimony in the hearing in New York." I said, "I'm awfully sorry. I can't do that. I'm in the middle of class now and I do work for Yale and not for [Duveen]." About half an hour later, another telephone call, this time from the president's office, President Andrew's office, and "I don't want to influence you unduly, but, uh, it would be in the university's best interest if you should achieve it." So I went down to New York and they slapped a subpoena on me and I went to court for several days and sat at the counsel table and scribbled little notes to help the lawyers in cross-examination. I was never called on to testify. After about a week of it, I said to Jay Arthur Leave who the active member of the _____ (671) group, "I am very awfully bored with this and I'd like to get back to my wife and dogs in New Haven." "Good heavens," he said, "I didn't realize you were married. Why, get your wife down, call up the Ritz and book a suite for the Thompson's, buy your wife some clothes, take her out to dinner, opera, anything you like, had [Duveen]'s box. Many years later in London, I often had [Duveen]'s box. So Cecily came down and we spent, all together, about three weeks. They paid me very handsomely for my services. In the end, the poor devil had to settle the thing.

MR. BROWN: In the face of all the exact evidence?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, see, it was tried before a jury which was absolutely ridiculous, should have been tried before a panel of experts or bank of judges. It was interesting. It was quite an experience for me and I was late getting back to Harvard but they didn't particularly mind because there was an amount of _____ (699).

MR. BROWN: You were to come back to Harvard? To assist Forbes again?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Or to teach? Or both?

MR. THOMPSON: I handled the lab work of his class, that was the way that worked out. I did a little studying of my own. About that time, I began to feel the need of more documentary evidence, and I wasn't particularly satisfied by this state of the text of [Cennino-Cennini], so I embarked on a [new edition] and then went on to look for more [material]. It was a [wanderjahr] there's no doubt about it. I didn't make any claim to [Berenson] or [Laurie] made some perfumes, maybe it was a great year to do nothing else. Schmitt Degener became a great friend of mine, I admire him, one of the most civilized men I've ever known.

MR. BROWN: Did you first meet him in Paris?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes. We used to dine together four or five nights a week. He was the politest, civilization, wonderful person.

MR. BROWN: [Berenson] you'd met a good deal earlier that year, that same year?

MR. THOMPSON: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: What was he like when you first knew him?

MR. THOMPSON: He was charming, wonderful. He was busy with the poetry and I spent most of the afternoon talking with Nicky Mariano, completely lost my heart to her, lovely person, wonderful person. Then after tea, he took me walking in the garden and he said, "What are you doing?" I told him, and he said, "Well, that's just _____ [cookery], that's just [cookery] (751)," he says. I said, "Well, I didn't-it may just be just [cookery, but] _____ it's not the boundary of my interest. I'm very much disturbed by the efforts of certain people to teach art appreciation which seems to me to be an attempt to drop on other people, personal preferences and taste. It's sort of like a book fairy tales. I think I'm very tired of hearing people tell about how works of art affect them

personally. I left New York feeling out of it. I said by indirection, as he very often did, and he said, "I'll tell you exactly how I feel about it. I may have spent last night in the arms of the most beautiful woman in France, but for me to describe my sensations to you would be the boastful, fanciful [vulgarity] (789). And I feel exactly the same way about people who try to describe what Billy Ivins used to call 'visual reactions.'" Billy and I became friends in France, and whenever I was in France after that I would see him when he was there; some times he was away. We didn't get very close until about 1931, I think. And then largely because Mel Green had filled me [with] the conviction [,] with all these [quirks] and [foibles, Berenson] was the great figure in art [….] (813). I had to tell him to press my advantage and make a closer friend of him, and I started writing to him. Every time I wrote to him I would get a letter back. And some times I would get a letter [from] him which wasn't [an] answer. And the letters were absolutely delightful. For the next 30 years, we kept up a pretty lively correspondence. You have all that remain of his letters to me. I think I've copied all if not most.

MR. BROWN: So this year was really a bonanza, as you look back?

MR. THOMPSON: Oh, definitely terrific, wonderful, wonderful year. Couldn't have been richer. I had another [Sheldon fellowship] (842) in '24 to enable me to prepare myself in Europe for the Youstard Exhibition to China.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1]

MR. BROWN: You were then tutoring what?

MR. THOMPSON: [In Fine Art] and [acting] as an assistant to Edward Forbes and conduct to his course in materials and methods of painters of various ages, most of them [medieval]. I think, [that] as far as I can remember, it was fairly uneventful in the autumn of '23. Edward Forbes asked me to go down as a sort of observer of the investigations which were being carried out at that time [at Chitzen Itza]. And I put my foot down and refused flatly to go. I said, "I've done my homework as far as expeditions are concerned." The Chinese Exhibition was a-that wasn't that year, that was the other time. I'm sorry-wash it out, wash it out.

MR. BROWN: This time, then, was when you got involved with the Chinese.

MR. THOMPSON: I told you that I'd lost my mind.

MR. BROWN: How did this come about, the going through Asia? You first went to India, didn't you?

MR. THOMPSON: Well, while I was visiting with Forbes in France and the Villa [Curonia], Edward Forbes-I think I've told you about this, the Henry Scott's fresco that we took off the wall?

MR. BROWN: Yes, you told of that.

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, well, the reason for that was that [Langdon] Warner wanted to know how to remove wall paintings from Chinese walls. And he had written to Edward Forbes to find out how Italian frescoes were transferred. Edward didn't know and I did, and I demonstrated the system on that [picture and Henry's]. The true system is to cover the fresco painting with pieces of cloth soaked in glue, very liquid, warm, and then to cover that layer across with another so that the seams and the joints between pieces would coincide in two layers, make a consistent [interlaggio]. And when it's thoroughly dry, you simply strip the cloth off the wall and it brings the surface of the plaster with it. You then clean out the back and coat it with a glue or cement which is not easily soluble in water, and you then moisten-when that's dry you moisten the cloth over the surface of the fresco and bit by bit remove it. Edward was so pleased with the demonstration that Henry Scott's fresco provided that he asked me to write out a full account of it and send it to [Langdon] Warner. [Langdon] Warner was on his way to China, he and Horace Jane went out to [Dun Huang] and then to my present shame and horror, without any practice at all, applied what he took to be this system to a very significant part of the "[Procession] of the [Donatrice]" in cave 128N at [Dun Huang], and stripped it off the wall and brought it back to Cambridge. His story was that the paintings were disintegrating, that they were being constantly repainted by the people in charge of the caves, and that it was [a holy] duty to prevent them from destruction. I was able to - Langdon, instead of using a thin, rather weak glue, had used a glue so very thick as to be almost unmanageable. The wall was cold and the glue had set immediately to a jelly. Instead of a mere film of glue on the cloth to penetrate the surface very slightly …. I practically[….gelatine to remove…] Was able to transfer them, not very successfully-fairly successfully-to canvas and to remove the very excessive amount of glue from the surface. And on the basis of that very partial success, the Harvard Museum allowed themselves to be persuaded by Langdon that it was a sacred duty to go and transfer as much as possible of the painting from [Dun Huang] and bring it back to the museum.

MR. BROWN: There was no control of these by the Chinese authorities or what?

MR. THOMPSON: No. Langdon was a very good storyteller and he said that the caves had been used [as I dare say they had] as a sort of a detention camp for White Russians and the White Russians had defaced the walls, and that his most serious difficulty was that the few [Buddhist] monks who [were still living] there, were constantly repainting the walls with bright [...aniline] colors. Which was true.

MR. BROWN: So you, at that time accepted their proposition.

MR. THOMPSON: Fell for it hook, line, and sinker. Edward Forbes took me down to see Al Huntington at the Hispanic Museum and I took the portfolio with me, two pieces of Landon's loot from his first expedition with me. And Arthur Huntington said, "Do I have to show them to Mr. Huntington?" And Edward, obviously on the verge of an attack of nervous giggles, said, "No, you don't have to show them to him if you don't want to." So I turned to Mr. Huntington and said, "Horace Jay, who went with Langdon, shared the difficulties and dangers of the expedition, suffered [frozen feet] and all kinds of difficulties and dangers, were surrounded, and you say you don't mind looking at them, and I just don't want to show them to you. If you ask as a privilege to be allowed to see them I will show them to you." Mr. Forbes at this point was in danger of asphyxiation (Laughter). Arthur Huntington, who is lamb, said, "I would like very much to see them and I wish you would let me." So I showed them to him. And he said, "I'll contribute $10,000." So he even took out his pocketbook and put $2,000 on the table; then he reached into his trousers pocket and turned them out and put a large number of small bills and silver coins onto the table, and wrote a check for the balance. Then he reached over the bar and said, "Could I beg for a dime because I've got to get up town for a lunch." All very happy and very funny. Mr. Forbes forgave me [having bearded the lion]. It was rather-it indicates how completely buffaloed I was by Langdon's story at that time.

MR. BROWN: And you had to go around and beg funds. [Was this part of it?]

MR. THOMPSON: Well, eventually a Mr. Hall, either living or dead, I don't remember which, gave-I think--$50,000 of the Aluminum Company of American funds, and the expedition was assured. There was a great deal backing and filling, but it finally got off. I [in the loot] that Sir [Marcus Aurelius Stein] had brought back some years earlier and published in India. He'd found that, I think perhaps a 12th or 13th Century, wall painting had been carried out over the door to a [little] cupboard off one of the caves. He tore it down and [went] in found a vast number of priceless, Oriental texts. Being a very good linguist and a learned man, he was able to tell which were not known and which were most significant. He took a large number of them back to the British Museum. Among them there were quite a number of painted rolls, and among those-I don't remember how many, 30 or 40-were precisely dated. I thought that this dated series-I got them all together-I thought this dated series should somehow or other contain evidence of some gradual progression because they covered perhaps 200 years or something like that. And I found that there were some systematic changes in the costumes, the lacquered hat of the men had rims which pointed down and as time went on they rose higher and higher into the horizontal and above. All the dated rolls fitted very neatly into a-there were other indications-into a chronological pattern, except one. And that was so completely discrepant that the whole theory had to be abandoned, or would have had to be abandoned except for the happy accident I mentioned the difficulty to Arthur Waylee and he said, "Well, let's check the date." And he found that the date given in _____ (182) was wrong and the date which the discrepant manuscript _____ roll actually bore made it fit perfectly into the scheme. I published a brief and amateurish account in [RUPAM] _____two or three years later.

MR. BROWN: All this [research] which you've just spoken of, was done in England, was it not?

MR. THOMPSON: It was done in England. Then I went over to Berlin to see the wall paintings which Glenn Laden, La Corke had brought back from East Turkistan, Hott Show and Coot Shaw. I found that the museum was in _____ was not open to the public. So I went to Bodar and, as a free agent, asked for an introduction from La Corke which was a gaff of the first order because La Corke and Bodar hadn't spoken, except to write _____ each other, for 40 years. Bodar took it bravely and said, "I can't give you the introduction myself but I'll see that you're provided with one." And I was provided with one and went to the _____ (204) and found that all the paintings-the expeditions, I think, being largely financed by a Mrs. Rockefeller, I'm not sure which one-were lying flat on their backs on the floor. The system used for removing those from the original sites had been to cut out sections on the wall. The wall was simply adobe, just mud mixed with a little straw and probably a little dung to hold it together. On that there was a thin layer of lime or chalk, some white substance. And then the paintings were done on that. Our system was very unsatisfactory, partly because the material was so crumbly that the sections couldn't be removed without a great deal of breakage at the edges. So there was a considerable area that had to be filled in by modern hands in order to make the [effect] even reasonable plausible. But La Corke was cordiality itself and we spent two or three days on our hands and knees walking around. When I left, he presented me with a little piece-almost six inches or so-presenting a little duckling from a water frieze at Kazeel which is near Grechub, with a charming inscription. I lent it to the [Fogg] Museum for a while and I lent it to the [Yale] Gallery for a while, and I kept it myself for a while, but this was all 50 years ago and this summer I looked at it and almost every fleck of paint had come off and there's very little left except [the] plaster of paris in which it was mounted with the friendly inscription from La Corke on the back [and] I threw it away. Nothing else could

be done with it.

MR. BROWN: This was all in preparation for you going to China?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes. In August or September, I finally got word to-

MR. BROWN: This was in '24 wasn't it?

MR. THOMPSON: This was in '24. The other members of the expedition consisted of Horace Jane who was Langdon's companion on the earlier expedition; Allen Reed Priest of the [Fogg] Museum; a doctor and a photographer and myself. And we were all to meet in Peking-they were going across the Pacific and I was going out by sea from France. So I went to Marseilles and took passage in India. I had no instructions to do so, but I had been provided with enough money for a first class ticket to Shanghai, and I traded that in for a second class ticket which enabled me to stop over in India. I went to Bombay, had a perfectly wonderful time there.

MR. BROWN: Did you stop in on people there?

MR. THOMPSON: I didn't know a soul in the continent, and I had very, very little money because the difference between first class and second class ticket's not very large. It was a hundred pounds all the way to Shanghai and perhaps I had 30 pounds for two or three weeks in India, most of which went in the first two days at the Taj Mahal [Hotel] because I didn't know any better. I had to buy a very expensive book-Vincent Smith's *History of Fine Art in [India & Ceylon]*. Fortunately for me, that was bound in bright red with a lot of gold ornament, a very conspicuous book, and I took a little harbor steamer out to the island of [Elephanta] in the Bay of Bombay. An Indian gentleman came up and said, "I see that you have a copy of Vincent Smith." And I said, Yes, I have. And very costly it was, too." And he said, "Well, I've never had an opportunity to read it. May I turn the pages?" And I said, "Certainly." And we fell into conversation, and were joined by several friends of his. His name was [Chattergee] as most people in Bombay is, he had with him his friend [B.K. Singha] who was the Christian Scientist correspondent in Bombay. They couldn't have been more cordial or kind, and I left them Vincent Smith to read while I explored the temple at [Elephanta] which was extremely well worth seeing. Then I rejoined them and they invited me back to their house for supper. And then I had a supper and they took over conduct of my life, said "The first thing you'll do is get out of the Taj Mahal because it's far too expensive. And if you go to Ajanta"-I had my heart set on going-"you must take camping equipment with you." I said, "I don't know what to get and I know where to get it." And they said, "Well, you'll want an acetylene lamp and then you'll want some cans of beans, food that you can eat at a pinch." So one of the Chattergee boys took me shopping and they [were sending] telegrams to influential people to smooth my path, none of which I remember ever came to anything but it made me feel very warm and comfortable. And I called the offices of the great export firm, Riley Brothers. I did so on the cryptic advise contained in a letter from Edward Forbes which read, "If you'll approach Ajanta by way of Geralgown call on Riley Brothers. Beware of bees, dangerous Ajanta." I went to Riley Brothers and showed them this telegram, and I went to their Bombay office, and they had never heard of, they couldn't imagine what this advice being given to me-it turned out later that Edwin Ross had been helped on his visit to Ajanta by Riley Brothers. But they said, "We can't explain it at all, you can't explain it. We have no station at Ajanta, or Geralgown, for that matter. But if you go to our nearest correspondent, they'll do what they can for you. So I went in a second class carriage over-night to, I think it wasn't Geralgown, I think it was Mama. And Riley Brothers agents, [who were] one Englishman and two Greeks, met me at the station and took me back to their bungalow, [Khan]. Gave me bath and breakfast, and said, "We don't know what we can do to help you, but we'll do anything we can. One of our-Mr. Haricopulas, Mr. Tooliatis, and Mr. Abut were the three, and I can't remember which was which, but one of them was going to a cotton bazaar in the general direction of Ajanta the next day and would give me a ride there, and then send me on in their old Ford with a native driver, to the nearest staff bungalow to Ajanta. They said, "You must have a servant who must [have a dhera], a cookboy." So they produced a cookboy who was about 60 or 70 years old.

MR. BROWN: You were worried about your funds, weren't you?

MR. THOMPSON: About my funds? Well, I was down to a [rupee] a day which wasn't very much, it was about 30 cents. But to duckmugrels were extremely inexpensive, just a few pennies a day. Motigran, my bearer, managed to produce every day a very small chicken, [weighing] about a pound [I should think.] There were no markets, there were no shops, no market of any kind and I had an idea that these chickens were all stolen. (Laughs) I was not at all sure about it but…I had a regular diet which was a small, spit roasted chicken and some very small potatoes and a kind of, I don't know[, I don't know. I suppose I paid for something.] The curator of the caves [, …..mayor], I met and he was very kind and very helpful, but he was leaving almost at once and so after one day with him, I was left to my own devices. I'd walk from the bungalow over to the caves. The caves were in a ravine, they formed one rocky wall of the luxuriant green ravine in which brilliant birds were constantly flying about, making a very pretty picture. The caves were absolutely fascinating, some of them had suffered pretty badly from the misguided efforts of [Lady] Herringham, who had varnished two or three of the best caves, completely robbed them of their original quality, the varnish [had] turned brown and they'd suffered badly , but several of

the other caves were still in a fine state of preservation. [And] I would eat my little chicken and go home at the end of the day. One day, to my perfect amazement, a crowd of people turned up, 20 or 30 young English government people, turned up for a picnic. They wanted to see the curator of the caves, and the curator of the caves wasn't there, and they said, "Well, you'll do. You'll show us around." So I showed them around, and they said, "Will you have lunch with us? Picnic with us?" And I said, "Well, if I can bring my [own] little contribution." Well, they set out such a banquet that I have never seen in my life. They turned one of the less painted caves into a wash room for men and one other wash room for ladies with hot water and towels and soap. So I had a very happy day, quite uncanny. When I saw their provisions, I went and hid my little chicken in the dark of one of the caves-but I retrieved it after they left. I went back and found that Motigran, who was always fascinated by my little acetylene lamp, had decided to clean it, or at least that was his story. I think he was just playing with it, [it had] exploded and set fire to his [turban] which consisted of about 20 yards of linen wrapped around his head. He was able to fold it so the scorched and burned part didn't show, but I was required to replace it as an industrial hazard. (Laughs) I did so grudgingly out of my small store of pennies. I went back to [Jalgar or] Mama, I think was the junction, and got onto a line for the nearest station to Aroara, who had another set of cave temples, quite different.

MR. BROWN: And these caves, tourists went to them then, did they? At this time, English tourists went to these caves?

MR. THOMPSON: Very little, but they did. There was no provision for tourism at all.

MR. BROWN: Were there any religious meaning left to them? Were they objects of pilgrimage?

MR. THOMPSON: I don't think so, I don't think so. The [Buddhist] caves were an anomaly in the [Nizam's Dominions] but of course, I have it in print. But Aroara was primarily Mohammedan and most extraordinary. The Ciraca Temple at Aroara is called[, has the appearance of being] an elaborate [Dravidian] temple built out of stone, but it is in fact carved out of living rock. I was astonished to find not only paintings there, but [palimpsests] that had been painted and then painted over, and in places probably the later painting had fallen away so you could see the work of the two ages, side by side. I had with me a [four-by-five] camera and some [panchromatic] plates, and I managed to get hold of a ladder and climbed up on the ladder and tied the camera to the ladder with a necktie and held my breath while I took some time exposures. Took two pictures and developed them in the dark of my bungalow, and in the morning found nothing left but clear glass. White ants had eaten the emulsion off the plate. So the next day I took pictures all over again, and I thought quite ingeniously, I set up my tripod in a washbowl and filled the washbowl with water and then hung the plates in a little drying rack from the tripod, and that fooled the ants.

[DOORBELL RINGS AND TAPE IS STOPPED]

MR. THOMPSON: -- and the P&O which I took from [Marseilles] to Bombay. There was an Oxford-trained Indian barrister named Amurari, Tarik Amurari, who since received a knighthood. His mother was Italian and his father is the great historian of Islam. And he told me that if I came to the center to get in touch with him at the high [court]. I eventually did so [;--] I've forgotten whether or not in our last conversation I mentioned it. While I was at Delora, the director of archaeology, whose name was Gurum Yazdani, visited the caves to make sure that they were in good order for a state visit which impended. I said to him, "I'm taking some pictures"--- forgotten whether I told you about the copies I made of one. And he said, "No, they've never been published. Never published any of the paintings at Aroara." And I said "I don't know where I shall publish them; I don't think I'm particularly qualified to publish them, but I'd like to arrange for their publication in some European or American Journal." And he told me that I might do so and wrote me a letter after his visit giving me the permission I'd asked for. I think you have the original of that letter. Did I tell you about the paintings? I wanted to make a color record of one of the ceiling paintings, it was a [palimpsest.....a good deal of] difficulty with the ceiling paintings is deciding which is the overpainting and which is the underpainting, 'cause the underpainting is -

MR. BROWN: Usually more vivid.

MR. THOMPSON: [Laughs] I learned that the hard way. There was an old painting, perhaps, we think, the 16th Century, which was largely, when disclosed, a very much more interesting - I won't say under it because it was over it. So I got up on a stepladder - I had absolutely no painting materials, I had no brushes, I had no paint, I had nothing to paint on. But I borrowed a bicycle and went with a letter of introduction to a school teacher [a very kindly man,] some 12 or 14 miles away, and got a large piece of cardboard, two by three feet, something of that sort. And the schoolteacher lent me some very moth eaten brushes. I returned to the town - I can't remember whether it was called Pardapoor or not, a small town near Aroara where I was staying and where I was very kindly received by the mayor and the doctor and all the professional men in town. The poor man from whom I had tried to hire a bicycle was almost beaten because he was prepared to accept rent from me, and they said he should be proud to lend me the bicycle. So he said he would lend it to me. So carrying a large piece of cardboard on a bicycle is not the easiest thing in the wind, and there was considerable wind, and a great deal of

time I had to push the bicycle. I still had no paint and no vehicle, but I took the point of view that the painters who had done these paintings in the cave temple, were in exactly the same position and also had no pigments. So I poked around and found various samples of red and yellow earth which would serve well enough for red and yellow, and some chalk and some [charcoal] and found that I could duplicate the colors of the paintings without any difficulty at all. I still had no medium. I had taken with me a small bottle of ammonia for mosquito bites, and I got hold of some buffalo milk which soured it, collected the curd, and dissolved it in the ammonia and used that as my painting medium. I don't think that that was authentic but it worked. Then I wanted to be sure that my copy was as exact as possible and was the same size as the original, so I asked where I could get some of [the kite paper, some of] the tissue paper which I thought would do for making a tracing, and the mayor said, "Why, I've got quantities of it at my house, lots of it." So he sent a man off to find some and returned and gave me the half a dozen pieces I needed. I pasted them together somehow and made a tracing of the main outline, transferred to my panel which I grounded with a wash of chalk, and made a copy of a piece of the ceiling showing the projecting edge of the later painting. It came out reasonably well [it's in the Fogg Museum now]. I took it with me with some difficulty, to Calcutta. And when I got to Calcutta, I went to a low [type of] boarding house [boarding house that's], and one afternoon went around to the high court and asked for Tarik Ameraly. And when he heard where I was staying, he said, "It's absolutely impossible. You can't stay there, it's full of the most unworthy type of shopkeepers and petty [clerks and so on.] Nothing would do but I must move to his house which I did. He lived very comfortably, indeed. [I made the acquaintance of Van Manen] a Dutchman. I said, "I know nothing about Indian painting, but these things seem to me not to be like all the other wall paintings that I know in India, Buddhist but these, Hindu. I don't know what the [iconography] is, and wish you'd…. I don't know anything about Indian archaeology at all except what I've learned the past few weeks." And [Van Manen] said, "My dear [young] friend, they say that in the country of the blind that the one-eyed man is king, but I would go farther and say that in the country of the blind, all men can see. You'd make just as good a job of it as I shall." He said, "Why don't you go around and see [Ordhendra Gangoly] who is the [editor] or [RUPAM] the [Journal of] Indian art."" And I went around and found Cumaranduli very responsive and very much interested in publishing this. I didn't have, at that time, any prints, I think, of the photographs, but he was very much interested in the color copy. And he said, "Do you mind leaving this with me for a day or two so that I may study it?" [And] I said, "Certainly not." Went back a couple of days later to collect it and he said, "Oh, I haven't got it any more. It's on its way to London to Stoneman Company for a color plate to be made from it. I thought you wanted me to publish it." And I didn't. I had no authority from the [….. I said: "Can you publish it?" I said "It's not and American or European Journal."] "Oh," he said, "That will be alright. Gastani I know very well, he'll be very happy about it." I said, 'I'm not happy about it at all." And I went back to Amaraldi who, being a good Mohamedan was inclined to regard Gangori as his [babo], and said he'd like nothing better than to prosecute him for it. I said that was a very good idea, that I would be leaving India in a day or two. So the matter was left in abeyance and we went on from there to Peking and joined Langdon Warner, Horace Heller, Pernice Jane, and Allan Priest and [Dick Starr our] photographer, [and our expedition doctor] whose name I think was Reed, but I can't remember. I told Langdon the whole story and said, "The last thing I want to do is pose as an expert in Oriental art." And Langdon said, "I don't see why, [all] the [rest of us do!]" (Laughter) "What do you think we're doing?" And so Langdon said there's nothing for it but to write Cumaranduli a letter, giving him permission to publish the thing. So I made some prints of the negatives and went to see an exiled Russian, Schteil van Hoschsteil - who some years later turned up at Harvard - and asked him to decipher the inscriptions. All he could make out was one phrase which said, [phrase from Indian language] the character wasn't quite clear, meaning, "Hail to the glorious Hamari." And that, with other things, led us to assume a date of perhaps the 8th Century. And I wrote a very brief [note, and published] photographs and color [plate of the copy in Rupum."] When I got back to Cambridge, I took the photographs in and showed them to Hugh Morgan [the Rupam illustrations]. He took them. [He took the] photographs themselves into see [Coomaraswamy] at the Boston Museum. He said, "These are of the utmost importance." They were, in his opinion and it was undoubtedly worthy, earliest known Hindu paintings. And he said I must publish these. I said, "They're already in the course of publication [in Rupam…Coomaraswamy…] I must publish them. He was quite right." So he did publish them in the [Ostasiatische Zeitschrift] an article which entirely eclipsed my whole effort. Years later, when I was teaching at Yale, [Coomaraswamy] and [Stella] Cramrich came down and Coomaraswamy was a lecturer, and [Stella] Cramrich said, "I think you may not have seen a publication by the Nizan's Department of Archaeology of the paintings at Aroara." I said I hadn't seen it, I'd be delighted. And she said, "I don't know if you will be or not." I read it and such [bile and wrath] poured out on my head as you would not believe. "Let Mr. Thompson not suppose that what he and His Excellency, the […] Highness "-[the Nizam's Dominions]" are completely ignorant. The paintings have been known for a long time, we've known them very well indeed." And they were accompanied with superb artist photographs, infinitely infinitely better than mine and very elaborate color plates and reconstructions of missing parts and all that. They did a splendid job. Why I should have incurred their anger, I don't know, but I suppose it was because [that we said we would publish in] American or European publication, and it was a publication made by a man who was in the eyes of the Moslem population of HEH, the [Nizam's'] Dominions altogether contemptable. And so I was [tarred] with [the same brush,] and I've always been very unhappy about it.

MR. BROWN: How had you happened to select that one cave and that one ceiling that [Coomaraswamy] later said is the earliest thing he knew?

MR. THOMPSON: Well, perhaps because it was best preserved or perhaps because I liked it best. It was of the main part of the Cirasha Temple, was the captain. There was also Pri, the galloping horseman and I photographed that, but in the atlas that [Yasani] finally had published, oh twenty times as much as I'd been able to. But I'd called attention to it and, in a sense, given it its baptism.

MR. BROWN: Really. You went right from India, then, to China? Were you delayed, or were you still on schedule more or less, as far as meeting up with the Warner expedition?

MR. THOMPSON: Oh, they went across the Pacific, up that way, and they did get to Peking before me but not by much. I went down by British India to Ceylon - I wanted very much to get up to see Ria, but I couldn't do it because I didn't have enough money. But I had a few days in Ceylon and then trans ship to Hong Kong and Shanghai. Getting from Shanghai to Peking was a little difficult because the railway was completely closed. I went to the railway station not realizing that and asked for a ticket to Peking. They said there hadn't been a train to Peking for several years and wouldn't be for several more. So there was nothing to do but go by ship. So I got a passage to Matson freighter - there was no passenger accommodations but they made room for me. I narrowly escaped getting o the wrong one and going to Macao, but I managed to get to Tientsin. The Scottish harbormaster in Tientsin came out to greet the ship, and I was told that before the ship could dock, she had to be lited, and if I wanted to go back with the harbormaster I could do so. So I stepped from the small ship - about 2,000 tons - onto a cake of ice, and from the cake of ice into the harbor- master's ship and went back to his hospitable home where he gave me a fine dish of oatmeal for my breakfast. Then I traveled from Tientsin to Peking in a baggage car along with a large number of Chinamen, in whom I recognized Fu Man Chou had returned, really quite scared. But arrived safely and was met at the station, taken to the little house in Tatung Poopoo Tung, which Langdon had taken for occupancy, and attended the _____ (918), the North China Language School for some little time.

MR. BROWN: Had you had any Chinese before you went out?

MR. THOMPSON: None at all. That was 50 years ago, and I think I still remember every word that I was taught in that school. The most extraordinary system. We had ten teachers a day, each for half and hour, and the progression was not from lesson to lesson, but from one lesson into the next lesson. The reason we had ten teachers was that you shouldn't get one individual's pronunciation. The teachers knew no English at all, I think they knew none. Everything, the whole lesson was conducted in Chinese. We learned the personal pronouns and the simple conceptions: above and below, and within and without. Most ingenious tea….

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 2]

MR. THOMPSON: Mark all signs of British Archaeological Survey, I think, had visited the caves two years before and his visit described in *Sur India*. Perhaps I told you that someone came to him with a manuscript which he needed to borrow, and pretty soon another manuscript, and he wondered where these manuscripts were coming from. He found by a means which I don't quite remember, that they were coming from a hole in the wall which was covered by a 13th Century painting. He decided to break down the 13th Century painting and see what was behind it. He found what looked like a wood pile, consisting of manuscripts, manuscript rolls. He didn't steal the lot, but he took a very large sum back to the British Museum. I think I did tell you about consulting those rolls and working out the basis for dating one small group of those. All kinds of interest and all kinds of literary interest, beyond me. Langdon felt that if the British Museum could have the rolls, the [Fogg] Museum could have [custody of the] paintings. So the grand plan was conceived of bringing back at least one whole cave temple. Because of the nature of the material in which the caves were carved, a loose aggregate clay and pebbles and that sort of thing-

MR. BROWN: Very fragile.

MR. THOMPSON: Very fragile. - the caves had to be made with a central tall pillar so they were really a rectangular passage, generally somewhat rectangular passage around a large core pillar. And of the 3500 or so caves in the so-called "rock wall" several hundred - not all, but several hundred - were painted at various times, all four walls and ceiling, and the walls of the core pillar. There were critical paintings in the center of the cave. The earliest, and perhaps the _____ (45) cave was one which [Pelliot] had assigned the number 128N to date it, I think, 128 A.D., and would most certainly be one of the supreme master-pieces of Chinese art, absolutely wonderful. _____ (50) first visit. And Langdon wanted particularly to have that one as, he would have said, "to preserve."

MR. BROWN: Was he a very pompous man or very glib?

MR. THOMPSON: No, not at all, very Kiplingesque, very, very much the empire builder-type.

MR. BROWN: Preserved also from the Chinese?

MR. THOMPSON: Oh, yes. Oh, Langdon told us all that the Chinese had used the caves as prison camps for undesirable White Russian refugees, and the White Russian refugees had spent their time knocking the paintings off the walls and writing unspeakably filthy things - which I'd say I missed on our visit - on the walls of the caves. Never saw any sign of that, myself. What he also said, and what was perfectly true was that the such curator staff, and there wasn't much - wasn't really curators, they were fairly busy brightening things up with nice colors. So it was represented as a sacred duty, go and take them away from the Chinese. Well, the Chinese didn't view it that way at all. Under cover of considerable politeness, they took very good care that we shouldn't do any more pilfering, they wished certain interpreters on us who were spying on us, of course. Allen Priest regarded the, he went on the expedition because he wanted of all things to see these. And as he'd go along, as Langdon quite well realized, you'd conclude some of the very earliest and some of the very finest, the finest of all known Chinese wall paintings - you may say if you could see cave 128N, you would say the whole later history of Chinese painting as we know it, was a gradual descent from the peak which had been reached there. Allen and I went out to dinner by ourselves one night, and Allen blew up and said, "This whole thing is absolutely sinful, and it must be stopped. We must abandon all idea of pilfering. And I am going to send a cable to [Pelliot], telling him exactly what we have done, and advise him to stop us."

MR. BROWN: Who was [Pelliot]?

MR. THOMPSON: Oh, I'm sorry. Pelliot had, I think, colored all, they didn't even make a photographic survey, very poor photographic survey, five volumes of photographs _____ (96) the other day. The only set in the world that ever went there. I said to Allen, "Just sleep on it because you'll certainly cause us all to be executed if you do take this action." He said, "I don't care. I think it is perfectly dreadful." I now think that Allen was perfectly right and that it was perfectly dreadful and should have been stopped. We should never have gone. It's fair to say that, although we called ourselves Harvard expedition, we really were not a Harvard expedition, we were a museum expedition. And t he expedition was to bring us statue. The word was Langdon's idea of big game hunting. I don't want to give you the wrong idea about Langdon, he was completely taken in by his own arguments, there was no dishonesty.

MR. BROWN: The imperative of a mission?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes. _____ (116) was the word on everyone's lips. Allen said, "It's bad enough the Philadelphia Museum should have the [Tang] tax on horses which are the [Elgin] marbles of China"-or seemed to be at that time, I guess they are, really -"but for us to tamper with the paintings is monstrous and must be stopped." I was confronted with the very difficult problem of letting Allen take his drastic courses, declaring Langdon and the rest of us, putting us in a light which would probably have resulted in our execution after -

MR. BROWN: Pelliot would have had you reported to the Chinese authorities?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes. And the Chinese authorities really knew all about it.

MR. BROWN: Yes, you've said they already had put spies on you.

MR. THOMPSON: I don't know how much Allen was responsible for that, I think probably a good deal, I don't know, I hope so. And so I then _____ (131) by telling Allen that I was going to give Langdon warning, notice that Allen had this intention. I didn't think it was fair to do it behind his back as Allen proposed to do. And Langdon thought that Allen's treachery was nothing compared with my sneaking, that I'd betrayed a comrade. The fact that the comrade was about to betray us all didn't weigh with him. So Langdon thought that I was the worse kind of sneak. I've always been glad that I did sneak. It wasn't sneak, it was supposed to be open. I said, "Langdon's in charge of this outfit, and he must be informed." And I think I was right and it didn't produce any particular breach between Allen and me. Lost touch with each other over the years, but resumed it.

MR. BROWN: You were all in close quarters then, weren't you?

MR. THOMPSON: Very close.

MR. BROWN: Rather uncomfortable with each other?

MR. THOMPSON: No, it wasn't uncomfortable. For a day or two it was touchy, but Allen didn't take any drastic action, and we did start off. Langdon decided not to go with us but to follow us on horseback, traveling faster than we could. We did eventually get to the caves of Doomong, we got to Anchechean, and we were without Langdon, immediately put under house arrest, told very politely that we should not go out because the temple population was unfriendly. We were presented with a hundred pounds of flour and a live sheep so that we shouldn't go out. Horace Jane was a superb diplomat, arranged finally that we should go in the morning to the caves and return in the evening. And we did so for three days.

MR. BROWN: Were you taking photographs or simply looking at them?

MR. THOMPSON: We took some photographs which I have never seen, I took a lot of notes, made two little sketches - you may have them among my papers, I don't know. I think of any importance at all, there was very little we could do. I mean, the population was very unfriendly, kept stoning us and that sort of thing 'cause they felt that Stein had pilfered the library, I don't know what [Pelliot] may have taken besides photographs, but Warner'd joined the people who were enriching themselves at the expense of these very poor neighborhoods. So they said, "If (181)" - which is what they called Warner, meaning 'the red gentlemen, the man with the red hair' - "comes, we will kill him." And as Langdon was on his way, Horace and I decided we'd better go back and head him off. So we moved off, the whole expedition was a total flop. We'd taken 10,000 plates and films, we were going to do the great rephotographing besides stealing walls. We had a conference with the local authorities and it was a hot day and _____ (191). The senior official had a flyswatter - not a flyswatter but a brush which was kind of long with horses' hairs in the end of the handle, and he would idly sweep the paintings of the lower frieze off the wall, they were not much stronger than pastels.

MR. BROWN: So you had a conference in the caves?

MR. THOMPSON: We had a conference in cave 128.

MR. BROWN: You did get up there despite-

MR. THOMPSON: Oh yes, oh yes.

MR. BROWN: They did take you up?

MR. THOMPSON: Oh yes. Three days, we went three days and then turned around and came back. We met Langdon half way, and he had got a [sculptor] from Chicago - I can't think of his name at the moment - to ride out with him. This [sculptor], when he found he wasn't going to see the things he'd come to see, wanted very much to get back to Peking as quickly as possible to rejoin his family. What the devil was his name? This [sculptor] friend, whose name escapes me at the moment, and I both wanted to, I wanted to get back to Harvard and he wanted to get back to his family. So we started off on horseback. I wasn't very much of a rider, and I remember mounting my horse _____ (217) as we first departed, and I landed on the ground on the other side, which didn't - Park, Alan Park. I had a beautiful, very strong, big _____ (223); he had a mare who was rather light footed. We were all riding, we had a thousand miles to go to Lando Fu. And sure enough, his mare cast her shoe and a local blacksmith put the shoe on and drove the nail into the quick and his horse went lame. We had one, sort of a cook boy, and Alan Park didn't speak a word of Chinese so I said that we wanted to get to Lando Fu near the source of the Yellow River. The Yellow River's quite substantial at that point, quite wide. The reason we wanted to get to Lando Fu and the significance of the size of the Yellow River is this: the fur traders from time to time send enormous rafts down the river, rafts which are made of yak skins stuffed with straw and carry very many tons of furs. They move slowly. But they're the only thing that can negotiate the passes, the gorges through which the Yellow River, which is broad and tranquil at Lando Fu, but very down to -

MR. BROWN: Rapids?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes. The river's only passable at certain seasons and the season when the water would be too low for passage was just ahead. So I - one horse couldn't by any means keep up with the other - I changed horses with Alan and let him take my reliable horse, and I took his horse and walked and led the horse. But I sent Alan ahead to make arrangements for us to have a small raft carried down through the rapids on a big raft on what proved to be the last passage of the rapids that was possible that year. That all worked out, but not without a good deal of unpleasantness and hardship. Alan was a good [sculptor], as I say, but he rode into Lando Fu on my horse who got progressively lamer, and even treatment by acupuncture was unable to do her any good. So I ended by her walking a good deal of the way across a dried up river valley which was full of these rolling stones, walking backward and pulling this horse. I did overtake Alan at a town called Bianso and we had a rather amusing time there.

MR. BROWN: The people were no longer hostile?

MR. THOMPSON: No, not at all, not at all. Alan and I went into Bianso one night and had dinner. It was the first town we came to that had a place where you could eat. It was not a restaurant, frankly, it was a whore house with lovely little maidens, much to the Mandarin taste, who served us. And we had an extremely good dinner and we came out and found that the city gate was shut. The guardian at the gate said, "You have to stay in the city until morning." We said, "Where's the key?" "Oh," he said, "It's at the [armory], the governor has it." So we went in, it was late at night, 10:30, 11:00 or later, to the [armory]. It was approached through a series of guard houses. We found the guards were all completely hopped up with opium so they didn't impede our passage at all. We got to the gates of the palace and knocked loudly. Nothing happened for a long time. A couple of men came out and asked what we wanted, and I said we wanted to see the governor. They said to come back

tomorrow. No question of coming back tomorrow. "Well," they said, "The magistrate is nothing but the local governor, not the province governor." The magistrate, or whatever he was, had retired and couldn't possibly see us. And I said, "Oh, I think he will if he realizes that we are not traitors, we represented Harvard University. Harvard, big school." They went off and came back. Our cook boy was absolutely quaking, expected to have our heads off.

MR. BROWN: You'd breached social practice entirely.

MR. THOMPSON: Oh, certainly. But I was determined not to be locked into a city with our belongings outside the city. Alan didn't know what was going on and our poor cook boy was completely unable to act as the interpreter, so I had to conduct the conversation myself which is extremely dangerous because you can inadvertently say the most awful things. Finally the men came back and said, "The governor will see you." The cook boy beamed with relief and started in, and I said, "Wait," knowing that this was a trap, that if we consented to go in, in the dark we would have undoubtedly have been executed because our claim to honorable treatment would have been [forfeited]. So to the utter dismay of the cook boy and Alan's complete mystification, I stopped the man and said, _____. I knew just enough about the mores of this country. They were a little taken back and rushed off like rabbits, and they came back with four lantern bearers with the Chinese lanterns, and we went in as became the representatives of Harvard University. And we found the magistrate being administered to by a charming concubine, both of them so full of opium that they could hardly speak. But they offered us tea and we had tea. _____ (348) hope I said (laughter) far from the ordinary way we _____ (349), we were staying outside the walls and unable to get back to it as we didn't have the key to the gate, unfortunately not available, I was told that it was at the [armory] and I hoped he'd be so good as to have the gate opened for us. He laughed cheerfully and said, "Certainly, let me do that." And we had a little pleasant conversation and then he offered us some more tea which is the signal to go. So we went out and found a great crowd of about 50 or 60 people, lots of lanterns, lots of lanterns. I thought to myself, "This is perfectly splendid, we're getting the full treatment." He was very polite, he gave us several gates, took us as far as his face permitted, and bade us goodnight very civilly. And we went down to the compound and through the city with this gang of people, there were certainly twenty lanterns, I think more. "This is too kind." Couldn't think why we rated this honor guard of 50, 60 people until they came to open the gate. Then it was perfectly clear - the fifty people was a key. You couldn't open the gate without having 50 people to lift the great forest tree off by which the gate was closed. And they were all laughing because I'd kept asking for the key and they said, "We've got to key, we've got the key." It was a perfect example of Chinese humor, they thought it was the funniest thing. And I thought it was awfully funny. We distributed a few silver, and they took us all the way to our inn and went back and turned the key. (Laughs) A long story which may amuse you. I've often tried to write it up and I can't seem to make it amusing, but it really was a good joke.

MR. BROWN: But you were all going back then, from the caves, the unsuccessful effort?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes. We were going back as fast as we could.

MR. BROWN: These were very unstable times in China, were they not?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes. They were made worse by Japanese troubles in Shanghai, the mill riots.

MR. BROWN: But the countryside where you were was controlled, various warlords were the real authority?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes. But we were held up on a mountain pass one time, we had a train of about 20 carts which we exchanged some times for wheelbarrows with sails, according to the state of the country, mule carts. One day we were held up by a couple of bandits who were simply soldiers with their insignia taken off. They were armed, and our arms and ammunition were all in the last cart.

MR. BROWN: You did have ammunition of your own?

MR. THOMPSON: We did, yes, we did have an arms permit. And Horace Jane engaged the bandits in conversation, signaled to me to go back and get some guns. So I did. They wanted $10,000 ransom. Horace, who's a perfectly wonderful diplomat and spoke very good Chinese - he is now the voice for China, has been for some years-

MR. BROWN: From Taiwan?

MR. THOMPSON: No, from Washington, from America. When I got back to the guns, Horace was saying to these two bandits who were demanding a large ransom, "But suppose I do lend you $2, how do I know that you'll ever repay it?" (Laughs) So the guns were never needed. When they saw the guns, they ran. But they were very troubled times.

MR. BROWN: You were prepared to use these guns?

MR. THOMPSON: Well, not really. The only time we ever - we had a big game rifle, the only time we ever had a chance to use that was in crossing the Opanshan, the six group mountain, and at sunset we saw on a crag across the valley, a great pair of antlers. It was a perfect shot. _____ (435) evening star, and Dick Star was supposed to be our best marksman. So he got this brand new, unused big game rifle from Abercrombie and Fitch, and he got down and made himself perfectly comfortable, he had all the time in the world and there was a rock to steady his arm, and he pulled the trigger. Absolutely nothing happened. The firing pin didn't reach the cartridge. Earlier on, very early in the expedition, we were in an inn by a river and the country was being fought over by General Woo and General Wu and General Ru, and they decided that we were the outpost of the American Army and provided with arms and ammunition, and so they were going to raid us. We decided the thing to do was to conceal these arms in out bedpacks which we proceeded to do in the dark. I never spent such an uncomfortable night.

MR. BROWN: Did they come?

MR. THOMPSON: Nothing happened. The raid was called off. In the morning, I found that I'd shared my bed with a photographic tripod, (Laughs) a perversion which I'd never been disposed to renew.

MR. BROWN: Had you gone out and Warner said that there were changes, there was a certain chance you wouldn't be able to accomplish your mission?

MR. THOMPSON: Oh, yes, we always realize it.

MR. BROWN: You didn't mind the great amount of time it took getting out and back?

MR. THOMPSON: Well, it wouldn't have made any difference whether we'd minded. Of course we were disappointed. I'm now thankful. I'm so glad that our plan was not carried out. I wish we'd made more photographs. We did find some things along the way, and I'd had a chance to buy a Tong mirror, a good one, money engraved mirror-I think I paid $20 max, about $10 American, and that was going to be my - that and rubbings from the _____ (484), the great national library, rubbing stones. I never got any of the rubbings, they're all still at the Fogg Museum, and I gave the Fogg Museum my Tong mirror. So my nose is quite clean as far as loot is concerned. But we finally got to Lando and I found that Alan Clark had rather unkindly put the blame for the laming of his horse on me. "My horse is fine," he said, "but you see how Thompson treats his horses." I didn't realize that until I got back and found that, got back to Cambridge and found that everybody at the Fogg Museum was horrified at my maltreatment of my horse. I wasn't very pleased about that, considering that I'd done superhuman things to keep the beast alive. But we went down the two rapids on the raft he had, got off on our little raft which was made of inflated sheep skins like the ones in Zellerbach. And we had, by that time, two cook boys - no we didn't. We had still one cook boy but we had two raftsmen. They have oars in front and a rear one for steering and gentle propulsion, but the current of the river enough. It was perfectly lovely to just roll off of the raft and go into the water and go along with the raft on the stream, or you can swim around as you please. And the current for a long time was swift now from its passage through the rapids to be full of sand, which has lovely scrubbing action. Then it broadened out and became a little dangerous. Bandits would just sit on the side of the stream and pop you off. But they didn't do that for us, we got through to Bowto. For the first time, we had passports which - I'd passed through 30 provinces, I think, I don't remember how many provinces, and there had never been any question of customs examination. But at Bowto they wanted to examine my luggage. With my success over the lanterns in mind, I refused. So they impounded my luggage. Alan had nothing with him but his knapsack, and he rushed off and took the first train to Peking, and I never saw him again. I went to the American Consul and the American Consul gave me breakfast. I told him that I refused to open my baggage and he said, "_____ (544)." Pretty soon there came a message from the local general saying that if my permission to open the baggage was not received by noon, my cook boy would be executed. I didn't think that was a very good idea so I confronted the [Consul] and he said, "Well, you got yourself into this, you get yourself out of it. I can not _____ (553) for you." So I sent down a letter to General Wu saying I'd been traveling for some time in the delightful country, had passed through many cities, seen things of great beauty and had acquired a few small objects all of which I was to pay the premium, and as it happened, my luggage was in his custody. I felt sure it was quite safe. I should be glad to have it returned intact after the sentries have looked over my small [belongings] nothing would be more satisfactory. In no time flat the luggage was unopened and the cook boy unharmed, and that was alright. The counsel took me to the local club for luncheon and I left so tired I didn't wake 'til the next morning still sitting with the chair in the garden. Made my way to Peking, got into the deepest bath I could draw, and rang for a whiskey and soda. End of the expedition. Well not quite because of the fact that it was then that I - it wasn't. As a matter of fact I did seem to, in those days and had been for some time, concerned with trying to learn Sanskrit, and I had a few more lessons from Schtiel van Holschtan, and hung around Peking for a little while. Mrs. Calhoun, the widow of a former minister, something of a thorn in the flesh of John McMurray who was then minister because she would consort with the Russians, she was the sort of uncrowned queen of the foreign population in Peking, very kind, very charming. I mentioned to her one day that I should very much like to go home by way of Europe, by Siberian, but that I understood that it was very difficult to arrange. She said, "I'll speak to my Russian friends about it." They agreed that I might do so.

Up to that time, only great guns like Standard Oil officials and that sort of -

MR. BROWN: These Russians were Soviet Russians?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, Soviets. I went to McMurray and said, "Will it embarrass you if I do this?" And he said, "Not at all. It's quite alright." So I did take the TransSiberian to Moscow. Very interesting trip it was. I've always claimed to be the international TransSiberian chess champion. Nobody's ever disputed the claim.

MR. BROWN: What happened on the train?

MR. THOMPSON: Well, I went in hard class because I had nothing with me but catched silver, lumped silver. Most of the frontiers have those contraband and I was lucky not to have it all taken away from me. They said I was allowed to change it at a very nice rate for rubles. There were several currencies involved because we went up through Manchuria which was Japanese.

MR. BROWN: Had you left Warner behind? Did he come back by then or not?

MR. THOMPSON: No, I left him out in the edge of Turkistan and I never heard anything about his trip back. I don't know. Allen Priest went one day and Horace Jane, I think left another, and Langdon went another. The whole thing just dissolved. I went in hard class, but I spent all my time in the restaurant car. The only restaurant car that had a piano in it. Also [Balilika] players from time to time. And played chess mostly and acted as an interpreter on the French, Italian, German, Chinese, Russian passengers who converged. While there were lots of pairs would could speak, there were lots of pairs who couldn't speak, and I had a very comfortable trip, effectively in the soft cars. I shared a compartment with a Russian lady who could hardly move because she was wearing-believe you, I didn't investigate - I believe she was wearing seven dresses. Hoping, hoping to get rid of _____ (667) went from Moscow not by the authorized group but by ____ (668). Crossed the border at _____ (668). The only customs interest was in papers. I had taken time in Moscow to see the university museum where the first works of Rocoff, the copies we still to be seen. It was closed, but I managed to get it open and I took some notes on the things, not very complimentary to the administration, and I think if they'd found that document which was in my breast pocket they would certainly have confiscated it, I don't know what they might have done to me. But their interest , fortunately for me, was concentrated on a package of bromo, bromo being extremely thin sheets of toilet paper which everyone in the east carries, thousands of feet, it's very rare. Was in a cardboard box. I told the customs man that I was willing to have him examine these papers if he really wanted to, but I assured him that it would be unprofitable, but that he must undertake to replace them. I think it took him 16 hours to put them back in the box. (Laughs) Then I went on to Warsaw and down through Czechoslovakia, to Vienna, taking with me a couple pounds of fresh, large grain caviar. Then to Venice where my mother was keeping house for my brother near Aporopoli. Various American friends were there and they were in great style. I got off in rags, I hadn't dared to bring more than one shirt with me for fear it would be confiscated.

MR. BROWN: You had at least written your parents, hadn't you, this whole time? Fairly steadily.

MR. THOMPSON: Oh, yes.

MR. BROWN: Had you brought back gifts for them? For your mother, isn't this the time you brought back the star?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, I brought back the star, now given to Elizabeth Martin. So glad that wasn't burnt up. And my mother, for once in her life, had all the caviar she wanted. But I'd taken two boxes, perhaps 50 Russian cigarettes, and I crossed the border into Poland and they'd said, "Never mind (726)" And I crossed the border into Czechoslovakia, "Never mind 50 cigarettes." Crossed the border into Austria, "Never mind, let it go." Crossed the border into Italy, "Pay $50 duty or something like that, or we will impound them and you can pick them up on your way out of the country." So my father never got his Russian cigarettes. But the caviar they didn't mind at all, that was just food. So my true silver, my tea cup in caste silver, just barely got me to Cherbourg and steerage passage -

MR. BROWN: You left your family behind? Your mother, your brother and all?

MR. THOMPSON: Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: They were there for -

MR. THOMPSON: For some time. I got to Cherbourg and was told along with other steerage passengers, I was to be on the dock at 5:00 in the morning, so I was on the dock at 5:00 in the morning and sat there until about noon when a cortage of top passage, a gentleman in a long coat and officers of the French line came along, leading my old friend, Dewey Amition, who was, I guess, still the head of the architectural department at M.I.T., I'm not sure. But he had been. Anyhow, he was a very old, good friend. He saw me sitting on the barge and

recognized me - I don't know how, but he stopped the procession, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm waiting to be herded into steerage." And I was herded into steerage, and shortly after orders came that I was to transfer into tourist without charge. Dewey practically owned the French Line. And he'd send me down a bottle of wine every day, very sweet. I got back to Harvard -

MR. BROWN: This was when? The fall of 1924?

MR. THOMPSON: '25. The fall of 1925. I underwent several weeks of court marshal. Well, I wasn't really court marshaled but everyone was thinking that this whole time expedition had been an extravagant disaster. I was in some way fingered out and ridiculed as a troublesome part of it. _____ (797)

MR. BROWN: Were you pretty embittered by that?

MR. THOMPSON: No, I _____ (800). I was pretty sore about the charge of having abused my horse. Edward Porch asked me down and O'Shawn invited me to ride and I said, " (805) dead horses." (Laughs) But that was finally cleared up. Not long after Edward asked me to join in an expedition to [Chitzen Itza] and I said, "Thank you but I think I've done my homework. I'm now going to do a little studying."

MR. BROWN: I set out to qualify for a PhD candidacy, but the expedition had run out of money and though I'd been promised a salary of $2500 as my share in it, I never got a penny. My clothes - I didn't have any clothes, I had to buy new clothes. I sent them to the laundry and the laundry burned down. Harvard did find a job as tutor for me which I think paid $700 a year, and Edward bought my Aroara painting for $300. I had no claim to it, but he pretended that I had. I never know quite how I got through that year, but I decided I better look a little farther afield. So I went down to Yale and I interviewed with Dean Meeks. I said to him, "You have a splendid collection of Italian paintings here and you have no Fine Arts Department, no courses in the history of art, and I should like to come and run it." And he leaned his protuberant form back in his chair and said, "Young man, have you been reading through my private papers?" (Laughs) I said I hadn't and he said, "Well, I've been having a brisk correspondence with the president on this subject, and you will hear from me." I think you have all the correspondence with [Everett Meeks] about that and also the correspondence I had with my fiancée.

MR. BROWN: Whom you met at this time?

MR. THOMPSON: I met on the fourth of February and became engaged on the sixth. We remained engaged for eighteen months. I finally was earning a very meager living at Yale, and spent seventeen very happy years there.

MR. BROWN: You were brought in, then, in 1926. Did Meeks right away take to you and think you might be the person?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes. He invited me to luncheon the first day I turned up for work, he invited me to lunch at the faculty club with Edwin Cassius Taylor who was the head of the painting department. He said, "I want you to understand," Meeks said, "I want you to understand that we are pretty pleased with our Painting Department. We win the Academy Awards pretty regularly, and we don't want to know you're interested in [tempera] painting or that you'll do anything to upset Taylor's organization." And Taylor said, "After all, it's my organization and if Dan Thompson's got anything we ought to know about, I want (909). I think [Everett] knew perfectly well that that would be his attitude. But anyhow, I had a class in [tempera] painting and it went very well and was very well received by the school and had some influence on it before its total destruction by [Charlie Sawyer].

MR. BROWN: This was a class modeled on some [at] the [Fogg] based on technique?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, except that it was, I took, [tried to teach tempera] not as an [Antiquarian] thing but as a working method. And some very handsome things were done. And some perfectly dreadful things, but some very nice things were done.

MR. BROWN: You were the one man in history of art, is that right?

MR. THOMPSON: Well, [Chauncey Stillman] took me around that first day to see Bob Hutchins who was then the head of Yale before he went to Chicago, and he said, "Bob, this is Dan Thompson of the Fine Arts Department. Matter of fact, they say he is the Fine Arts Department." The next year, I did get some _____ (946). And the next year, I think, or the next year but one, _____ (948) whom I loved dearly all this life and before…., I can say, from the teaching point of view, of course our points of view were radically different, I became the director of the gallery and gave a couple of the courses in Art Appreciation, which was [me on….]

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2]

[BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 1]

MR. THOMPSON: But Colonel Rollins, who was the printer for the university, very salty, delightful character, became a very great friend of mine. I spent a year at Yale before I was married, and I was careful to make a few social contacts which would have to made remade after I was married, if possible. I spent most of my time with my students; a very good effect both ways. In teaching [tempera] at Yale, I learned a great deal more than I taught.

MR. BROWN: How did you teach [tempera]? Do you recall?

MR. THOMPSON: Practice. And as I was not, there were skilled draftsmen, and Taylor was a (15) of the whole professional practice of the [tempera] painting at all but painting, designing a thing, _____ (19) architectural views and so on. _____ (21) was primarily interested in wall painting. [I've fought a losing] battle all my life against the word 'mural,' dreadful....

MR. BROWN: Why?

MR. THOMPSON: Well, I think 'wall' is better than 'mural.' I don't think you gain anything except a rather urgent sounding word. Wall painting - mural.

MR. BROWN: You simply set your students into the medium and the problems?

MR. THOMPSON: I taught them what I knew the first year. The next year I taught them what I hadn't known and what I'd learned, and I think I learned much more than I taught. My own practice had been limited, one person's practice is bound to be limited. It's not affected it's not modesty, I really did learn from the experimental work of each successive class. Learned a great deal, learned a great deal from Taylor. In fact, my real appreciation of the possibilities of the [tempera] paintings hangs entirely on Taylor's instructions. [Delightful person, wonderful teacher].

MR. BROWN: Did he work closely with you to approve what you were doing?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, he did, he did. I got more and more interested in [documents] (43) about medieval painting techniques. He became less and less interested. The end came at Yale in '32 - I didn't leave in '32 but the end came in '32. Meeks'd been very generous in '31. He arranged to let me have a half year off in Sterling Fellowship. He said, "Go off and get your books out of your system and then come back and do some more teaching." Well, it wasn't just that way, but in '32 he followed his [Beaux-Arts tradition] to Paris and followed the injunction of the Angel regime. Angel's assignment from the corporation was to turn Yale College into a university. The institution of a Fine Arts Department was welcomed at Angels' charming plea bargaining, but it didn't progress rapidly enough due to the combination of Sizer and me was not enough. I'd looked forward to building up a department gradually. Meeks, I think, was under some pressure to dress the windows with ready made figurines. So he picked out, and managed somehow to secure the services of, one of the _____ (74) engaged in the history of art. And as a running mate and, I think in order to accomplish the deal at all, he took also Marcel [Aubert], who was a charming man with some years of experience as a curator at the Louvre, but was no significance at all.

MR. BROWN: These he found in '32 when he went to France?

MR. THOMPSON: He found them in '32 and they came in the autumn of '32 and completely overshadowed, not me but my dream of building up a department. I had the greatest liking and admiration for Osheon and got on beautifully with [Aubert], charming - I've often seen him in Paris since. I felt that it was a disasterous way to create a department, to bring in someone with at most two or three years of future.

MR. BROWN: Osheon was rather old, wasn't he?

MR. THOMPSON: Oh, he was already retired, I'm sure he was already retired, and it was a great credit to Meeks' personality that he was able to get him to come over. And he did succeed better than I expected in establishing a school at Yale. But it hasn't been a success. I felt it couldn't be a success.

MR. BROWN: Why did you feel it couldn't?

MR. THOMPSON: Because he wouldn't have time enough. You can't create a school in two or three years.

MR. BROWN: You can't create it, as you said, with 'ready-made." As opposed to what? Building gradually on the strength that you have in the school?

MR. THOMPSON: If Osheon had been ten years younger, it would have been justified. His influence was very good, he had some good pupils, but the only one who has really justified Meeks, Gail Lars, Aster Williams, Glen Phasen, has done at Williams, exactly what I had hoped we might do at Yale. He has built up a school, which I think is one of the [best] fine arts departments in the country. Another pupil of mine, George Hamilton - I offered

a course one year in documents of the history of the technology of art, and only one person turned up for the first meeting, George Hamilton. And I said, "Well I guess that lets you out." He said, I don't see why it lets me out. I'd like to do the course because I was interested in the subject, want to learn about it. You offered the course. I don't see what difference it makes whether you have one pupil or twenty." "Well," I said, "that's very novel point of view. I like that very much. Now, what kind of course do you want? Do you want to do any work or do you just want to have a good time for credit?" He said, " I want to do some work." And I said, "Well, I've got lots of work to be done. Why don't we take a text that needs editing and edit it?" So we took the [De Arte Illuminandi] (124), [the so-] called *Naples Manuscript* for which there was no English translation, and made it the focus of the study of all the topics which we were dealing in. I said, "We'll do that. It's a half year course. We'll start it today and we'll end up with a finished manuscript by the end of the term, if you really mean to work." Poor George. I said, "Do you know any Latin?" He said, "Yes, I do." "Good," I said, "fine. Do you know any Italian?" He said, "No, I don't." "Well," I said, "we'll have to spend two or three days on that." He said, "the only Italian I know is opera Italian. I know quite a lot of arias." I said, "Fine." Within a week, he was reading Italian.

MR. BROWN: He was a very, very promising student. You'd known that, had you?

MR. THOMPSON: Well, I found it out, it didn't take any time at all. I had to tailor the job to what this boy could do. What he didn't know how to do it write English and he's told me since that he had never hated anyone so much as he hated me. (Laughs) He'd take the utmost care and I'd say, "This is perfectly fine, George," and it would be perfectly fine. "But if we could just change that, and do this, and so on." And by the time we were through, [there] wouldn't [be very much left] and then George would rewrite it and it would be perfect. And so though he hated me, he hated me with good purpose. Glen Phasen [always/also] said I also taught him how to write, and he writes very well and a great deal. I think he writes very well. (154) in Marth Sedgewick's, he told the assembled company that I had taught him how to write and used only one phrase doing so: "Are you sure that you said exactly what you meant?" Except I think I had to point out that he hadn't. I also had him learn technical terms. He [was] writing on jewelry and described something as a "sloping edge" of something. I told him, "Surely, there's a better word for that. Let's tried 'beveled.'"

MR. BROWN: Was he doing manuscript [stuff] at work, too?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, he was. More inscriptions, really, than manuscripts.

MR. BROWN: Did this course begin to attract more people? I suppose never very many.

MR. THOMPSON: I never repeated it. But we did get the manuscript done and off by the last day of the term . And George got a fully deserved A++. He and Glen Phasen made a powerful team.

MR. BROWN: This is an interview on July 27, 1976, in Manchester, Massachusetts.

MR. THOMPSON: After lunch.

MR. BROWN: After lunch. Perhaps you could say something of your teaching at Yale, in particular now, about teaching tempera painting.

MR. THOMPSON: I went down to take up my duties in New Haven in the autumn of '26. [Everett Meeks], the Dean of the School of Fine Arts, invited me to luncheon and invited Ned Taylor, Edwin Cassius Taylor, who was to become a major influence in my life and thinking, joined us for luncheon. It was my business to introduce, more for the benefit of the students in the college than in the art school, courses in the history of art. It was understood that somebody older and more experienced would join us later. It turned out to be Theodore Sizer, but at the time, Dean Meeks was very anxious that Taylor and I should know each other and work together in harmony. Well, Taylor was the type of person who made that very easy, he was a perfectly delightful character, lovely character, and a masterly, professional painter. He knew what would work and what wouldn't work, and if his thinking was conditioned by a sort of Beaux Arts tradition, so was all the rest of the school. And if the students felt that the subject always had to be the mantle of something being handed down from somebody to somebody else, that was perfectly alright. But Ned Taylor taught composition admirably, he taught technique of painting with mastery, technique of oil painting on a large scale. And when people were studying with him, they could do a job of painting. I've never known anyone so completely able in that respect as he was. What people did was their own damn business and if it was a bit childish, they were children, they were just kids, green kids with often very little background of any sort. It was quite reasonable for them to do some pretty dim subjects, but they did learn to paint. And that's about what Edward Meeks said at lunch to me that day. He said, "Now, I want you to understand that we think we are doing a very good job on teaching a profession of painting as well as the profession of architecture and the profession of sculpture. And you keep your hands off. I don't want any interference from you-"all in a very good natured tone. He said, "You stick to the history of art." And Ned Taylor said, "[Everett], I entirely disagree with you. If Dan Thompson's got anything to teach, we want to learn it." "I don't know that I've got anything particular to teach, but I've got a great deal to learn that I can only learn through trying to teach." And Taylor laughed, as he was inclined to do, in a very good natured way, and he said,

"We'll all learn things together, and teaching's certainly the best way I know to learn things. How do you like to do it?" I said, "Well, if there were any kids who'd like to learn something about [tempera] painting, I know a little something about it and I'd love to have a little class." He said, "Fine. I know at least two or three of our boys who would be very much interested." And so chief among them was a chap named Louis York who became, in my opinion, a very good painter indeed.

MR. BROWN: And a teacher at Yale also.

MR. THOMPSON: And a teacher at Yale. There was also a chap named Louie Agostino who did a most exquisite piece of work in my class, and then disappeared into the New Haven Post Office and was never seen again, never would paint again. But the interest in [tempera] painting increased, and it finally became a standard part of the Yale curriculum. By degrees, I've learned something about [tempera] painting.

MR. BROWN: How did you approach the teaching of tempera painting?

MR. THOMPSON: Oh, I had them ground their panels and I taught them to work with gesso and make ornaments in gesso and how to lay gold and burnish it and how to paint, how to manipulate the colors. I was still under the impression that [Cennino] didn't mean what he said when he said that you cannot use too much egg in your mixture of colors, and so a good deal of time was spent trying to produce a lovely, even mat surface, which I learned later not to value at all, as it forms automatically even if there's an excess of egg in the mixtures. But when one or two of the paintings done in my class came out the tops in competition, more and more people wanted to learn tempera painting and quite a lively little school developed. It was carried on after I left Yale by Louis York with greater success, but Louis was very much more experienced and competent painter than I ever was.

MR. BROWN: Were most of the people who came into your class already had their basic grounding in painting?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, they had; yes, they had, in drawing and painting. And it is no exaggeration to say that they taught me more than I taught them. I got of the view, Taylor is teaching it second-hand from his pupils. The uses of the green, the terre-verte underpainting, which was standard practice in the [Trecento and] Quattrocento. Became very much clearer to me as a result of Taylor's teaching t hat it had ever been before. Taylor was a thoroughly competent, thoroughly able technician. He knew how to execute a job with technical unity throughout and a good piece of work, and he taught his students to do that. His things were not patchy as they're so very apt to be. He taught composition not only within the limits of the frame but composition as a part of the function that the painting was intended to need, to satisfy. If the painting was not going to be seen on axis, it was to be designed on axis; if it was to be seen off axis, it was designed accordingly, and so on. Just thoroughly professional training. I hated to see it go as it did under Charlie Sawyer's rather destructive administration which followed [Everett] Meek's when everything after it was a sculpture and painting, all the skilled, technical instruction was thrown to the wind.

MR. BROWN: Did you feel that under the regime that you knew, were the students able to crack themselves to an extent, or were they still really expecting sort of an artisan training to learn the technical and not expecting to express themselves, became mature artists?

MR. THOMPSON: Pretty completely that. You have to begin with sort of copybook exercises. I don't think there was a great deal to express, but I remember talking rather indignantly to Louis York one time and saying, "I'm awfully tired of this elementary and rather traditional subject matter of choice. Anybody'd think you were all tired, old men instead of lively young people. Why don't you do something out of your own imagination?" And Louis came up with a painting, quite a large painting, full of the most extraordinary symbolism. I was so dismayed by this, I called in the university psychiatrist, Glen Fry, and said, "What do you make of that?" And Glen Fry said, "I think it's a leg pull." And low and behold, it was a leg pull. Louis had really gone out of his way to create a series of minor scandals, had lovely, naked ladies' feet treading strange flowers and of course all kinds of rather elementary symbolism which, if it had not been so self conscious would certainly have been alarming. We had an awfully good time. There was a chap named Phil Eliot, I think, [who] also became a very, very competent tempera painter, indeed, and carried his professional life somewhere west, I lost track of him, and there were several others.

MR. BROWN: Did you exhibit the students' work beyond New Haven? Did it become known? You mentioned earlier it became fairly well known.

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, it did, it did. There was a sort of school of Yale tempera painters and their work was admired [on a…technical…] I don't think any school had very much hope in succeeding in an effort to produce artists. I think the most a school can hope to produce is competent painters. I think whether an artist's an artist is another question entirely, hardly a question for the school, much more a question for other influences.

MR. BROWN: You were at Yale until what year?

MR. THOMPSON: '33. I was there for seven splendid years, very happy years indeed. Tubby Sizer, Theodore Sizer, came from Cleveland, I think in 1927, and he and his wife and five lovely children - eventually six - were closest friends of my wife and myself, and remained so throughout Tubby's life. During the war in London, he stayed with us in London a good deal of the time, and my wife nursed him through a distressing sort of illness. We were very close friends indeed. And we were professionally as far apart as the poles because Tubby - I can't call him anything but Tubby - Tubby's philosophy of teaching was diametrically opposed to mine. He belonged to the Billy Ivins school of gutsy reaction which Ivins sweetened a little by calling it 'visceral reaction." You feel it here, in the tummy. I don't expect college students to feel things there the first time they see a lantern slide, any work of art, however great and I think there's a danger to the integrity of the personal reaction if you take what should produce [this] famous visceral reaction - it isn't that I deny the [existence] of reactions somewhere in the midriff, but that I feel it is something which can at best be helpfully [incorporated] (378), and certainly not at all by the methods of the [Nuremberger …] (380). Remember the funnel in the little boy's head and the red sand that pours through it? I don't think you can accomplish very much with reality by dread cultivation, of emotional reaction to what you are. I think the best you can do is concentrate attention on them and hope that in time they will assert themselves and produce a reverberation, a retinance in the mind of the student. Doesn't seem to me a subject for direct teaching, teaching of art appreciation, music appreciation. It's very, very hazardous in that respect because you may create a short-lived fashion.

MR. BROWN: Would the students, in fact, really be experiencing something viscerally just because the teacher told them to? They couldn't at all.

MR. THOMPSON: Well, Tubby thought they could. I mean, they learned to write [essays], gave the approved reaction, gave the approved comments, feeding back what they'd been told. And my approach was entirely different.

MR. BROWN: Was he convinced, though, that because he got these correct answers that his approach was working?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, oh, yes. He was perfectly delighted. But it wasn't unique to Tubby; it's a fault that I find in all teaching of appreciation, it seems to me a contradiction of terms. You can't teach spontaneous reaction. Stenman Glass used to quote someone, I'm not quite sure whom, used to say, "We aim at order and hope for beauty." If you aim at beauty, you're apt to come out with something awfully [pretty and not very] beautiful; if you aim at order, some times you have better luck.

MR. BROWN: This is something that you learned from one of your mentors, then, George Herbert Palmer, to make the arts, somebody called it an "eternal possession," you were saying earlier.

MR. THOMPSON: Yes.

MR. BROWN: You do aim for that?

MR. THOMPSON: Internal possession and my feeling is that anything which causes the student to be, while still free of external influences, exposed to the operation of the work of art itself as being _____ (425), it may do it's work, it may produce a reaction maybe of love and admiration, maybe of strong distaste. I don't care what it is, as long as it's a genuine reaction. If people think that it's perfectly natural and not improper for people to do, that some 12th Century Byzantine painting is pretty crude and pretty rough and [ugly], that's a genuine reaction, I don't propose to argue with it. But I have found that if a student is exposed to a particular kind of image he first finds distasteful, he's very apt in time to get a taste for it and see beauties in it he never thought to see. But the first time you taste caviar, it seems [to be a] bit fishy, and after a while, perhaps you like enough to pay quite a price for it. I don't like to waste time telling people they must like caviar because it's delicious and so on.

MR. BROWN: Did you find that your way of getting the students into doing the work of art or just learning the techniques was one that was eventually then overturned, at least at Yale?

MR. THOMPSON: Sizer was very enthusiastic, indeed, about the tempera painting and practiced it himself with great success. No problem there at all. No, it was just in the history of art that I liked to pursue a policy of indirection and he, of course, is direction. My feeling about that left me a little cold to Meek's idea of importing even so great and warm and powerful a figure as Osheon because he was at the end of his career and not at the beginning, and I feel that a teacher working with pupils and learning from them as well as teaching them - perhaps more - makes a strong and lasting department. I don't like to use the expression "window dressing," but there was a certain amount of obligation on officials on Meek's position at that time to help to carry out the mandate that had been given to President Andrew to turn Yale College into Yale University. And at times that did mean window dressing, as for example when, although there was a lively school of brain surgery in the medical school at Yale, when Harvey Cushing was imported after his retirement in Boston, his fame caused him to outshine the serious workers at Yale, and I suppose my feeling was that the small, quiet, steady growth that I

felt that I could see among my students, not only of the painting but of history, would be overshadowed and diminished by the presence of the great - of course, I think I was wrong, I think I was wrong. I think Osheon was so young at heart and so desirable member of the community that at any age I should have made him more welcome although I'm happy to say that we did become friends and allies. [Aubert] was another story, he was sort of part of the package that [Everett Meeks] made to acquire Osheon, and [Aubert] was a sort of picture postcard man. He was a regular director, charming person, delightful, lovely family, but quite unimportant at Yale as he had been for many years at the Louvre, just doesn't make waves.

MR. BROWN: Did you then leave Yale? Didn't you also get a subsidy and go traveling and do research in Europe?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, I think it was in 1931. [Everett Meeks] said to me, "I'm arranging to give you a half year off [and] a Sterling Fellowship, and you go off and get your darned old book out of your system, and we'll all be happier."

MR. BROWN: This was the Cennino Cennini?

MR. THOMPSON: No, it was some other stuff that I was working on then.

MR. BROWN: You did in fact go?

MR. THOMPSON: I spent the [following] summer and autumn of 1931 having quick a turn round in libraries to see how much unedited material there might be and found a good deal of it, and warmed up old acquaintances in Europe and had a very happy time. My wife had a dash of illness which took a great deal of the joy out of it. I went back and spent a couple of more years at Yale. And I'm happy to say that [Everett Meeks] and I parted the best of friends, remained the best of friends all the rest of his life. He was [an] able and good administrator within framework of the job that was laid down for him by the administration, I think faultless, and it broke my heart to see his structure falling to ruins within months of [his] turning it over to [Charlie Sawyer] whose effort was almost totally destructive. Tore it down, I pleaded with him not to tear it down but rebuild, but he was very cross with me at the moment because he had asked me to come back and give the Ryerson lectures, again stipulating that they must deal with the paintings in the Yale Gallery. And I'd provisionally accepted that invitation although I'd previously turned down a similar invitation from [Everett Meeks] and Charlie thought I was pleased about that and extremely angry when I told him that I shouldn't be able to do it although I gave him plenty of notice. So he didn't listen to me when I said, "Please make haste slowly. Don't tear down any faster than you build up. Tearing down is quick and easy and building up is slow.

MR. BROWN: What sort of things did he tear down?

MR. THOMPSON: The whole structure of the technical teaching. He said, "Let's just put bricks in architects' hands and leave it to them, and paints in the painters' hands and leave it to them, not interfere with their self-expression and individuality. Tear down this wretched [Beaux-arts] monster which has been strangling the development of the Arts at Yale." I said, "The techniques of building need to be learned, the techniques of painting need to be learned. What people do with them, you can't control, but there are right and wrong ways to lay a brick, there are right and wrong ways to do a job of painting and get it done and get it done on time in a business-like, work-man like way." And that was anathema to a somewhat romantic disposition. So he began by tearing down and when confronted with the job of rebuilding, he flubbed it. Said all discipline was taboo, no, nothing technical could be taught. But the old school had both in architecture and in painting - somewhat less degree in sculpture but even there - fairly competent technical instruction. The students up to, I can't remember what the year was. Charlie took over in '38, perhaps, I've forgotten.

MR. BROWN: It was well after you'd gone?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes. Oh, yes, I had no personal contact with him except very distantly as his student. Before Osheon left a few disciples, the best of them, I think, was Glen Phasen who immediately left Yale; Charlie Schemor; Tom O'Cosby; I think one or two others, one who went to Vassar, I can't remember his name, shamed to say. The Yale school was certainly strictly [Beaux-arts] in its point of view, had all the virtues in a very high degree, and almost all the teachers were [Beaux-arts] trained. I don't think anyone has devised any better system of teaching, but teaching and learning have very little to do with each other. Barry Randall once defined learning which is obviously an instantaneous thing, I mean, you suddenly realize that you have learned something, and Randall put it quite well. He said, "We build up potential in assorted academic [Leiden] jars, and the great moments are when a spark leaps across from one knowledge to another. And you can't make that spark jump. All you can do is help build up the potential." You can't teach good taste and you can't teach art, you can only teach techniques, and techniques change in the hands of the people who employ them. You can't teach individuality; individuality imposes itself or doesn't, and if it doesn't, why then your painter or architect is in the wrong profession. But there are things that can be taught and that should be taught. And schools that are practicing art need to be taught because they are not obvious.

MR. BROWN: You went from Yale directly to England? What was the sequence there?

MR. THOMPSON: I applied for a fellowship from the, I resigned my post at Yale in '33, and applied for a fellowship in the American Council of Learned Societies to make a fairly systematic survey of some of the main European libraries for works on the history of the technology of the arts, I was given a very liberal fellowship, in the course of the next year, I handled something like, read through or turned the pages of, perhaps 10,000 manuscripts and found at least a couple of hundred additions [to the literature] of the [technology] of the arts, some of which I've since published.

MR. BROWN: Before you went to Europe again, did you know exactly where you were going to look for these or were there even unexpected sources you hadn't known about?

MR. THOMPSON: You some times get clues from the library catalogues, sometimes it's just sheer accident, coming on them. I found there was considerable literature. While I was still at Yale, I'd - by sheer accident - happened on Portugese. [Ladino] text called - I don't know how to pronounce it, I've never learned to speak Portugese - it's called the [*Libro De Como Si Facem As Cores* which means " The] Book About How to Make Colors." And it represented a totally different tradition than the Northern European texts with which I was familiar, and I realized that there probably were others there. I've never [done] anything with the one Greek text of importance, [*Hermeneia Tis Zografikis*] because its status is not very clear. [Didron] I believe, edited it from a manuscript copy made by an eminent forger, so one doesn't know quite how much was genuine manuscript of it but I've never dealt with it. Then there's a Russian text called [Poleni/Polenik] which I think simply means "a handle"; there probably are and there're certainly Oriental texts on painting and that sort of thing, but I've never run into those. It's a small family, but I found a certain amount of interest in it. And while I was on this American Council of Learned Societies fellowship, the University of London invited me to lecture at the [Courtauld] Institute, and I wrote a paper which the [Fogg] Museum later published , and the University of London offered me a post to head a laboratory for which Norman Wilkinson had just left a request. I was very reluctant to do it, so finally I agreed to stay two years in order to train someone else. The young man who was given to me to train didn't respond kindly to training, so at the end of two years, I found myself stuck with the department.

MR. BROWN: This was a department to study the techniques of art?

MR. THOMPSON: Well, it was called the Department of the History of the Technology of the Arts. A rather clumsy title, but I just don't know how to make it shorter.

MR. BROWN: Courtauld was almost brand new then, wasn't it?

MR. THOMPSON: Well, not all that new. Walter White who was among the celebrated degree holders, I think he was one of the first, and I think that was perhaps a year or so before I went there. But it was certainly very new. The position [that] they [made] for me was very generous, I had a free hand and for a very short time, I had a few students. And we had interesting times. I held a class meeting in the evening and get a first class silversmith come in and show how to beat a convex shape and a concave shape, how to make a chalice. And I would have refreshments. And I'd get a craftsman of one kind or another to give little reality [to] some of these techniques, and I think it was worth while. But I never was able to assemble very much of a school because the war came along so very soon after.

MR. BROWN: Were you given a pretty free hand, as much as they could as far as the director was concerned?

MR. THOMPSON: A very free hand. I was expected to pass on the condition of things and tell whether wood worms were alive or dead and advise on restoration and that sort of thing. But I strongly opposed carrying out any restoration in the laboratory that they built for me. I carried out some quite basic scientific studies on the nature of red organic [dyestuffs] and with a grant from the Goldsmiths' Company, did some x-ray [diffraction] work on the rate of self-[annealing] of silver. There was sort of an epidemic just them of good hallmarks taken out of poor pieces and grafted onto better pieces with bad hallmarks. And they wanted some way of distinguishing when that could be done, and I thought that was a worthy subject. We never arrived at any satisfactory conclusion but we did our best.

MR. BROWN: They thought this to be a constant, the self-[annealing] process, and that one could therefore -

MR. THOMPSON: Yeah. Silver does - I won't say self-[annealed], but every time it's washed in hot water, there is a certain amount of [annealing] slight [annealing] affect, and the tensions do relax over time and it does appear in X-ray, back [reflection] to the photographs. But the techniques necessary were quite complicated and X-ray [diffraction] was in its youth in those days and we didn't get too far with it. Carried out some studies on the [absorption spectra] of organic [dye] stuffs but I used the wrong end of the [spectrum], I used the ultra-violet end. If I'd realized it, the [infra]-red end would have been much more revealing. But you can't win them all.

MR. BROWN: Now these were all techniques that you had to either teach yourself or hire technicians for. How did

you learn?

MR. THOMPSON: I had a student who failed his doctoral examinations at Oxford, chemistry, and he came and worked with me, [he] was very good. Later became the president of the American Marietta Company. We had a very interesting problem, a archaic Greek head came up for sale and it was bought - was sold, I think, by a man named Sydney Burney, and it was bought by a dealer named Kevorkian. It was offered by Kevorkian to the Boston Museum, and the Boston Museum said, "No, we don't quite like the smell of it. We think it's a little bit fishy." [And it] was sent to my lab for examination to see whether it could be determined by any possible means whether it was old or new. It was supposed to have been dug out of the sea, to have been brought up out of the sea, [and] I found that washings from the surface of it showed no trace of sea water, the usual ingredients of sea water being absent, (lots of sodium chloride) and I found that the washings often contained a large amount of silver. That lead to the suspicion that the [beautiful] golden color that had been given to the undoubtedly [Parian] marble of which it was made, might have been due to treatment with silver salts. And we found, in fact, that the surface of the statue was photo sensitive, you could print a negative on its tummy. Further examination found that along with the sodium chloride, there was a considerable amount of uria present in the washings from the marble. Altogether found the amount of evidence that the surface had been tampered with chemically to cast some doubt on its authenticity. We used to get some funny, funny things. The insurance company brought in a box full of ashes and said, "Can you tell whether these are the ashes of a Van Dyke? Because the burglars who had been apprehended claim that they burned up the Van Dyke." And we found that the canvas had been [primed] with a mixture of [Lithopone] which was completely unknown in Van Dyke's day, and that seemed to argue that the Van Dyke in itself was probably in existence and this seemed to be perhaps stage scenery or something like that.

MR. BROWN: This would have been outside work? The ordinary work at the Institute was what? To take care of Doug Watson?

MR. THOMPSON: No, no, no, we didn't do any restoration at all. I didn't want to. I didn't want to confuse the issue with the full time task of restoring. I think since my day, Rulman and Louie Stones have together turned it largely into a restoration function. But I wanted to make studies in the materials and techniques of works of art. And [that was a] respectful, acceptable use of it as far as the university was concerned. Then the war came along and I had no students, and the demand for laboratory and machine shop facilities, both of which I had, was advanced. I turned it over to the war effort and turned it into a instrument development and gauge making outfit, and actually set up a small -

[END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1]

[BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 2]

MR. BROWN: November 2, 1976. You were discussing the reaction when your translation of Cennino Cennini came out, the reactions in Britain.

MR. THOMPSON: Yes. I don't remember exactly the dates of the publication but I think the translation appeared in about 1930 and in '33 or perhaps it was -- I don't know, perhaps it was in '33 that I went to England as a fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies to try to turn out more technological literature, [and] I was ordered to appear before the Society of Mural Decorators and Painters in Tempera to attempt to justify my [temerity] in upsetting the nice relation between Cennino as the source of all good and [Lady] Christiana J. Herringham, his translator, as the arch-priestess [and] I went to a meeting of the Society, and said there were a small number of positive errors in Lady Herringham's translation which I'd reluctantly corrected. Reluctantly because I'd been brought up on Lady Herringham's translation, loved it dearly, and found it much more readable - and I still do find it more readable, more pleasant - than my own, but think it's less accurate. The reception of this guarded confession was dubious. I felt a pretty icy atmosphere and decided that a slightly [comic turn] would perhaps do some good. So I said that, "There is one respect in which my publication is definitely superior." You could feel the hackles of the audience, mostly ladies, rise. I said, "There's no question about it, for the [practicing] workman, my little book has a distinct advantage over Lady Herringham's." (Growls) Low growls from the audience. "No," I said, "I mean it. The binding is waterproof." (Laughter) That produced a laugh which saved the day and they decided that time would reveal the truth, the [....] and my impertinent translation would soon be forgotten. I'm happy to say that it's worked the other way and [Allen and Unwin have] I think I have now taken the Lady Herringham translation off the market and Dover tell me that the sales of my translation go on quite steadily, even now. [Well] I don't like [it and] I do want to correct some [infelicities] in it and a certain number of positive errors. I remember saying to Carl Young at Yale one time, "How do you protect yourself against making a perfectly awful mistake out of omission or commission?" And Carl Young, with his usual good judgment said, "You've got to give the reviewers a break." (Laughs) Anyhow, soon after I came back to America in 1947, the Society of Mural Decorators and Painters in Tempera invited me to add my name to the short and - from their point of view - quite distinguished list of honorary members. I made rather a point of sending, from time to time, short articles, usually related to tempera painting or something else, advise on drawing methods.

They were always published enthusiastically in the yearbook of the Society, which was called "Tempera" that enjoyed a circulation of, I think, perhaps 50 copies, and mine, alas, were burned in the fire that destroyed my house two years ago. I think it would be difficult to track them down, but they do exist. The moving spirits in the Society were the Misses Borradaile, Viola and Roselyn Borradaile. I think one of them was married but still used her maiden name. And they were very much interested in a manuscript which was burned in the fire which destroyed the library at Strasbourg in about 1849 , so it's not available for consultation, but a transcript of it had been made [at] the order of Sir Charles [Locke] Eastlake, the first director of the National Gallery. I've seen it, it's in the National Gallery , but felt that it was too far from the original to be regarded as strictly reliable. But it contains a rule called an a well known, old famous water liquid with which all colors may be tempered, and it is a sort of wax emulsion. We have no other evidence about it at all. It may be very important, it may be very unimportant, and I have always felt that it was too badly documented for this not altogether convincing transcript from the lost Strasbourg manuscript to be taken very seriously without some supporting evidence. But the [Misses Borradaile] compounded a witch's brew according to this recipe which is not very explicit, and had very little hesitation in, I'll not say "announcing" it, but regarding it as the secret of the [Van Eycks and] perhaps it was, I don't know. They eventually, with the help of a German lady, completed a translation of the whole Strasbourg manuscript, so-called, as if there were only one manuscript in Strasbourg, and [Allen and Unwin] and I think one other publisher asked me about the advisability of printing it. I felt obliged to write very frankly that from my point of view, the manuscript had very little authority and a good many readings which indicated that the transcriber had been a very expert [Paleographer]. Not condemning the work at all, but on the contrary, it had certain interest. Makes it very clear, for example, that the color which is known in medieval Latin as "brunum" is probably the same as the color which was known in medieval German as "braun," was actually a purple. It was a mixture of red and blue which is purple in any language, except that the real purple, [the] shellfish purple, was almost any color except what we call "purple." [Laughter] Any color in the range of colors represented by one member of the plum family or another. I have probably the best translation for brunum is plum, not brown but plum. I don't know why it should be called brown, can't understand it, except that some purples and some browns are so harmonious as to almost resemble each other. That and the altogether inexplicable, so far inexplicable metamorphosis of the word "[glaucus]" which means "sea green," "blue green" to "bright yellow" were the two real stumbling blocks to-

MR. BROWN: So these are all explained in this manuscript?

MR. THOMPSON: No. But the Strasbourg manuscript makes good many mentions of - defining mentions of the word brown which makes it perfectly clear that it was a plum color of some sort, and that is borne out by earlier and later manuscripts, [Valentinen Boltz von Rufach], and it explains, gives some, so to speak, colors of the explanation of the Latin word brunum. Eventually the [Misses Borradaile] made an arrangement to have their life-work on the Strasbourg manuscript published by a man whose name I don't remember in an attractive and very useful little, white volume, grossly underpriced-I'm afraid at their own expense. They sent me a copy and I said, "It is time for Thompson to pay [off] small debts. They've shown kindness to make me an honorary member of their society in spite of my wickedness in upsetting their hierarchy, and it is up to Thompson to write a review of this work of the [Borradaile] sisters and their colleagues, which will not misinform the reader but still give them some pleasure." And I explained it to [van, van...] I can't think of his name - the editor [of *Speculum*] exactly what I wanted to do. He said, "Would you go right ahead and do it?" They didn't change a word, and it reads like the most enthusiastic review and does no injustice to the truth. It's just that I left unsaid all the disagreeable things that I should have felt obliged to say if I'd been dealing with the question of the material they were working with, and not with the work they had done with it. They were, I'm happy to say, inordinately pleased, and I had [*Speculum*] (207) send the publisher a large number of reprints of the review which he tucked into each copy as it was sold, or before it was sold. So honor was satisfied. I think that completes the story of the Society of Mural Decorators and Painters in Tempera.

MR. BROWN: And how did you please them?

MR. THOMPSON: I dealt with their treatment of the manuscript and not with the manuscript itself. I think I'm wrong in saying there's no connection, no support for their witches' brew; I think I'm wrong now that I think [of] it. I think this was right, I think that the _____ is what it's called in one of the [Le Beque] manuscripts published by Mrs. Mary [Merrifield] in her "Original Treatises" and not in the Strasbourg manuscript. I think that does give it a little more substance than I have indicated.

MR. BROWN: You came back from England in '47. You then only occasionally made such studies or reviews, as you've just described, is that right?

MR. THOMPSON: Very seldom, very seldom. A friend of mine, a English friend, was having great trouble in obtaining drawing papers of suitable colors as backgrounds for certain designs that she was making, and I said, "Well, the answer is readily available in [Cennino], he describes the tinting of papers which was very common in the 15th and 16th Centuries, and you have only to follow the directions that [Cennino] gives." She followed them and ran into several small difficulties which I was able to dispose of without any trouble at all. I said to myself, "If

this girl has had these troubles, it's worth while for me to write a paper to eliminate them in the experience of other students of [Cennino]." So I wrote a paper for "Tempera" disposing of the small difficulties which can arise in carrying out [Cennino's] instructions. Now speaking of the mistakes that I made in my [Cennino] translation, [Cennino] speaks of tinting parchment as well as paper. To do it, he says that the parchment must be held by "chiodi," and I translated it as "large-headed nail," and that is a goof of the first order. I was thinking it was something rather like shingle nails, and shingle nails, roofing nails could be used, but they should be used not as nails to hold the parchment but as holders to which the parchment can be attached by folding it over the head of the large-headed nail, the chiodo, and tying it with string to the stem of the nail. That's a very feeble defense of my translation. You could use shingle nails. What you do use, what the parchment maker [or tinter] should use is a mushroom-shaped peg or something can even be cork-shaped, around which the parchment can be wrapped and tied, because no matter how large the head of the nail is, the parchment, which shrinks enormously as it dries, will tear through-the nail will tear through the parchment as it shrinks, [and] if the nail were not driven tight into wooden support or some other support under it, the parchment would simply pull itself past the nail and fall limp. Or if the nail were driven in tight, even with a large head, it would still tear itself away - the force it exerts is colossal. But if the parchment is folded over the head of a mushroom and then tied tightly to it, the force is so largely distributed around circumference of the peg that it can't tear itself away. And the pegs in turn can be laced into a framework. There's always a good deal of [waste if you] start with a piece of parchment [or ….]. About an inch and a half or two inches of it all around has to be lost if it's ever to be wetted and dried again, you have to trim off the misshapen portion.

MR. BROWN: Yours is an extremely or rather difficult, technical translation, then, isn't it? If you used the wrong word, the clarity of the descriptive passage is lost.

MR. THOMPSON: May I sum up the difficulty by saying that if you know what the author means, it's usually not very hard to translate him accurately. But if you don't know, you made the kinds of mistakes that I made. I can't even claim the benefit of picturesque beauty that appears here and there in Lady Herringham's translation of [Cennino] when she translated the word for "emery powder" as "powdered emeralds." (Laughs) There's something extravagantly beautiful about grounding things with powdered emeralds.

MR. BROWN: You'd begun before the war on [Theophilus]. Did you continue some work on that? [In the post-war years?]

MR. THOMPSON: I did indeed, I did indeed. And I spent a good deal of time trying to solve the appalling difficulties of translating that enormous and profoundly important work. I was encouraged and inspired and enormously helped by [Wilhelm Theobald's] great German translation, but he omits the entire section, the entire first book, which deals with painting. If I'd been wise, I think I should have confined myself to supplying the deficiency of [Theobald's] work instead of looking for the comparatively few points where I felt he'd gone wrong in the rest of the work. A man in Chicago wrote me and said that he'd noticed in an article of mine on the manuscripts of [Theophilus] in speculum about 1932, I should think, 2, '3, '4, somewhere in there, that I said I had a translation under way that wasn't intended to be pre-[emptive] and so he asked how soon my translation would be ready, I said I couldn't possibly give a date because the problems which remained to be solved were unpredictably difficult. He wrote back and said-what's his name, [Smith] I think-that he and a colleague named Hawthorne, an Englishman, felt that in one year they could quite well do a working translation, and they needed it for their teaching. And I wrote back and said, "By all means, if you can do a translation in one year, by all means do it." Five or six years later, my recollection of the exact dates and times is not reliable, their translation did finally appear. And in the same year, another translation and a critical text was published by Dodwell in England, and both Hawthorne and Smith and Dodwell were sent to me for review by *Speculum*. It took me a year to write a semblance of a review, and I hardly scratched the surface of the almost completely unsatisfactory nature of either translation. While we're on that subject, if I may say that I don't think Dodwell's work on the text was admirable; he established a text which can be used with confidence. It is a [Lachmanian] type of reconstruction which I happen personally not to like, I'd rather have one text and the variation from others than a text which never existed but is made up with the editor's favorite preferred readings from a large number of manuscripts. But the English translations are both quite unsatisfactory, almost wholly unsatisfactory.

MR. BROWN: These appeared in the late 1930's?

MR. THOMPSON: No. No, no. No, no, not in the '30s. Were we talking about the '30s? No, it was much later. It was in the '50s that I think the Smith wrote me from Chicago.

MR. BROWN: From time to time you were working on a text?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, from '47 on, I was in this country, and I was working on my [Theophilus] translation, making really -as I look back on it-very little progress. I'm perfectly satisfied that any one person who tries to make an adequate translation of the whole [Theophilus] is doomed to failure. [Theobald] did perfect wonders, [Wilhelm Theobald] was the head of the German patent office and he spent years and years and years, and he

solved a great many of the most difficult problems. But some of them aren't solved. Some of them solved to his satisfaction and not mine, they're just not complete, and some of the work he didn't touch at all. He touched only what he regarded as the engineering aspect. The book was published by the Association of German Engineers, the [Verein Deutscher Ingenieure] and in very sumptuous and costly form, handsome. [Theobald] and I never met, but we corresponded. I'm sorry to say that both Dodwell and Smith and Hawthorne seemed not to have consulted [Theobald's] translation at all as far as I could see, they didn't pay any attention to it. But what I'm saying is that it isn't a one-man job; there are so many, so many techniques involved and some of the things so enormously complicated and far ranging that no one person can possibly be expected to deal adequately with the whole bit. For example, the [musicological] aspect, completely misunderstood in both translations. They didn't take the trouble to, both sets of translators and even [Theobald], didn't take the trouble to find out what the author must have meant. I have advanced an explanation which suits me a little more satisfactorily than theirs, for the [cymbala], but I'm not sure that I am right.

MR. BROWN: You have dealt with everything, you said earlier, but the astrology section?

MR. THOMPSON: No, the astrology section is not in the [Theophilus] but in the [Secretum Philosophorum]. That, also, I was trying to translate into English with the idea that a translation of perhaps the text of one manuscript and an English translation would really be more useful than a [Variorum Edition] of all the known manuscripts and an English translation. A good deal of the [*Secretum Philophorum*] has no fine arts interest at all. In fact, most of it hasn't, it's engineering, it's a treatise on the seven liberal arts, and it's interest is preserving a text which I suggested one time calling [*De Coloribus et Mixtionibus*], a set of rules for illuminators for the shading and highlighting of solid ground colors, laid systematically in books [and] evidently supported by some powerful authority, never been satisfactorily explained except by a suggestion made orally to me one time by Montague [Rhodes] James that it might have been [Cluny]. I asked him what authority could, in the [12th], 13th Century, perhaps late 13th Century, have sanctioned a certain systematic practice in the shading and lightening, highlighting of pigments in books, and he said that he could only guess, but he said, "I should ask myself whether it might not be Cluny." I've never been able to think of any better answer.

MR. BROWN: Was Cluny at that time a very structured, well-run place for illuminating? Was it a particularly competent place?

MR. THOMPSON: Oh yes, oh yes. Absolutely. And of course, enormous authority. This canon, this set of rules, [which was dictated] by normal, good practice, was copied over and over and over, over again, it appears in all sorts of contexts, but it was included in most of the manuscripts of the [Secretum Philosphorum]. That was what led me to the [*Secretum Philosophorum*] I said, I'm engaged now in a purely history of science study of one small aspect of it. My department in the University of London, by the way, had to be supported by two other departments, and the departments which supported it, authorized its formation, were the Chemistry Department, Professor Charles Singer with Professor Charles Gibson, and the History of Science Department with Charles Singer being the sponsors. So I've always had part of one foot in the history of science camp. Except for keeping live those two works for file, the work on [Theophilus] and the work on the [*Secretum Philosophorum*], my writings in the field of fine arts work are pretty much limited to occasional reviews. I haven't been a good fine arts man at all.

MR. BROWN: But you were a good deal of this by intention? The direction you took during World War II in England and then when you were getting back here, you meant to continue in engineering?

MR. THOMPSON: I won't say that I turned my back on the fine arts world, but the fine arts world certainly didn't welcome me with very open arms. It was suggested at one point that I should take over the so-called direction of the Gardener Museum, and I wrote to [Berenson] about it, and he wrote back and said, "It's a very good address." (Laughs)

MR. BROWN: What do you suppose he meant by that?

MR. THOMPSON: Well, there is no job, nothing about the job that could possibly interest anyone who's creative or constructive, operation of nothing can be changed, nothing can be altered. Simply maintenance. Of course, the social aspect and the direction of concerts and all that sort of thing's different. But "it's a very good address"-I thought it was a typical [Berenson] reply.

MR. BROWN: Nothing intellectual or spiritually challenging. Could you or did you consider after World War II, staying on at the [Courtauld] or did you for a time?

MR. THOMPSON: I did for a few months. I mean, things aren't changed automatically. But once they wanted me to come back, invited me to come back at least, but I felt a certain loyalty to my company in '46 which diminished rapidly through '47.

MR. BROWN: Did your fortunes decline?

MR. THOMPSON: No, no, no. On the contrary, it prospered. The company was bought by Sir James [Lithgow] and moved to Scotland. I continued to run the London office, but the control of the company, control of the policy was eased largely out of my hands into the hands of a Hungarian of great genius and very little scruple. When Tombos urged me to come back, he made it a condition that I must sever my relations with the company, and I wasn't at that time prepared to do that, said that I should like nothing better than to do some teaching but it would have to be on a divided basis. He said, "That's what we cannot have." Which I think was probably quite right.

MR. BROWN: Did you maintain a number of friendships with erstwhile colleagues at the [Courtauld]? Did you have a good many friends there?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, sure. Not very many of them all went to [Warburg. Anthony Blunt,] who became director of the [Courtauld], and I were always on the best of terms with very little interest in each other's professional occupation. Fritz [Saxl] was one of the best friends I ever had, we were very close indeed. [Saxl] and Gertrude Bain, near saints as any friends I've ever had.

MR. BROWN: How so, could you say?

MR. THOMPSON: Their devotion to scholarship was almost religious and all-embracing. The subject matter of scholarship made very little difference to them, the method of scholarship was everything. They were naturally [Geistes ges Chichtes, their first interest,] but their personal warmths and kindness and appreciation, understanding, perfectly wonderful people, wonderful. Ruth [Saxl] daughter worked as an assistant in my lab for me some time, did quite nice little piece of work on the [histology] parchment because I had a theory - I suppose it centered about the so-called "[Uterine] velum" of the 13th Century in France-not exclusively but largely there, a parchment of very thin, singularly opaque, [beautifully white] the surface which was very much like good quality India paper, almost looked like a dusty white but it wasn't dusty. Very thin and very opaque, really a good deal like India paper except [that] it wasn't. And the rumor grew [up], this story, that it was the skin of stillborn calves. [And] I once suggested in my *Materials of Medieval Painting*that if it was indeed the skin of stillborn cows, the state of animal husbandry in Europe must have been in a deplorable state in the 13th Century. And old Raley-[an excellent illuminator], was a very good friend of mine-wrote me and said, spoke very enthusiastically about that comment but [he] said, "If anything was more ridiculous it was another suggestion that this was indeed [uterine vellum]." My suggestion was it was probably the skin of small animals, possibly rabbits, squirrels, that sort of thing, which were very popular [in the] diet of those days. [Pies of] rabbits, of course, rabbits and hares always have been, but I think it very likely that that is the explanation. It may have been something else but I don't think it could have been the skin of a bird [but I think] but probably from the size, I think it might well have been squirrel skin or possibly rabbit skin. Some refinements or tricks of preparation that we don't know.

MR. BROWN: She investigates this?

MR. THOMPSON: Well, Sir Henry Dale, who was the great immunologist, leader in the identification of proteins by their immunological effect, said in conversation with him one time that he thought it might be possible, even after a thousand years, to match the protein and discover exactly what animal [the] parchment came from. I suggested to Belle Green that if [Hedwig Saxl's] studies took an immunological turn that we might be able to beg minute, almost microscopic samples of parchment of dated manuscripts in the Morgan library. And Belle threw up her hands in horror at the idea of making holes in Mr. Morgan's books even though it might have been a hundredth part of the area of the smallest worm hole. Phil Hall, rather to my surprise, who at that time was [nominally] Lebell's assistant, said, "You're welcome to take all the samples you want from any of my manuscripts," which I thought was very nice of him. But [Hedwig] never did get to the immunological point. Dale even allowed that it might be possible to identify the presence of the proteins of hens' eggs, the yolks and whites, in compounds, [if] emulsions [were] used, as they may have been at some point, it might even be possible to tell whether they were emulsions of egg or size or whatever. That's a line which I should like to have pursued and probably should have pursued if it hadn't been for the war. The only systematic work t hat I was able to accomplish at the [Courtauld] Institute was preparation of samples of a large number-very large number-of organic and inorganic pigments according to medieval rules. And in the course of making one, one does learn to understand the recipes [for] making them somewhat better. Unfortunately, Singer's work on alums, [which was,...er....,]which alums are one of the great problems im production of pigments according to medieval rules-

MR. BROWN: Why are they a problem?

MR. THOMPSON: The identification of arumid erorca, for example, which we can't say rock alum, roche alum, may have been what it was supposed to be and it may not. But Singer's great work on alums was ten years or so, came along ten years or so later and wasn't available to us, the knowledge wasn't available. But we managed to cover the field of organic red pigments pretty well. No absolutely reliable specimen of the Kermes dye was available, none is available even now, though my friends in Portugal are still working on it. But I did, in the

autumn of 1939, just before the war, I did have collected a lot of the [Margarodes polonicus] in Poland. It was collected for me by Professor Yakooksy of Poznan at my expense, at the [Courtauld's] expense, [at a] moderate expense. And that was about the only exception. Not quite, the folium red from the [Chrozophora tinctoria] was available only at second hand. I mean, the man in the south of France was interested in it and he had prepared some cloths saturated with it and let us have some. But I didn't, myself, prepare it from the plant, so I can't guarantee that. Having made these pigments, Robert Fraumar and I made absorption [spectrograms] of them in the ultra-violet and identification seemed possible. The Polish [cochineal] the [Margarodes polonicus] was so nearly identical with the American [cochineal] in its ultra violet absorption that, [that which] would have been one of the most useful dating indications was a little uncertain. But again, we were a little ahead of the game because we should have been working not in the ultra violet region but in the [infra] red region where the dissections would have been much more marked. But the [infra] red spectography was not at that time understood or well practiced.

MR. BROWN: Has this work been continued as a course elsewhere?

MR. THOMPSON: No, it hasn't. No, after I left the [Courtauld] took back a man named Steven Reece Jones, of whom I was very fond, personally, liked him very much indeed, but I'd had to dismiss him because his unreliability in the laboratory. It didn't matter because he didn't continue any of the purely scientific investigations but simply acted as understudy to Helmut Rulmar, the restorer to the National Gallery who made the technology department of the [Courtauld the base of] his own operations.

MR. BROWN: And you, in your time, did not take on any restoration. I know you've said that before.

MR. THOMPSON: No.

MR. BROWN: Your idea there was to, in the field of the technology of art, continue pure scholarship as it was in the history of art, with the other departments, right?

MR. THOMPSON: We had some interesting experiences. I've forgotten whether I've told you the story of the archaic Greek marble.

MR. BROWN: You did mention it, yes, with the photosensitive belly.

MR. THOMPSON: Or the shoebox full of ashes, the Van Dyke ashes.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. THOMPSON: The question of whether wood worms are alive or dead, in England, can be quite a serious question. If you find a little pile of dust under a panel painting, you suspect the presence of wood worms but you can't be sure.

MR. BROWN: Did you determine that?

MR. THOMPSON: No, no, we found that it was, on the whole, better just to assume that they were alive and fumigate. Surely I told you the story of trying to listen to them?

MR. BROWN: No!

MR. THOMPSON: Oh, that was great fun.

[END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2]

[BEGIN TAPE 4, SIDE 1]

MR. BROWN: November 2, 1976. The wood worms?

MR. THOMPSON: The [painting] in which we suspected, felt quite sure, the live [Lyctus…or Lyctus] larvae must be present-was [placed] on the lectern of the lecture table-shades of Faraday and Humphry [Davy] and [Dewar] and many others in the background. An extremely sensitive microphone was placed strategically upon it, and the front seats in the auditorium of the Royal Institution are specially wired for deaf people, so the microphone was connected to one of these seats. I put on the head phones and listened. There was total silence. I said, "Maybe the little animals are just not hungry." So I listened patiently and all of a sudden my ears were split! "My gosh," I said, "They're eating their little heads off." And I took off the earphones because it was deafening, and the sound was even louder-they were digging up [Albemarle] Street with lots of pneumatic drills! (Laughs)

MR. BROWN: End of experiment?

MR. THOMPSON: End of experiment. (Laughs) The result of that, I think, was Mr. Spencer Churchill took back his painting. We told him how in August we'd disinfected it for him, killed the larvae if there were any, and we didn't have another good sample, and some how or other the project was never completed. For a moment, I thought the [Lyctus] must be the noisiest eater in the animal kingdom.

MR. BROWN: Did you keep up with Bernard [Berenson] into the '50s?

MR. THOMPSON: After the war, yes. Well during the war, messages could pass only through the [.....] of Sweden, the only person who knew where he was and who did relay very non-committal messages. But immediately after the war, our correspondence picked up again and continued to near the end of his life.

MR. BROWN: And he has known since the early '20s, isn't that true, as quite a young man?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, I met him in the early spring of '23, and then nearly lost touch with him until about '30 or '31. Then it was Belle Green-as in my life it always seemed to be-who said to me one day I was a perfect fool not to pursue my acquaintance with the BB because, as she said, he has forgotten more than Oscar will ever know. She did not love Ben Oskie very much. I don't think even the [Warburg] people loved him very much. He was sort of ugly duckling.

MR. BROWN: Rather brutal or stepped on too many toes?

MR. THOMPSON: Vain, I think. He was ambitious. [Saxl] and Bain didn't have an [atom] of ambition in them, they had burning zeal but no ambition, no. So in, I can't remember, I think it was in '31 perhaps, I can't remember, Yale gave me a half year off and a Sterling Scholarship, fellowship, and I went to Rome to do some work at the Vatican and the [Magliabecchiana], and published a silly little bit of a tract on the making of ink. At that time, I was trying to distribute papers in as many different [kinds of] journals as possible, and this went to the journal of the-what was it called? [….Mitteilung]

MR. BROWN: The German Institute at […]?

MR. THOMPSON: No, it was the [Mitteilung, medizin und wissenschaften,] I can't remember, it's a very long title. They wanted it, they wanted the article in German; they said they could translate it, but it would be better if I wrote it in German. So I wrote it in German and said, "This is a good chance to, I'm in Rome, brush up acquaintance with BB." So I sent it to him and said, "I'm not a particularly good German scholar, and I should be much obliged if you'd give this a coup de grace." And he wrote back and said, "You do write shockingly good German. I'm ashamed of you." He said, "My German is so colored by hatred that I can't touch it. But Nicky, whose mother's perfect in German and who's good in German herself, has made a few changes. We've all had some difficulty in finding the word for the trimming of a manuscript, the cutting down of the book. The manuscript had evidently been cut down in size and the only word we could think of was "Beschnitten" and that had, at the time, a particularly strong, Nazi coloration because it happens to be the word for circumcision. (Laughs) I think Nicky got us out of that difficulty, I've forgotten just how. But BB thought that was quite funny. I went up to France and saw him then, saw him nearly every year after that. He and I went down to France every spring to teach at Miss Childs' School.

MR. BROWN: This was in the '20s or the '30s?

MR. THOMPSON: In the '30s. Went to France and I was working in the [Laurentian] Library one morning and there was an obviously American girl, very attractive little girl, copying a large initial from a late Italian music manuscript, drawing the outline of the letter and gradually filling it in with ink. I stopped at her putao and complimented her on the care with which she was doing it. Some time later, we met around the gallery around the [loggia, to] smoke a cigarette and we were talking, and she said, "I was so pleased to have you compliment me on my work. It's very reassuring." And I said, "Don't let it go to your head. You're doing it beautifully and it's very careful, but you know it wasn't done that way at all." Surely I've told you this story?

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. THOMPSON: She said, "What do you mean it wasn't done that way? How else could it be done? They must have had an outline fill in." I said, "No, not at all. It came off the pen that way." "But how can it?" she said. I said, "It was a very wide pen, and if you move it in a straight line at right angles to the writing edge of the pen, it will make a very fine line. And if you move it at an angle in between those two extremes, it'll make a somewhat narrower line. It is exactly like taking a ribbon and turning it, folding it." So I simulated in a drawing the movement of the edge of the pen held parallel to the writing line and also one sloping at an angle to the writing line, and sort of had the effect of the change did to the resulting letter. She was very much interested, little skeptical. That afternoon she came over to my place and said, "Is your name Dan Thompson?" And I said, "Yes it is." "Ah," she said, "Miss Childs said it must be." (Laughs) Well, Miss Childs and I had had a blistering row four or five years before. I used to teach at the Childs -Walker School in Boston, but after I went to Yale there was some

silly question of who paid my traveling expenses if I came up to give a course in Boston. So we'd lost touch with each other for three or four years. Miss Childs'd evidently forgiven me and I had forgiven her, and we've loved each other ever since. She's a wonderful person.

MR. BROWN: Was she quite a skilled artist herself?

MR. THOMPSON: No. But a profound appreciation of everything that's good and beautiful and a very able and lively stimulant to the young mind. She was primarily concerned with the geometrical basis of design, but that didn't limit her enthusiasm. She wasn't learned but she was very sharp sighted and a very, very fine, great teacher, encouraging, stimulating.

MR. BROWN: And she had students in Italy at that time?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, she did. Mr. Howard Walker had died and she moved to Florence and taken a little house on the Via de Ronco, and engaged a studio. I used to go every year, and'30-I think it was the spring of, can't remember, '31 or perhaps it was '33-This girl said that Miss Childs wanted very much to see me, and so I went. I took some flowers. Well, we couldn't put enough flowers in one cab, so we filled another cab. It was Miss Childs' birthday. And the girls and I put all the flowers on the dining table and we had, Kitty and I had a happy reunion. No mention of past differences, never came up at all. We just started off as if nothing had ever happened. Had a lovely dinner and then the girls suddenly-I don't know if they considered it among themselves or what happened-they started throwing the flowers at Miss Childs tossing them, I won't say throwing them, tossing them at her. She loved it and sat there until she was just embedded in flowers. She never forgot it-probably one of the happiest occasions of her life. It was certainly one of the happiest of mine, I was perfectly delighted about it. And she said, "Now can't you give the girls a quick run through the processes of [gessoing] and [gilding] and tempera painting?" And I said, "Of course I can." And at the end of two weeks, we had an exhibition and every girl had finished a little [panel] with a sample of practically every known technique according to [Cennino], at least. And it was a great success, she was very happy about it. And I must say, the pictures were awfully pretty, just lovely, very bright and garish and gay. And so nothing would do but I should come down the next year. Miss Childs paid me very handsomely, and I think she probably made the parents of the girls pay even more handsomely for it. This annual thing became quite a feature of the year in her school. She had about a dozen girls, mostly Americans, some Canadian.

MR. BROWN: Would you have to come from United States?

MR. THOMPSON: No, from London. In '33, you see, I went to London in '33.

MR. BROWN: Did your wife go with you?

MR. THOMPSON: Oh, yes. She didn't always go with me. One year when our son John was a baby, she had to stay behind, and a little cousin of mine from Maine who had come over to lend a hand with the baby, came down instead. The old biddies in the [pension where I stayed took a very] gloomy [view of] that." And then a couple of years later, my friend Henry Winslow asked me to take his daughter to [Florence] one spring, she had friends there she was going to stay with, but she came across [Pension ….] with me, and the biddies by then decided I was altogether a bad type and practically had to change [pension]. But the only reason for telling you that is, you were asking whether my wife came with me.

MR. BROWN: During this time, did you see [Berenson] fairly regularly?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, almost always. The only times actually that I-that isn't true, actually, I did see him in London one time. And he had Lady Horner's house. Otherwise I never saw him except at his house. But I always, throughout all this, at least for a couple weeks for luncheon in the afternoon.

MR. BROWN: You said another time to me that he'd characterized so many people who are art historians as crows or [gleaners or] something like that, people painting on other people's work, I guess, doing trivia.

MR. THOMPSON: He always used to say [of] himself that his fame was just a matter of a happy accident entirely. He said the great harvest had been reaped by [Burckhardt] and Corncopocacelli and the early 19th Century scholars, so that every little came after [was] in a sense [a gleaner]. But he said the gleanings weren't too bad, the drawings had been neglected and "I picked up the drawings." And they were fruitful and the time was ripe. People were beginning to be interested in collecting and the study of drawings did make identifications, their attributions possible, which without the study of the drawings would have had to be pretty doubtful. But he said, the story you are referring to is speaking of the present day art historian as coming after the gleaners and sort of [carrion] crows who'd see a neglected grain in a field somewhere and pick it up and squawk very loudly, "See what I've found? Look at this wonderful discovery that I have made." And I think he's not far wrong. [Berenson] had the profounded respect for Richard Afner's scholarship, considered him far and away the most able scholar and couldn't deplore too much the miserable field in which he'd chosen to exercise it. No question, I think, about

Afner's ability, but there was considerable question about the interestingness of what he was working on.

MR. BROWN: Was [Berenson] quite encouraging to you about your field?

MR. THOMPSON: Yes, he was, he was. He'd tease me about it, he'd say, "[cookery, cookery, ...cookery]. (313) I prefer the dining room, you prefer the kitchen, well alright then, you can't have one without the other." (Laughs)

MR. BROWN: Was [Berenson], on the basis of, say your researchers and those of ones like yours, was he revising some of his attributions?

MR. THOMPSON: No, no. No, no, no, no, no, I never did anything that required and revisions of attributions.

MR. BROWN: In the later years, you didn't see him after the war, did you? But you wrote to him.

MR. THOMPSON: No, I never saw him.

MR. BROWN: Did you find his attitudes about the same? What do you recall particularly from your correspondence after World War II? What did he seem to be interested in?

MR. THOMPSON: I think he was more interested in his reading than in paintings. But he was very busy writing his biography, [and he] was a [voracious] reader, loved to talk about whatever he was reading and it comes a little into the letters but not very much.

MR. BROWN: Would you consider him or someone else to have been a mentor of yours? What about Edward Forbes who you'd known very early? You'd have known him again after the war, too, wouldn't you?

MR. THOMPSON: Oh, yes indeed. I knew him as long as his mind lasted. Loved him dearly. Don't think he ever quite trusted me, I don't know why, never could understand quite why. The [fire] was all laid for my interest in the history of the technology of art because it began [as I told you] back in 1917 which is a long time ago, in the library of the Loomis family. But it was Edward Forbes who kindled it, and saw that I learned a little something about the history of art and saw things, which is essential, [and] my eyes in those days [were] I think extraordinarily keen, I think my visual acuity must have been exceptional, because a student of mine [in Newcastle on Tyne....college, Louisa] Hodgkins, I think it was , simply could not understand what I was talking about in discussing the drawing brush strokes of the [Mantegna] every brush stroke is a drawing line. She said, "I can't see that at all, I don't follow you." And one day some years later, she came into my office and said, "I owe you an apology. I have just seen a new [oculist] and he's prescribed some new glasses for me. I went to the National Gallery and looked at the [Mantegna] we were discussing there, and saw exactly what you said was there. I hadn't seen it. My glasses were not good." But I think, my eyesight is dreadful now, but I think in those days it must have been particularly acute, because I quite often would see things that I couldn't persuade people I really did see. I don't know that Edward saw those, though his eyesight was keen, but he saw a great deal and taught me to see a great deal.

MR. BROWN: How about Paul Sacks after you came back?

MR. THOMPSON: No, I didn't. Paul Sacks I hardly saw after I came back. He wasn't at all well. I wanted to see him, I particularly wanted my son to have known him because Paul was so extremely kind to me when I was 16, 17, something like that. My son was much younger than that, but I did want John to know my old friends, but Paul wasn't up to seeing me. I saw more of his wife and I didn't see much of her. I used to-you'll have some letters from them, very sweet person, a darling person. Edward was the clumsiest operator, his hands wouldn't do at all what he wanted them to do, but he was so earnest and so industrious that statistically, he was bound to succeed some times, and some times he did. Some of his paintings are delightful. I think he'd ride hobbies. He'd think clam shells were fascinating colors and he did that great Madonna in clam shells, [in] the [Fogg now] which I think is really a very handsome piece of work. He never could learn to handle gold leaf, and he never quite saw some of the optical phenomena which are so inborn in painting of any age, he never could grasp the-the glaze he could understand, but he never saw the usefulness with scumble, he couldn't understand that. And he thought a glaze had to be a transparent thing whereas it has only to be slightly darker than the surface to which it's applied. He thought of a glaze as a transparent colored varnish, in effect. It was an old habit of thought which he never could throw off and it hampered the exchange of ideas because he couldn't quite follow my thinking. But [the] encouragement to learn, and the opportunity to learn, came entirely from Edward Forbes, his kindness and generosity to me were unimaginable. He treated me in every way as a [son, a] sixth [child]-he had five children and I was just taken into the family and treated like a beloved [son] with utmost generosity, generosity of mind not of person, person as well but he'd always contrived to supplement delicately any scholarship that I might have, and I lived in the family for months.

[END OF TAPE 4]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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