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Oral history interview with Richard Artschwager, 1978 March 3-28

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Transcript

Interview

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW INTERVIEW WITH
RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER
AT HIS STUDIO IN NEW YORK CITY
MARCH 3 & 22, 1978
INTERVIEWER: PAUL CUMMINGS**

RA: RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER
PC: PAUL CUMMINGS

PC: Let me say it's the third of March, 1978. Paul Cummings talking to Richard Artschwager in his studio on 103 Franklin Street, New York City.

PC: You were born in 1924 in Washington, D.C., right?

RA: '23.

PC: '23?

RA: Yeah.

PC: Oh. Where did I get '24?

RA: Um, hmm.

PC: Somewhere.

RA: I want this released after my death.

PC: [laughs]

RA: Okay?

PC: That one year makes a difference?

RA: Uh, at one point it seemed like I needed a year because it was just.... I think it was Jack Benny's proverbial 39.

PC: Oh, right.

RA: That's exactly what it was. I can't, you know....

PC: No. Anyway. [laughs]

RA: If this is revelation time, so be it.

PC: So. But you grew up there, went to school, high school, grammar school, in Washington, D.C.?

RA: Grammar school?

PC: Grammar school.

RA: No, some of it in New Mexico.

PC: Oh, how did New Mexico come into it?

RA: All right, my father was a pathologist for the Department of Agriculture. Pathologist, you know, of just plants.

PC: Right.

RA: A plant person, and he was working mainly with sugar plants. . . . Sugar beets and sugar cane, which would take him to places like Okeechobee, Florida, Baton Rouge, once or twice to Cuba. And then....

PC: Sugar beets.

RA: Sugar beet seed was _____ [based in, Bateson], Colorado, [also in, Paulson], Colorado, which is where he perched when he first came to this country.

PC: From where?

RA: From [Lincunin, Ling-koon-in], East Prussia, which is near Tilsit)or what used to be Tilsit.

PC: Right.

RA: And south central New Mexico was a place where beet seed was raised. For the seed, beets were grown for the seed.

PC: Yeah.

RA: The climate and conditions were right. So he was working there and came down with tuberculosis. I guess it was rather sudden. Anyway, he was down there, and he wired my mother, "I'm stuck down here, going to be here for a while. Pack it up and come on out here. We're going to be here for a time." And this was in '34.

PC: So the Depression was on.

RA: Yeah, it was. Not for him exactly because he was working for the government, which was low money but regular.

PC: Right.

RA: But we traveled out. My sister and I, my mother, someone who had been dragooned into going along because my mother could never manage to get a driver's license in the District of Columbia, which was just as well. [laughs] But in a Model-A Ford from Washington to, actually to El Paso where he was in the hospital. And that brought us out there, and, of course, it stayed out there. Pleased, I think, pleased everybody.

PC: So you did stay there until you went in the Army?

RA: Yeah, right, I think so.

PC: About ten years. Ten years then, about.

RA: '43, '44, would have been.

PC: Well, what towns did you live in? Where did you go to school at?

RA: The town was, first of all, Mesilla, which once was the territorial capital of the New Mexico Territory. But it was just an old village with some sprinkling of

other Anglo farmers, people who taught at the local college. So it was a pretty much rural state of affairs.

PC: Well, were you aware of the Depression problems, or it wasn't too difficult because of that?

RA: Oh, yeah. From childhood, people coming by the door, or someone who took care of my sister and me, who was a registered nurse as it turned out, and came to the door very embarrassed: "I have had nothing to eat for two days." This was, of course, very _____. I don't know how far back your recollection goes, that [far, part]. But I guess that would be one, about my only anchor for the trouble that this country had in Washington. But out there was a way station for a lot of travel from Dust Bowl out to California, Grapes of Wrath.

PC: Right straight across.

RA: Yeah. So we saw a lot of that, we saw a lot passing through. And it was.... I think it wasn't that startling because there was a lot of little rural poverty around anyway. But, no, it was. It was....

PC: It was apparent.

RA: Yeah. For the grownups it was scary. It was very scary to have these disenfranchised people passing through there.

PC: Um hmm. What kind of school did you go to there?

RA: That was a grade school, a brick structure, twelve-holer outhouse.

PC: Very fancy. [laughs]

RA: Yeah. A lot of Indian kids who were not recognizable as Indian, but were in fact Indians, lived in a village a couple miles away.

PC: What do you mean "not recognizable as"?

RA: Well, in that they blended with the other, you know, with their dark skin, black hair, and spoke Spanish. But the Mexicans around there would run to type. I think mostly your Mexican archetype of broad face and short, and that sort of.... In very formal ways, it seems to me in retrospect. And they would.... St. Guadalupe, for instance, is a Mexican feast day that would fall on December 12th, and that would become a larger event. The center of that was in this village, and there would be a ceremony the night of the Feast of Guadalupe, which was a mixture of Catholic and pagan ritual, with dancing, and obviously Indian costumes and drum that just went on. And half these kids, then, would not appear in school the next day, and the half that were there would fall asleep at their desks, because they had been up all night.

PC: Right. Did you ever see any of those? I mean visit any of those feasts or activities, dances?

RA: Oh, the dance? That and then.... Yeah, I think I came around for that. It was both open and closed.

PC: What do you mean, "both open and closed"?

RA: I mean, it wasn't like going to the kivas. [This thing] I'm talking about was like the pueblos, because it was.... This had already been coopted by the Spanish centuries ago, but not completely. It was something else. It was a menage. I suppose it would be an example of the way the Spanish were able to cover as much territory as they did.

PC: Um hmm. Well, were you interested in art then as a child? Did you draw? Or was that not a part of what was going on?

RA: My mother studied art. She had gone to the National Academy, she spent some time in Cleveland, she studied in Washington at the Corcoran, and had a year in Munich at the Munich Academy.

PC: Oh, really!

RA: So she had some art school. Nothing like a degree. She always wanted a degree. She didn't realize until later. She took a bachelor's at the age of seventy.

PC: Oh, really. [chuckles]

RA: She felt put down not having a college degree.

PC: Well, did she paint? Were there paintings and drawings around the house?

RA: She painted the way I would say women in that place in the world paint. Even paint on Sunday, although they didn't have jobs. Those were the Sundays painters that would say more about the status of the painting than it would about what they have to do from day to day, from Monday to Monday. And that was all, that was flavored with, okay, what was going on in Santa Fe, the Taos cult. And so people would paint landscapes, they would paint geriatric Mexicans, and....

PC: The colorful characters, that sort of....

RA: Um hmm.

PC: Did you draw? I mean, you know....

RA: I drew.... I'm trying to think if I drew obsessively the way people who are in this trade that I'm in [do].

PC: [laughs]

RA: No, I drew in the fourth grade when I should have been doing other things. But, yeah, always a little bit of that. My mother, you could say, gave me some pointers. Showed me how to draw glasses, the correction ...

PC: Perspective and....

RA: Watch the edge. Edges were very important. What one might expect. Not.... Oh, gosh. [walks away from microphone)Trans.]

[Interruption in taping]

PC: No great drawing problems, though. You never sat down and made a still life and drew it?

RA: No, that, too. It was an avocation. It was a respected avocation.

PC: Right. [phone rings] Out there.... I'll make that a [short one].

[Interruption in taping]

RA: Okay, that's what.... Sorry about the interruption. That's what art was out there and what it was for me, for my mother, and the family, and our circle of friends out there, and practically everybody: A respected avocation.

PC: Right.

RA: A few exceptions, but they.... But it was still a respected avocation, who was....

PC: Who were the exceptions?

RA: There were a couple of slightly famous people around. Tom Lee, who was in El Paso and who did a mural in our local public library under WPA auspices. Another lady, whose name I can't recall, who did a mural in the biology building. And Peter Hurd [Obert, Over, over]. That name might be familiar.

PC: Yeah. I know the....

RA: Part of the....

PC: The Wyeth....

RA: The American genre people. Yeah, married to Henrietta Wyeth, and she was out there, too.

PC: So you never ever got involved with Andrew Dasberg or that crowd of people around Taos?

RA: Taos was.... One of my mother's friends would go up to Taos from time to time, or Santa Fe. We just never got up there. Santa Fe maybe. I don't think it would have made any difference.

PC: Yeah.

RA: Because there were equivalents around.

PC: Everywhere, pretty much.

RA: If you didn't have the, say, pure Dasberg) Dasberg was known, of course)then you had second stringers close in.

PC: Right, right. Well, you know, was there an interest in literature and music, or other things, you know? There must have been some interest in science because of your father's activities.

RA: Well, science was the thing. Science was what mattered.

PC: Um hmm.

RA: Not an avocation; a vocation. I make the distinction. What did my father give me? He gave me Schopenhauer. He gave me Will Durant. He had my sister and me, get us to.... He'd get us to memorize passages from Schiller. Kept a little of that going.

PC: But a sort of German-oriented point of view.

RA: It's what he knew.

PC: Right.

RA: I didn't get any Chekhov, Pushkin, Tolstoy, which I _____ from my mother.

PC: Shakespeare.... Yeah.

RA: Shakespeare, which I should have gotten from my mother, because she discovered that over here when she came to this country as a child. The program of life was mainly my father's, and my mother could have put something in there but she was more laid back.

PC: Did you learn German, for example? Do you speak German?

RA: Case in point, learned German. We traveled to Germany a couple times when I was a kid.

PC: You mean in the thirties?

RA: Yeah. Father took the family over to East Prussia when I was five, and sent my sister and me and my mother over when I was eight to Munich, when she decided)or it was decided for her)I went to attend the academy there)or to go to school in Munich. She had hoped to get into the academy, and in fact she did. So there was a winter in Munich, and I learned German, and did not learn Russian. Germany was easier to get to, of course.

PC: Right.

RA: But my mother would not have taken me in hand and say, "Now you've got to learn this stuff." She did not.... She wasn't a protagonist for her own culture)or for any culture, for that matter.

PC: For what kind of background.

RA: [I wasn't, Russian] Jewish.

PC: Um hmm. I think it's fascinating that she could just take off one way or another with agreement and go off to Munich and spend a winter painting.

RA: Well....

PC: It seems very extraordinary at that time.

RA: Yeah. With a couple of kids and all.

PC: Yeah, yeah.

RA: It was. I didn't realize it then, because it was just a lark for us. And it scared her. She was not really equipped for that, because....

PC: Well, it must have been a drive, I mean, to do that.

RA: Ah, hell, I think it was my father's drive, instead. He said, "You ought to do this," and she said "Okay," and he packed us off. I think he wanted a little vacation.

PC: [laughs] Well, do you remember much in Munich?

RA: I remembered quite a bit. It certainly was a shock for me to see Munich at the end of the war. I went, of course, looking for the places that I had known.

PC: Right.

RA: I [only] remembered a couple. The grade school that I attended there for a year. And I asked about it on the street corner there in my)you know, in this grayish green with the steel hat. [laughs]

PC: Right. [laughs] And they must have wondered about that question.

RA: "Bitte, kennen sie die [Kirkenschuller, Kirkenschüller]?" and the man said, "It's right behind you." Which it was, what was left of it.

PC: Yeah.

RA: So that was....

PC: Well, what did you think of, you know, turning around and seeing your school flattened that you had gone to for a time?

RA: Well, I had been around some before then. I came over late in '44, and saw.... I had seen most of the German cities before I saw Munich. I suppose you could say I was toughened up some. It's.... You get brutalized for war. You have to get brutalized to.... Relatively speaking....

PC: Yeah, yeah.

RA: And mostly it's in steps. Some of the steps were kind of jarring, and certainly seeing that destruction was....

Sure I wasn't that brutalized; it was pretty jarring.

PC: But what about a student being there in the thirties? You brought a whole other background to those, to that group of students?

RA: Okay. Well, it was just kids. I mean, there is a community of children which usually floats over political states of affairs)and oftentimes over economic, too. In the South, black and white children playing together, and then after a certain age, ah hah, no more. So I was eight years old)my sister was five)and I just went to school. It was a little strange, but it was okay. The only, I think, hard moment for me was that I had come in their.... See their achievement for second grade or third grade or first grade was different from ours by about a semester. So I was put in the third grade, which was a semester beyond me, as it turned out. As it turned out it was.... Well, I was behind in computation, all right, and I couldn't catch up. So then I was put back, which of course brought me to tears. Giving up a set of friends that I had just acquired)it wasn't that long)but there was a form of discipline as we.... You know, the stereotype of discipline. But along with it was a lot of gentleness of understanding. It was good school; it was good teaching. There was corporal punishment, this one kid especially. I remember he got the daylights whipped out of him. The teacher turned red in the face. It was kind of a ritual. Takes off his belt, "You come up here." Wham! Sudden.

PC: Yeah.

RA: But if it's the thing, it's not that bad. If everybody's doing it....

PC: That's just part of the scheme, the culture, at that moment.

RA: Yeah.

PC: Well, what about coming back then to the Southwest. Here you were with a winter....

RA: Pardon?

PC: ....a winter of German education and you come back....

RA: Oh, then we went back to Washington.

PC: Oh, then you went back to Washington.

RA: All it did was set me askew in the learning. I wouldn't say that I.... I had some kind of learning difficulties. I don't know what they were. I was advanced in reading. I had a tough time with computation. I don't know what those things mean, but after, let's say, after moving into fractions in the fifth grade then it got very good. Multiplication, long division, was a pain in the ass. And I didn't get that really smoothed out until, I don't know, probably toward the end of high school.

PC: Yeah. So high school was in Washington?

RA: No, that was still grade school.

PC: No, but I mean after you came back from Germany?

RA: Well, this was when I was eight.

PC: Right.

RA: Then back.... I believe I was into the third grade. And there until, I guess, the sixth grade. And then seventh grade in New Mexico, eighth grade, and so on. And all of that was, oh, let's say.... You know how those things work out. You're in a strange place. Well, I guess that's gonna show up some personality. If you like to move around)I do)you have gypsy feet, and it's another place to go. And that's usually gonna mean, certainly in my case, that personal attachments are light and either not formed at all or in later years easily formed, but still tending to be....

PC: Open-door policy, yeah.

RA: Yeah. And open door because I could leave at anytime, tune out. That's the later manifestation. But then it was a lot of time with myself.

PC: What interested you in the high school years. Were you interested in art or science? What interested you outside of what you were doing in school? Sports or any particular pursuits?

RA: [pauses] I would say the Wild West. What made, sounded good when the word first came down that we were moving to New Mexico or moving to Texas. A Cezanne-esque landscape, which moved me around a lot at that age. It was.... Okay, it was admired, supposed to be admired, anyway. This is nice scenery, _____ scenery. But I really did. I was really stirred up by it, and moved around in that as much as I could. And you could do a lot at an early age in that part of the country, because that's the way things were done. Kids started in early. They started driving, if they could, when they were eleven or twelve. Sometimes because they were needed to work. And the ones who didn't need [to)Ed.] could point to the example of the others who didn't have to. I got a gun when I was twelve, [or, bought] a .22. I mean, it was that rural thing. And what did I do? I sent away for a correspondence course in taxidermy. Shot and stuffed birds.

PC: Oh, really. You really did it. I mean so many people got interested in that.

RA: Yeah.

PC: There are quite a variety of birds out there, aren't there? I mean, more than six or eight.

RA: [coughs] Well, this was like the.... It's like the Nile Valley.

PC: _____ the migration.

RA: And the places where migratory birds can perch and get something to eat and drink are not that many. So they tend to channel. This was one of the channels. A lot of traffic, and it was all exotic. That was another part of the Wild West, the exotic west, the wilderness, that I didn't have any inkling of when we left but got into rather quickly. Eagles. You can actually see an eagle. Somebody, go on our bicycles, and we can go see this eagle's nest. Eagle's nest!

PC: [laughs] They're there!

RA: Yeah.

PC: So you spent a lot of time out of doors, as those people did.

RA: Yeah.

PC: Yeah. But you still were.... Were you interested in sports in high school, or general student activities, or not too much?

RA: That was difficult because I was an outsider. I didn't.... I could function in some places, but not others. I made a poor adolescent. You know, miserable and.... That's in some ways.

PC: Um hmm.

RA: Okay, in this terrain that I just described)I mean literally, terrain)knew things that I.... I soon learned to know certain things, then I could have some fun that way, and some.... Let's see, no sports. I think just not good enough. Agility there.... It's like physical agility was like my mental agility. Did not seem to.... Just didn't channel in there. I could probably do rock climbing better than anybody around, but I couldn't play baseball worth a damn. But then that was....

PC: Right. That's normal.

RA: Yeah.

PC: So, I'm just trying to get the chronology a little straight. You came back from Germany to New Mexico or to Washington?

RA: To Washington.

PC: To Washington.

RA: That was the second trip to Germany. To Washington, yeah.

PC: And so there was still some school there, right?

RA: I'll say it was fifth and sixth grades.

PC: And then back out to the Southwest.

RA: And then.... The first time to the Southwest was after the sixth grade. Hell, what year was that? I think I

already said it was 1934. I'm pretty sure it was 1934.

PC: So you had a, lot of moving around.

RA: Yeah. Well, the last trip to Europe was more a trip than just a.... Like that, just a trip because it was a period of some months. It was a better part of a year. [pause] It was good. It was good. A little culture shock when you get to the other end, but....

PC: [laughs] Did you find that you looked at life here differently after the year in Germany, or nearly a year in Munich? Or wasn't it that....

RA: It was a again.... I was in the world of being a child, of being a student in school.

PC: Still another school.

RA: It was just another school, yeah. Munich was more open in a way because it was a city. We were in a city, which was Washington, but Washington was not a city like Munich. If there's any action in Washington, it's not like what you would find in Munich. And I guess my mother was more interested. She would take us to marionette shows and things like that, and art galleries. There was a little of that in Washington. Smithsonian. I would prowl around the Smithsonian Freer Gallery and National Museum when my father would take me downtown, get me off my mother's hands. But very little of that. No theater. Practically no movies. And I don't know whether it was because they couldn't afford that or.... It was hard scratch, I guess. Or you didn't take the kids to that. There was a little bit of foreign films. Okay, first taste of foreign films, the, Leni Riefenstahl's *Blue Light*, saw it as a kid. I don't know if you've ever seen it, but, when you are as open to fantasy as you are at that age, that was a dynamite movie. That was a.... At any rate it was something that has stuck in my mind to this day, certainly. But there just wasn't a whole lot of that. More in Munich.

PC: More in Munich.

RA: But I don't know what I was into there. I think it was everything, kind of at the same level. It was the society, society of children. It was the funny throb of that place which I call "thin].

PC: You mean Washington?

RA: No, I'm talking now about Munich. Gangs of kids going around. And they move around in a different way)or did move around in a different way in Munich from anything that I was familiar with. It was [tiny, quite, tight]....

PC: In what way?

RA: Serious.

PC: Well, this was 1930 what....

RA: It was just before Hitler came in.

PC: Yeah.

RA: And while we were there Hindenburg was voted in as Chancellor, and Hitler was not. Hitler, I think he campaigned for the first time, came in right after that. But it was, you know, Americans coming into Europe. There were always Americans there, especially in Munic]. And it was a fairly cosmopolitan city.

PC: Right. Well, there all the painting schools. Herr Hofmann was there. Well, he'd left by that time.

RA: Yeah. But that's a realm that I didn't know anything about, and either my mother didn't or she wasn't curious about. Her appetite then and still is, her taste is for Max Slevogt, Cezanne, of course, and that's kind of the way she paints.

PC: Huh. Well, were you introduced to Cezanne early on in those years? Or that's later.

RA: No. Nothing until I got ready to go to college. I traveled to.... Let's see, how did that go? I would take the train or a bus to Albuquerque, take the Santa Fe to Chicago, have a three-hour layover in Chicago, three or four hours, and then the New York Central to Ithaca. And I think the first stop in Chicago)Art Institute)and bought a portfolio of reproductions from the collection, from the Hermitage Collection. That was really my first look. But before that, okay....

PC: That was going to Cornell.

RA: Yeah.

PC: How did you pick Cornell?

RA: Oh, not very astutely.

PC: [laughs]

RA: I wanted to do science. A little bit was peer pressure from my father, but also I was really interested. I tried to make some kind of a selection. I think my last year in high school my father began)typical)suggested that I go to summer school, do a summer school at Cornell, take a couple of courses there so that I could get ahead a little bit, advance the cause, and my mother should go with me. And I think again a little peace and quiet, but it was.... Peace and quiet isn't the right thing. My mother and father had a very good relationship, but he was, I think, quite open about needing a little solitude from time to time)which I do, too, and I prescribe it for everybody. But I think that's what it was)in part. So I then signed up for a course in ornithology, and one botany course, and one art course)drawing course. I saw the trip as my trip, too, one in which I should look around and decide what I'm going to do. Get a little closer to these three terrains.

PC: Well, were you, had any specific ideas before that or was this the first sort of picking and choosing?

RA: Oh, that moved at that point to be kind of a natural historian, some continuation of something that would keep me out in the wilderness, and more romantic than abstract interest. But I was gonna sniff around and see how it felt. Later I took a different cut on it. I decided on.... I got quite specific. I was gonna work with plants, because I thought the material was easier to work with, and I had a good vision of working in cell chemistry, and preparing myself by taking a lot of physical sciences)math and physical sciences. Which at that time was not that common of a thing to do, and made a lot of sense. And if I had continued I imagine I would have, as a researcher, dug up a thing or two. Then the interest in structures had.... There's some interest in structures and ways of getting at....

PC: What do you mean by that, "interest in structures"?

RA: Well.... All right, as a kid)or a grownup or whatever)you can watch the geese fly over in October.

PC: Right.

RA: Or watch the egrets when they come up the Rio Grande. They come up from the lower Rio Grande to feed. And just watch them for just, as pure pleasure. And you can wonder why they do what, what the apparatus is, what the mechanism.... Because the other gets used up in a way. It doesn't just get used up, but it's not a.... It can't be an ongoing plan of projected interest or projected curiosities satisfied the way the other could be.

PC: So what crystallized the change, though?

RA: Change? From?

PC: Well, from the first things you did at Cornell)science and art and drawing and....

RA: Well, that was just to get a little preview.

PC: I see.

RA: My father took a really dim view of it when we got back....

PC: [laughs]

RA: It was wasting my time. He, well, being normally very open about what I might do with myself, was at the same time hoping that I would do something like he did. [Science, Like].... But I'm not sure I understood your question.

PC: Well, you.... Or maybe I didn't understand. You went to Cornell for that one sort of summer thing.

RA: That was when I was still in high school.

PC: Right.

RA: Then there was also a summer at Cold Spring Harbor, and I have difficulty placing these chronologically but...

PC: What happened at _____. Yeah.

RA: And I think I was still in high school too. That got me.... I must have learned a lot then because there were people around who.... They were really.... There was real science going on. They were really interesting. Substantially interesting things going on. [Del, Dell, Adele] [Brooke, Brook] was there at the time. [Salvador Edward)Ed.] Luria. Del Brooke was better known than Luria. Anybody read Double Helix might possibly remember the name. Del Brooke is one of the people who was in that running. But I guess that would have been my territory if I'd stayed with the science. So that probably mattered a lot, that summer, those few weeks on the North Shore probably mattered a lot.

PC: But you went to Cornell, though. I mean, for, what, four years for a B.A.?

RA: How did that go? I guess I went three years, because intervened some private school.

PC: Oh.

RA: I got the two years from high school in Las Cruces, and then my father offered to send me to a private school. There was one around there, which as luck would have it was a military school. Well, those schools.... I'll tell you something about those schools. They would be something like going into a, becoming a monk in the Middle Ages. If you want to get some schooling, if you want to learn reading and writing and a lot more.... If you want to be a scholar go into the monastery. If you want a good high school education)I think this is true in a lot of places in this country)it's the fucking military schools.

PC: Right.

RA: I'd, real good, high school education. So I had two years....

PC: What school?

RA: No, I had one year! New Mexico School of the Military Arts in Roswell, New Mexico. So, I did.... I know what I did. I did a senior year there, And I did first year of college there. First year of college there.

PC: Well, how did you take to that? Because that's regime, isn't it? I mean, uniforms and everything else.

RA: Oh, I could handle that very well. I'd say I had an appetite for [it then]. I needed badly.... I wanted to.... I wanted to be an acceptable, macho young man. Or I wanted to.... And it wasn't a bad thing then. You know, the military in the South and in the West is not....

PC: Actually, it's a pretty....

RA: It's not bad news.

PC: No.

RA: But it was bad news to a very, very few people, at that time.

PC: But it was a very well respected career, I suppose.

RA: Sure.

PC: Yeah. If you could get in, maintain yourself, and come out of the.... What did they call them? I've forgotten. If you came out of military school you could then go into the army or something.

RA: You could join the army and you could....

PC: It's like a junior officer, sort of....

RA: Oh, I don't know. That wasn't the thing. The first year.... No, I wouldn't say that I became a young fascist there. It was already, you know, grain of salt, but....

PC: [chuckles]

RA: Ah, hell.

PC: But you were still in your same territory, though. I mean, it's New Mexico and it was outdoors.

RA: Yeah, that's true. It was a bit of everything there. It was outdoors. Go into town on Saturday night. Playing polo. And also some good school, some good teachers, and even some interesting people. I would say first taste of music. Not first, but.... All right, I heard my first, I heard Stravinsky for the first time. On records, because they had just gotten around to making half-way decent records at that time. Paul Horgan was there. He was an old-

timer who wrote a lot about the Southwest. Again, One of those fixtures.

PC: Right.

RA: And so it was a place where art and arts are acceptable and also get a little mysterious and compelling.

PC: What do you mean mysterious?

RA: I mean something that asked that you juggle your state a little bit to understand it. And, in understanding it, having.... What do I say? How can I say? Having a, getting a really novel subjective experience.

PC: Um hmm.

RA: Which I hadn't known about. I had no inkling of that. I mean, that sort of thing can come from society, I suppose. One's first love. Can certainly come from art in the right circumstances. So that's what it was, was the.... Assaulting art and assault by art.

PC: But now at military school, you lived at the school, wouldn't you?

RA: Yeah.

PC: So you got to know everybody to a degree?

RA: Um hmm. That's right. It was the Society for.... Okay, where.... Some of the rules were very straightforward. And some of them were complex and ambiguous. But the balance was not bad. You could work your way into the complex and ambiguous and still have some kind of a standoff.

PC: Do you remember any of your instructors there? Teachers as being special or out of the ordinary, illuminating [somehow]?

RA: I don't think so. I think Paul Horgan would have been the only one. A couple of others who had their.... No, that was.... No.

PC: Well, did you go to Cornell before you went in the army or after?

RA: The army was in between.

PC: The army was in between. How did you pick the army or did the army pick you?

RA: Just as a postscript to the last [point he made?)Trans.]....

PC: Um hmm.

RA: I was still groping along through my life, looking, not too much, with an occasional glance to right nor left, not making too many waves, I think. So I recall. While I was at Cornell, I was just drafted. I would have been drafted sooner if I hadn't been in college, but I was just drafted. When the hell was that? I guess I was in my third year, I [think I)Ed.] finished my third year, but I'm not sure. But it was around in there.

PC: Yeah.

RA: Went in the army, came back, married abroad, and went back and finished my degree under the GI Bill.

PC: Now part of what you did in the army was.... You were in G-2 or something? How does....

RA: Let's see. I was first.... Field artillery. Trained in field artillery, went through the field artillery school at Fort Sill. And then from that I think half a dozen of my group)or maybe it was two; it was just a couple or three people)were sent to the military intelligence school at what has been for many years been called Camp David. So there was another course of instruction there. And then I was sent overseas, and then I ended up assigned to a division)the save division, as it turns out, that Roy Lichtenstein was in.

PC: Oh, you're kidding.

RA: Yes.

PC: Huh!

RA: And to work with division G-2, and did what they called tactical intelligence. But that was a situation very much to my liking: A small group that I had charge of, a couple of jeeps, some guns, a typewriter, and a field

desk and.... So we did our work. It was at sort of the latter part of the last German offensive, Battle of the Bulge.

PC: Right.

RA: And then, let's see, we zipped across, I guess it would be central Germany, as far as Leipzig. No, as far the [Elbe], [Torga]. Met the Russians, had a good time with the Russians, till the men in green put a stop to that. You can pinpoint the cold war, as it was known to Americans, almost to the week.

PC: Yeah. What do you mean "the men in green"?

RA: The NKVD. The Russian security.

PC: Right.

RA: But the first contact was boisterous and friendly and all of this. All that's very well known.

PC: Then the official rule came down.

RA: Yeah, we just couldn't fraternize anymore. What shall I say? A most interesting time. And a lot of just flirting. I mean, the [connections] were then.... There was more than a.... There was more a grand tour of Europe. It really was a.... I was a grand sabbatical.

PC: What kind of rank did you have, if you had several people in jeeps and....

RA: Oh, see I came out of the field artillery school, so they made me a second lieutenant. And then I was made a first lieutenant. And then I guess I should have been made a captain, but I was bad. But that was later. When the war was over I had to stay over there, because I didn't have enough points to go back.

PC: Oh, right.

RA: So I scurried around among friends and found myself a berth in Frankfurt, in Eisenhower's headquarters, and worked away at papers there for a time. You know, courier, moving papers, moving distinguished prisoners. And sniffing around.

PC: Who was the distinguished prisoner then?

RA: Well, say, I once moved.... I was told to take General von Falconhorst, whom the English had, to Oslo because the Norwegians wanted to try him for war crimes. So, he and I flew to Oslo, chatted.

PC: How many would there be of you on a detail like that? Just two of you?

RA: Just myself.

PC: Oh, really, just....

RA: Yeah. Just get on the plane and.... I was very smooth about it. I didn't carry a.... You know, I didn't carry a big .45. I knew the man. I understood the man. I think I had a little Walter pistol in my pocket. But it was just these two people. Got on the plane. Landed at Greenland. He then saw Greenland from the sky. He hadn't seen that. It was just [flattened]. It was like the recently dug-up ruins of the [Caldean] civilization. He was really shocked.

PC: Yeah, yeah.

RA: And then brought him in to this address than had been given me in Oslo. And he was greeted there, you know, quite friendly and immediately reminiscing about old times.

PC: Amazing!

RA: Yeah. So it was.... This wasn't all tongue-in-cheek, but it was some.... I don't know, someone's sense of humanity was allowed to creep in there, and I felt it, and, [I mean, I think] everybody did. It was over and it was too bad what had happened.

PC: Yeah. Incredible.

[Interruption in taping]

PC: This is side 2. [This interview was originally recorded on a reel-to-reel tape recorder)Trans.] I was going to ask you a couple more things about the army, because you weren't at that point really interested in making art

yet, were you? Or were you?

[Interruption in taping]

PC: No. You were?

RA: I was interested in going back to school and being a scientist. And, remembering that this was a sabbatical.... It would have been tragic if they'd have just [ended up that way]. I mean, a lot going on in one's life, a lot of travel. [laughs]

PC: Right.

RA: But I wasn't that sealed up. In Europe, I found out on the way that I was in danger of.... That I really had lost was throwing away ordinary sentiments.

PC: Now, wait a minute. What does that mean?

RA: That there were things in my life that I was pro forma disregarding, which I didn't want to disregard and which I shouldn't disregard. I think what brought that up was seeing.... Oh, seeing degradation and suffering and not wanting to just sit still for that. I mean, it really hadn't gotten toughened up as one did, for that piece of work)where you automatically eliminate any feeling for other people, the way you do when you get on the subway. Except this was really getting out of hand. Running into a variety of strong personalities. A great variety of strong personalities.

PC: In the army.

RA: In the army and outside the army. People in.... Europeans of all kinds, children, old people, who, like myself)this was beginning to become manifestly clear)put some real value on their life, having escaped with it by so a narrow margin in a lot of cases. In practically every case. And there was an openness that one had to respond to and feel a solidarity with. Which would be, I suppose, something like what.... There was some of that in the Depression, which I only knew from movies or thinking things about movies. But one couldn't turn one's face from all those things, from those people, from families, from oneself, either. And all this, of course, sharpened up by seeing people and things and being touched by them. Hearing some really fine music. I remember one von Karajan concert in Vienna. It just [whistles], lifted me right....

PC: Right off.

RA: And then.... But mostly in bits and pieces from other people. It's.... The harder I try to be succinct, the more bogged down I'd get.

PC: Later on....

RA: At one point in Paris, being open enough myself to ask a friend, looking through old magazines)I think it was Coronet magazine, which ran photographs; it was the first magazine to run photographs. There was a picture of a horse's head, mainly the head, and it's up close and it's a little blurry, and I asked my friend, "What about that? I mean why.... I mean this really looks terrible. I don't understand it." And he said to me, "If you were a farmer and worked with that horse every day you would understand it." In other words, making, being the teacher, which was.... Being a teacher is from time to time making the right catalytic remark. And that was certainly one. It was here. [points to heart or head?)Trans.]

PC: Right.

RA: Well, it was just an ongoing process of education.

PC: Right. But now, to pursue more reflections about the army, did you too experience.... Which is one [where, while] you're gathering information and appraising things, appraising information, people, all that kind of business, is a fairly intellectual activity. Do you think that....

RA: With the baroque flavoring here and there.

PC: [laughs] Right. But do you think that provided anything for you in terms of usable material?

RA: Wow. I think I went at it the way I had.... I was going to say I had trying to, was preparing for a scientist, although I really hadn't been yet, because I hadn't had that much schooling or I hadn't thought that much or I hadn't taken to it right. Pragmatic solving of riddles, yeah. Which in some way was my job. And the ramifications complex and sometimes unpredictable. Okay, one time I and my group had done a nice job of locating a minefield, and we published in our daily report. This minefield was a diagram. I mean, so many centimeters this

way, so many centimeters that way. All those fools would have to do is go [laid, made] that thing up. It was located anyway with the coordinates that matched the map that everybody used. And then there was a mishap and the next day somebody's jeep got blown up, one of the Signal Corps people. So I raised holy hell: "You got the report.... Didn't somebody read the report?" "No, it's marked secret. We burn those things right away because we don't want them around."

PC: [gasps] Fantastic.

RA: So then what was an exercise in abstraction)I didn't maybe think about it too much at the time)became something quite different. The real bite of cause and effect as it grabs one's life or other people's lives. And then also that everything is [sensate, sensitive, senseless]. Very .... You know a rush that nothing is permanent. And it's really fucked up and there's nothing you can do about it.

PC: So let's see, you came out of the army and you had the GI Bill, and then you went back to Cornell, right? Or did you.... What happened?

RA: Went back to New Mexico, with my bride from Vienna, a lovely lady whom I'd met over there, and we came back together.

PC: How'd you meet her?

RA: Huh! Blind date to the opera to see Die Fledermaus. [laughs]

PC: Terrific.

RA: We went up to New Mexico, and then I was looking at possibilities of graduate work. I wanted to get going and to get back and to regain this time that I'd lost. I wasn't even of two minds then. I just didn't have good sense)at all. Made a visit to Pasadena because I thought that would be a good place to do graduate work. And looked around there and got the idea that this place is really good. It was the level of what was going on. Cold Spring Harbor heavy, real science)real science)and people my own age. And they all looked like they were in there and really competent. And I wanted that and at the same time I didn't.... [pause] I got overwhelmed. I didn't know whether I could handle it. They seemed very good, and I had this... game. I was _____ and I felt lost. And I don't think I would have been accepted for a doctorate. I think I would have probably walked out of there with a booby prize)with the Master's degree)and then gone somewhere else. Eventually, I think I would have.... I'm sure that I would have come up with some interesting work. There was enough aptitude for it, but it was too.... It was spread out.

PC: It wasn't concentrated on.

RA: Yeah. But I was still firmly decided to do it when we came back from this journey of about, I think it was a week or so, a month. Came back, and I was kicking my thoughts around with my wife, and she said to me, "You don't want to do that; you want to be an artist. You should.... You're not one of those; you're an artist." And that was, of course.... That was not even a.... That was a purely catalytic remark. You know, no argument, no metaphor, nothing .

PC: But what was that based on? What do you think led her to say that?

RA: All I'd done was [open up] to some unease about having just come back from the war.... [telephone rings]

[Interruption in taping]

RA: I know I'd been working on this, but I was just expressing some unease, and she could have said something else or I could have disregarded what she said, or I could have said something else to myself, but I did pick up on it and rather quickly.

PC: But had you been doing anything to give her that idea?

RA: I don't think so.

PC: I mean, drawing or talking about it?

RA: She drew that conclusion just from having lived with me and I guess watched my ways, the way I respond to things and so on. She taught me a few things. But she had sure got me into something that time. Boy!

PC: [laughs] How do you mean that?

RA: Well, this was in a sense like an arranged marriage. I don't mean my marriage with her, but what followed

on this remark. And what I decided to do then was very much out of whimsy. And I think it was that very whimsy that would be one of the things that might have led her to say that in the first place. Not the whimsy of that event, but like knowing me for a while, it doesn't matter. Then after that, you know, closing my eyes and jumping, and then I started to examine this new terrain. I think it was really out of curiosity. The unthinkable . . . in my family certainly. Because after that I went back to Ithaca to finish my degree, which I thought I should do since my parents had paid for that, and then at one point went to visit some old friends of my parents and told them what I was going to do and they cracked up. So it's not.... See, it's not an anti-intellectual society. Scientists are better now than they used to be about that, but it used to be that art was not something that could be taken seriously, large enough to come to grips with.

Went back to Ithaca, finished up. It was in fall then, yeah. No, summer then fall. Because she taught in the art department during the summer, and I went to school, and then by the end of the year)January or February, I guess it was)finished. And during that time of course took some courses and directed some thoughts toward this new uncharted terrain.

PC: Was she an artist then?

RA: She was I think a block designer. She's a block.... That's what she did in Europe. Never quite managed to do it here, because the whole business was arranged differently. She was never able to adapt to the systems that they have here, mass production, learning how to cut patterns, learning how to hustle in certain ways. But she was a very astute, sensitive person. And was one of those people who led me to look and not just slip over things, not to dismiss)which I'm still working on.

PC: Well, it takes a long time to....

RA: You know what I'm talking about.

PC: Yeah, one [can] do that. But now what did you do? You finished Cornell and you got a Bachelor of Science and....

RA: Well, at Cornell I improved my mind. I took a course in Goethe with [Lange, Langer], who's one of the great scholars in this country and I learned.... Suddenly I learned a whole lot about literature and philosophy and this world of the humanists and the world of the subjective, which I knew I had better get cracking with, because I couldn't do another double reverse. I [looked] at some books that I hadn't looked at before. I was given a.... By his assistant.... In a conversation with his assistant I was.... What did he give me? He gave me Hermann Hesse's [Vos Palenspiel])you know, the Magister Ludi)the only good Herman Hesse. And that thing illuminated a lot. I would say it really changed my life. Which I was up for. You know, I was marshaled for some change, and it was suggestive of many things.

PC: That was a catalyst.

RA: Yeah. Well, that's mainly what I got out of that time. Then on the advice of a teacher there named Hartell.... No, not Hartell. What the hell was his name? It was Hansen. Went to New York. Thought should go to New York to study some art, since I was gonna be an artist.

PC: Right.

RA: He said study with those in [front], but don't study too long, because you'll get caught up in a manner. Got to New York, studied with Ozenfant and saw what he was talking about, which is the inner circle of.... I don't know if you know anything about the schools. I guess there were two, there was Hans Hofmann, and there was Ozenfant.

PC: Right.

RA: Hans Hofmann was better known, but Ozenfant was also very interesting because he was.... He was on the outs. He was start of the School of Paris. He knew all those people.

PC: Right. Where was the school? Do you remember?

RA: Twentieth Street, just east of Gramercy Park. Two people there, two students, one named Robert [Richenburg], who was a good painter. Don't hear about anymore. And Ibram Lassaw was there. He was drawing the GI money. Very expensive. I mean, [Oscar] [Reese, Reids]. Ozenfant accepted him as a colleague of course, but.... You know, he was fair. A place to work, scribbled in notebooks, and get some money to live on.

PC: Right. So you went there on the GI Bill?

RA: Um hmm.

PC: Who else was there? Do you remember other students?

RA: In that school?

PC: Yeah.

RA: In that school there's nobody that I know of who ever did anything. Lots out of Hofmann.

PC: Yeah.

RA: But I think that Ozenfant was better, because Hofmann you could get from New York, in the galleries, whatever was being talked about.

PC: Oh, I see. But what was Ozenfant like as a teacher for you?

RA: Well, dogmatic. That's what Hansen meant when he warned me about that. Well, somebody who's really dogmatic is easy to deal with, because it's a dogma that's very visible.

PC: Right.

RA: Hofmann's dogma was less visible, because, you know, he's really that way a more sophisticated person, and fitted in better with what was just happening in New York at that time.

PC: Well, he was becoming more successful at that time and Ozenfant was maintaining a sort of level, if not....

RA: And he was embattled.

PC: Yeah.

RA: He hated Pollock.

PC: Ah hah!

RA: And he taught painting by his lights, which is....

PC: So you started painting with him then, sort of?

RA: Painting, drawing. It was all.... It was a small school, just one class, not divided. And easels sprinkled around. Everybody had their easel. And no hierarchy of any kind. No courses.

PC: Oh, I see. So it was more like an atelier situation.

RA: Yeah, that's what it was. And a very pleasant studio to work in. A novelty for me. I mean, to be surrounded by these effete, soft-headed people. I was just horrified from time to time. What have I got myself into?

PC: [laughs]

RA: But he put out a lot of what was [saved] in his Foundations of Modern Art, and some anecdotes about the people)Leger, Picasso)sprinkled in there. And I guess I filed away certain things. But after a year or a year and a half, why....

PC: That was enough.

RA: Yeah. I decided I'd....

PC: What did you do there? Was it still life painting? Figure painting? Traditional? Or did he want you to work in his style?

RA: He didn't say "work in his style," but if somebody was already imitating, then he would criticize it as successful or deficient according to those lights. Paint not thick enough. This form too small. It wasn't.... Okay, it wasn't as tight as all that, being he showed what he liked. And he would lecture some on art history, and give a broad view of things, and introduced us all to Puvis de Chavannes, whom I'd otherwise never bothered to look at. And a lot of it, I would say.... I don't think any of it went over my head, but it was a particular viewpoint. I wasn't used to that, something that.... I was used to the kind of knowledge that could be proved or disproved.

PC: I see, by tests, like in science.

RA: Yeah.

PC: But don't you think that's one of the fascinating things about the arts?

RA: Well, sure. I was that.... I knew that much, and I said as much at the time. I want to build on sand....

PC: [laughs]

RA: ...because science is.... Okay, it looks better now)scientists)but because all scientists take a relativistic viewpoint about what they're doing, and know that they're making models, and the models are only models and the models are not really of a piece with nature, which is finally inaccessible. I would say over a period of time I came to grips with the idea that there's.... You know, to really understand that objective fact.... That either it's not accessible or there's no such thing. And do what I think I intuited correctly to be the more interesting thing to do. If you're making models, then go ahead and make models. Or make whatever it is. I mean, even whether it's a model or not, let that be problematic.

PC: Yeah, yeah. So you really got involved with various kinds of ambiguity: suggestion, ambiguity.

RA: Ambiguity from like really two sources. One would be the skepticism that I would bring to all of this, having come from a scientist background, and the other, maybe it was.... took my time with it. I don't know, maybe it was Ozenfant's teaching, but that was a, that is a thing unto itself. That's what we were talking about criticism a while ago. It adds structure.

PC: Where did you live? Did you live around the school or someplace else? What sort of.... Go to the galleries and the museums?

RA: A little. Oh, Chaim Koppelman was there also. Do you know him?

PC: Yeah.

RA: The aesthetic realist?

PC: I didn't know that!

RA: And the Society of Eli [Siegl, Seagle]? Got acquainted with that.

PC: Oh, boy.

RA: And you can imagine what I thought of that.

PC: That must.... [chuckles] Were they involved with that, was he involved with it then?

RA: Who, Koppelman?

PC: Yeah.

RA: Yeah. Yeah, proselytizing for that, and I think he founded the Society for Aesthetic Realism and part of that was the Seurat Club. Well, the Seurat Club notion would have come.... Georges Seurat.

PC: Yeah. What do you mean, the Seurat Club? I've never heard of it.

RA: It would be.... Well, let's say you had the United Lutheran Church, and then in the United Lutheran Church you'd have the young people's group. It would be an option attached to the Aesthetic Realists. Seurat was to Ozenfant the artist's sine qua non.

PC: Oh, really?

RA: Yeah. And to Koppelman also. Who's also semi, he was pretty close, pretty close on Ozenfant's ways of teaching his attitudes. He didn't paint or make Ozenfant, but he was more for than against. So, where the hell are we now?

PC: Talking about the Ozenfant's school and....

RA: Yeah.

PC: That's an amazing group of people [there].

RA: Well, mixed up enough.

PC: Yeah. But you never had thoughts of going to the Art Students League?

RA: I considered. I considered Art Students League, I considered Hofmann, but I thought I would do.... Because I was really out there on thin ice)and to use one of Cathy's phrases, General of an Imaginary Army)and I'd better not run around in circles. If I decided to do something I'd better do it for a while, anyway, and so I stuck with that for as long as I thought it would be worthwhile. Which would be actually as long as I thought there was anything to be gained from it....

RA: And at some point I decided this is probably not going anywhere; it doesn't look like I can contribute anything.

PC: What do you think you got out of Ozenfant's classes?

RA: Quite a bit, because I knew so little.

PC: I mean, was it more what you got from him, or was it more that you found by, got yourself?

RA: A reason for.... A program for working, which is what is school is a whole lot. Some more skepticism. I certainly did not get a vision of anything new that could come up. I didn't get anything about Duchamp except as some kind of a clown. I couldn't swallow his classicism, but I liked his methodology. I liked that. I think it was just a.... I don't know if it would have been any different)or that much different)if I'd passed through Hans Hofmann. I just don't know.

PC: But did you start going around.... Did you meet artists right away, or the gallery scene?

RA: No, didn't make any scenes. I thought Pollock was fine. I thought deKooning was okay, but Cezanne was a lot better, and [it was all] contained in Cezanne anyway. And that there damn sure wouldn't be any point in adding to what was already pretty well taken care of by two or three people. So in other words, it didn't occur to me to follow in the footsteps of the abstract expressionists. That was just simply out of the question. It was either something new or nothing, and that just didn't seem very promising. Maybe I'll get it somewhere, but.... I felt then very much at sea, very much as if I'd become a dilettante. I was out there on a limb, like far from a life plan, and a little nervous about it)married, supporting myself, having a tough time doing that.

PC: Did you have a job, too, on the side?

RA: Scammed a job. First job I got in New York, a baby photographer. I lied my way into that and I did that for.... I guess I did that for about a year.

[Interruption in taping]

PC: How in the world did you ever decide to find that?

RA: Looked in the paper and see what's available out of the classifieds. Tried for that, and I had the right kind of camera, I had a car, and that's all you needed. So I learned about New York. I'd get my assignments the day before, maybe ten sittings, and addresses, and my wife and I would get out the map of New York, locate these places, make an itinerary.

PC: Right.

RA: At that time you could [carhop] a lot more than you can now. Go out and drive, learned about being tired, the way you can get tired in New York. We bought a house out of pure innocence and hubris.

PC: Where was the house?

RA: Chelsea. Old house. Beautiful little Federal house that we fixed up. Got some muscle from that, from an undertaking that's too large, but you do it anyway.

PC: Right. Now how'd the baby photography thing operate. I mean if you went to ten places, that was a long day.

RA: I think that was that summer. This is the way it went. It was the summer before I headed into art school, because it was closed, so I worked that through the summer. And then.... Then I got fired! That's what it was. I got fired for too many underexposures. I took some beautiful pictures, which are [real good] pictures. But I was getting too many underexposures, and I didn't have the courage to look for another job, so I went out on the street and I did the same thing. Found a photoprocessor on [Bowery]. And then I was really far afield. I picked a neighborhood where nobody would know me, nobody would recognize me. Not quite ready to be a bohemian, never was. East Harlem, which was Italian, mainly Italian. A little bit Puerto Rican, a little bit Black. And I just.... You know, in that neighborhood can do it. Got my little kit and just go in the park where the baby carriages were and then solicit and make an appointment, and go take the pictures, bring the proofs. "Okay, you want this, this,

this, wallet size. All those multiple cameos, they're [wrong].

PC: Right, right.

RA: And struggled through that way for a while.

PC: You met a lot of people that way then.

RA: Hmm. Well, it was the same kind of social traffic as in Europe when I was in the army, when I was either getting tactical information or running spies. An appetite for street corner exchanges. So it was all right; I was able to do it once I got into it. And then a succession of other jobs, and then deciding what to do. Become a tradesman. And that was also sort of carefully thought out: Which kind of work would give you enough to live on? Which kind of work would give you the most options about your time? I thought the trades were it. Those people seem to have more choice that way than anybody else. I didn't attempt, for instance, to do commercial art, because I didn't know . Certainly not teaching; there wasn't [enough] that seemed to be available to me, and I didn't.... I think I circulated easier among people who were working people. Somehow it got comfortable. And picked on the furniture, and that went on for many years.

PC: How did you find the actual furniture people you worked with?

RA: Well, first I worked by myself.

PC: Did you know enough about carpentry? And joinery?

RA: Nothing. Same sort of [boom]! [actually the sound is untranscribable, an approximation of an explosion)Trans.] No, it's also I think a proper stance for a person whose had a liberal education. You can learn.... School is to learn how to learn, and if you learned that presumably you can....

PC: Apply it to any activity.

RA: [learn] anything. It's a matter of logic, I think. And we'd just done a lot with the house, so it got [proved] magically that you could put in plumbing and install bathrooms and make new walls, et cetera. So enough credibility from there to do that. And it just went willy nilly. How do you not be broke? At the most ordinary level? And now and then watch your life flow by, with possibly a slight shudder.

PC: What kind of carpentry did you do on what kind of furniture? What was made?

RA: Some of it was ambitious. I exhibited at Crafts Museum once. Okay, it started with me buying a saw table and drill press and running an ad in the New York Times classifieds. And went on from there. So I earned as I learned. And I guess after a couple of years I knew quite a bit.

PC: Did you do cabinetry and anything ?

RA: Just furniture, furniture. No renovation, no carpentry. It was cabinetmaking.

PC: Where'd your designs come from?

RA: They came from.... Let me think. They came from.... Rod Shawn Giddings, George Nakashima, myself, let give me some motion, some ocean.

PC: Well, Rod Shawn Giddings was a big deal in those days, wasn't it?

RA: Um hmm. Yeah, this was the last of the deco.

PC: Yeah, right. Neo-neoclassic.

RA: And it was also a good design time. The Modern did a furniture show.

PC: Right.

RA: Did a container show a little bit after.

PC: Yeah, the Walker did shows, Detroit, all kinds of places, yeah. So there's a lot of furniture that you've made around the countryside.

RA: Yeah.

PC: How many years did you do that?

RA: God. For, I would say, ten.... Fifteen years. Finally closed it down just about fifteen years after starting off.

PC: How big did it get, when you say closed it down?

RA: As many as six people.

PC: So you had a _____.

RA: Well, first it was one-of-a-kind things. I wanted to not do nothing. A tradesman, yes, but I wanted what I did to.... I first of all wanted to do something the usefulness of which was beyond question. And then I guess I was in the practice of looking at all those things that I suppose a lot of people were concerned about at that time. Not mass-produced. You make something.... If you make one thing, it'll have a presence, just from.... You know, that old stuff. The presence being a humanizing element in people's.... either drab or exciting life as the case may be. A better thing to do with those materials than grind them up into production furniture. And [then] I got hungry. And then I also got bored and got interested in production. I thought I could do production. I devised.... Well, I decided)it was like that)I decided I'll do production, and then life'll become easier.... Because life is really hard. And I'll be clever about it and think about it, and I'll come up with something, what to make. Things with drawers in them, because those are the hardest and there'd be the least competition. So I figured out tolerances and tried out things, worked out some sort of.... Directed myself to interchangeability of parts. Can I do on a small scale what a factory is doing on a large scale, just by being reasonably clever about it? Yes, I was able to do that. And then got in the swim of that work, went along, and I found myself [been used] after some years, and my friends and the people I spent time with were mainly Puerto Ricans. I spoke more Spanish than I did English. And I really got immersed in that life. And from looking at all that material, after a while you don't see it anymore and you don't even see the motions. They come automatically. So something had to come out of that vacuum and eventually did.

PC: Well, did you have a company? Did you have a label or a name?

RA: Just the names, my name. From the production time on, it was all wholesale.

PC: Were they signed pieces? I mean, could one sort of go out and collect these things?

RA: After that? Man.... [laughs] Once the production got going they were eminently unsigned.

PC: [laughs] What kind of things did you make then, once you got into the production [side]?

RA: Boy, they were drab as hell. The other things had some spark to them, but these things were utterly drab. I mean, nice materials. Used a lot a of walnut, used some oak, a little rosewood here and there. But drab.

PC: But, I mean, what were they? Chest of drawers or high boys?

RA: Like that.

PC: Yeah.

RA: Do you remember [Jens, Jance] [Rissom] Furniture?

PC: Oh, yeah.

RA: _____ Furniture?

PC: Yeah.

RA: Cheaper versions of Jens Rissom's. And I had a routine where I could precut a bunch of stuff, and could assemble from starting to finish)that is, completely finished piece)of a small chest of drawers in four hours.

PC: Really?

RA: So I made that available to a man who eventually opened up a whole bunch of stores, this Warren [Ruben, Rubinen] Workbench, and he got the sense of that right away)he saw the advantage of that. He could give me a list a week or two ahead, and then the list would be completed and the stuff would be there, and he sent the.... This would be orders that he had written. The things would never enter a warehouse. They would go into the truck to the customer, and all he had was paperwork. So we served each other very well.

PC: Oh, I see. He'd have a display piece and that was it.

RA: Um hmm.

PC: No warehousing, no stock, or anything.

RA: Yeah.

PC: But now, to sort of go back to Ozenfant. You went there, you stopped, you were doing the various jobs. Were you painting? Were you making things? What was going on while the furniture business seemed to be taking so much time?

RA: The furniture business took a lot of time.

PC: Yeah.

RA: I was not.... I mean, not the best at making a living. I managed to chew up a lot of time doing that. I think there was a spell of three years where I didn't touch anything. Then I had a two-alarm fire, which cleaned out the _____ factory, cleaned out the little factory pretty well. I was underinsured, and it took me years to dig out from under that. I could have either gone bankrupt or get back in there. I borrowed money and went back in there)and feeling really sunk in a morass and horrified, but what else can you do?

PC: Yeah.

RA: And it came to me then that you may be acting like the ant, but you've been living an ant's life with grasshopper consequences. And then I picked up again. That was maybe '59 and....

PC: But the fire was '59.

RA: I think the fire was '58)right around in there. Had the fire. I couldn't talk for a week. And then I took off and went out to New Mexico)Arizona actually)saw my brother-in-law, and we got in a station wagon and went down into Mexico for a weekend. Came back and cleaned it all up. And then somewhere, maybe a year after that, maybe it was sooner, I decided I was gonna have.... One way or another, I was just going to pursue this other activity, and if it has to be at its lowest level, be at its lowest level. So I got some charcoal paper and some charcoal and went to these studios)which may still exist for all I know)that you go in and you pay a dollar and a quarter, there'd be a model and some....

PC: Well, there used to be....

RA: Drab model and some drab figures.

PC: The man who used to run those things and [he, who] moved it around.... And I always went to him. I cannot think of his name offhand.

RA: Oh, I didn't know any of the people involved.

PC: Yeah, but he used to have these kind of large, flowing sketch drawing classes.

RA: Oh, there was no instructor in any of the places I went.

PC: Oh, he wasn't an instructor.

RA: Oh.

PC: I mean, he would always.... I can't think of his name. He was very well known for it. He would just like find a space and put a little sign on the street corner or something. [chuckles] So anyway, you went and started drawing.

RA: Yeah, and some _____.... Something came out of those right away. And then I pick up some pastels. So it was at, let's say a perversely dilettante-ish level that I went into that. Then.... Okay, then I started in the shop, where there was less for me to do because things were going okay. I just had to be there to keep an eye on things. I must have seen something at that time that got me going on the constructions, and one of the things was di Suvera. I mean the fact of it, not the style. I mean, I was a little.... I read Sidney Geis's review and saw the show, saw it in Green Gallery for the first time. I don't know what else was around. I thought Nevelsen was pretty too. And I liked those things. But what I started making myself.... Those two events, you know, I was mainly just.... Both of them meant that it was possible to do something.

PC: What do you mean it's possible?

RA: Possible to do something that was half-way interesting. But what I went after was certainly no connection with either one of those.

PC: But your inclination now was towards three-dimensional objects as opposed to painting.

RA: The first thing I made was ticked off by something I either heard on the radio or saw on television. It was a program of handmade cartoons that was emceed by a man who was a policeman, wore a policeman's uniform, and talked to kids as the friendly policeman. He told about his son who had been going out to the garage, and he would just.... Instead of making something, he would just nail boards together. Nail one of them to the other, and the other one to the other, which upset him very much. He wasn't telling a story on himself. He was giving his feeling about it, and just for that no summer camp. Wouldn't send him to summer camp. It was so bizarre that it stuck in my mind, and that's all I can think of that makes any connection at that time with what I undertook without anything but the sense that my time is mine because, you know, I'm paying the bills and I'm taking care of things. So I took scrap material and I made a homunculus. I made a torso out of quarter-inch plywood, and hung it from the ceiling. It was life-size and quite heavy. And from two sides, two opposite sides, would be maybe related to Braque or Lawrence, rectangles overlapping. And from the edge, Hartung cleaned up. So it had.... It was a walk-around, but it wasn't in the usual sense. It had two sets of corresponding points of view.

PC: I see. It wasn't really classic because that moved all the way around.

RA: No.

PC: It had a front and back.

RA: It had a front and back, which pretty well matched, and had sides which matched.

PC: Right.

RA: Sides a little skinnier, one consisting of lines and the other consisting of overlapping rectangles. And then a couple other things that were related to that, half of which enlarged on that notion some. One was a fan-shaped, sort of a book construction; the other a double figure. A set of panels going this way and then, set in between, some cutouts which seen from the edge would form a [little, you know] more [sounds like: brokan, bro-kam]. And, of course, in the place which was)and I was thinking about that at the time)in a place which is not a studio. But then of course my studio was wherever that was going on. There was a little bit of a feisty stance, but I think more cerebral than emotional. So the other work was just an extension of that, and you work where you are and you work with the materials that are there. You inflect what is there, which is.... I think that notion would carry through till now or very recently. Still pursue that. That is, whatever you make is in a context. And I'm in this context of Puerto Ricans and the radio going and all that furniture going. So almost everything I make is.... Most of what I made is portable. I mean, in a special sense.

PC: Well, what were some of the other....

RA: So it works with whatever is around. So in a practical sense I worked in the shop with whatever was around, once I was doing that.

PC: How did your employees respond to these manifestations?

RA: With some pain and hostility. Because it was an affront to them. Laughing about it. Sometimes okay. [fire engine noises further obscure conversation)Trans.]

PC: Did they catch on after a while or was it questioning and competitive?

RA: No. We were all supposed to be working there. And they knew that I knew how to work and I knew how to do all those things. But it was always.... It was a parody of what they were doing and it was demeaning.

PC: I see. But now what were some of the other early objects?

RA: Well, all right, the first, as I said, was figure.

PC: Right. I'm just trying to think. I don't think I've ever seen those or photographs of them.

RA: Uh uh. You wouldn't. Because that went into the dumpster.

PC: [laughs]

RA: Book: plywood, like this. [gesturing)Trans.]

PC: _____ open pages.

RA: Smaller pieces fitted in to make the space, sometimes angled a little bit, so that the end view would

be)again, a particular view)the end view would be a fan with some odd [syncopes] of grapes here and there. And that other figure piece, which was a floor mat, a carpet protector, shaped like this, maybe two dozen of those, that one I described to you a while ago.

PC: I see.

RA: And then it was.... Okay, then it was a piece of furniture, which was one that preceded that, and that was down....

PC: Sort of an _____.

RA: ...an object was a chest of drawers.

PC: With a mirror.

RA: Not.... A mirror in a sense, picture on top of that, which was about as wide as the whole thing, so that was another.... Either.... Okay, anthropomorphic number with the head in the right position. It was a portrait head of the right size.

PC: A real portrait head? Or was it? What do you mean?

RA: Painted.

PC: Oh, really?

RA: Yeah. Then I painted too and that got funded. The drawing led to heroic drawing, and then I was thinking a little bit)I was sort of thinking a little bit)and the drawing.... [Is RA working throughout the taping? If so, it might explain some of the abruptness in sentence style and his apparent indecision about details)Trans.]

[Interruption in taping]

RA: ... Leonard Baskin and gigantic woodcuts, which I didn't like, but I thought some could be done by going bigger, and Franz Kline would be the examples. So enlarged format)enlarging everything)and that would scientific smarts. If you enlarge, then you do that as with a magnifying glass.

PC: Right.

RA: And you coarsen the texture and Kline gave me example for that, because there are a few)I don't know if you've seen them)the.... There was a big one I saw in Chicago. Done all in beaverboard, done on that roof.

PC: Oh, yes, right.

RA: So that's probably where I got the notion for that. So there we are.

[interruption in taping]

PC: This is side 3, March 22, 1978. Paul Cummings talking to Richard Artschwager, 103 Franklin Street. More or less continue talking about some of those early pieces, which I gather few if any exist anymore. If we could get some background on the development of the sculpture.

RA: All right. That certainly. Some chronology of ideas and pieces.

PC: Right.

RA: And you're not asking for the.... It seems like it would also be necessary to relate my state of affairs to the ideas.

PC: Right. Well, what was in the painting that you've made? That had no relationship to the three-dimensional objects you started building, did it? Because the paintings I've never seen. I mean those early....

RA: I thought about that the other day, and why did one get started, why did the other get started? Well, generally it was after having a two-alarm fire in my shop, wanting something else, something different, and wanting what I'd wanted before, and deciding to work or play)whatever you want to call it)to pursue some art and not worry about whether I can make any kind of major contribution or not. So that was the drawing, and I think I had something to say about that the last [time].

PC: Had you continued painting, though, up to the time the cabinet business was going, or not?

RA: Well, of course I studied painting way back. And then here and there, as a kind of a every-once-in-a-while Sunday painter, I would do something.

PC: I see.

RA: But I knew there was a hiatus of three years where I didn't touch anything)at all. Nothing much to be said about paintings done then that I can think of. There's one that I submitted to a regional juried show, a Southwest show, which ended up at the University of Oklahoma, which they have. Of course I haven't seen that for years. But that might be all, except for a couple of things here and there, sprinkled around.

Deposited with friends and relatives. Not too much. I think out of.... All right, out of that painting there's one thing that comes to mind, which is a focus on corners and intersections and highlights, on overstating and overdeveloping those. And that might have some bearing. Things that got interesting later as nodes of attention. The painting, when I really got started, got into things)that would be after 1960)that painting came out of drawing. And the drawing, as I said at first, was just drawing to be doing something. A form of pleasure.

PC: [So sketch _____. or?? It was sketch time.]

RA: Yeah. With no ambition behind it other than to....

PC: As an end in itself almost.

RA: As an end in itself, correct. See what I can come up with. But, as you say, an end in itself. At some point I thought I would like to make more ambitious drawings. Like the drawings were ambitious in a sense, in that they.... How shall I say it? They moved, or they made a kind of noise which I wanted to see in a larger format. And I thought about that carefully. Enlarging would be enlarging the square footage, the given unit.

PC: Right.

RA: It would mean also enlarging the rest of the apparatus. That would be the coarseness of the surface, the size of the tool that it's drawn with, and)hopelessly, ironically)my own physical size. And I'd read something about Kline, and I knew.... And I looked at him dealing with that. And saw a large piece of his in Chicago on fiberboard, which I think the Art Institute acquired. At least they had it there for a while. It's a very good painting, a large painting, crudely done in blues and blacks. But I remembered the surface and got some of that myself. Draw on that, and then you have paper, highly magnified or enlarged, or the person reduced. Drew on that. It didn't give forth too much, but I started using some washes with acrylic paint, which I tried out on canvas and didn't like. It was just like poster paint .

PC: Right, just goes flat.

RA: Yeah. The washes got interesting runs, and dribbles in the wash behaved very different from what they would do on canvas. Canvas has a tooth but it's a [rather] much finer one. But that led to paintings anyway. And the paintings were black and white, [because] they had originated from drawings. Now I'm not clear why I picked up on photo imagery, but at the time I picked up on it I thought that this could be my little terrain, and nobody else.... It would be something for me to....

PC: Cut out your own....

RA: ...specialize in, as it were, in a low branch in the big tree.

PC: [laughs] How did you find the things you used, though, the images?

RA: They were obscure in the way that a model in a life class is obscure and anonymous. They're obscure. Also, in the way that [Jasper)Ed.] Johns' coats hangers and beer cans are obscure. _____ having coat hangers. And I have to assume that there was some message from there.

PC: But those were interiors, weren't they? Or did they come later?

RA: The first things were whatever I might find in [La Prinza, La Prinsa], the Spanish language newspaper, which I would get to read because the boys in the shop had it....

PC: Ah, right.

RA: ...a way to keep up my Spanish and it was this. [gestures??]

PC: So they came out of ads and photographs and....?

RA: There were interesting things to focus on in the same way that there were interesting things to focus on in the day-to-day life of that shop.

PC: Right.

RA: One can cultivate that kind of interest. One almost has to, unless it's the fashion of the day, and then it's still cultivated. For myself it was more poignant because I was living [La Prinza, La Prinsa] life and.... But did look around and looked at the life and entered into the life of my fellow Puerto Ricans)the food, the music, the chatter, the idioms of the language)because that was a lot of my life, and I was clear then that, whatever the day consists of, there better be something there. [I want] there to be something there.

PC: In terms of what? What do you mean something there?

RA: Well, whatever.... First, the assumption that the romantic notion that there is something there.

PC: Oh, I see, right. Then you move in....

RA: And suddenly there I am. Make good of it.

PC: Now how did you react to this absorbing a totally different culture? Was it conscious or did it just grow because of the shop and the people working and radio and the newspaper?

RA: It grew. It was being there a long time. It reflected my own propensities, I think. A chameleon type of ego that will....

PC: Turn green on green and brown on brown.

RA: Yeah. Which I practiced when I was back in the spy business in Frankfurt and Vienna.

PC: Do you think that that sort of thinking you picked up in the military became useful material later on?

RA: Well, I am sure it colored my behavior at that time. There you are. Sniff around and see what's going on.

PC: Right. And you can be visible or invisible, depending on choices.

RA: Yeah, right. And since you mention that, as a sport, go and speak Spanish, and if you've got it really in good shape you can come on like a native)for a little while anyway.

PC: [laughs] So it's almost role playing in a way.

RA: Yeah.

PC: A spy in another culture.

RA: But also the assumption that it's all role playing, and that is the best thing that I can do and the only thing that I can do.

PC: But, you know, you had mentioned something about when you first began making the structures and the resentment that started to appear amongst the workers and that....

[interruption in taping]

PC: ...[puzzles] me because, you know, first of all you have skills to do what you wanted to do, and you had designed some of the things that these people were building. Why the resentment? I mean, because you made something that wasn't functional?

RA: I obviously wasn't settling anymore for what I was doing there. I was getting antsy and expressing that on the spot.

PC: Ah, so you were bringing another point of view.

RA: Yeah. And that was.... Well, now we're off the painting; we're on the sculpture. All right, the sculpture I did because I was spending time in that place every day)had to be there anyway)and I think there there was a message from [Mark)Ed.] di Suvero: Work with what's around.

PC: Right.

RA: You could say that that's got an older history, going back to....

PC: Schwitters?

RA: Schwitters and Rauschenberg.

PC: Right.

RA: But those materials became style instantly.

PC: Right.

RA: And the style of mood, quality of lyricism in Schwitters and Rauschenberg, are very close. And I think that.... I know that I was very impressed with what di Suvero had done, and largely with that. I think it was that....

PC: In a large piece of sculpture?

RA: If you're going to make do with what's around you, then have the best of it and don't go rushing off to the first obvious art format that comes to mind. But really look at what's around you and be in what's around you. But, of course, my type was gonna be in what's around you but out also)looking at what I'm doing, watching myself doing that. So all the stuff was reflexive that way and got made out of what material was there, and at first out of scrap, not out of new material. This scrap was quarter-inch plywood, which had slight thickness and a lot more in the two dimensions in which you sort of usually measure.

PC: Right.

RA: It's a skin, and you can stack it up. The first thing you can do is stack it up.

PC: Right.

RA: And that's the first thing I did. And there was an odd kind of a clue for that)I don't know if I mentioned this the last time)on a radio program. It was a case _____ _____....

PC: Oh, The Public Policeman.

RA: I mentioned that. All right, now we should be where? We got a little bit of sculpture going there, which is....

PC: Now did the painting continue? I mean there still are paintings, but did they weave together, or was one sort of dominant and the other held aside briefly?

RA: I don't think for a couple years)or a year or two anyway. I was mindful that what I'm doing should make sense. That is to say that the art should grow out of the situation. And there the painting [was] faulted right at the start. And the sculpture was not. The painting got forced into the mold, or somewhat absorbed, I think as soon as I started to make a couple of paintings in the way I made up the sculpture pieces)as those entities as objects as [insurgents, insertions]. Have [insurgents, insertions] politically, by putting frames on them. So there was something to do in the shop: making frames and a lot of concentration on that. And then one very clear piece that antedated the frame paintings, and that was purely sculpture, and that was the [Railing Piece, railing piece], which I think I mentioned before. A rectangle, a tall rectangle, made out of stair railing.

PC: No.

RA: Not with mitered corners, but hand-carved corners that bent around the way a stair rail goes. So it was a loop tending toward rectangle, bracketed off the wall two or three inches, so that it proposed two things. It proposed.... Okay, you see it, you go up to it, and from its material and format, proposed grabbing it, so then something else became clear. For the eye, for the hand, and, if you fix both the eye)distance and direction)and the hands, then you've really got the audience participator person locked into a very particular, singular viewpoint. And that became important because then, about the same time, I also made the plywood things that had two pairs of nodal viewpoints.

PC: Oh, right.

RA: You remember I'd said, "Maybe you walk around sculpture." This counts, and that sort of doesn't count. This counts, that sort of doesn't count. Going around in that fashion. Highs and lows of relevancy.

PC: Right. But now using the materials that were around)you had formica, wood, cabinetry)were you just sticking to what was there? I mean, there was no preconceived idea? Were these things that were built? Did you make drawings for them? How did they.... What's the history of the evolution of one of those pieces?

RA: First, it was very much an art-derived piece, and that was from looking at the materials.

PC: Right.

RA: Formica, which depicts woodgrain. And then the wood itself. And there was a box about twice the size of that tape recorder to be either held, placed on the table, or mounted on the wall)it sort of bounced back and forth; I didn't know quite what to do with it)which was lined on the inside with noncolor black and white ghost formica, and, on the outside, wood. Playing on illusion and reality, and really very arty in that sense. [And then there was a hybrid construction)that was a found chest of drawers, not.... In good condition. Or?? And then there was a hybrid construction)that was a found chest of drawers, not in good condition.] With a painting on top of it, same format as that. [gesturing to object)Trans.]

PC: Sort of like a high boy with a mirror attached to the top?

RA: Yeah. And the mirror was a painting, and it was a portrait head, and it was I think precisely life size)maybe a hair over life size)and black and white, ranging through white, gray, and black. And that of course was a painting. That was a painting on an armature different from a canvas)an armature that could be the thing itself, the thing depicted.

PC: Was it attached? Or did it just abut on the top and the back?

RA: What, the picture?

PC: Yeah.

RA: It was of the kind that has a little easel....

PC: Oh, I see.

RA: ...easel piece on the back, so it tilted.

PC: It was like a large sort of photograph.

RA: It was.... Yeah, that's right. It was the photograph on the dresser, but as wide as the dresser, and had a little bit of a tilt. So it was....

PC: Oh, they used to have those old-fashioned dressers that had mirrors that swiveled back and forth in a way.

RA: Some relation _____ _____ to.

PC: Yeah.

RA: But that was out of paintings. Well, all the sculpture was really out of paintings)making paintings. Or collage if you will. But actually the whole thing was a collage. One element.... If you have a two-element collage, one element would be the thing made, and the other element would be whatever's around it)the floor, the walls, people walking by)and that implication was already there. I think the _____....

PC: But now, in making a piece like that, what would you.... Would you make blueprints for it or plans, or would you just carpentry it up out of your head? There would have to be some calculation going on.

RA: Not that much, because that's where the scale came in.

PC: Right.

RA: I had become a really skilled cabinetmaker, so I could just start cutting, or take material, which I had discovered and was very pleased with: all this painterly material that you could get from the lumberyard.

PC: Right, painting by the sheet.

RA: Yeah. And you could get wood by the yard, cabinet wood by the yard.

PC: Colors.

RA: You could get mirror surface by the yard. You could get shadow by the yard and light by the yard and put it together in that fashion.

PC: I think it always fascinates people that it is very possible to build something like that just by picking up some lumber and wood and working away without....

RA: Well, I could do it, you know.... Keeping the plans, I might have done a sketch for that. Or actually I think I

took measurements off that other piece, which I liked very well, and followed the size and proportions of it.

PC: But a lot of it can be after a while working just out of your mind's eyes almost.

RA: Yeah, it can be as easy as scribbling away on a piece of paper or a canvas. So there was a ready skill that could go in there and make for an easy, loose procedure.

PC: Right, yeah. How did the pieces evolve? Because I think the first ones that I remember seeing must have been at Castelli's in '65, I think. And there weren't many shown before then, were there?

RA: Let's see, there was nothing in the gallery except a couple of paintings in '63, fall of '63, because I approached them in spring of '63.

PC: How did you get involved with them?

RA: With them? I decided in the spring of '63 that I had some pretty good work and made up.... No, the first thing I did was decide where I would like to show the work. And I did this by going to a couple dozen places)museums and galleries)and taking notes and just looking at the spaces)what looked like fun, what looked pregnant with possibilities. And from that list, I picked a dozen or two dozen and wrote that many form letters and made up that many sets of jumbo snapshots of.... You know, small format, three or four inches.

PC: Right, four by fives.

RA: No, not even that big. With the [deco, decal] edge.

PC: Oh, yeah.

RA: And sent those out and got either no response or negative response, and one strong positive one from Ivan.

PC: Ivan Karp.

RA: Yeah. One said come back in the fall with some real photographs and not these dinky things. But I believe that his sense of whimsy picked up on the non-art type of photograph sizing.

PC: Photographs for one thing, yeah, I'm sure. [laughs]

RA: Yeah, you know. He would pick up on that, sure. So I brought some photographs, and he came down and did send some people down, and then in the course of the fall and the winter.... And there was one.... Let's see, I know that they had a few paintings in through the fall or winter. A group show in the spring that had four people in it: myself, Christo, Bob Watts, and Alex Hay. And I had three pieces in that. One painting and a couple of sculptures, seems like. And the main sculpture was a table and chair, fairly well known job there.

PC: Right, yeah.

RA: But there were other things.

PC: Now how did something like that evolve? I mean, two elements in one piece? The table and that?

RA: Oh, that?

PC: Yeah.

RA: Well, that was.... The chair came first. There was a chair that preceded. There were dressers that preceded, and there was that rail frame that preceded, and a few other things. The chair was done.... That first chair was done from a model, which was a Victorian chair that I had at home, so I duplicated, out of the encyclopedia, formica, wood, velour)sort of reddish velour)light and shadow. And imposed what was a Victorian motif on a box construction. You know, did it some violence, which is no more violence than Maillol making a figure out of stone instead of out of meat. And I was very clear about what I was doing there, and I saw them, as I'd said before, as catalytic pieces, as insurgents. So you know, a table would be a natural.

PC: What do you mean by insurgents, because you've used it several ways, and it sort of is ambiguous to me.

RA: All right, a piece of art but functioning on a different plane from a piece of art to be cataloged, archived, stored, looked at under those special, ideal conditions. To be either walked around, clockwise of counter-clockwise, or stared at on a wall. Added to that, the other kinds of instructions that one can get from a thing. A tape recorder tells you what to do with it, a necktie tells you what to do with it, a chair tells you what it wants you to do, and so on. Seemingly as instructors as.... And the instructor mechanism of "look at me," "drink me,"

"sit on me," as an entry into the everyday. The whole.... An entry into the field.

PC: But what about, what happens when you have somebody who is culturally unattuned....

RA: So then you get more bored.

PC: What do you do, though, when you have somebody who is culturally unattuned to that particular thing?

RA: Well, that depends upon their assiduity, and it depends on how snappy the art is, how effective the art is. And I always thought that the art should do a good job. The paradox here being that it should sustain itself, be separate. It should join in. It should be spliced into the)I don't want to call it system)but into the field. It should be spliced into the field, but hang separately so that it can operate on a field, and make art that way, in different ways, by telling you to do something)or telling you to consider doing something and not doing it. Which could be a chair.... Such as I described. A claw chair would propose to you that you sit on it, but other things about it, it's not quite fitting. It's having edges that are too sharp and so would propose that you stay the hell away from it and just look at it.

PC: Right, right.

RA: The same situation that, oh, let's say, that a Duncan Phyfe table would be in the American wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art: Hands off.

PC: Yeah, but at one time it did have a purpose other than being an object of contemplation.

RA: So you can use on that, in the same way that from Heritage you could buy an imitation of something old and then you can use on the permanence or the transitoriness of whatever.

PC: Right.

RA: And the other side of this is making things that would . . . change the way things look or feel or apprehended in other ways. In freezing them into tableaus, and what does that mean? That means converting that which is for a peripatetic person)for the whole movement of body and mind)over to just for the eye, which is what a lot of art is based on anyway. You cut out making visual art.... Visual art aggressively cuts out the sound factor for the most part, cuts out the audio. In museums, which contains things for the eye, you're not supposed to make a lot of noise. That's convention. It sounds silly at first, but it belongs. It's appropriate to the apparatus of the art, as that demand is implied.

PC: I wonder how that started.

RA: It could be with religious art.

PC: No, it's just fascinating me because I went to the Duane Hanson exhibition today, and just hoards of people and they talk, carry on these conversations)with the sculptures as well as with whoever they're with. It's extraordinary.

RA: Well, that's ironic.

PC: Yeah, the other way. [laughs]

RA: Breaking that taboo, yeah. That's all right, too.

PC: It's a real amazing thing. In fact, I walked in with two people and one turned to me and said, "Well, where is the exhibition?" I said, "Well, it's right there in front of you."

RA: That's going to be one of the most popular exhibitions at the....

PC: Unbelievable.

RA: ...that you've ever put on.

PC: Just unbelievable. But, you know, one thing we haven't mentioned, before we kind of continue, you mentioned Walter de Maria before we began the tape. Were there any artists that you knew in those early, you know, late fifties, early sixties? People that you were interested in or friendly with?

RA: Fifties, only one I can think of, George Tooker.

PC: Really?

RA: Yeah.

PC: Where'd you ever meet him?

RA: Been out of touch with him for a long time. He was friends with somebody I went to art school with, name of William Christopher, also an artist.

PC: Oh, yeah.

RA: So I knew them both as friends, and kept in touch with both of them for a while there and lost touch later. And then nobody. There's Walter and of course there was Claes Oldenburg, and we saw a good bit of each other for about half a year or a year.

PC: When did you meet Oldenburg?

RA: When would that be? Fall of.... I think fall of '62. Fall of '62. Saw a piece of his work. Was very impressed because there's.... As with everything at Green Gallery.... I was watching that, needless to say. And there was one thing that I particularly liked, and talked to Bellamy about it, and he said, "Go see him." So I went to see him and from that followed some talk and some.... And a tradeoff for.... I would make certain armatures for him _____. One thing I was going to make for him and then get something in exchange. Fine.

PC: What work of his interested you? Do you remember?

RA: Oh, I think all of it. It was....

PC: Oh, I see, it was not just a specific piece.

RA: Well, I think they fell into two categories at that time. One was the more brittle, dense, painted plaster, and the other would be the more grayed out balloon-like, low-saturation-of-color, stuffed pieces. And I admired those very much, but probably picked up more on the painted plaster.

PC: But then that only lasted a short time. Did you work on some pieces for him and make armatures?

RA: Oh, the first thing was a construction, which I think went.... I think that [went at Hartford Nettl, won a Hartford medal] a while ago. And that was a stand of women's lingerie and underwear. It was a tall thing on what was supposed to have been a painted wooden base. And I put it to him that I thought it would be sharper if it were worked up in formica. And he said, "Fine." And I made it up and it did indeed work very, very well. The base was a prism, a compressed prism. I made some reference to Giacometti when I saw his whatchacallit, his mockup of the thing. And so built that. That went together and it went into a show. I think it was called New Realists or something, and to Sidney Janis, and I think it was Halloween, at the end of October. And it was on that same evening that he suggested that we collaborate on a piece or on some pieces. We'd make something together. And I said, "Fine!" You know, I was pleased, delighted, and impressed. And I liked the idea of just making some art, especially with somebody who really knew how to do it. So he said, "Why don't you make some sketches and I'll make some sketches and we'll get together in a couple of weeks." "Fine." So I made some sketches, and we did get together in a couple weeks. He hadn't come up with anything yet. No, as a matter of fact, he had made some little beginnings of a.... I think it was a.... It was a sort of melange of collapsed things. Furniture was already in there, and I don't know whether he mentioned it first or I mentioned it first. I only know that I'd worked on it already. But it was a collage that if I could.... I would say that it makes me think of the drum set that he did. [makes sound like large balloon collapsing] [Collapse.]

PC: Before the air went out of it?

RA: At that time.... Let's see.... Okay, so I spread out my schedule, as he had about a dozen of them there, and he immediately piled them into three piles. He made three classifications, and.... Exactly remember how this was.... They did include stuffed things. There were two drawings that were just straight chests of drawer. And he commented on that. He said, "That's the chest of drawers," and I said, "Yeah. Right." [claps hands as in "aha!"]

PC: [laughs]

RA: Then I remember there was an easy chair of the overstuffed variety, of the men's club variety, which.... I think this was me trying to make a notion that would relate to his notions, to his, you know, gross physicality, so the arms of the chair almost closed on the seat, like that. [gesturing]

PC: Right.

RA: Two gigantic thighs, to have brass studs going around. You've seen things like that.

PC: Right, yeah.

RA: And to be covered)and this was also a key matter)in Naugahyde.

PC: That's right, those were the great years of Naugahyde, right.

RA: Right, and it was called Naugahyde, the hide of the Nauga.

PC: Right.

RA: So, to make a long story short, what I gave him was the polychrome, the formica, briefly, which I had no intention of giving him. I mean, that we were going to do a collaboration, okay, but that never happened. And the other, possibly more important, was the flexible plastic sheets, the vinyl and, again, ready-made colors and textures that could be used to make either a squishy or a rigid construct.

So it went on. I made a few more things for him. I made some bacon for him. I made a toothpick for him, and I think I made an ironing board for him. Never got what I supposed to get in trade. Got one little thing, but never got what I supposed to get in trade for those other efforts, which was supposed to be a major piece out of the store. And he kind of forgot about that, and then I hassled him about it for a while, but then I sort of got.... Because of other things that happened, I just got embittered and didn't particularly want to deal with that or with him.

Anyway, that went on through spring, and I was working during that time. I should say, of course, what he gave to me, which is maybe harder to define because it's easier to say to say what you gave to somebody than it is to say what somebody gave to you.

PC: Yeah.

RA: But it would have something to do with scale. It would have something to do with a kind of aggressiveness off-the-wall, but very definitely something there.

PC: What about de Maria, because you mentioned you'd seen that show of his, I think it was at The Great Jones Gallery. Did you know him before that or was it after?

RA: No. Saw an ad in the Village Voice)for some reason or other that looked interesting. I'll go look at that. Went over there, and there was nobody there. It was cold. There was pot-bellied stove and he and [Robert)Ed.] [Whitman], and Suzanne)the lady to whom he was married at the time)huddled around the stove, and looked around and was very moved, impressed, and so on. And he came and looked at my stuff, and I think, as I recall, he was moved and impressed, and so we would see each other from time to time, visit and.... I had an easier time then because I had this shop, and he had a tough time because he was.... They were just having a tough time. Very, very little to live on. And I helped him once when he was ready to do a show, but he didn't have the means or equipment to do it. And that was Paula Cooper's first gallery, when she was Paula Johnson.

PC: On 68th Street, 69th Street, yeah.

RA: Yeah. And that ran for just a little while, and that's where Scull [the collector)Ed.], found him out, I think on Richard Bellamy's suggestion, and that whole thing got going. But he needed some mahogany panel for that. I got the mahogany panel and cut it out and loaded it up on Whitman's Ford automobile and then assembled it [on the spot], and it all worked out fine. And he never reimbursed me for the wood, but he gave me a set of drawings, which was much, much nicer to have.

And I don't see him often. Just once in a great while. We were able to talk very easy. Sort of a slow, wispy way that was typical of himself at the time,

and that I could fall into naturally. Seems as if we were well meshed as ideas and personalities.

PC: Were there other people at that point that you met, or not so many?

RA: Well, Ivan Karp, of course. Main dealings were with him and that was, and continues to be, an interesting experience. And I see him, I think the way most of his friends do, as somebody who sees very clearly in some areas, very blind in other areas. And there are parts of my work that he can't stand, and there are other parts that... loyal to for many years.

PC: Well, what about Leo [Castelli.]? Where does he come into this? Was he involved very much or was it mostly Ivan?

RA: Most of my dealings were with Ivan, some with Leo. It took me a long time)a long time)to get to the point

where I could have a conversation with him, and it would be a Leo-type conversation. Everybody knows what that is.

PC: [chuckles]

RA: I finally accommodated to that, and I think things finally got to a point where he.... Oh, I don't know, it's sort of blown hot and cold as far as my work was concerned, which he, I don't know, was determined to be somewhat impressed with. I would say it's been all right for seven years or so.

PC: But Illeana [Sonnabend (Castelli's wife).], got interested in your work didn't she, early on, somewhere?

RA: She and Leo both came unannounced to a studio that I have on 28th Street. And it was a dismal, dingy, messed up place. And there was some art around. There's some good art around. Little hard to see because it was a dingy, dismal, messed up place. And she went picking around. It was a brief visit. She went picking around, and I know that she was taken by the painting. Nothing ever came of that until [just] a few years ago. She showed some work in Europe.

PC: Where? In Paris?

RA: Um hmm, Paris and Geneva. I don't know if she still has....

PC: No, Geneva's gone.

RA: That's closed up. And she sent it somewhere else. I think she sent it somewhere in Sweden, the same show. But that's an old connection and I think I would keep that out. It's wanting to finish what got started, and because she likes the work. But not much in the way of steady, ongoing contact, but.... I think for a number of reasons. It would be my personality or.... Whatever it is, whatever it is.

PC: Well, you had said at one point before that you had never any interest in being the sort of bohemian, moving in the bohemian aspects of the art world.

RA: Well, here I am living in a loft.

PC: Well, but that's....

RA: But lofts are not what they once used to be.

PC: That's true.

RA: Well, I'm out of the bourgeois capitalist furniture part of it for some time.

PC: Right.

RA: I find willy nilly I've been an artist for some years now. So. But it doesn't make me a bohemian.

PC: Right.

RA: Sometime continuity.... I guess that's what I do.

PC: Well, you should define, which you've used a couple of times, which intrigues me, "make some art." Does that imply that sometimes you make art, sometimes you make other things, sometimes ....

RA: I didn't know that I had said that. Hmm. Under that would be, "You're an artist when you make some art," as opposed to artists are those people who live in lofts, they go to openings, wear kinky clothes, smoke a lot of dope, shoot up vitamin B-12.

PC: Or whatever.

RA: Or whatever. That's I suppose a throwback to my upbringing.

PC: What do you mean by that?

RA: Which was not anti-intellectual, but certainly not bohemian.

PC: Well, I think they raised you with a scientific attitudes.

RA: Okay, always a little skepticism.

PC: Right, because the humanities always bother the scientists because they're a little dusty in the corners.

RA: The humanities do always bother the scientist. They're just now, well, you can date it from Helmholtz, understanding that they make models. And so they're in the same kind of activity.

PC: Why do you think that is?

RA: Oh, it had to come to that eventually. The belief in the absolute power of reason goes back a long ways)to the Greeks, I suppose)and got a lot of reinforcement. I'm only saying what's known anyway. Got a lot of reinforcement in the Renaissance and after, from Descartes on, and that's still the world that scientists live in for the most part.

PC: But you know I'm particularly curious because of your family background, and then your involvement in the visual arts.

RA: Well, that's a....

PC: I mean, you grew up in one and live in the other now.

RA: Yeah. Well, that's a natural propensity finally asserting itself after quite a while. I was talking to Illeana ....

[interruption in taping]

RA: ...to Alana [Heiss, Heins] a few days ago. We got into some talk about what we'd done in the past. And she'd been a probation officer at one time, and she had interviewed many criminals. She was drawing parallels between criminals she had known and artists she had known and the similarity.

PC: That would be a fascinating game.

RA: Yeah.

PC: This is marvelous.

RA: And of course there are a lot of parallels.

PC: Oh, yes, absolutely. The Dwan Gallery in 1964 did a box exhibition wherein you were included. Do you think that was an appropriate grasp of what you were doing or was it just trying to support a concept pulling you and several people together?

RA: I think people then were seeing what they could see. The criticism of the art as it was coming out would.... All right, the criticism is going to keep up with the art second by second. I mean, as soon as it's out to view, the first takes on it are going to be different from later, mulled over, collated, digested, whatever [opinions)Ed.]....

PC: Anthologized, yeah, that's true.

RA: So the most startling boxes, you know, the rise of boxes was very startling. I mean, there were boxes by boxes . Now, there are, I suppose a lot more could be said about it how relevant but lots, lots more has been said. You don't say boxes anymore; you say grid structure mainly.

PC: Right. Well, it's like the time your structure showed at the Jewish Museum....

RA: Um hmm!

PC: ...which now, when one looks at it....

RA: What's primary?

PC: [laughs] That's true.

[Interruption in taping]

PC: What did all those exhibitions mean to you, because in the middle sixties there seemed to be an endless series that you were included in: Whitney sculpture exhibitions, Documenta, Milwaukee auctions, exhibitions, and on and on and on. Were they meaningful to you in terms of appreciation, interpretation, or was it something that went through the gallery and didn't mean a great deal to you in any way?

RA: Exhibitionism gets the work out. And vain hope that little by little, preferably fast, my work could be read the way it was intended. And, of course, as a blessing to everybody.

PC: Do you think people are beginning to read it or did in those days even read it with these intentions, or were they a lot of variations on a theme?

RA: Ahh.... [pauses, thinking]

[Interruption in taping]

RA: I don't think I've gotten through yet, but I was glad to be in those shows.

PC: So there are still possibilities of response, interpretation, and....

RA: Oh, God, yes. I think the, the museum/gallery situation, which doesn't bother me as a political fact as much as it does some others, presents some problems for my work as I describe it, especially the sculpture)and I really want to make an even separation with the paintings and the sculpture because I wind up talking about his, the work to be in the system, to be in the legit, workaday, useful part of experience as insertions in that. It's difficult to pull off. The work goes into a place, which as soon as you cross the door, it's already "the world of art."

PC: How do you mean that? I mean I get two different readings on that.

RA: Okay. All right, the art is separate from non-art)geographically separate in that it's in a place where you can look at it or run your hand over it as art, as a separate essence. So my attempt to co-opt whatever is around as art by means of a catalyst, which would be that thing that I made, is difficult if the field is before you start a priori labeled as art.

PC: So what that means that if something goes into the dealer....

RA: The only time I've had a free run on that is with the Black Spot, which is small enough so that it can go anywhere and so I....

PC: Right, a sort of [blips, lifts] for something.

RA: Yeah.

PC: How did you arrive at those, because they came in different sizes, didn't they at one point?

RA: They came in different sizes.... They boiled down to an ideal size, and that size is about the size of a jumbo loaf of bread.

PC: Well, there's also a small one that's what, about eight inches by four, somehow.

RA: Well, in there somewhere. I am describing with my hands)this is to the tape)a load of bread.

PC: A loaf of bread. [laughs] But how did that evolve? Because it has appeared in the multiple you made, [and, and in] one of multiple .

RA: That came very nicely out of the sculpture and out of the painting. I was gnawing on painting, making drawings, which derived from a painting, which consists of a lot of very fine, black marks)or videograms. The resolution stops; not as abruptly as in Lichtenstein's Ben Gay, but the resolution does stop beyond a certain point. There's no flush, there's no scumble, there's no microscopic level. The definition doesn't disappear into what your eyes can't handle anymore. But does stop. But where it stops is, I would say, more problematic and less paradoxical than where Roy's stops.

PC: Right.

RA: And I made drawings, which I think were an attempt to make it less problematical. I drew simply with felt tip pen, not dots but little lines, x's, y's, jiggles, to see what that stuff out of which my paintings are made, what it really does. Can I get along with less? Push at [William] or op [art], push at minimalism, I don't know. And trying to get down to fewer and fewer marks and ending up with the classic drawing that is probably in a lot of people's notebooks, which is take a ballpoint pen, drop it to the middle of a sheet of paper, give it a twist, the drawing's complete. The ultimate minimal.... The rendering of idea, the object of attention, which doesn't interfere with the field because it's too small, but you can see it.

PC: Right.

RA: Then)going back to an old bromide of mine)enlarging that to something that can live in the same space that you and I occupy. And I got to that empirically by trying out. What seems to be in the hand and no longer

something that's just a mark, that's just a separate vision. And at some point doing those marks.... Once I got to the single dot on a sheet of paper, doing that on a more complicated given, in a way that the cellotex is more complicated, given an absolutely smooth surface.

PC: Right.

RA: Recognize that the given is always going to be complicated, so at last the recipe: make it complicated. Same applies to the sculpture. The given includes not just the sculpture, but everything that's around it)unless you wear blinders of a special kind so that you can only see that and not see anything else. Other things will be seen. Attention will be paid, or attention will not be paid, not according to instructions given, except the instructions given by that which is looked at. And instructions are going to come from all directions, assuming you're not blind. So the more complicated given would be a photograph)blacking out people's eyes and nonsense of that kind. But it went straight to the size of a loaf of bread, an object)a piece of wood actually at first it was, light-weight pine wood, painted flat black in that shape, which was also arrived at empirically. It was shaved, honed, stretched, compressed, adjusted to where it looked)and I can only say, this was an aesthetic judgment)to where it looked right. The main shift on that came accidentally from a mark made by a felt tip pen and was a shift from what I'd done earlier, which was out of the sculpture. Now let me come to that. The sculpture, which was working, as I have said, as catalyst, some of that was working well small. There were some really small things that were working really well. And making drastic changes considering how small they were.

[Interruption in taping]

RA: ...were some just invented things. Mostly they would resemble or they would echo little loudspeakers or receptacles of one kind of another. That then went to punctuation. That would have been twelve years ago, a period about eight inches in diameter, about two inches thick. Stick that on a wall. Exclamation point three or four feet high. That deadended because it closed the door so quickly. It was an instantly recognizable imagery, but he could take an exclamation point and hang it, oh, I don't know, over a refrigerator. Pretty good. You've not only got that thing, but you've really got the refrigerator working in alarming fashion.

PC: [chuckles] Right.

RA: So that would be a sort of a gross expression of what all the sculpture wanted to do anyhow)where it could be maybe.... Well, in either case you can't say exactly what's going on, except that the frame of reference is suddenly shifted, probably from the useful, accepted peripherally scanned to the what-are-you-looking-at-that-for, useless kind of regard, kind of preoccupation, kind of attention. So it was, as I say, fed by the sculpture, too.

PC: But now you turned that sort of oval shape into different materials: glass, black lines ....

RA: That later. That later. But first of all they went from the round, from the period, to something more attenuated. And what that does is very simple. It then has orientation, has up and down. They're slight, but enough to key it into

its surroundings slightly, rather than just a pinhole. And whether it was placed horizontally or vertically it would do that.

PC: Change the wall relationship.

RA: It would either tend to make a human body, I suppose or make horizon. Make connections of that sort. And that resolution came end of '67, beginning of '68, when I was out on the west coast and had a little job in Davis University of California at Davis, near Sacramento.

PC: What was that? Teaching?

RA: Yep. That was my first, I think my first teaching job.

PC: How did you get into that?

RA: Paul Waldman clued me into that, said, "You ought to go out there. I'll set it up for you." He did, and I went out there three months, and that's where the drawing was done that I alluded to. And that's where these things got made, which I then started to put up as a complex)I made about a hundred of these things)as a complex on a wall. [It was going to] be a very large scale drawing, and in a very busy space, which happened to be the student faculty gallery space. Which was a very good situation, where students or faculty could go in. We could put up some art and then take it down after a while. An unprogrammed sort of a floating crap game style of constant exhibition. So it was busy. It was noisy, because there was a lot of stuff there, and in the manner of the exclamation point over the refrigerator, there were all kinds of situations that assert themselves just as soon as I put a few of these things up. But right off I had too many of them. It was clear that I had too many of them. I

start pulling them down. Ended up with two or three, and then in minutes down to one, and in a matter of minutes out the door, in the hall, on the elevator, out of the building, and....

PC: Everywhere.

RA: ...dropped the last one in Detroit, I think. So it then was doing what it was supposed to do. It then fulfilled its possibilities in a certain way as a disbursed, seen again, single image that was small enough and tight enough so that it wouldn't.... So that you had to see whatever is around. So that my polemic, whatever you want to call it, of "see that in conjunction with" was unavoidable.

PC: Well, now when, the one that got turned into paper, when they were glued on a wall, [that] one of them)a black one and a white one)whatever it was, would just focus your eye on the whole area that you might normally just walk by. It was like a little red light or something. It was fascinating how I _____.

RA: Yeah, the perfect less is more.

PC: Yeah.

RA: Except that it defeated, or wiped out, any Oriental notions of you just contemplate that)empty out yourself and contemplate that)because there's a lot of other stuff going on around you.

PC: Yeah, but it was so contained, and yet it wasn't large physically sometimes. You'd see it in the.... Somebody's put one on the side of a building or something, you know, and it was just.... The whole wall would focus.

RA: Would _____ up the whole building.

PC: Yeah. And it was fascinating, and I've always been intrigued by those. How did you come to make them in paper? Or plastic or whatever .

RA: Well, everything else is an offshoot. The wooden things were unhandy because they were fastened with double-faced tape, and they'd fall down after a while, so then it really went over to stenciling them. And that's where it really became social if somewhat criminal. Well, it was social right at the start.

PC: Right.

RA: But right as soon as I was out of that building I had to either sneak the thing in or ask permission or talk to somebody. It became literally a social _____.

PC: Oh, really? In California.

RA: Um hmm.

PC: But now how.... What was the response to that?

RA: And then the other things were offshoots of that.

PC: The glass ones and the whatever _____ _____.

RA: Yeah. Oh, response? Fine. I mean, this is the.... You know, any kid can pick up on that. It was the ideal art, nothing elitist going down at all.

PC: In terms of the object. In terms of the idea, it certainly was.

RA: Well, it can.... Sure.

PC: You know, I mean it was the whole.... You would walk by a wall one day that you'd walked by for three years, then all of a sudden the next day there's a little white blip there, and it was a total different wall. And I've always been intrigued by that.

[Interruption in taping]

PC: One of the.... Oh, there's several other things that fascinate me. You were in the pop art exhibition, which I always thought a rather strange association. Do you feel that's true or don't you agree with that?

RA: Oh, I think the pop label was always unfortunate, and it more than any other label, more than minimalism, it led critics as well as laymen astray and didn't say very much. It's always a catchall, and still is. Do you include George Segal, do you not, and who cares, because the receptacle is not very good. So it didn't matter.

PC: Yeah, yeah. I was always amused by a Bellamy and [Bugowski, Bulgowski] series of exhibitions called [Heart to Artschwager, Heart to Artschwager].

RA: Oh, yeah, I cracked up when it just was opening.

PC: [laughs] What did you think of those? I mean, just the idea.

RA: Oh, Bellamy and I are brothers, and I welcomed the irony of that and I was rather pleased, too.

PC: Yeah, yeah.

RA: And also he makes the best group shows)or used to.

PC: Did you work with him very much. I mean was he a fan or a promoter or understander or....

RA: Yeah. He was the first person I looked up when I thought I had something. Everybody else got letters, but him a personal visit. And it was one of those times when I couldn't get through to him. But a little bit after he sought me out, and was my supporter and friend and still is. And through some dry times in the mid-sixties, when it was going hard)it was going hard in a number of ways)and I probably showed there more than I did anywhere else.

PC: What do you mean "It was going difficult"? In terms of the work, or life, or....

RA: The work didn't go over. It really didn't.

PC: Well, it was very difficult. I've always been interested in it from, I think, the first show at Leo's. It was something that I found for years you couldn't discuss with people because they wouldn't talk about it. And I could never.... And I've never had that experience with another artist's work. They just would, you know.... Either there wasn't a vocabulary that the critics had evolved)everybody seems to have three people who write produce all the verbiage, which you can then pick from)or what it was. And I found it very difficult to engage people in any kind of conversation about it.

RA: Well, I've found that to be the case, too, and I thought that '65 show was a mature, complete, clear statement.

PC: Was that the one that had sort of a mirror or a picture [but, where] it was all formica?

RA: Yeah.

PC: The frame and that was.... Yeah.

RA: Very material, very heavy, and Orientally empty.

PC: Yeah. It was blue and brown or something.

RA: I think it was Barbara Rose pointed out in her ABC article there were several people who came on that notion of empty center at the same time. Well, I think my first expression of that would have been this railing that I described to you.

PC: I don't remember that piece.

RA: Pardon?

PC: I don't remember that piece.

RA: Well, it was shown in one of the Up to Artschwager shows, and Casper [Cummings, Konig] bought it, and he took it back to Germany with him.

PC: I wonder if I saw it in a different way. I remember.... Do you find.... In researching this, I was astounded to see how little really that's been written about your work. Or is it just that I haven't found the right sources?

RA: No, no. No, you're quite right. You're quite right, and that's fed my paranoia. Although I think you would agree that in talking about these matters I'm kind of willing to talk, I'm willing to reveal myself. I can, given sufficient time, put a sentence together and say the relevant. I had a tough time, and I had a tough time getting through, and, as a friend commented, it seems like my circle of friends now for some years, seems to be away from my contemporaries, which is true.

PC: What exactly....

RA: It may be too bad.

PC: Who exemplifies that? What are you....

RA: Oh, who have I rattled around with there? [It would be some ex-students, [Joseph Herd, Josepher], John Torriano, and.... Or??: It would be some ex-students: [Joseph Herd, Josepher], John Toriano, and....] Couple of people in the gallery: Rosencliff and Lichtenstein. The critical framework somehow was not available, or not made available, or certainly was....

PC: I think maybe it's just....

RA: I wasn't sought out to help make one available.

PC: I think critics after a little while suffer from a problem of being afraid to ask questions because of their own image of themselves, you know, and there's.... It just was difficult for people to pick up, and then five years later they say, "God, I can't really start asking questions because I should have written this three years ago or something."

RA: Oh, that's too bad.

PC: [laughs] Well, I've given up reading criticism, mostly for that reason, because I find I don't want to make a leap of that kind, dare the quicksands anymore. [chuckles]

RA: Well, that's okay if you're in high school.

PC: [laughs]

RA: No, I'm not targeting you, but the, to not ask questions.

PC: It's gets difficult. How did you ever come to make that one multiple? The first one, which is the box with the objects in it?

RA: Oh, [Brook John] Sander came around and, "Would you like to do a print?" Or I think he said an addition, and I'm sure you know him, and he's easy to get on with and I.... In a way, I didn't plot the idea because it would be doing something to that notion. It would be doing something to it that it wasn't intended for. I mean it's already a multiple, for God's sake. It was the ultimate multiple. But I chewed on it a little bit and came on a sort of compressed kit of restricted versions of anything that's small, intense, contrasting, and then the other variables you compare: sharp focus to bad focus. That would be the hairy ones. It's not a biomorphic piece of surrealism, as somebody said, but it's simply the other one, _____es.

PC: Right. That's a fascinating reaction I suppose I'll tell you about some time. [laughing]

RA: And the coconut, the 3-D, you know, the knackwurst one.

PC: Right.

RA: Being flat, flat, it's a flat ovoid from no matter what position you stand in.

PC: From 360 point degrees.

RA: Yeah, you retain the flat. The analog of the retina, you retain that as you go around, so it's a walkaround.... It will tend to make a walkaround flat plane into a....

PC: Well, it's almost destroyed if it's looked at right. You destroy the three-dimensionality of it.

RA: Yeah. To a certain extent those [that are, there] flat on the wall do, too. Or at least they'll mess up the space a little. Because it's not anchoring very well. Too slippery to anchor.

PC: Right. One of the other things that's sort of woven through here are drawings. You recently had a drawing exhibition, and)what was it?)a year or two ago did that little book of, I've forgotten how many drawings. [I mean], with the interior, the door, window, rug, facets .... What started that particular theory that became a little book?

RA: I was painting at the time. After Black Spot I went straight into painting)which is perverse, turning one's back, I suppose, on [a train of, apparent] success. But deciding to for a time, for a change, working with a defined context, restricted context, rather than a context that's only limited by where a person can walk and what he can see. Because I had been completely blown open by Black Spot, right?

PC: Right.

RA: So do the opposite: Block it in, into an enclosure, and that's why I went back onto the painting, and then made a something that stood for the.... I don't want to say "infinite," but for what.... All right, infinite. What goes on and on and on by using that embossed material. There were two kinds. One was sort of breaststroke embossment and the other a concentric swirl embossment. The ones that look like Van Gogh.... You know the ones I'm talking about?

PC: Right, right.

RA: Okay. So there is the pattern in there that is extensible.

PC: Right, goes on, right.

RA: And then on that or in that is some configuration which is extensible in a different sense [with] the imagery, and not extensible because it's actually closed off. And in some cases, with some of the paintings, it's not extensible at all. Okay, so that would be a proposed context, and the six things as a very tight field or universe of discourse consisting of just those six things.

PC: How'd you pick them? How'd that group evolve?

RA: Found. I was making drawings which were studies where paintings as invented paintings. Invented interiors, I should say. And I was making my life drawing studies [where] I was working off the photograph. And it was just deciding, "What am I going to do today?" so I thumbed through my notebook or something, going back a few days , "Oh, I'll just do that. [Well, But] I'm not gonna trace it. I'll just make a list of those things that are there. And so I made a list of the things that were there, and then drew those and then the notion was already realized, because that same set of instructions would serve for the next page, and the next page, _____.

PC: Right. But I couldn't.... You know, it's interesting to see the changes. But I couldn't really.... Well, in many ways the shapes relate to other pieces that you've made interior _____.

RA: Yeah. Well, the meditations would seem to be severe. There are only six icons that you can make if you are to assemble it together.

PC: Right.

RA: But that's the only restriction. That being said, then you can do anything you want.

PC: But then in a show you had this year, at the Gallery ____ahn drawing show uptown, that's a whole other situation, [with, in] that kind of all-over pattern, or had that appeared before?

RA: That had appeared in some weaving paintings, that I had done starting.... The first one, it's either '65 or '66, which was just basket-weave, a painting. Maybe two-by-three foot basket weave, carefully rendered with loving care. And that was about a couple of years later, in '69 maybe. With some charcoal drawings of a weave where some mistakes begin to appear. And then from just out and out randomly things could connect and things that you're not quite sure if this strip connects with that one or with another one, a random pattern. Also, from looking at the paintings and trying to realize something more intelligent out of these paintings, which were kind of fun, I mean, but that's....

PC: But were those drawings also some kind of comment on abstraction?

RA: Well, certainly some of the drawings in the book)let's just call it the Book Show)were comments on abstraction or on Byzantine art or Renaissance art or concrete poetry or whatever you like, because all the restrictions were off. I just used those six titles. But the last show was.... Okay, [it] grew out of that, but in a different way. The weaving became something that was needed, that bothered me.

PC: What do you mean needed?

RA: All right. The Book Show was all pen and ink. Black lines on white paper. And did not include only the six objects. Much more was implied, and whatever was implied)and it might be walls, it might be people walking by)was relegated to the paper. So I would say out of the dumb notion, "Something must be done about the ground. You can't just leave this white paper. But if you do something to it, then it's not ground anymore." So it would be an attempt to fight off the kind of paranoia or deal with it, by defining that which has not been defined. Make something out of all that, just bail it up. Say what's there, so you won't have to be nervous. That just as a passing thought. And then pursue with maybe some tongue-in-cheek. But really trying to make something specific that could never have a name, because there isn't any stuff like that. It's really impossible.

PC: Well, in some cases)I'm just trying to remember various pieces)it seemed also to camouflage another image. Or there was another image kind of woven through it. Fences or the landscape kind of, the lulls.

RA: All right. The weaving would stand for everything, would become everything that you're getting all the time, including the sound of that refrigerator, and those lights over there, which you're not paying any attention to because we have other matters to deal with. [I mean], what you say to me and what I say to you. And you only have the attention of the refrigerator noise because I've drawn attention to them by way of bringing that in. All right, the fence....

PC: So sort of finding it out by obscuring it.

RA: Yeah.... [sighs] Or making....

PC: It's almost the opposite of what the blips....

RA: ...making a miracle on a conversation, on a serious conversation that you're having with somebody about eleven o'clock on Saturday night, on the upper platform of the Spring Street Bar.

PC: [laughs] Right.

RA: And there's certain points where it exactly works out. You can actually hear what the other person is saying, or where what's going on melds with all of the sound and all of the noise and all of the stir. And the connection points in those drawings are usually just before it disappears. When the lines got very close and they would assume the same coloration as the weaving, and then they would get.... Just at the last moment they would get harder and jump out a little bit, disappear.

PC: So in a way it is almost opposite of the blips.

RA: Well....

PC: I mean, they focused you on a large area and these focus you on a small area to start weaving a larger area.

RA: Yeah.... On most things.... People have said to me that they usually work back from the)like the vanishing point can be seen immediately)and work back from there to the fence configuration. And where the fence is the closest it's the hardest to see as a gestalt, because it's lost....

PC: ...in the other drawing, the other lines.

RA: Yeah, the lines are too far apart, and you have to remember what you saw to be able to then out of what you remember invent in your mind this.

PC: Right.

RA: Rather than just the following along.

[Interruption in taping]

PC: Do your drawings serve as points of references to go back into sculpture, or is it a sort of parallel activity? Because they're not really drawings for pieces or drawings for paintings, particularly.

RA: These drawings?

PC: Um hmm, that recent show.

RA: These drawings are an end to themselves.

PC: Right.

RA: They can be the other. [pauses] I don't know how to answer that, except that the sculpture has always partaken of what we call painterly or drawing, so....

PC: There's a certain interplay.

RA: Yeah. I've taken your question specific to my situation right now, which I couldn't help doing.

PC: You mean the pieces you're working on now?

RA: Yeah. And right now I'm working in a larger space and I think there'll be some.... I think there will be some sculpture come out of that, but I don't know. If something suggests itself, well, of course that's where it'll go. But it's now in a space that a person would move through [it], so you don't have a constant viewpoint....

[interruption in taping]

RA: ...constant viewpoint, you know, _____ but maybe a fluctuation between a constant viewpoint. That is, things staying as they are and things changing as you move along.

PC: Okay, I want to pick up on something you mentioned before, which was teaching in California. How'd you like that experience and what did you teach?

RA: Oh, let's see. I've been out three times, different places. Davis.... This was over a long period of time. Davis, Fresno , and Cal Arts. I had a good time each time, but I think got better at it. It's something that's good to do a little bit of from time to time.

PC: For?

RA: For sake of students and for sake of teaching.

PC: You mean helps you focus on things, clarify?

RA: It's something that I was skeptical about for many years and stayed away from.

PC: Based on what? The skepticism?

RA: Can't teach art.

PC: Now that you've taught, do you think you can?

RA: To a certain extent.

PC: Really? How much? I mean, in what way?

RA: I think maybe just little clues here and there, I suppose in the same sense that something like that could be going on right now between you and me. _____ exchanges that people in this style, this community, do anyway. Maybe it's entertainment. In a school, questions get clear and answers within tend to get clear.

PC: But it doesn't have any great attraction for you except on an occasional experiment?

RA: I can say I'm keeping it at a level where when I do it it's a pleasure.

PC: I just find it fascinating that.... And I guess you're an example of somebody who was working as an artist and doing something that was not directly related to what they were doing, because so many people are just painters or carpenters, electricians, and you were making cabinetry, but you were using the material to fuel the cabinetry to make sculpture. But you were still.... There was still a line there that you weren't crossing. [I mean] you didn't teach painting some people do for three days a week.

RA: Well, let's say anything that breaks the mold is okay.

PC: Yeah.

RA: More common is a critic who then becomes an artist, and you've got a bunch of those.

PC: Well, yeah....

RA: A couple of them turned out pretty well. [Don.] Judd turned out terrific.

PC: Yeah.

RA: What is your point on it?

PC: No, I'm just curious about why you really haven't used your art that way, or your art experience that way.

RA: That I've not used it....

PC: As a teaching device, you know, except on occasion, because it is a method so many people did use to sort of survive and make a living, create followings, endless other situations.

RA: Well, it's a tough thing. [pauses] I think it's a good way to go down the drain for a lot of people.

PC: Yeah, I think that's true. It consumes so much idea and so much energy.

RA: You get.... If you're working, I think it's better to judge what you're working yourself, and to suspend that judgment as long as possible. To work I would say almost mindlessly for a time. This is the way it turns out for me anyway, that that notion surface)that the art surfaces before notion surfaces, or, if you will, the criticism comes after the art.

PC: Do you think about your pieces or look at them for long periods of time? Or make things, and sort of stand them around and think about them?

RA: I keep notebooks. I keep a fairly messy studio and fairly messy [head], because that's the way it turns out. It's not the kind of work where you all the time go from premises to conclusion.

PC: So things happen in the middle.

RA: Do indeed.

PC: So there's a certain amount of discovery of one kind or another on your part as the pace goes on. They're not preformed....

RA: How are you going to find out something that you don't know?

PC: Right. Because so many people I think who almost fully form what they're doing in their head and then execute it....

RA: Sometimes. I could say that Black Spot was that way, but as I've described it to you it wasn't [that] at all.

PC: Right.

RA: Wasn't at all.

PC: Right. Because you had to work it out in real terms.

RA: Yeah.

[Interruption in taping]

PC: You haven't written very much about your own work have you? I don't remember finding anything much.

RA: You mean a discourse?

PC: Yeah, a statement.

RA: Oh, there's statements....

PC: A few here and there.

RA: ...sprinkled here and around. I have.... Certainly not the way Bob Morris has done. I think hardly anybody writes about their own work. Where I've written, it's been made up out of a piece of work. [Like] writing would be sine qua non of a kind of work that is meshed in with other things. If you write an essay, it goes in among the advertisements, or the illustrations, flipping the pages, and always in a lively context. And in that sense I wrote a piece)oh, a long time, 10 years, was it 11 years, in '77 [means '67?)Ed.])which was of that nature, as a piece of work which.... All right, it was an essay, but a piece of art, which to a certain extent coopted its surrounding pages, and I think it was probably a landmark piece of that kind. There've been others since then.

PC: That was in....

RA: Arts Magazine, November '67.

PC: Arts Magazine, right. I keep thinking of something else.

RA: Nothing else published by [me]. Main Coop in Chicago put out a book, and I gave them something last year or the year before. And what else have I done?

PC: Did you have something in Tracks at one point?

RA: No, I was going to do something for them. He asked me. Peter Frank asked me and I never did it.

[Interruption in taping]

PC: I'm curious, going back to the various materials and the formica, which comes in different colors and swirls and things and.... Several pieces)and I think of those ones that lay on the wall that sort of had different planes or a recessed plane)seemed to be abstract, but they also seemed to have references towards something else. Is that so, or is it not?

RA: Well, two, three times.... I suppose you could say there are parody things that would have woodgrain.

PC: Right.

RA: There would be things that have a proposed context or concomitant of surface, and that would be all those marbleized things)the marbleized being that there's a repeat in that, being much like the weavery in this last [drawing] show. Stuff that stands for.... I'm stuck here for finishing that sentence. It stands for what that.... It stands for materiality, what that might be made of, but then aggressively, you know, imagistic and false space.

PC: But all those pieces seem to be such strong kind of [mimetic]....

RA: And times, which makes false)I want to get to your next question, but I just want to finish this)another time, which enters falsely into the space with exaggerated light and shadow.]

PC: Oh, I see.

RA: Where surface that's sloped toward where the light might be expected to come is very light, and the other surfaces would be darker and something that's undercut would be black. Moonscape kind of light. But the light that falls on the piece is rendered, rather than just allowed to shine willy nilly.... [laughing]

PC: Pick and choose.

RA: ....without any kind of control, yeah.

PC: Yeah.

RA: So fixing the light as well as the configuration. Now, did I blow your next question?

PC: No, that's fine. I was just....

[Interruption in taping]

RA: ...[respectable] pieces. I don't know of anybody else who picked up on that)you know, to make the light where it is. All right, painting does that. But something that's in a common space....

PC: Three-dimensional.

RA: ...I don't think that anybody else ever picked up on that, either from me or independently.

PC: I don't remember seeing .... I'm curious also about the implications of the value of truth in what you were just saying. You know, that the light is this way and the shadow....

RA: You mean have I told the truth or if I've been a liar?

PC: [laughs] No, but in terms of being what you're looking at. What you're looking at is true unto itself, but it's presenting something which might not be true, vis-...-vis the light that might in this installation come from over here, and another one from a totally other point of view. The light of the object....

RA: Well, those things are paradoxical. They are in common space, and are made to be practically in your lap. But they specify a light. And as soon as they do that, they've got nothing to do with you or anything else that's in the room.

PC: They're self-contained, in a way.

RA: Um hmm.

[END OF INTERVIEW]