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Oral history interview with William T. Brown, 2010 August 23-24

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with William Theophilus Brown on August 23-24, 2010. The interview took place in San Francisco, CA, and was conducted by Jonathan Weinberg for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JONATHAN WEINBERG: And it's working now. All right. This is Jonathan Weinberg interviewing William Theophilus Brown at his home at 1661 Pine Street in San Francisco, California, on August 23rd, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number one.

Okay. So Bill — [Laughs] — it's an honor for me to be here asking you these questions, and it just makes sense I guess to start off with where were you born and when — those sort of questions, those sort of basic biographical questions.

WILLIAM THEOPHILUS BROWN: I was born in Moline, Illinois, on April 7th, 1919. And the reason I was born there is because my father worked for John Deere plows, and he had 160 patents to his name. He was a brilliant man and gave a huge boost to the company itself. And by International Harvester, their arch enemy, he was known as "the awfulest Brown." [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: And you're named after him, obviously.

MR. BROWN: Every other generation gets the "William." He was just Theophilus Brown. That goes back for four generations.

MR. WEINBERG: So I want to get back to your father but since it is such a wonderful sort of American family, go back the four generations and say a few words about that.

MR. BROWN: Well, the fourth generation was a great friend of Thoreau.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, and how did that happen? Why? How? What was —

MR. BROWN: Well, you know, New England was tiny in those days. I don't know how they met. But when he came up from Concord [MA], he always stayed with my grandfather and grandmother. And I don't know too much about him, except I had signed first editions of his work and I thought they were too valuable to read so I sold them and read them in paperback. [They laugh.] Wise, very wise.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. But your father — were your family from England, originally?

MR. BROWN: I think my father is English and partly French, and my mother was German. They came over here in the 1840s and went to St. Louis [MO] and made beer. And then my grandfather — my mother's father — came up to Davenport [IA] and started his own brewery.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, okay. So that was the great family business, was beer, or something, at some point.

MR. BROWN: Beer, but our household — we never had it, it seems to me. [They laugh.] In fact, I didn't know what liquor was until I went off to school.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, that's interesting. So your — tell me more about your father.

MR. BROWN: Well, he was 40 when I was born. He was very reserved, but I adored him. He was very quiet and very loving. He cared a great deal for me. May I show you a picture of the two of us?

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, sure, sure.

MR. BROWN: I found it the other day. I think he was an incredibly handsome guy.

MR. WEINBERG: He's going to get a picture. That's what we're waiting for. He said not to pause things or slow the interview down.

MR. : You didn't say the year before.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, I neglected to say that it's August 23rd, 2010. Oh, wonderful. And that's you?

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, that's sweet. Well, we'll make sure to take a photograph of that.

MR. BROWN: Is it me, or do you agree that he's a very handsome man?

MR. WEINBERG: He's a very handsome man.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, I think so, too.

MR. WEINBERG: And what was the religion of your family?

MR. BROWN: Oh, I think it was called Protestant. [They laugh.] We went to school in a haphazard way, and when I was 15, I left it permanently. The only churches I've been in since were cathedrals in France.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. Was it Episcopalian? Is that when you say Protestant?

MR. BROWN: I guess this was an Episcopalian church but I didn't take any of it at all seriously. As a matter of fact, I left the church at 15 forever for making me feel guilty about my sexual life.

MR. WEINBERG: Good, good. Well, that's good to know. We'll maybe get back to it in a little. Did you have brothers and sisters?

MR. BROWN: I had an older sister, two years. We barely got along. I don't know why. I think I was a shitty little brother, actually. At the end of her life, we became good friends.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, good. But when you say that you were a shitty little brother, do you mean like when you were little?

MR. BROWN: Well, for instance, we both took art lessons and my main aim was to do better than she. And we both took piano lessons and I remember she was given the [Robert] Schumann *Arabesque* and I liked it, so I sort of took it away from her and played it better than she — things like that.

MR. WEINBERG: So you were competitive.

MR. BROWN: We were very competitive.

MR. WEINBERG: And your mother?

MR. BROWN: My mother was much more conventional than my father. But she was very loving and I think she did pretty much what my dad thought she should do. And I think she ran the family very well.

MR. WEINBERG: So she didn't work?

MR. BROWN: No, we had enough money. We had two maids or something living in the house. She did work. I remember her darning socks and things like that.

MR. WEINBERG: I should say, she didn't have a job outside of the house?

MR. BROWN: No, she didn't, no.

MR. WEINBERG: But of course, it's a lot of work to raise a family.

MR. BROWN: I think so, especially —

MR. WEINBERG: Did she ever have aspirations to work?

MR. BROWN: I don't think so, no.

MR. WEINBERG: So she wasn't artistic or — you don't remember her —

MR. BROWN: I don't think she was, really.

MR. WEINBERG: No, okay. And your father was, though? You said your father was —

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes. He taught me to draw when I was six years old. I mean, he taught me how he drew. I was sitting with him in the car waiting for my mother to come out from a visit to someone in a hospital, and he had a

black notebook with him and he showed me how to draw the houses across the street. And then a couple of days later, he gave me a black notebook. And in the next few years, I filled it up. And that's at the Archives of American Art.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. And did he draw as part of his work? Had he been trained to do engineering drawing? What kind of — you should mention that he worked for — was he an engineer or what was he?

MR. BROWN: He was chief of the experimental department. And he invented, as I said, 160 — had 160 patents, all for John Deere plows.

MR. WEINBERG: So they were plows. That's what I'm trying to — so he was a mechanical engineer, kind of thing.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, some pretty important inventions, apparently.

MR. WEINBERG: So I wonder how — I mean, he was probably trained to do engineering drawings, I mean, because they did that in the —

MR. BROWN: He did them and all of his diaries — he kept diaries — are on the Internet. And I have pictures in here from people who have taken some of the pages out and given me photographs. And some of them have drawings that he did.

MR. WEINBERG: Very good. Okay. And so you had this kind of competitive relationship with your sister but it was a happy childhood, would you say?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, I think in retrospect, it was. I wanted to get out of Moline in the worst way. [Laughs.]

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, okay. That's a good point. What was Moline like?

MR. BROWN: Well, it was very strange. It was very stratified according to your position at Deere & Company. Mrs. Butterworth was the granddaughter of John Deere, and I once went to her house at my mother's suggestion. And she had quite an art collection — a Rembrandt [van Rijn] that passed the examinations. And she looked like my idea of a duchess — [they laugh] — out of *Alice in Wonderland*.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh my god. Was there a little —

MR. BROWN: It was very funny, yeah. We went through the house and then she said, "I want you to see the Tiepolo ceiling in the library." Apparently, they had bought a [Giovanni Battista] Tiepolo ceiling. I didn't know they were for sale. [Laughs.] Anyway, and she said — she was in her 80s then and I was home from college — and she said, "I find the best way of viewing this is lying down on the carpet." So suddenly, I was helping Mrs. Butterworth lie down on the carpet and I was there and I thought, "Oh my god, how long do I have to be here?" [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Lying next to her. She didn't do anything, I hope. I hope she was —

MR. BROWN: No, she was — no.

MR. WEINBERG: Seems like somewhat of a shady way to get a young man — [inaudible, they laugh] — doesn't it? Maybe when she was younger, she used to use that device. That's better than the etchings.

MR. BROWN: Anyway, she — fortunately, the butler came through one of the doors and said, "Mrs. Butterworth, your dentist appointment." And he helped her up and she said, "Now you just stay here as long you want." [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: That's wonderful. So but that's a good topic. One of the things I noticed is you mentioned — you said, when I was 15, I left the church. And why 15? Was that just an arbitrary age?

MR. BROWN: Well, it took me that long to — well, we're all boys together — when I was in the bathtub when I was 11 years old, I was washing down there and it felt so good that I kept washing down there. And suddenly — psh! I didn't even know what it was. I was so stupid. Nobody had given me any information about sex.

So I found out a name for it and I went to the public library and the public library said it was a sin and all of this sort of thing. Nevertheless, it was a daily habit, too. And so I felt guilty. And then I decided, the church is doing this to me to make some money. And as soon as that dawned on me — it took a while — I left it forever.

MR. WEINBERG: That's pretty young to, when you were 15, to sort of realize that. But you maybe — you know, that's just the kind of age, you know, to come to that kind of realization. I mean, were you reading — what kind of novels or what — it sounds like you were very precocious, is what I'm trying to say.

MR. BROWN: Oh, maybe a little in art. That's about it. Have I told you the Grant Wood story or not?

MR. WEINBERG: Well, even if you've told me, you should tell the world.

MR. BROWN: All right. To whom it may concern — [Laughs] — I did, when I was 11, a drawing of my dad asleep in his reclining chair after dinner, in charcoal, that was about this big.

MR. WEINBERG: Would you say like 8-by-10, would you say, or —

MR. BROWN: A little bit bigger maybe.

MR. WEINBERG: A little bigger, okay.

MR. BROWN: And he framed it very nicely — or had it framed — and entered it into an adult — there was an annual in the tri-cities that year, as they were called then — Davenport, Rock Island and Moline — at the Davenport gallery. And that year, the sole juror was Grant Wood. And it was supposed to be for adults only. And he gave me third prize. And so — [Laughs] — when they saw this little kid walking up the aisle to the dais in the center of the museum, he reached down and I reached up and shook hands. It was a great thrill. And well, that's that story.

MR. WEINBERG: Did you ever encounter him again?

MR. BROWN: No, no, he died shortly after that.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: So that would have been when? Like the middle of the 1930s, something?

MR. BROWN: Brigidette Murray [ph] — [inaudible] — let's see, 19 plus 11 —

MR. WEINBERG: So you were around 11 years old?

MR. BROWN: No, I think I got it when I was 12 and did the drawing when I was 11.

MR. WEINBERG: Interesting, amazing, amazing story. So any other memories of Grant Wood? No?

MR. BROWN: Oh, I am a huge fan, still, of his. No, I — that's it.

MR. WEINBERG: I guess I want to go back to your father because you said that he was very quiet but it sounds like you had this close relationship with him, in some sense, even if it wasn't verbal.

MR. BROWN: When I was in the Army, without any information at all, he seemed to know exactly were I was in Europe all the time and drew maps in his diary almost every day.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh my god.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. And once, when I was still in training in an infantry — no, a signal corps company in New Jersey — I had a weekend pass to New York, and going back, I felt as though I was having a stroke or something. It was the beginning of rheumatic fever, actually. So I got off in New Jersey — the last stop — and got in a cab and said, "Take me to a hospital."

And they took me to a Catholic hospital. Here were these nuns, wondering what in the hell to do with me. And finally, an Army ambulance took me to an Army general hospital on Staten Island [NY]. And I said, "Be sure to let them know at camp, whatever, that I am here and not AWOL."

They didn't, and about a week later, my father, fortunately, at his office, got a letter saying, "Your son is AWOL." And in wartime, the sense of death. And I think my mother would never have been able to handle that. So that was a piece of luck. And I think it was pretty tough on him. They never apologized, of course. But somebody finally did get the message.

MR. WEINBERG: And when did he die?

MR. BROWN: My father died in 1971. My mother and father died about two weeks apart. He was 92.

MR. WEINBERG: And I assume that at some point, he figured out that you were gay. How did he handle that?

MR. BROWN: Oh, that's an interesting story. My sister decided, without asking me, to tell my parents that I was gay. And I was living with Paul [Wonner?], had been for quite a while. And only thing I ever heard from them was, in the next letter, they said, "Give our love to Paul."

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, sweet.

MR. BROWN: For me, that's pretty extraordinary.

MR. WEINBERG: So they were very accepting in a discreet way.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. It was never mentioned when we saw each other again.

MR. WEINBERG: So I just wanted — I'm sorry because I'm always very interested in childhood, you know. I am. It just fascinates me. So, school — and you didn't go to — they didn't send you to boarding school.

MR. BROWN: Oh, well, yeah. I went to first two years of high school and —

MR. WEINBERG: Was it public school or —

MR. BROWN: It was public school and I kind of enjoyed it, especially in high school. I made a couple of friends, a couple of girlfriends — not sexually but I liked them a lot. And we had a wonderful high school art teacher who later became head of Colgate art department, or something.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, really? Was it a he or a she?

MR. BROWN: It was a he.

MR. WEINBERG: Do you remember his name?

MR. BROWN: Reginald Neal.

MR. WEINBERG: Reginald Neal, okay.

MR. BROWN: And he encouraged me. And then, after my sophomore year, they sent me to Lake Forest Academy [IL], a prep school for getting guys into colleges, of course. And I was told that if you pass and list more than one college, none of them will take you.

Because our neighbors in New Hampshire, our summer place — a husband and wife, and they had a daughter that we played with — was the head of the Yale music department and both fine pianists, and we saw a lot of them, I chose Yale. Actually, the art department — this is pre-Alberts — was so terrible that I changed from majoring in art to music. [Paul] Hindemith was there. It was a very interesting, lively place.

MR. WEINBERG: So as a young — before you came to college, it sounds like you were split between music and art-making. You were sort of —

MR. BROWN: I loved music and I still do, but there was never any doubt in my mind that I would pursue art. I didn't — I thought I might have some ability there. I knew I had very ordinary ability in music.

MR. WEINBERG: But that's interesting because clearly, you actually didn't only have ordinary ability because it seems like people, at various points, thought you almost had quite an ability in music. So you were taking piano, I assume. Was that the instrument?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, oh, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: And you were doing it how seriously? I mean, how —

MR. BROWN: Oh, you know, like all kids, I wasn't practicing, except — well, I mean, if I wanted to be a pianist, I would have spent at least two or three hours doing it. 15 minutes was maximum.

MR. WEINBERG: I see, so it was never really — you never really were that serious.

MR. BROWN: No, no, but I was greatly affected by music. Especially with this double guilt of homosexuality and masturbation, I became very introverted and relied on music and painting. That's what I thought about.

MR. WEINBERG: And was it classical music always?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. Well, and it's funny you say that because I was sort of — I had an uncle who offered me tickets to a concert in Davenport by George Gershwin. And I said, oh, I don't want to hear that stuff. Now I

could kill myself. I'm a great, great fan of his. I think he's a miraculously wonderful man and composer. But I was a snob — a stupid little snob.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, I'm wondering where that — because that's what — I'm trying to get back to those early — the early Bill Brown days. And I'm trying to figure out, like, where is that coming from, like, because often, there is somebody who is influencing that, saying don't listen to popular music. Don't listen to — you know.

MR. BROWN: One of my mother's sisters was the head of the Civic Music, and when these great people like Rachmaninoff came to town, they'd have to spend a day with her. And anyway, we spent many evenings together and she helped educate me, musically. But it was there anyway. And we were already gifted with 78s and I remember listening to the Rachmaninoff second piano concerto over and over again.

MR. WEINBERG: So it was a very intellectual household, you would say?

MR. BROWN: I don't think so. I mean —

MR. WEINBERG: Or did you feel that it was a way to sort of put you apart from, maybe, the provincialism of the — because I often think about that, as culture is a way for — I think sometimes gay men, too, particularly — to sort of almost set them apart from an atmosphere, rather than —

MR. BROWN: Well, I didn't know any other gay men.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, not so much that, not so much that, but just as a way to mark your difference. Because actually, to choose — what I'm thinking of is, like, choosing classical music and not listening to popular music, it makes a big difference in terms of your friends in school.

MR. BROWN: Oh, well, yes, I didn't have friends in school, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: So it was basically a few girl friends? You didn't have a lot of friends, you said, actually.

MR. BROWN: No, I didn't. And of course, at sports, I was abominable and when they had to choose sides, I was always the last one. [They laugh.] And I mean, they weren't mean to me but I was out of it.

MR. WEINBERG: So but you had a few intense friendships?

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah. The girl across the street, Margie Rathbone, and the boy down a little side street, Rufus. I had a kind of a hankering, at least, to talk about sex and things like — but I never did with him.

MR. WEINBERG: And your family didn't — your father never explained sex to you? There was never that —

MR. BROWN: Nothing. He had a very — I bet no one ever told him. I think he was very — I don't know.

MR. WEINBERG: And you never had a sense that — he was always loyal to your mother. There was never —

MR. BROWN: It's very interesting you say that because I had a gay second cousin, and his father and my father were very, very close. And his father died first, and when he did, my father went into a depression the like of which I never saw. And it always made me wonder, perhaps they had, had a sort of a — some sort of romance.

MR. WEINBERG: And I guess — I'm so focused on this — but with your relationship with your father, it was that you were close but probably, you didn't share — it wasn't the kind of thing where you were telling each other things.

MR. BROWN: Oh, no, no.

MR. WEINBERG: It was a sympathy, rather than a kind of —

MR. BROWN: Yeah, he was loving and I admired him but it wasn't physical at all.

MR. WEINBERG: So it wasn't physical and so it wasn't one where you would tell him what was going on in your life on a day-to-day basis.

MR. BROWN: No, nor would he hug me.

MR. WEINBERG: I see. That's interesting. And we don't have to go more into the psychology of that, but that's interesting, in terms of how you were raised and everything. Okay, so you went to this private school —

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: — and there were close friends there, or not?

MR. BROWN: Well, actually, there was one teacher there who liked music a lot. He may have been gay, I don't know, but he let me hang — he had an upright piano — and he let me hang around his apartment. And then I had one probably gay guy — we never went into that.

MR. WEINBERG: And by that time, you knew that you were gay, you were attracted, you know, to guys, or —

MR. BROWN: I don't think there was any question, as I reached puberty, although I still had very, very close relationships with women. I think a lot of gay men do.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, of course. But I was thinking, so you came to some realization that you were attracted to men, do you think somewhere like when you were 15, around there maybe?

MR. BROWN: I think probably earlier.

MR. WEINBERG: Even earlier. And when do you think you maybe put a name to it? Or how did that happen?

MR. BROWN: I think my sister was talking about a girl friend of hers and she said, her brother is that way. I forget how she expressed it. And I knew exactly what she meant and I knew exactly that I was one of them. And I wondered if she knew, too. She didn't tell me.

MR. WEINBERG: And once you sort of thought about that — because you mentioned, sort of, going to a public library and looking up — you know, I assume — masturbation.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes, yes.

MR. WEINBERG: But did you also sort of try to figure out what is this homosexuality and what do I do with that, or —

MR. BROWN: Well, it was a burden then, at first. Later, I realized it was — I was so lucky. Can you imagine me being in Moline with five horrible children and a wife? I'd have detested it [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Well, if you were heterosexual, you might not have felt that way but —

MR. BROWN: I doubt it. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: So interestingly, you associate the fact that you're gay with escaping that kind of provincialism, too?

MR. BROWN: Well, I didn't put it together that coherently, probably, then. But later I did, yes.

MR. WEINBERG: And when you talk about Moline as wanting to escape it, was this also the rhetoric of your parents and were they — or everybody else was happy with Moline?

MR. BROWN: Oh, I don't know if they were — we got away every summer, you see, to the White Mountains, where all my father's brothers and sisters and their kids, who I liked a lot — one of each sex in each of the three kids — and those were wonderful summers.

MR. WEINBERG: Now, in this period of awakening adolescence, did you ever have sex in that period or it wasn't till you got to college, or later?

MR. BROWN: No. No, I was dying to but — I remember driving east, as we did every summer. We stopped one night at a little town and there was only one hotel and there was only one room left. And it only had one bed. So they asked a man in the next room — a young man — if he would mind if they put a cot at the end of his bed. And so he accepted me and I was just dying for him to come over and rape me or whatever — [they laugh] — he wanted to do.

MR. WEINBERG: That one kind of experience, I think, could be so important, and it —

MR. BROWN: I remember it to this day.

MR. WEINBERG: And it's not even a real experience. It's just a possibility that never happened but it's so charged.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. Of course, nothing happened.

MR. WEINBERG: Nothing happened. This is your opportunity to change the story, but now and forever more,

nothing happened. [They laugh.] Okay, so now we have you going — and so nothing — you have no great, other memories of private school or —

MR. BROWN: Private school —

MR. WEINBERG: Were you a good student? That's a question I didn't ask you.

MR. BROWN: Was I a good student?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Good enough. I mean, I passed my boards and all that stuff, got into college.

MR. WEINBERG: So did you accept — I imagine you would have been good in English classes and reading, or was that — you mentioned being a big reader but you said — but you weren't?

MR. BROWN: I'm not a huge reader but I'm a very selective reader and I often reread. I mean, I'm sort of a snob about reading, I think. I mean, [Anton] Chekov and [Fyodor] Dostoyevsky and —

MR. WEINBERG: That started in high school?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: I wondered if you had discovered, at that point, any gay authors or gay writers.

MR. BROWN: Not really, and that would have been such a help.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, I was wondering because that's sometimes what happens.

MR. BROWN: Well, I — yeah. Even Virginia Woolf, I didn't pick up on her, and nor would it have helped me if I had. I mean, I didn't understand lesbian relationships. Well, I mean, they seemed perfectly okay; I really wanted to find male-male —

MR. WEINBERG: Well, for me, for example, Thomas Mann was, like, really —

MR. BROWN: Oh, well, I read *Death in Venice* [1912]. In fact, that made a huge impression on me.

MR. WEINBERG: When would that have been?

MR. BROWN: After college, although I heard him lecture at Yale when he was brought up from New York by Alfred Knopf. And at one point in the lecture — and this shows you what a superficial mind I have — he said, "The development — oh, excuse me, I meant the de-velopment." [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: So now I'll get you to Yale, so now you're arriving at Yale. And you were — because sometimes people were younger then, when they went to college —were you 17?

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, so you got to Yale. And I was a Yale undergraduate so I kind of know —

MR. BROWN: Oh, you were?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, and I taught there for 11 years so — and I'm still doing — so I know Yale well. And this is when, that you're at Yale? Around 1937?

MR. BROWN: I graduated in '41.

MR. WEINBERG: Forty-one [1941], okay. Yeah, so exactly '37. What was that like?

MR. BROWN: Well, the only other boy from my prep school who got into Yale became my first-year roommate but we really had nothing to do with — we had separate bedrooms and we didn't even go to dinner very often together, really. So I didn't — my best friends, really, were the Simons, the head of the music department. I'd often go there for dinner. And then I slowly made some friends in the music department. That was very much more my style.

MR. WEINBERG: So interesting, you're such a funny, charming — and it seems, later, had so many friends. What is your — is your theory that you — when did that sort of break — when did you break out and become the charming, friendly, easy-to-make-friends person that you are today? Did that happen in college?

MR. BROWN: Well, I'm rather unaware of it. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: No, but I think it did. I mean, you know, when you talk later in your life, it's not about how few friends you have. You have lots and lots of friends.

MR. BROWN: Yes, I did.

MR. WEINBERG: You know, and I think that happens. I think that happens to people. They suddenly find themselves. Do you think that started happening in college or —

MR. BROWN: Well, yes, and then —

MR. WEINBERG: It's a new time. It's a time to sort of remake your personality.

MR. BROWN: And then I happened to be in a class with Mrs. Hindemith. We were in a seminar together, and I would always give her my *Yale Daily News* because it was just after going to the mailbox. And so we became very good friends, and then I got invited to the house a lot and I — I still think he's an incredibly marvelous man, very neglected as a composer.

And then things began to happen at Yale. There was, I think, a musicologist, a German, who I think — he was married and had a daughter — but I think he was a little bit taken with me. I would spend weekends there and I remember him coming into my bedroom, seeing a big hard-on sticking up. [They laugh.] And I'm saying, "I'm going to bed." [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: But in the Army, of course, then, being a graduate of an Ivy League college, the old Army sergeants hated you like — they waited six weeks to send me to the worst place they could, which was in Georgia, a heavy weapons infantry training camp full of Okies, wonderful guys. And I didn't understand a word they said but they could take guns apart in their sleep. But I was totally lost there.

And I met a guy at the recreation club at night from Harvard and he said, "Why don't you try to get transferred to the Fourth Battalion," which is so-called Army intelligence. And so I went to the company headquarters and filled out a form. And I'm sure that the sergeants just threw it away as soon as I left. However, 10 days later, I was called out of line in the morning at call or whatever it was and they said, "Pack up. You're transferred to the Fourth Battalion." I thought, finally, I've done something on my own.

Well, about a week later, I got a letter from my mother and she said, "Remember Mrs. Ramsey? She's the wife of General Ramsey." [Laughs.] She was her best friend, was the wife of the head of the camp. And so one woman wrote to the other and said, do something about this person. And so she gave it to her husband. And that was very lucky. That was just before — in fact, I was having Sunday lunch with them when Pearl Harbor — we were listening to the New York Philharmonic, Brahms piano concerto, and it was interrupted. And he disappeared, never saw him again. We were transferred to Air Warning Service.

MR. WEINBERG: I'm confused — you were at lunch with — who disappeared? I got —

MR. BROWN: The head of the — the colonel who was the —

MR. WEINBERG: The head of the camp, okay.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: So that was a great bit of fortune. Did you remember — because I remember Paul Cadmus talking about being interviewed to get into the Army and they actually asked him if he was a homosexual. And he said — very rare for anybody to do this — he said yes and was then, therefore, not accepted. Of course, very few people ever replied to that but did you —

MR. BROWN: They didn't ask me.

MR. WEINBERG: So sometimes they did and sometimes they didn't.

MR. BROWN: The only thing I did. The first day, you know, they shave your hair and strip you and there you are. And at one point, they wanted a urine specimen and there was a long trough and we each had a little jar to fill. And there was a boy next to me who couldn't take a leak, and I said, "Well, I have plenty," so I got the poor son of a bitch in the Army, maybe, who knows. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: He may not have gotten if not for your urine. That's a funny story. A pee-shy soldier. Yeah, I think there's other people who've actually even talked about how traumatic that was, that experience of just having to do that in front of all those people.

MR. BROWN: Well, yeah, I mean, the story was, one doctor would look through one ear and another doctor, at the same time, would look through the other and if their glances didn't meet, you were in. [They laugh.] That's a corny joke.

MR. WEINBERG: And so now you were in Intelligence and it was better life?

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah. We worked with civilians in Charleston [SC]. And then I met a sailor there and that was my first love affair. And I lived with him in his garden apartment in Charleston.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, well, I think this is worthy of more information so you had never — at that point, you were a virgin? No sex at Yale?

MR. BROWN: No, I didn't have any sex at Yale. I longed for it but I didn't ever have any. Yeah, funny.

MR. WEINBERG: So is this a time when you want to tell the world your first experience with another person, or is it not worthy of history?

MR. BROWN: Oh, it was marvelous. We could eat where we want. We lived in a hotel. And I'd gotten bored with the soldiers and I ran into this group of sailors. And they were better looking and more interesting, and this one — well, I particularly fancied him. We would walk each other to either his apartment or my hotel. And then one night he invited me in and we were pretty busy there for about six months. It was wonderful.

MR. WEINBERG: And what was his other — what was his — do you remember his name?

MR. BROWN: Yes. Jim Downey [sp]. I even have a picture of him somewhere.

MR. WEINBERG: I can look at that later. And what was appealing about him besides the fact he was so good looking?

MR. BROWN: Well, he was good looking and very, very sexual, and we simply did it all the time. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Was he an artist, too, or no?

MR. BROWN: No, no. We really had very little in common besides down here. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: And were you drawing when you were in the Army?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, in fact, I kept notebooks and I have some — my father had some photos taken of them, which I can show you. And I think they went to the Archives of American Art, the originals. And in fact, the general signed one of them.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, okay. Actually, one of the things, so we can have this on the tape, is that they wanted to remind you that many of the things have been microfilmed but they don't actually have the originals. So if there are things that you have that you —

MR. BROWN: Oh, really? Oh, I think I sent them the correspondence with Hindemith and [Igor] Stravinsky, or something like that, and I didn't — need to give them to them. And I think they microfilmed them and sent them back.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, those might be — but anything that you still have that you want them to have, they'd love to have. So having that on the tape, but even just letting you know that and, you know, as much as you want to complete or fill out and add to the record.

MR. BROWN: At this point, of course, I'm perfectly willing to give them away. I wouldn't — yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, whatever — they just want me to that. I'm the messenger. Now, so we have you now in the Army — but actually, I wanted to go back because we sort of got ahead of ourselves. And I guess because I'm a Yalie, I want to know more about Yale. And as you said, you didn't have sex at Yale. And you didn't have any friends that you knew were gay or you thought were gay, or never had conversations about that, or —

MR. BROWN: There was one man. They have colleges, as you know — I was in Davenport — and I think there was one other gay guy there, but I never had sex with him.

MR. WEINBERG: But anybody, at this point, that you were talking about being gay with who was also gay?

MR. BROWN: No. But there was one man — you know, there was an awful lot of beautiful guys wandering around.

MR. WEINBERG: I would think that was true then.

MR. BROWN: But the very strange thing is, there was one guy I just absolutely, you know, would have killed myself for, and we never met. I would just see him on campus once in a while. So strange. Now, of course, half the young men I see are so beautiful and they're gays.

MR. WEINBERG: No, but that often happens. You also fixate — well, that's why *Death in Venice* is such a powerful book, because often, one fixates — even though it's not like *Death in Venice* — one fixates on someone you don't know, and that becomes, sort of — particularly in that period before you come out.

MR. BROWN: When his journals came out, there was a picture of Mann from *Life* magazine — took a photo of — Christopher [Isherwood] used to tell me this story — and he said — I asked him why he was laughing in the picture and he said, "Oh, didn't I ever tell you?"

And Mann was standing next to the photographer and the photographer said, "Well, that's your wife and that's your daughter who married off," and went down the line. And they came to Christopher. Well, Christopher was first asked to marry Mann's oldest daughter and he said, I'm not the marrying kind but maybe my friend, Don, would. And he did. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: I didn't know that.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. And so when — the only person who didn't speak German in the room was the photographer from *Life* or wherever, and Mann said, "Oh, he's the family pimp." [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, well, anyway, going back to Yale, so you — I've read this elsewhere — that you only took one art class at Yale?

MR. BROWN: Yes, oh, it was pre-Alberts and it was so deplorable. I think it was something like an empty flowerpot on its side, was what we were supposed to paint the entire semester. Everybody dropped out. Tom [Thomas] Hess was a class younger than I but already friends. And so we had our own little art class within Yale and, just, we got together.

MR. WEINBERG: So let's — for the record, Tom Hess was at Yale and you became very good friends with him.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes. And that remained —

MR. WEINBERG: Tom Hess was an important art historian.

MR. BROWN: — very important in my life after I got out of college. And even once, when we were both in New York still in uniform — he was in the Air Corps and I was, of course, in the Infantry — he said, "Oh, you have an hour to spare?" And I said sure. And he said, "Well, I want you to meet Audrey, the girl I'm going to marry." And we went into this penthouse with a Botticelli or something in it. Over the fireplace was a very beautiful [Paul] Cezanne. And to the left of it, a [Henri] Toulouse-Lautrec that's now in MOMA, in New York, and so forth. And well, that was quite a change from my daily life.

And then, when I got to New York, finally, after getting out of the Army — and spent two years in Paris on the G.I. Bill, where I had a boyfriend who let me live with him.

MR. WEINBERG: And his name?

MR. BROWN: Sorry?

MR. WEINBERG: What was his name?

MR. BROWN: Henri Hell. He was a great friend of the composer Francis Poulenc, and he wrote his biography. And he knew a lot of very interesting people. He worked as an editor for Plon, which is a big publishing company there.

And anyway, I would go to Tom and Audrey's house on [Sundays?]. She was a Sears Roebuck inheritess [sic]. And that's where I met [Willem] de Kooning and his wife, and Hedda Sterne and her marvelous husband, Saul Steinberg, and a lot of others. But the de Koonings were the most important.

MR. WEINBERG: We'll come back to De Kooning and sort of — I'm still — because we have a — this is going to be six hours and we're now up to the first hour. So we have to pace ourselves. Let's go back to Yale a little bit. And so the art class was worthless but you were taking music. But music has — music theory or —

MR. BROWN: Yes, I —

MR. WEINBERG: Because Yale is a pretty high-level music school so —

MR. BROWN: It is, yes, much higher than I. But I did have friends there.

MR. WEINBERG: I see. But as a music major, you were majoring in theory? You were majoring in — what was your sort of focus, as a music major?

MR. BROWN: Well, I took the beginner's easy courses and some in theory.

MR. WEINBERG: You mean history and — so you weren't exploring, at that point, or pretending to explore being a solo musician.

MR. BROWN: Oh, no. I took piano lessons but — and I took some baby courses with Hindemith.

MR. WEINBERG: In composing. And art history? This was a great time in art history at Yale. You didn't really do that?

MR. BROWN: Faucion [ph] was there.

MR. WEINBERG: Exactly. I was wondering if you took him.

MR. BROWN: No. I couldn't understand him. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Sounds good, though. I'm glad to see you're so honest. You could have just said "Faucion was there" and moved on. I would have liked to have taken it. But you didn't.

MR. BROWN: No, I knew I would be lost.

MR. WEINBERG: But you were aware that he existed.

MR. BROWN: I sure was, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: And so you didn't take — because I think Charles Montgomery was teaching American art — none of those people?

MR. BROWN: No, that doesn't ring a bell at all.

MR. WEINBERG: And I think Hitchcock might have been there at that point, but —

MR. BROWN: Who?

MR. WEINBERG: The architectural historian [Henry-Russell] Hitchcock. Because I think he —

MR. BROWN: I did take some art history courses.

MR. WEINBERG: But none of them sort of — you don't remember which they were, or you do?

MR. BROWN: Not really. George Hamilton was a friend.

MR. WEINBERG: I was going to say George Hamilton was there. That's who I'm thinking of. I don't think Hitchcock was there but definitely, George Hamilton was. He was —

MR. BROWN: We spent — he must have been gay.

MR. WEINBERG: I wasn't going to say it because I felt like I shouldn't say that on the tape but you can say it. Yes, he probably was.

MR. BROWN: Well, I'm not —

MR. WEINBERG: The well-known art historian that we called the art history department — we called them the three sisters. That's what we called them — the people that he came into — or that's how Vincent Scully referred to them.

MR. BROWN: We spent a lot of time in his apartment but no sex, nothing like that.

MR. WEINBERG: Who's we?

MR. BROWN: Well, a few friends that I had in the music department.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. Every now and then, I sound like a detective. Who's we? [They laugh.] 'Fess up now.

MR. BROWN: Me, myself and I.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, right. [They laugh.]

MR. BROWN: All of us.

MR. WEINBERG: I just realized that you both were at Yale and you're both absolutely contemporaries — the great architectural historian Vincent Scully. We just were at his 90th birthday party.

MR. BROWN: Whose?

MR. WEINBERG: Vincent Scully.

MR. BROWN: Vincent, oh, yeah, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: He was there exactly the same time you were.

MR. BROWN: I didn't know that. I didn't know him, of course, at all.

MR. WEINBERG: You know, it might not have been exactly that time because I think he was one of those people that came to Yale very young and he was maybe 15 or 16.

MR. BROWN: Prodigy.

MR. WEINBERG: I don't know. There's just a weird thing a lot of times in college and sometimes people went to college a little earlier. But I know, also, he was in the Marines, or he may have been there later. It may have been, actually — it was something — I don't think the — the years might not have corresponded even though you're exactly the same age. So you didn't know him, or —

MR. BROWN: No, I didn't, no.

MR. WEINBERG: But he would have — indeed, George Hamilton was one of his teachers. And Hamilton didn't have an effect on you, in particular, or —

MR. BROWN: Well, he bought a lot of art. And he had a great sense of humor. I was trying to think of some George Hamilton jokes but we can skip those.

MR. WEINBERG: We can skip those. And the art gallery, even then, though, had a nice art collection, right, I mean, because it had Katherine Dreier's, you know —

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: One of the questions — this might be a good place to ask you about it — and you know, feel free — is that I notice that in a lot of the writing about you, you make hardly any mention, with the exception of Grant Wood, of American artists before World War II. And I'm thinking — because, of course, the collection that would have been at Yale of modern art would have had a lot of, you know, American Modernists in it.

MR. BROWN: Well, I was very much in love with — it was a little later, of course — [Edward] Hopper.

MR. WEINBERG: Hopper, okay. That's interesting.

MR. BROWN: [Winslow] Homer.

MR. WEINBERG: Homer. [Thomas] Eakins?

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah, huge — and still am, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: But more, you became aware of that later, rather than at Yale?

MR. BROWN: I can't remember when I first became — I don't think it was too much later than Yale.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, okay. But did you spend much time in the art gallery at Yale? Is that a place that you hung out?

MR. BROWN: No, I really didn't.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay.

MR. BROWN: I would go down on weekends and spend a lot of time at the Met and Museum of Modern Art, and I knew this extraordinary woman, Mary Callery. And I don't know — we can go into that later.

MR. WEINBERG: We can — it sounds like we've done Yale. Is there anything that you

MR. BROWN: I'm graduated?

MR. WEINBERG: Well, the only thing I was wondering was, it seems like it was an okay place. It doesn't sound like you have warm — a lot of people, when they talk about Yale, speak about it with a much more greater sense of passion and nostalgia.

MR. BROWN: I never went back. No. I got a letter, I think the year after I graduated: "Dear Bill," from a classmate I never knew, "it's time to contribute to class funds." And I wrote back, "Yale was a place I attended, not a club I joined for life. And if you want to save some money, never write to me again."

MR. WEINBERG: Goodness.

MR. BROWN: And they never did.

MR. WEINBERG: And was it because you felt — was it because, in some ways, it was a homophobic place?

MR. BROWN: No, it was just indifference.

MR. WEINBERG: Indifference. You didn't like the Ivy League —

MR. BROWN: Well, I felt very — I felt certain teachers were very important to me and I stayed in touch with them all through the Army. And I sent letters to the Hindemiths because they had no way of knowing what happened to their parents and things. And I found out that her mother had died and his was still alive, for instance.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. So now you've gone — we're actually almost done with the Army, too. We're moving along here. But you're getting to Europe. So they shipped you off to Europe at some point.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I was in many training camps in the south, and one, I think, Japanese boy who had a cot next to me at one place felt sorry for me. And he worked at the motor pool, and he said, "Why don't you come down to the motor pool? Maybe you can be a Jeep driver." Well, that was really a gift.

So I became a Jeep driver and I drove our company commander around while my friends were slogging through the — [Laughs] -- whatever. And once, when we came back, we were the only two in camp for the night and on the bulletin board of the orderly room said they wanted two volunteers for overseas duty. One was a corporal and the other was a sergeant or something. And I was a corporal and I immediately signed up and got out and left, and went overseas rather quickly, thinking it would be better. And it was, as a matter of fact.

MR. WEINBERG: But weren't you under — in battles and things? Wasn't that part of it?

MR. BROWN: I was in the Battle of the Bulge.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. Was that pretty scary?

MR. BROWN: There were some pretty hairy times.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, yeah. What was that like?

MR. BROWN: Well, it wasn't so full of chicken shit. You didn't have to have your gun looked at every day. [Laughs.]

MR. WEINBERG: But did you shoot at people or anything?

MR. BROWN: I was in the signal company. I don't think I could have. I just — I don't know.

MR. WEINBERG: I'm so ignorant — what does it mean to be in the signal company?

MR. BROWN: Oh, to keep communications between the regimental commander and the lesser folk. We strung wires and operated switchboards. And it was pretty dangerous. You would be stringing wires while a town was being bombed and things like that. And the beginning of the Bulge — we were warned that we were going to make an advance on the Germans. This was Sunday morning.

We were coming back from breakfast with our mess gear. There was one road to the town. One guy that I was with looked up the road and there was a Tiger tank coming our way — it was a German tank, of course. So we ran like hell to our house that we had appropriated, which was the other way, and in about three minutes, put all our stuff that we could, fast, into a three-quarter ton truck and drove down the road the other way.

All our officers had deserted us, and we found them in the basement of a bombed-out house in the town we finally got to. And so that was sort of the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge for us. And it went on quite a while. But you don't want to hear about that.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, it's interesting. Did you have close friends who died, or did you —

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Christmas Eve, we slept in a cow barn with the cows. And in the center section was a place they set up chow, which is where they'd process the milk. And it was very cold and there were huge, thick doors to the courtyard. We were standing in line, waiting for breakfast. I was maybe fourth or fifth in line.

And the door was open about this far. And suddenly, the loudest explosion I've ever heard in my life crashed just near the open door, and three guys behind me were killed instantly from shrapnel, you know. Somebody said, I don't believe in a bullet with my name on it but I do believe in a bullet that says, "to whom it may concern." [Laughs.]

[END OF CD1.]

MR. WEINBERG: Gosh. Well, that's why they say — what is it — you're the greatest generation. So you were part of it. I mean, you know, saved Europe and the world and all that.

MR. BROWN: I always said that if I hadn't been drafted, the war would have ended five minutes earlier. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: And what was your rank when you ended?

MR. BROWN: Corporal.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh.

MR. BROWN: Hindemith loved to brag. He said, I never heard of anybody who's been in the Army that long and risen so little. [They laugh.] And then there was another — my mother's best woman friend had a son just my age. And we didn't like each other particularly but we didn't dislike each other. We weren't friends. We went to the same prep school.

He entered the Army about the same time I did, as a private. And I've got letters from my mother, "John is now a corporal," while I was a private. "John is now a sergeant." I was still a private. "John is now a staff sergeant." Maybe I was a private first-class. Anyway, "John is now at officer's training school." Doesn't matter. As I say, the highest I got was corporal. And then more letters. I didn't give a damn about John, except, finally, one letter came. "John is a major." And then the next letter — "John was killed in action." And I was still corporal. [They laugh.]

[Cross talk.]

MR. BROWN: Terrible story, I know.

MR. WEINBERG: I know, but in a certain way, that's what counts.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, how ridiculous it all is.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. So on leaves and things, did you get to go see art at all or was that never going to happen until after you were out of the Army?

MR. BROWN: On leave?

MR. WEINBERG: You know, when you were in Europe. Did you —

MR. BROWN: No, I never had that kind of leave in Europe. No, I saw no art until after, on the G.I. Bill. And then I had two marvelous years in Paris, really.

MR. WEINBERG: So let's move on to that. That sounds like a happier story.

MR. BROWN: Well, there was this girl I met. I was in Europe with three classmates in 1939. We went over on the *Normandy* and back, on its last trip, for about $95, round trip. And then — let's see, where are we going?

MR. WEINBERG: I guess that would get you to Paris.

MR. BROWN: No, I'm just trying to think. Anyway, oh yes, it was interesting, I was — this Mary Callery, she married, I think, a senator or something, named Coudert, and had a beautiful daughter. Oh, in '39, I was in an art store with my guy, who was interested in buying a Pascin, actually, for $50 or something.

Only, our French was abominable and there was a man in the store — just a customer — and he said, "Maybe I could help you with your French." And he spoke elegant English and elegant French. And I said, "Gee, you speak good English for a Frenchman." And he said, "Well, I live in St. Louis." [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: And so you were on the G.I. Bill at this point?

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah, yeah, absolutely.

MR. WEINBERG: In Paris?

MR. BROWN: No, no, not in '39. I was an undergraduate.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, you were an undergraduate, excuse me, right. But you were in — this was in Paris, though?

MR. BROWN: This was in Paris. I spent a couple of weeks in Paris.

MR. WEINBERG: During the summer — you were on, like, a vacation.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, just trying to place this. Okay.

MR. BROWN: And he said, "Well, I do live in St. Louis." And I said, "Oh, what do you do?" And I he said, "Well, I'm a musician." And I said, "Well, what instrument do you play?" And he said, "Well, I conduct the St. Louis symphony." Well, I had a — I said, "You're Vladimir Golschmann." I had an uncle on the board of the symphony. And we became lifelong friends. He was a marvelous man and had a great collection of paintings. And then, when I got back — I need to stop for a minute.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, no, no, because this is a lot, just in terms of the chronology of it. You know, in some ways, that's not the most important thing, anyway. Do you want something — maybe we should have a drink of water or something.

MR. BROWN: Anything stronger?

MR. WEINBERG: No, for me, water right now.

MR. BROWN: Really?

MR. WEINBERG: I want to keep my brain. But later, stronger.

MR. : Yes, we'll look forward to it after the interview.

MR. WEINBERG: But you can have something stronger.

MR. BROWN: No, I'm definitely going to stick to water. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, I mean, I think we're just getting the —

MR. BROWN: Do you want ice in it?

MR. WEINBERG: No, just a glass of water. I'm just a little thirsty. And then I'm thinking — because we've got you in — we're doing afterwards. So you're thinking about how you had sort of an introduction to the sort of European art scene.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah. Well, that hasn't — well, that's Mary Callery, and we're leading up to that part.

MR. WEINBERG: Right. And then I know, also, because you also took a class in New York with, what's his name, Ozenfant — is that how you say it?

[Off-side conversation.]

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible, off mic] — “you know, Ozenfant, there’s a madness in your method.” [They laugh.] Anyway, so —

[Cross talk.]

MR. WEINBERG: All right, so let me get this again. I don’t want to lose it. We’re not actually recording it. Okay, are we recording? Yeah. It is definitely recording. Okay. All righty. How long has it been?

[Off-side conversation.]

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, so let me put this there. So you were talking about sort of the beginning of Paris, Europe culture —

MR. BROWN: Yes, well, he was very instrumental in this. His wife, who was very beautiful, was French —

MR. WEINBERG: No, I’m sorry, let’s repeat this. So we’re talking about the conductor?

MR. BROWN: We’re talking about Golschmann, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Golschmann, okay.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Of course, I only saw him in ’39 that one time in the store but we stayed in touch, wrote letters to each other. And after the war, he had an apartment in New York. And I was living there.

And as I said, his wife was in Paris and he spent the summer with a very beautiful girl named Caroline Coudert, who is the daughter of Mary Callery. And I didn’t know who Mary Callery was, and Caroline said, I hate to introduce anybody to my mother because I always lose my friendship and they become my mother’s friends, and that happened in my case, too, although I still liked her a lot. But I saw Mary a lot.

And she had married, after Caroline, an Italian industrialist and was extraordinarily rich. I think they only stayed married a couple of years. And they bought a lot of huge Picassos, which are now in MOMA, in New York, and they were all over her house on 68th Street. And at first, she would invite me over to have a drink. And I remember, I think, the second time, the two other guests were [Marcel] Duchamp and [Joan] Miró. So I sat on a stool and just kept my mouth shut.

Then another time, she said, let’s go down to Chinatown. There was a subway very near her house. But she didn’t tell me Georgia O’Keeffe was coming along, too. Well, Georgia O’Keeffe obviously had a thing for Mary. Mary had something for me. And of course, I had something for a boy across town. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: So let me follow that up. So what made you think that Georgia O’Keeffe had something for Mary, just because —

MR. BROWN: Oh, well, Mary could tell her to do anything, and she hardly spoke to me and she kept — Mary kept saying, “His name is Bill.” And she’d call me “the young man” if she referred to me at all. [They laugh.] And when we were ready to go, she put on some sort of black scarf over her head and then a pin right through it, so I knew she was a witch. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: So you didn’t like her very well.

MR. BROWN: I didn’t like her at all. [They laugh.] Then one evening — one weekend — Mary had a barn in the middle of Long Island, which she used for a weekend place — sort of designed by Mies van der Rohe. He was a good friend of hers. And I was invited for Sunday lunch and Georgia was there for the weekend. And after lunch, we were all snowed in so I couldn’t go home, although I wanted to.

And after dinner, there were lights in these huge, floor-to-ceiling windows — floodlights out so you could see the snow coming in almost parallel to the ground. And Mary set up an easel and gave her some clay and she made kind of a little pelvis form. And I was standing behind her on the other side of the room doing — trying to do some sort of collage or something, I don’t remember. And Mary was working on something on the other side of the window.

And at one point, I looked up at the snow, and I said, “Isn’t it beautiful?” And Georgia said, “Don’t be too lenient, young man.” [They laugh.] But Mary could say anything, and she’d say — in front of her and she babbles on like a little brook.

And then the next morning, I remember coming down to breakfast — she had her own room — but there were

some cots on the balcony. And Georgia had made breakfast for us and there was a big plate with four eggs on it. I said, “What are those?” And she said, “They’re four hard-boiled eggs.” And I said, “I can’t eat four hard-boiled eggs for breakfast.” And she said, “What kind of a young man are you?” And I said, “I’m that kind.” [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: So but she actually made a painting in front of you? Is that what you’re sort of saying?

MR. BROWN: Oh, she was doing a sculpture, a little sculpture.

MR. WEINBERG: A little sculpture. That’s interesting.

MR. BROWN: Anyway, and I did visit her in Abecue.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, you did? I did not know that.

MR. BROWN: Well, that was kind of interesting. Mary arranged this. She let me in and —

MR. WEINBERG: When would this have been? So this would have been in the ’40s at some point, right?

MR. BROWN: Early ’50s.

MR. WEINBERG: Early ’50s, okay.

MR. BROWN: Like ’51. And have you been to Abecue?

MR. WEINBERG: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Very beautiful.

MR. WEINBERG: Very beautiful.

MR. BROWN: Have you been in her house?

MR. WEINBERG: Even in her house.

MR. BROWN: Well, then, I don’t have to describe it.

MR. WEINBERG: No, you could — it might be nice to hear your description of it.

MR. BROWN: No, no, she said, “Take off your shoes so you don’t ruin my nice mud floors.” And I appreciated that. And she and somebody named Spud Jackson or Johnson was sitting with her at a table in the corner with a board in front of them. And on the board were two pieces of pies. And she said, “Bring up a chair.” And I did and sat down.

And then she said, “Maria!” And Maria shouted back, “What?” She said, “What did we have for lunch?” And Maria said, “Beans!” And she said, “Bring Mr. Brown some beans.” And Maria said, “I ate ‘em.” [They laugh.] And with that, Georgia takes her pie and shoves it across and says, “Eat it.” [They laugh.] Anyway, enough of that.

MR. WEINBERG: That’s a good story. [Laughs.] Okay, so now we’re back — let’s go back to early Paris.

MR. BROWN: Oh, well, I was lonely there and I went into a — I don’t know if this will go in the — no?

MR. WEINBERG: Doesn’t matter. Wherever it goes, it will go down.

MR. BROWN: Well, it’s fun to be truthful for a change.

MR. WEINBERG: Exactly.

MR. BROWN: And I went into the peace choir at midnight and produced a hard-on. In the next booth, you know, they had these rounded things — this is on Rue Raspail — was this guy in the same condition, nice-looking guy. And he said, “Would you like to come home with me?” And I said, “Yes, I would.” And he became my boyfriend and —

MR. WEINBERG: And was this all in French, this conversation? I don’t know why I wanted to know that. It’s not really an important detail.

MR. BROWN: I think his English was about on par with my French. I can’t remember what —

MR. WEINBERG: But you got the major — you got the gist right.

MR. BROWN: Oh, absolutely, there was no mistake.

MR. WEINBERG: And this was the lover — not the lover, the friend of Pascan or what was the relationship?

MR. BROWN: Oh, he was — [Francis] Poulenc.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, Poulenc, excuse me.

MR. BROWN: He was his biographer and a good friend, and I became, therefore, a very good friend of Poulenc, too. In fact, we went down and spent a week at his summer place.

MR. WEINBERG: How fortuitous.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. And anyway, he knew —

MR. WEINBERG: Say again his name.

MR. BROWN: Henri H-E-L-L. Henri Hell. And as I said, he worked for Poulenc. And he knew, oh, Mary Lourdenois [sp], who was a big character then, was painted by Picasso. I met some interesting people there. And he'd had an affair with Stephen Spender at one point. And I don't know, Ned Maron [ph].

MR. WEINBERG: Important names.

MR. BROWN: So every time — even after I met Paul and we went back to Paris — I always looked him up, and he would make dinner for us and —

MR. WEINBERG: Now, it sounds a little bit, at this point, that very early, that you're being — you know, even in that funny little story that you said to Georgia O'Keeffe, that you're kind of — that you quickly became very comfortable being gay, at least, kind of, if you were in an art world and a cultured world.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, I think in the art world, it doesn't seem to matter too much. I mean, most are sort of gay anyway, I think.

And then when I — in 1951, I went to Santa Fe for the first time. You've heard this story I'm sure. And there was this girl named Marandi Masacho [ph], who ran the Thunderbird shop. And I didn't know her — she was sort of the social turnstile there. And she seemed to like me and arranged for me to go to parties. And one Sunday night, she invited me to dinner with her boyfriend. And she knew I was gay, I'm sure.

And I said I'd bring a bottle of wine and she called Sunday morning and she said, "Could you bring another? Some other people are coming." And I said, "No, there are blue laws." She said, "Well, that doesn't matter." Well, the other people were the Stravinskys and it was their one night in Paris — I mean, in Santa Fe. They were driving across the country.

And of course, I knew instantly who they were. I'd seen him conduct and I was a big worshipper — still am — of his music. And I was very, very excited. They were very easy to be with and they invited us to have breakfast with them. And I never thought I'd see them again, of course.

But the following summer, in '52, I was in Paris for a modern music festival, contemporary, and once on the way back to Henri Hell's, I was alone and passed the Stravinskys. They were sitting at one of these outdoor cafés — not Magots but across the street. I forget the name of the café. And I thought, "I'm not going to stop and say, 'I'm Bill Brown. Do you remember me?'" So I just kept walking.

And just as I was almost past, Vera said, "Bill, aren't you going to say hello to us?" And so I was introduced to his son, Soulima, and his wife. And then she said exactly what I thought she probably would. She said, "We're very busy here, dear, so we can't see you, but there's a Stravinsky festival in Holland next week and we have nothing much to do up there. And why don't you come up and see us? We're staying at the Hotel Des Indes in the Hague and we'll have a car and chauffeur provided by the queen."

And so I thought, what the hell, I've never been in Holland. So I went up and I was put at their table immediately. And we spent seven wonderful days together going all over Holland, lots to the museums. And then I went back — there is a point to this story — after we had taken them to the airport to fly back to the States, the chauffeur dropped me off at the hotel so I could pay the bill and leave for Paris. And they said, "Oh, the queen has paid."

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, nice.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. [They laugh.] And then I went back and called up Henri and asked him, "Are you free for dinner?" And he said no. And then he called me about 10 minutes later and he said, "Oh, you might as well

come along, too. It's another American." And it was Samuel Barber.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh my god. [They laugh.]

MR. BROWN: And we got along very well, and he had gotten me invited to a house party on Corsica. But I was not happy there. I mean, I was supposed to be the sleeping partner of the host, Baron something or other, and I didn't like him at all.

MR. WEINBERG: So you were brought to — for the host, in a sense.

MR. BROWN: I was — yeah, exactly. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: It was a blind date. That was the nice way to say it.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, I wish I had been blind. [They laugh.] Anyway —

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, so that part didn't work out so much.

MR. BROWN: That didn't work out at all. And one day, they were — Sam and his boyfriend, who I loved — and I'm very fond of Sam and remain so — and the host were down on the beach, and I found out there was one plane leaving the island that day in about an hour. So I got all my things together and got the ticket and went down and said goodbye. They were horrified. Sam said, "Take me with you." [They laugh.]

And I flew back to France, just to southern France, and the next day, took a plane to Paris and the next day, a boat to America. And in about a month, I was in California going to grad school, getting away from everybody and all that. I was already around so many famous people, it was — I thought I'd never find out who I was if I was anyone.

MR. WEINBERG: The one famous person that I know that's part of all these stories, just, you know, again, to have this on record is — because I know that you met Picasso — and how did that happen?

MR. BROWN: That happened twice. The first time, Mary Callery, when I went to France, wrote out some letters of introduction that I never intended to use. One was to [Georges] Braque. One was to Christian Zervos. Do you know who he is? A publisher.

MR. WEINBERG: Yes, okay.

MR. BROWN: Art books. One was to Picasso. I don't know who the fourth one was. Anyway, I put them in my suitcase. And this girl — I was in something called the Experiment in International Living. This was a free trip for me because I was an assistant — a group leader. And there were seven Vassar girls. And we went on a boat down the St. Lawrence — took forever to get over to Paris.

MR. WEINBERG: This was when you were still in college?

MR. BROWN: Sorry?

MR. WEINBERG: This was when you were still in college?

MR. BROWN: Oh, no.

MR. WEINBERG: This was after the war?

MR. BROWN: After the war.

MR. WEINBERG: After the war, okay.

MR. BROWN: And her name was Sue Kaufman and she actually ended up writing *Diary of a Mad Housewife* [1967]. I don't know if you know that. Anyway, I liked her a lot and we would sit on this dull boat and write letters and notes. And I ran out of stationery and I said, "Do you have any extra?" And she reached in and gave me 10 pages, and they were all signed, "Carson McCullers" — [They laugh] — three-fourths of the way down.

And I asked her about that and she said, "Oh, I worked with Carson's sister on *Mademoiselle*," or whatever the hell it was. And apparently, she did that so she could write notes for her sister. Anyway, we spent the first month in Chartres studying the cathedral — that was interesting — and living, each, in a different French family. And then the second month, Sue and I decided to go off by ourselves and we went to Antibes. And the second morning, we got up and went to the Grimaldi Museum. You've been there.

MR. WEINBERG: No, no. Nope.

MR. BROWN: No? Well, it is a wonderful museum on the water that was being converted into an all-Picasso museum. And as we were going up the very broad steps, there was Picasso and Francoise [Gilot] and his entourage, about six of them. And I thought, well, what the hell, I'd walk back three blocks to our hotel and pulled out the intro, although it really wasn't necessary, as it turned out, gave it to Picasso. And he said, "How is Mary?" And I said something and he said, "Follow us."

And Francoise spoke impeccable English. And we had a lot of fun. At one point, I was lagging behind Picasso on the third floor, which has a long balcony before the entrance to the various galleries. And he hunkered down and pulled me down beside him and he made a frame with his hands like this and through the third rung, there was a woman sitting, knitting. And he said, "Vermeer." [Laughs.] Anyway, then we went into this room, which had all Picassos except for one big stone bar relief.

And obviously, that was built by the Romans or something. And he said, "Does anybody know what this is?" Nobody said a word. Well, what it was, was an erect cock — a big, fat cock, balls hanging. [They laugh.] And Picasso said, "It was a sign above a Venetian whorehouse." And in the lower right-hand corner, there was a hole about this big that had been drilled that had nothing to do with the original plaque, obviously, and he stuck his finger in it like this. Then he pulled it out and went to Francoise, grabbed a hold of her finger, forefinger, stuck it in. Went up to us all — [They laugh].

MR. WEINBERG: Extraordinary.

MR. BROWN: Then, when Mary came.

MR. WEINBERG: What did you make of that? What was he saying?

MR. BROWN: Well, it was very sexual. [They laugh.] He didn't say a thing. He just giggled — [They laugh].

MR. WEINBERG: So you made this poking — actually, I had a friend who used to call that poking. And she'd say, if you were having sex, or did you have sex, she'd say, did you poke? And then she would actually make that same gesture of, like, you know, with the round and then you put the finger in.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Was he saying that he is the most potent, or what did you —

MR. BROWN: No, he didn't say a damn thing.

MR. WEINBERG: No, he didn't say it but what did you take it to mean?

MR. BROWN: Something very sexual. I didn't go beyond that.

MR. WEINBERG: And is Picasso — what is your relationship to Picasso's work and how does that —

MR. BROWN: Oh, I've been a big fan forever. He was my — I think the first artist I really loved was [Vincent] Van Gogh. And I loved him so. And then, I think, Picasso, and then de Kooning, were all huge. And then Rembrandt and the old guys.

MR. WEINBERG: So meeting Picasso, did it fulfill — was it what you imagined it to be? Often, when you meet a hero, it's —

MR. BROWN: Oh, he was such fun. And then he said, "They're hanging — I did a three-part mural, which they're hanging tomorrow, here, in another spot. If you have nothing better to do, why don't you come and watch it?" And we had nothing better to do. [They laugh.] And around it were some of those plaster casts of Michelangelo's slaves, you know, and he said, if they don't take those out by tomorrow, I'm going to paint pink stockings on them. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: That's wonderful.

MR. BROWN: I loved what Francoise said in her journal. She said, "Why are you so horrible to us and so nice to strangers?" And he said, "Because they don't matter." [They laugh.] Picasso logic.

MR. WEINBERG: And he spoke — all these statements when he was speaking, it was always in French?

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Did he speak English at all?

MR. BROWN: I didn't hear him. I think he understood a bit of it, I don't know. And then, one day when Mary was there, he brought over about 25 beautiful prints, very — I don't know if there was additional, but all bullfights. And she looked at them and took them back and said, "Thank you very much for the loan." And he said, "Oh, no, it was just a little gift." [Laughs.]

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, nice.

MR. BROWN: So they were framed in this farmhouse on Long Island and I used to love to look at them. I think they're now in MOMA. I haven't visited them in MOMA.

MR. WEINBERG: So you mentioned there was a second time you get to meet him.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah, and then once, I was walking down the street in Paris and he was getting in a cab and he saw me. He got out to shake hands. And I was holding an edition of some French magazine with Picasso on the cover, and I said, "See what I have?" And he said, "Oh, I've already seen you've had that." I mean, he was so quick.

And then once, we went to his studio in Paris and that was very exciting. And he invited Mary and I — he invited us to lunch and she had — damn her — she had an appointment with somebody else so I was dragged away. That's more or less my Picasso story.

MR. WEINBERG: No, that's good. So it was not a disappointment, meeting him?

MR. BROWN: Oh, it was — no, not at all. It was quite incredible.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, so you were talking about Hess and de Kooning, but should we go to Berkeley? Is that the next thing? Or do we go, now, back to New York?

MR. BROWN: Well, I guess that is the next thing because when I flew back to Paris and took a boat to — I went to my family's summer house in Massachusetts, at that point, and my college art teacher, who I liked a lot, had just come to call on me but I wasn't home yet. And so the discussion was what to do about Bill. I was a remittance man, for Christ's sake, in my '30s.

MR. WEINBERG: What does that mean?

MR. BROWN: That dad was paying for everything.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, okay. So this was '51, you said, right?

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, okay. So you were a ne'er-do-well.

MR. BROWN: Actually, it was '52.

MR. WEINBERG: And you were a ne'er-do-well because you weren't supporting yourself.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah, living well.

MR. WEINBERG: Living well. Nice, glamorous. That's glamour.

MR. BROWN: Nice dad. Anyway — and in a way, I was beginning to feel as though I would never know who I was when I was around all these people. And he suggested some schools in the Middle West, but being born in the Middle West, I didn't want to go back there. So on my own, I had a — actually, I had a college classmate, Jim Ackerman, who was going to teach art history, beginning that fall, at Berkeley. And so I thought, well, what the hell, California.

MR. WEINBERG: He was my teacher — one of my teachers back there.

MR. BROWN: Really?

MR. WEINBERG: At Harvard. I got my Ph.D. at Harvard.

MR. BROWN: Really?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, yeah.

MR. BROWN: So anyway —

MR. WEINBERG: And why not — it's interesting because this is kind of, in some ways, momentous and you would think the obvious thing to do would be to go to school in New York or, you know —

MR. BROWN: No, I wanted to get away from them.

MR. WEINBERG: You just wanted to get away from Paris, New York — the center, somehow.

MR. BROWN: Well, I just wanted to get away from all these wonderful, famous people that I knew. And so I applied, and without Jim, they said, I'd have to wait a semester. But I said, oh, come on, pull a string and he did. I got into the fall class just a couple weeks after I got back to this country. And in the first three — I was here about four or five days before registration — and in the first class, series of classes, Paul was in two or three of them. He thought I was such a snob that he didn't speak to me —

MR. WEINBERG: This is Paul Wonner, just for the record.

MR. BROWN: But I could see immediately that he painted better than any teacher or any other student, and slowly, we became friends. And he remains the absolute center of my life.

MR. WEINBERG: So was his work what attracted you first?

MR. BROWN: That's a good question and hard to answer. I certainly realized that he was the best painter, by my standards. And then he also — he had one very beautiful boyfriend — I mean, I don't think they were sleeping together; maybe they had — that I actually had a fling with him a little later. But then, about in the middle of the semester, Paul and I got together and we moved in together and that was that, for years and years and years. And I still miss him terribly.

MR. WEINBERG: And so it wasn't, kind of, immediately love; it was — and you knew —

MR. BROWN: Actually, it was very — no, but quite soon after, it was a lot of sex, actually, that kind of — but it remained love. We sort of went — slid from maybe lover to brother, in a certain way.

MR. WEINBERG: Best friends, partner.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, but his —

MR. WEINBERG: And how was negotiating — I mean, I've asked you this before in a different set of interviews but, you know, could you — it's one of the things that's as extraordinary as — and we mostly take it for granted — but it was an extraordinary thing to sort of shack up with somebody then and continue to do it for 50 years, or more.

MR. BROWN: Well, in New York, I was out on the West Side but I wasn't on the East Side where my fancy, rich college friends were. And I decided, to hell with all of them when we came to California. I was just going to be gay. And I guess that's the answer.

MR. WEINBERG: But here it was, 1950, you said?

MR. BROWN: '52.

MR. WEINBERG: And you know, there were witch hunts and there was a lot of people who were getting, you know — it wasn't an easy time, necessarily, to be gay and out.

MR. BROWN: No, it wasn't, no.

MR. WEINBERG: But that didn't worry you or you —

MR. BROWN: Well, we had the department. You know who Erle Loran was? He was the head of the art department at that point.

MR. WEINBERG: No.

MR. BROWN: Well, you're lucky. [They laugh.] Anyway, he was one of my teachers and he made fun of me having a peel-off palette and some cheap brushes and things like that. Then I took a walk in the canyon behind the campus with Paul and a woman named Rose Mandel and ran into some poison oak. I knew about poison ivy but not oak. It started up here and made a nonstop trip down to my feet. So I was out six weeks.

And this was my first semester there so, oh, god. But Elaine de Kooning had written me a letter and she didn't know my address, so it just said, "Bill Brown, Art Department," so forth. And it said "de Kooning," with an address, not Elaine or Willem. Well, anyway, when I came back to class, Erle came over and took off his glasses and said, "Do you know de Kooning?" [They laugh.] I said, "Yes." Anyway, I got an A in every course. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: That was good. So wait, we kind of did skip over that because you introduced it earlier but you talked about meeting de Kooning with Tom Hess, so that must have been —

MR. BROWN: That's where I originally met him, at a dinner party. Tom would give these dinner parties and —

MR. WEINBERG: And the year — this was in the —

MR. BROWN: This would be in the late '40s and early '50s, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, okay.

MR. BROWN: And, oh god, an awful lot of people — [Philip] Guston and [Saul] Steinberg and his — who was his wife, painter?

MR. WEINBERG: You mentioned her. Helen Stern [sic], right?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, Hedda.

MR. WEINBERG: Hedda Sterne, right.

MR. BROWN: Exactly. Anyway, and lots of other people.

MR. WEINBERG: Jackson Pollock at all?

MR. BROWN: I never had dinner with him but I saw him in a fistfight that was sort of for fun on Long Island with de Kooning. And I once —

MR. WEINBERG: What was that, exactly?

MR. BROWN: Oh, this was — oh, gosh, I can't remember the year but they would all go to East Hampton, and there was a great big party and I remember de Kooning's mother was there, knitting and reading the Bible, and this fistfight was going on. [They laugh.] These guys liked each other a lot, you know.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, but it was done as a kind of — almost making fun of their reputation for being competitive.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, exactly, oh, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: I see. So you met de Kooning with — I know — but you actually had more of a close friendship — a bit of a friendship with de Kooning.

MR. BROWN: Absolutely. He gave me a drawing, and when I wanted — he spent a weekend at — or a week in my apartment when I was away once, and I think he felt obligated to do something, I don't know. But he was very — he was a beautiful man. He would kiss me on the mouth but there was no indication of anything else.

MR. WEINBERG: So he stayed in your apartment in New York?

MR. BROWN: He stayed in my apartment in New York, which —

MR. WEINBERG: Didn't he have his own apartment in New York?

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah, but I don't know — somebody was using it. I forgot —

MR. WEINBERG: What was the reason.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, it was no big deal.

MR. WEINBERG: And I know that you actually watched him paint.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah, he would let me into his studio and watch him paint. And I saw one of the big women just about finished and I remember he said — well, I was stunned by it — and he said, "It will be all right but everything needs to go to the left six inches." [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: And so when you were painting, before you get to Berkeley, you were making — you were drawing paintings, sort of, right.

MR. BROWN: Oh, sure.

MR. WEINBERG: And was it in a kind of de Kooning style at that time?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, I think he greatly influenced me, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. Was there ever discussion — or in this group of people at that time, was there a sense of figuration versus abstraction? Was there, you know, what was the right style — was there any discussion about that? Art? I mean, anything —

MR. BROWN: Oh, I suppose there was. I wasn't really part of these — I also stayed with the Rothkos. I don't know if I told you that.

MR. WEINBERG: No, I don't. Yeah, tell us about that.

MR. BROWN: Well, Tom Hess got me into all these things and he said they needed somebody to stay in their apartment on, gosh, 56th Street or something, no fancy deal. He was young, still, happily married, had a baby. And they were going to Europe for a month. And I was supposed to stay there, which I did. He lent me his studio. And they didn't like Europe so they came back within two weeks and I had no place to go. So he said, well, just stay here. We have an extra room. So I spent two weeks with them.

MR. WEINBERG: At that point, was he starting to do total abstraction or was he doing the pictograph paintings?

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah, definitely total abstraction.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay.

MR. BROWN: And every time I would come back from California, I would always go with Tom and have dinner with him or something. And then he said, "Have you seen Mark?" I said, "No, why would he want to see me?" And he said, "He does. You call him." He was always very polite. And he would show me his new work. And so I have a very, very good impression of him.

MR. WEINBERG: So at that point, was there some sense of, well, you admire Rothko but this was not for you, to go that far abstract, trying to think about that?

MR. BROWN: Well, I guess that's pretty accurate. I'm a great fan of his painting. I think he's a wonderful painter. And I'm glad I didn't know him in his sad last years. I have good memories only.

MR. WEINBERG: But it seems even under the spell of de Kooning, you've resisted abstract expressionism to a certain extent.

MR. BROWN: For a long time.

MR. WEINBERG: Why? That's what I'm kind of getting at. Why was it —

MR. BROWN: I started out as a sort of an academic, figurative painter. And I started — that was done in New York. But the last year I was there was '52 and I came out — must have been this thing —

MR. WEINBERG: Can we just — what's the name of the painting, just for history's sake? That painting so people will know what we're talking about.

MR. BROWN: Oh, it's a football painting.

MR. WEINBERG: It's a football painting. Okay, it's from 1952.

MR. BROWN: I think it's very funny. You can see one guy with his crack in his ass —

MR. WEINBERG: Yes, yes. [They laugh.] I saw that right away.

MR. BROWN: I thought, oh, boy, the truth will out.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, in a way, though — oh, so you're literalizing — because when you get in de Kooning over and over again is the Picasso motif. It comes from *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, actually — the sort of vagina that also can be an ass crack. It's a strange motif that really comes right from Picasso, I think. But de Kooning does it over and over and over again. So it's your kind of masculine — does that sound right — it's your masculine

version of that, I think.

MR. BROWN: I think that's probably right, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, right. You know, I think we should change tapes now. It's almost two hours. I hope we're getting everything. I think so. Let's see. Stop. How do we stop this? Stop.

[END OF CD 2.]

MR. WEINBERG: All right, it's recording. Excellent.

MR. WEINBERG: So where were we? We were talking about de Kooning. I was trying to focus in on this idea about where you were sort of situating yourself in between abstraction and abstract expressionism and where you were — you know, because one of the things about Picasso was Picasso was so involved with the idea of the motif, but at the same time, always resisted the idea that there was a difference. He said that all painting is abstraction so in a certain sense, it wasn't a choice between one or the other. But I think at that time in the early '50s, there must have been a sense, you know, why hold onto the figure? Why not just —

MR. BROWN: But I've come back to the figure, very much so, in a funny way.

MR. WEINBERG: Now.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, for quite a while.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, but I'm trying to, viewing it more historically —

MR. BROWN: Back then.

MR. WEINBERG: Back then, did you feel, in some ways — what did you think about Jackson Pollock, for example? So de Kooning represented somebody who was holding onto figuration —

MR. BROWN: I have a story about that. I once said to de Kooning, "I don't think much of Jackson Pollock." And he said, "You're wrong, Bill." And I said, "Why?" And he said, "Because he opened a door." And I said, "Into a closet." [They laugh.] I have seen Pollocks that are impressive but I've never seen one that I particularly wanted to see twice. They don't do a lot for me. Do they for you?

MR. WEINBERG: That's not the issue here but that was good. That's what I wanted to — that's what I was trying to get from you. That's what I — no, really, that's what I wanted you to articulate, I wanted to feel. And this conversation that you had with de Kooning, that would have been a 1950s conversation?

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, okay. So for you, really, a total abstraction, in that sense, or what seemed to be total abstraction, was, as you said, a closet. It was not something that was —

MR. BROWN: Well, the way he did it.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, but you didn't feel that way about Rothko, though?

MR. BROWN: I didn't feel that way about Rothko or de Kooning's — there are totally abstract paintings of de Kooning's — one beautiful one in Chicago that seems, to me, just — there are no figures, nothing.

MR. WEINBERG: He seemed always, though, to seem somehow more — at least you could relate them to landscape. Often, the ones that seem more abstract even have titles that tend to landscape titles so that there was a certain sense that they were motif-driven. And did he continue to work from the model?

MR. BROWN: No. I did hear that —

MR. WEINBERG: Or was in the '50s working from models?

MR. BROWN: If he did, I had no knowledge of it.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay.

MR. BROWN: I don't know if you had heard but at the end of his life, he had a projection of a van Gogh on his studio wall. I think it was the *Portrait of Dr. Gachet* [1890]. And he said, "He may not have been the greatest

artist but he was the greatest spirit." Did you ever hear that story? It's a lovely story.

MR. WEINBERG: But I adore van Gogh. I keep all my stories to myself but afterwards, maybe we'll talk about van Gogh. But you mentioned, also, how much — that van Gogh was your first favorite.

MR. BROWN: Oh, my first favorite artist, and it hasn't changed.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. In fact, when you went — you said you hadn't been to Holland but when you went to Holland — because I actually don't — you know, I know there was no van Gogh Museum at that point, was there?

MR. BROWN: Well, maybe not at that point but I have seen the van Gogh Museum. In fact, I even met his nephew in Paris. It was strange. I think that was Theo's son.

MR. WEINBERG: I was going to say, also, that — I actually jokingly said — because there is this issue about names and we might as well bring it up here because we talked about it before the tape started.

And actually, at the Archives of American Art, they're somewhat concerned about this because they have you under "William T. Brown" in their files and you mentioned that, since we're talking about Theo and Vincent, I was thinking, why would I go by — if it were me, I wouldn't go by Theophilus; I would go by Theo because Theo is such an exalted name, as the man who kept van Gogh going, you know, his brother. But talk a little bit just even about your name.

MR. BROWN: Well, I began with "Bill Brown," and then Joan Brown married a Bill Brown and we both won honorable mentions in some Oakland museum. And we decided we'd better do something, so we used our middle initial. Then another Bill Brown — a black Bill Brown — became a very good friend of mine, so there were three of us.

And then I thought, to hell with it, and so I wanted to use Theophilus Brown but my dealer in Los Angeles, Felix Landau, said no, I can't. I can make it Theo but not Theophilus. Nobody can understand that word. [They laugh.] So it's been a fight and I still see "William Theo Brown" —

MR. WEINBERG: So the naming really started — you really started changing the name or working on the name in the — this would have been happening in the early '60s or the '50s or —

MR. BROWN: I started trying to change it in the '60s.

MR. WEINBERG: So it's really in the '60s, interesting. Well, it also has its own parallels with Vincent van Gogh because, you know, there's been much writing about when he decided just to call himself "Vincent" and sign his paintings just "Vincent." So there is something there.

MR. BROWN: I didn't know that. That's very interesting. For instance, this picture, Matt Gonzalez [sp] found on the Internet. And I immediately recognized it. I remember that painting. But it was not signed at all on the — in fact, it still has the Davenport, Iowa — I think I got a prize there — on it. And so when I got it back, I bought some oils, which I've been using for years — and signed it "W.B.," which I might have signed at that time. Abroad, I sign "Theophilus Brown."

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, interesting, so the signatures on that painting have been added much later? Even the "W.B '52."

MR. BROWN: Last year.

MR. WEINBERG: And so it has all the signatures. That's very interesting. That's fascinating. Cool. Interesting. So now we've got the name down but also, I was going to say it's interesting that you have Theo — so the connection to van Gogh is also interesting, just through naming, through names.

And let's — and also, for history's sake, because this is still — we haven't actually solved this problem — what would you, as an artist — it seems, given the fact that we have this big monograph — is "Theophilus Brown" the way you want to be known?

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. So that, I think, should be changed at the Archives of American Art.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. William T. on checks; Bill with friends; and Theophilus Brown on walls. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Good, good, got that down.

MR. BROWN: On toilet walls and — [They laugh].

MR. WEINBERG: I think that's very good. We've got that down, got that solved. All right, so now we're back — we did the de Kooning thing and we've got you back — we've got to get you back to Berkeley because we kind of went back and forth between New York and California.

MR. BROWN: For a while. Then it became — the intervals became less and less — of visiting New York. Now I haven't been to New York for 15 years.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. But let's get you to Berkeley again, and you were just meeting up with Paul.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, yeah. And now we were talking about how you were drawn to Paul because you thought he was the best painter —

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. WEINBERG: — which is interesting, even in and of itself, because in a lot of situations when you're a young artist, you don't like the person who's the best painter in the class. So that's an interesting thing about you. You feel threatened by them. You don't want to — you know, that's the person you're least likely to be friends with. But you didn't feel competitive with him?

MR. BROWN: I didn't feel competitive, no. I was just very — I think I learned a lot from him and he seemed to want to know me, too. And then —

MR. WEINBERG: Well, you remember in my book, you're in the chapter of, really, people who find each other. What's the word when you find your life mate? You're soulmates.

MR. BROWN: Soulmate, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, you found the person who you —

MR. BROWN: Yeah, I really did, yeah. Or he did, or we did.

MR. WEINBERG: And it's interesting. Until you get to that point with Paul, it doesn't sound like — I mean, even though you talk about — I mean, you've talked a little bit about, you know, caring for people but it doesn't sound like you had a kind of intimacy with somebody. Is that wrong or kind of — certainly, it didn't sound like you had a male best friend until that point. Is that right? It sort of seems like most of your friends were women.

MR. BROWN: You're right, and some of them still are. Some of them are lesbians. But yeah, I'm very fond of women, except sexually. I think I'm 100 percent gay. I had a wet dream once when I was a kid about a woman and it scared the hell out of me. [They laugh.] It really did!

MR. WEINBERG: So in other words, you were latently heterosexual in that one moment and it was just too horrible. You couldn't follow it.

MR. BROWN: I think I'm now 99 percent pure. [Laughs.]

MR. WEINBERG: Right, but so anyway, so like, when I grew up, I had so many male best friends and, sort of, that was the most intense friendships, were — tended to be with men until — or boys or whatever. But that didn't really happen to you until your 30s with Paul, or is that wrong? Even though you had lovers.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, I think that's pretty accurate, yeah. Well, except in the Army, I had this boyfriend, the sailor, that I lived with for —

MR. WEINBERG: But he wasn't more like — he wasn't somebody you were talking about art and intellectual things —

MR. BROWN: No, we had nothing in common except sex, which finally proved not to be enough. I think we had six months of —

MR. WEINBERG: I mean, the person you gossip with, the person, like, you tell the first things you want to sort of share things that happened to you — that kind of thing?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, no, we didn't have that.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, you know, Paul was that person for you.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah. And it remained that way.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. So now you're in Berkeley. And this is actually — when does Clyfford Still come to Berkeley?

MR. BROWN: Fortunately, before I was there.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, okay.

MR. BROWN: He was a good friend of Rothko's, and while I was staying there, he came several evenings. And I don't remember anything about him, still, himself, except I despised his painting. And one day the doorbell rang at the Rothko apartment and it was a truckload of Still's paintings being delivered and they cluttered the whole hallways. And I thought they were awful. Do you like him as a painter? You aren't as mean as I am.

MR. WEINBERG: No, it's not like that. It's like, you know, to be honest — you know, this is not really what we're supposed to be talking about but I'm —

MR. BROWN: Oh, I don't care.

MR. WEINBERG: Whatever. The archives might care. I would say that I'm not too psychically involved right now with abstract painting so it's hard for me to sort of — I think when I was really young, when I did like abstract art was — I'm talking 15, 16. This is the '70s. And actually, I liked Helen Frankenthaler. I did like Clyfford Still. I liked Rothko. I like those but I think now — and to me, I'm only interested in figurative painting, mostly, so it didn't seem — wasn't compelling. But that's interesting.

And also, I realize I'm getting things mixed up because in my mind, you know, David Park — they were teaching — there's actually Cal Arts, right, and they were on the faculty. Clyfford Still comes on the faculty. There's Berkeley and Cal artists going on at the same time, right?

MR. BROWN: David, at the end of his life, was teaching at Berkeley and we were teaching the same basic drawing course. And he would let me teach his class and he'd take mine. We'd exchange classes.

MR. WEINBERG: It's not Cal Arts. It's — what is the big arts school — the other arts school in Oakland/San Francisco.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I think just Berkeley.

MR. WEINBERG: It's just Berkeley?

MR. BROWN: Berkeley.

MR. WEINBERG: So when Bechtel goes to — doesn't he go to — because he —

MR. BROWN: Oh, Bechtel — he taught in — didn't he teach in the city?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, that's what I'm thinking of. There's another arts school that David Park teaches at and — no?

MR. BROWN: David Park really wasn't teaching much until he got the job at — you know, he was window — he was going around with a guy I happened to know because we had adjoining apartments when I was a studio, and they were doing window dressings or whatever they're called — arrangements.

MR. WEINBERG: Cal Arts is in Los Angeles so I'm getting a little mixed up, but there is another art school in the city.

MR. BROWN: CCAC [California College of Arts] in Oakland.

MR. WEINBERG: CCAC is what I'm thinking of. Okay, let's get that right.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, Paul Wonner went there, too.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, okay, those are the two competing places.

MR. BROWN: One day, I was in David Park's studio with Dick Diebenkorn — and this was in the last years when I was in Berkeley — and he was showing us a new painting he'd just made. And it was a brick building with people strolling in front of it, and in the lower right-hand corner was a much bigger single figure. And Dick, when he thought David wasn't looking, blocked that figure out. Only David caught him and he said, "Well, Dick, I see you've got a lot to learn." [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Good for him. All right, now that we're sort of in that mode, let's sort of retreat back and sort of say — you know, so you're at Berkeley and you're coming into that orbit of the different people like David Park, and why don't you sort of start talking about those early days of — and also, your own doing the football paintings, which sort of put you in the limelight?

MR. BROWN: Oh, the football painting started, as you can see, in New York before I came out here.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, really? Okay.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. But I did most of them here. Paul and I got a studio downtown, and the city —

MR. WEINBERG: This is even while you were getting your MFA, I assume.

MR. BROWN: Sorry?

MR. WEINBERG: This is while you were getting your MFA, or I assume you were getting a degree.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Yeah, and one day, there was a knock on the studio door and I opened it and it was a big, tall guy and he said, "I'm freezing my butt off. You got any heat in this goddamn place? Oh, I'm Dick Diebenkorn, by the way." And he had the next studio, next to us. And that became a source of our friendship.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. And the football paintings become known — you were going to tell us a little bit more about those. And why do you start to do those?

MR. BROWN: Oh, that was through Dick Diebenkorn, too.

MR. WEINBERG: And why did you start doing them in the first place?

MR. BROWN: I liked this — they were all males — I love this unified action, a bunch of bodies. And so I would take the black-and-white photos in the *New York Times* Sport section and use those. They told me, when they did the article, that I put the same color shirt on opposite members of the teams. [Laughs.] I didn't know anything about — I couldn't care less about it.

Anyway, so I did these. And one day, there was a knock on the door and it was Dick Diebenkorn. And in tow, he had a woman named Dorothy Sieberling, who was the art editor of *Life* magazine. And I think he wanted to get rid of her, I don't know. But anyway, she came in and saw these football paintings and was quite excited by them. She sent a photographer from Los Angeles, the next day, out to take pictures of them. I was all excited. Nothing had ever happened to me before.

And then, nothing from her. And finally, about — this was in April, this would have been — and finally, oh, in July or something, I rolled up — they're painted on paper, 36 inches high. I picked out three or four and rolled them up in a tube and sent them to her at *Life* magazine in New York. And then I still didn't do anything, hear anything.

And then finally, I sent her a self-addressed letter and a card inside saying, "We think these are marvelous. We hate them and we're burning them," or — you know, some trivia. And I got a long letter saying they were doing a spread — you've seen the article?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: At football time. And that brought Felix Landau, my first dealer, from Los Angeles, up here to ask me if he could show them. And then I sent him slides of Paul's work and he took Paul on, too. And in those days, things sold pretty well. They were very tiny prices, seemingly, but they were enough to keep us alive, enough so that we could move down there, which was a great relief from living in David's.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, so you were living in David's and you got your — did you get your degree at Berkeley? Did you go all the way to —

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: And you were teaching here a little bit, or —

MR. BROWN: Yeah, I was actually a guest teacher at — Paul went up — this is an incredible story: Paul got a job teaching at some prestigious university. I forget where. Maybe — not Davis. I really can't remember.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, that's okay.

MR. BROWN: But Marty Rugelo, who was the wife of one of the instructors in the art department — and they had us to dinner all the time — called up the head of the art department at the place where — and said that Paul was gay. So they fired him before he ever got there.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh my god, I didn't know that.

MR. BROWN: And so he had a degree in library science so he got a — he had to have some money so he had to move up to Davis. And I stayed here and he would come down on weekends, but it was obvious that if we wanted to stay together, I had to move to Davis. And so I did, and we got a — the art department was not much then but they gave me a guest teaching job. And I was only there for two or three years and then moved to L.A. in the early '60s. And that was an incredibly marvelous move for us and our life —

MR. WEINBERG: That's interesting when — one of the things that, you know, should be so obvious — and you know, we'll get into this, I think, too — you know, the whole question about Bay Area figuration and everything is that I remember thinking, well, why did they go down to — you know, they're Bay Area painters and that's how we know them. What are they doing going down to California — L.A. I mean, what are they going down to Los Angeles for? And you came here to go to Berkeley, but you didn't feel this, at that time —

MR. BROWN: No, I didn't have any identity with the Bay Area, at that point.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, you didn't feel like this was a place where you loved it and the light was perfect, or anything.

MR. BROWN: No, no.

MR. WEINBERG: You wanted to be in a bigger city.

MR. BROWN: Or that I was a part of a group or —

MR. WEINBERG: Right, and did it seem provincial here and you wanted to be in a place that was more with it? What was the appeal of Los Angeles?

MR. BROWN: One, that we had a dealer who was selling our work down there, and nobody was up here. [Pause.] So well, for us, it was very interesting because we met old movie stars and people in the industry and very interesting people that were not at Davis, and we hadn't met anybody up here of that caliber. So it was a shot in the arm.

MR. WEINBERG: And was this around the time when you met Christopher Isherwood and Don Bachardy?

MR. BROWN: Exactly.

MR. WEINBERG: When you say old movie stars, they seemed to be chock full at their dinner parties and everything. Is that where that would happen?

MR. BROWN: Well, we became good friends of Eva Marie Saint. And one evening — we would go every Wednesday with Don Bachardy to Chris's. Sometimes, they would feed us first — also with a model, always. And this particular evening, they were feeding us and suddenly, Don rushed out the door and Chris put another place at the table. And they didn't say anything, and about 10 minutes later, Don came in with Marlene Dietrich, and that was — oh, and Cecil Beaton was there making *My Fair Lady* so he was drawing with us, too. And that was an interesting evening, good conversation.

MR. WEINBERG: So this was *My Fair Lady* — doing the movie production?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: So this would have been early '60s, too, right? Around '62 probably, right?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, exactly, yeah. Oh, he was tough with her.

MR. WEINBERG: With Marlene Dietrich?

MR. BROWN: Yeah. He said, "Well, Marlene, we're the same age, and I'm 62." [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: And what did she say to that? That's rude.

MR. BROWN: Nothing. [They laugh.] And then everybody was saying how lovely she looked, which she did. She looked fantastic. I sat next to her. And she said, "Well, you know how hair is just after you've been to the

hairdresser." And Cecil Beaton said, "Marlene, you haven't been near a hairdresser for three weeks." [They laugh.] Anyway —

MR. WEINBERG: Wait, now, who was — was it Don because now I have a very strong memories of Don — I think Don Bachardy saying not-nice things about Cecil Beaton. But anyway, that's so funny — that's funny.

[Cross talk.]

MR. WEINBERG: I don't know where I get it but there's a lot about how Cecil Beaton didn't do — a lot of *My Fair Lady* isn't really by Cecil Beaton. He took all the credit and a lot of the people — a lot of it was done for him.

MR. BROWN: He did take us through the sets, and in his office, there were three photos -- he'd taken just before she died -- of Isak Dinesen. I was a big fan of hers. And he gave all three to me.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, nice. He was a wonderful photographer.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah, I don't know about him. And he bought one of my paintings. But we were in London and we called him and he called back, and I felt, there's nothing. We didn't meet. He didn't want to see us.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, so actually, we've skipped way ahead, actually, because we have the football paintings, and you're still in graduate school, and then you were at a studio with Diebenkorn and we're just at that point where, you know, history will — is very interested in that point and we skipped right over it, which is the point at which you're sort of coming into contact with David Park and Diebenkorn and —

MR. BROWN: Right, and we all drew together.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, right, okay. Talk about David Park because you know how much I admire David Park, and —

MR. BROWN: I think he may be the greatest of all those painters. There was a show, a 75th anniversary show at MOMA here. Actually, they hung a big picture of mine and I couldn't believe it. And I thought the most beautiful painting was a David Park, and he was so young when he died.

MR. WEINBERG: You know, for both you and Diebenkorn, I would say, there is a strong pull of de Kooning. I mean, de Kooning seems really important for both of you. And then there is a shift. Is it because of David Park or were you all — and I'm sure you were influencing each other but what was it —

MR. BROWN: Oh, I don't think I influenced anybody of those guys, I think they were pretty well set in their —

MR. WEINBERG: Well, but certainly, there's a shift towards color and there's a change that happens. Is it David — you know, and I'm sure David Park thought he was the guy that was causing it, but was it coming through that, or was it that you all started to look at Matisse in a different way, or what's —

MR. BROWN: I don't know. He would come in and look at my football paintings and be very, very flattering. And then one day, I said, "David, I've stopped painting football." And he said, "Thank god." [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Why? And why did you stop?

MR. BROWN: I think I didn't have it.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, so then what — so that change, that moment when things happened, what's going — so you're all drawing together. You're looking at — you're doing —

MR. BROWN: Oh, I think we kept doing it as long as we were all in the same vicinity and able to. We moved down at about the same time the Diebenkorns did, to Los Angeles. And they were down there for teaching for, I don't know, four or five years. We drew down there together, too. Jim Weeks, who was neglected, I think.

MR. WEINBERG: I guess, you know, because on one hand, I was actually reading Evie Lincoln's unpublished piece about you and I know that you are ambivalent about the whole Bay Area designation, so maybe we could talk about that somewhat. Because I feel like the — I think I can sort of understand because nobody wants to be in a group, and there are very distinctive qualities of each of your work.

And I also understand, maybe, why, you know, the idea that it's this very limited period of years is very

problematic. But I sort of want to try to understand — because I think there is a moment when you guys are all in conversation, when you are each riffing off each other. And it seems, maybe even later, now — because that was several years ago — there seems to be something about that, and maybe you could talk about it — and also, why you don't feel that way, why you disagree with that.

MR. BROWN: I really don't feel that way about it. I never drew with Frank Lobdell and I don't particularly like his work, but I certainly don't like or dislike him. I don't know him. But I like very much the guys that I did know. And we haven't talked about Nate [Nathan] Oliveira, but I'm both a fan and a friend.

We had a funny experience once: We were —

MR. WEINBERG: So, trying to — I'm sorry to interrupt you — so when you say you don't feel that way, you don't feel like your work and Diebenkorn, for example, are in conversation in any way, or there was any kind of — or even maybe, articulate a little bit more — because maybe I'm doing too much of the talking here — articulate why it is that you don't like the designation "Bay Area painter," just to have that down on the record.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I — did I say that somewhere?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, or I got that sense, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Oh, that isn't very serious. I didn't — it's meaningless. I think it was given to us anyway by the newspapers. We never referred to each other as Bay Area painters. We're just friends. No, I liked all those guys enormously and I thought it was unlike New York, where there was a lot of rivalry between painters.

MR. WEINBERG: But wasn't there a sense, at a certain point, where maybe you felt like you had figured it out? You know, like, here you were, trying to maybe reconcile figuration and abstraction, and that you had — you guys had kind of figured out something?

MR. BROWN: I don't think I felt that I'd figured out anything. I'm still wondering about that, too, although I can see that there are certain constant elements in my work. I'm very conscious of form. And figuration — I think I'm really much less of a modernist, in other people's terms, than I was. I'm perfectly happy drawing a figure, which I do quite often, as well as I can without adding any modernistic furnish — furbishes.

MR. WEINBERG: So it's in the late '50s and — but it seemed like you were with a group of people who were kind of all thinking that, or beginning, or working in and around that possibility. I loved it when you said that Pollock had opened a door but it was a closet, right. So the other side of this — maybe you guys had opened a door, or you had opened a door or some of you had opened a door and there was something else that you had found, or maybe were finding.

MR. BROWN: I think we were influenced in subtle ways we didn't even think about by each other.

MR. WEINBERG: I guess, also, what it means to — maybe because you were in it, you didn't realize, maybe, at the time, how extraordinary it was — but what it means to have — well, you said a little bit about it — to have a community, you know, where you're all looking at each other and responding — what that was like.

MR. BROWN: Oh, we had no sense — maybe Diebenkorn did — of being anything at all, except some painters at Berkeley, I think. At least I and Paul, I think, had no idea that we were of any importance at all. It's still hard for me to believe that we are. [They laugh.] It's true!

MR. WEINBERG: Let's be — I'm your good friend. I love you. I think, let's just drop all that modesty stuff.

MR. BROWN: You think that's being modest?

MR. WEINBERG: No, no, no. Well, I'm not kind of saying, oh, you guys were so great. You were all sitting around saying how great you are. What I'm more saying — what I'm trying to get at more and what, as somebody who doesn't have this in my life — so this is what I'm trying to get at — is what it means to be in a group of, you know, six guys, whatever, drawing from a model, looking at each other's work —

MR. BROWN: We didn't much.

MR. WEINBERG: You didn't? Is that what you're trying to say? You didn't look over each other's shoulders while you had these classes — or not these classes, these studios?

MR. BROWN: Much later. I was drawing with Mark Adams and Beth Van Hoesen and Wayne Thiebaud and Gordon Cook —

MR. WEINBERG: And that was more like that.

MR. BROWN: And one day, Beth said, at a coffee break, “It might be a good idea if, once a month or so, if we felt like it, we pinned up a drawing on the bulletin board. What do you think, Mark?” “Oh, I think that’s a great idea, Beth.” “What do you think, Wayne?” He gave us a long dissertation nobody understood. [They laugh.] And then he said, “What do you think” — what’s his name? Oh, god, my memory — anyway, he said, “I think it’s a great idea and I think we’d never meet again.” [Laughs.]

MR. WEINBERG: All right, so but back in those ’50s days, you mentioned Diebenkorn knocked on your door and came in, and you said that Paul and David Park looked at your paintings and you looked at their paintings. You were looking.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah. Oh, David told me a very, very funny story. He thought that there wasn’t enough — oh, no, Jim Ackerman — communication between the art history and the artists in the department. So Jim Ackerman started by calling on David Park.

And he went around and he said, “I like this one and I don’t think so much of this one,” you know. David sat there, gave him [inaudible] and he left. A year later, he came back and went through the same routine. After he was finished, David said, “That first one that you liked last year, you hated this year.” [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Wait, and David’s saying this to James Ackerman?

MR. BROWN: Sorry?

MR. WEINBERG: I’m sorry, I’m confused by who’s saying this to who.

MR. BROWN: Oh, David said it to Jim the second year, yeah. [They laugh.] That was the end of any nonsense between the two departments. It was very funny.

MR. WEINBERG: We had some discussion before, in another interview, about, you know, how David Park was of this group, one of the — besides you and Paul — who painted male nudes, and what did you make of this?

MR. BROWN: Yes, I think David had some more than inclination toward the male — in fact, there’s a new book by Nancy Boas that’s coming out on David, and she wanted — she called me several times to ask me if he was gay or not. And I don’t know. But Dick Diebenkorn really refused to — David brought in a beautiful son of Mark Schorer, who was — you’ve heard of him. He was a teacher here and a good writer. Anyway, and Dick just refused to draw him.

MR. WEINBERG: And at that time, you just really — you were male artists; you were supposed to work from naked women, not men, right.

MR. BROWN: Well, I gave — unbeknownst, then, to Dick — what I thought was my best male nude drawing and I never saw it again, whereas he picked out a couple little drawings I did with women, and they were framed and they’re still in their house in the country. So I don’t know.

MR. WEINBERG: That’s interesting.

MR. BROWN: He had a problem.

MR. WEINBERG: He never seemed, personally, to have a problem with you and Paul, as partners?

MR. BROWN: Well, I asked Phyllis [Gilman] about that. I said, “Wasn’t that tough for him?” And she said no, but I don’t know what the truth is. I think we were pretty close.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. You know, I think it’s good to have this on the record: I know that one of the things that really bugged you was Caroline Jones’ sort of way of breaking down the —

MR. BROWN: Oh, I hate that book [*Bay Area Figurative Art, 1950-1965*?], yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, well, it’s important to get that for the record, if you want to, particularly —

[Off-side conversation.]

MR. WEINBERG: — particularly the idea of second-generation — the way she broke things into generations was absurd, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Well, it was so stupid. They were here first. I was older than Dick Diebenkorn. So it’s crap. And because she wrote this, it’s repeated every time somebody writes about this subject. So she was — she got a lot of things wrong. I think it’s not a very good book.

MR. WEINBERG: So kind of what — be more explicit in saying what was wrong so we can get it right.

MR. BROWN: Well, that, in itself, bothered me very much. And —

MR. WEINBERG: What, exactly, in your words, rather than my words?

MR. BROWN: That she called us a second generation and the bridge — I think she uses the word “the bridge generation,” which was total nonsense. And she simply didn’t do her homework. I was so angry that I decided I wouldn’t go to the show — the big show — that followed her book. And she heard about that and she pleaded with me to go to the show, and I thought, well, what the hell, so I did.

MR. WEINBERG: And you said there was other things wrong, other mistakes.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I don’t remember.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, just to try to get these things right. Okay. And okay, now, I think you also were somewhat annoyed at — I remember we talked about this last time — about, you know, as good friends as you were with Richard Diebenkorn, that at certain points, he resented being grouped with other artists, I think.

MR. BROWN: I think he wanted — yes, because in New York, he made a name for himself way before anybody else did. And at one point, he was asked to put together —

MR. WEINBERG: These are with — this is with his abstract things, the kind of de Kooning — beautiful, de Kooning-esque abstractions?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. Right, like *Ocean Park*.

MR. WEINBERG: No, I’m thinking even earlier. He actually had a big show in New York very early of abstract —

MR. BROWN: Yes, before —

MR. WEINBERG: Before he did figuration.

MR. BROWN: Exactly, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, right, okay, okay.

MR. BROWN: Well, at some point after I knew him, then, after he was doing the *Ocean Park* painting, he was asked by a big gallery in New York to put together a show of his buddies out here. And he refused. And I heard him say that he regretted it, and that’s all I know about that story.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. And you did admire each other’s work and there was a closeness there.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes, I admire his work very much, although I used to think he was a great drawer, and I’m not so sure I think so anymore.

MR. WEINBERG: I kind of agree with that. And did you feel that when he moved towards complete abstraction, that was — if you can call them complete abstractions — that the OCEAN PARK series was a — what was the sort of reaction of you and Paul to that? Was that a — you were fine with it or did you feel like it was kind of moving away from —

MR. BROWN: Oh, it was moving away from my interests, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: But it wasn’t a sense that you — because you do feel like you were a group, it wasn’t like a betrayal or losing — sort of breaking the faith with some kind of a —

MR. BROWN: Well, as you say, he’d been a non-objective painter before, earlier, and he — it was funny because in — Paul and I had a studio in Ocean Park. And when we left and had a house in Malibu, we abandoned it, but told Sam Francis about it.

And he rented a big studio adjacent to ours and we sublet, or just gave the studio, the rights, to Dick. And it was an industrial building, the second floor, and the windows were windows that were pivoted in the center, and half went to the outside and half went in. And he did a picture of those and it’s really the first *Ocean Park*.

MR. WEINBERG: Ah, that’s cool.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: So I didn't know that about the studio. So he actually used your studio there, so there was a double studio thing.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. And then at the same time — I think the same time he showed us that picture — he showed us a painting, looked like a good figurative painting to me. And he said, "What do you think about it?" I said, "I like it." He said, "There's one thing wrong with it." And I said, "What?" And he said, "The woman." So that was the end.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, you see, that's kind of what — I guess that's kind of what I mean. I recognize why there's the anxiety in the sense of — you know, it seems like all of you guys — of being lumped together. And on the other hand, there you are — you know, he's in that same studio that you had also chosen, and you liked it and he liked it, and he played off it.

You know, it's not that, that means, you know, William Theophilus Brown is responsible for the *Ocean Park* series because you were in the same space, but because there was a certain shared sensibility or something, there was that possibility of things happening, while, if you probably put de Kooning in that space or, you know, god knows if Jackson Pollock had been in that space for six months, it wouldn't have done anything for them. You know, that's what I meant. That's that kind of — there was a kind of community of spirit.

MR. BROWN: Yes, there was. We saw a lot of them down there. And then, of course, he, in Ocean Park, built himself a pretty grand studio across the street and up a block or two.

MR. WEINBERG: And we didn't really talk — because one of the things I wanted to talk about was the difference between San Francisco and Los Angeles — not just, you know, lots of movie stars hanging out there.

MR. BROWN: That's a big one, isn't it.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, right, but I think, first of all, light, subject matter —

MR. BROWN: People talk about light, and I don't think I'm as sensitive to light nuances in places as other people are.

MR. WEINBERG: Really?

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Interesting. I'm shocked. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: Or at least, I'm —

MR. WEINBERG: I'm dismayed when you say that. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: — telling the truth.

MR. WEINBERG: I don't know. Is that true, do you think? I mean, your paintings seem to be so about light.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, but I'm not aware of the light in this city being different than down there.

MR. WEINBERG: I see. I can understand that, yeah. There's definitely a California light, though. Whenever I get out of the plane, I feel that. So but did L.A. seem a much more, you know, intellectually satisfying place at that moment? Was it — because of course, a lot of people don't like it.

MR. BROWN: I think for us, it was, except for artists. We met people like André Previn and, well, god, I don't know. You don't want to hear a lot of names. But well, I was at the Stravinskys' all the time.

MR. WEINBERG: Uh-huh, and that was another coming together, right.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Coming back to that. And they became very close.

MR. BROWN: Very close. I was there maybe three or four times a week.

MR. WEINBERG: Wow. And so the music was very important, then.

MR. BROWN: Well, yes, the music was — of course, the music has been pretty strong up here, too, but not like Los Angeles.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. When you think about that — and it's always very hard. I mean, if you look at the history of modern art, there is a desire by various artists, like Picasso, to aspire to music. There's almost a kind of hierarchy in the 20th century where music is held up as the highest art form because you don't — you know, you don't — there aren't any — a piece of music doesn't have to look like a piece of fruit, you know. It's all feeling. Do you feel that there's a kind of — are there certain paintings that are more like music for you or do you ever aspire to make a painting like music?

MR. BROWN: I think they're very closely related. It's difficult to say exactly how. But just as I think it's impossible to talk about painting, one is visual and the other is intellectual, and you can't really transform language into a visual experience, do you think?

MR. WEINBERG: Well, it's this weird paradox where you end up having to do it anyway, or try doing it anyway, even if we can't.

MR. BROWN: Well, good writers can pull some pretty nice tricks.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. I think there is this kind of — or I guess when you mentioned modernism, I think there's this kind of emphasis on feeling — you know, that you want the painting to feel, in a way, and music does that. So there is a kind of —

MR. BROWN: Don't you think all art does that?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, yeah. But as you say that, where you can sort of say there are meanings that you can sort of get in a novel or short story, and there is a moral or there — can we talk philosophical ideas. And there certainly are in painting, often, or certain kinds of painting.

There seems to be an emphasis, at the time when you were in the '50s and '60s, particularly, on a kind of painting that was supposed to be mostly about sensation. And figuration, in fact, was considered a — interfered in that, in some sense. You know, that was the — let me put it in a different way: Why was it — why would there ever have been pressure on you not to be a figurative artist? Or what were the criticisms that you got for being a figurative artist in the '50s or '60s?

MR. BROWN: That would be tricky. It would depend very much on the critic. And on the same show, I would get, sometimes, a very positive review and from another critic, a very negative one. So it was —

MR. WEINBERG: But were you aware, even in your teaching, of sort of accusations that if you did figuration, it was too illustrative or it was too narrative or it was too —

MR. BROWN: I've never gotten that.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. And that was never a worry or an anxiety?

MR. BROWN: Sorry?

MR. WEINBERG: That was never a worry or an anxiety?

MR. BROWN: No, I don't think so.

MR. WEINBERG: Right. It's 5:05, so we've done three hours now. Okay, well, we're not really at a good — let's see if we have a good ending point. Well, maybe — I guess maybe we are and we could start fresh tomorrow, then. Do you think you've had enough now, today?

MR. BROWN: It's up to you. I'm perfectly happy.

MR. WEINBERG: Let's see, how far — yeah, it just seems like we're getting vague and weird. So maybe we'll come back tomorrow, fresh?

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, let's do that.

MR. BROWN: Oh, won't you have a drink first?

[Cross talk.]

MR. WEINBERG: Aren't we going to go to dinner?

MR. BROWN: Well, that would be nice.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, and we can have real conversation.

MR. BROWN: No, no. [They laugh.]

[END OF CD 3.]

MR. WEINBERG: This is Jonathan Weinberg interviewing William Theophilus Brown at 161 Pine Street in San Francisco, California, on August 24th, 2010. This is the disc number four, and this is the second part of the interview. And we're back.

We just actually came from your studio. We're now back in your apartment. And last time, you — after we turned off the tape, you mentioned that you had a story about Fairfield Porter. You said something about Fairfield Porter and I just wondered what that was and I wanted to hear about that.

MR. BROWN: The story is that Elaine de Kooning wanted to do a portrait of me so I came down, sat on a stool and she did a full, figure-length —

MR. WEINBERG: And when was this around?

MR. BROWN: I'm so bad — '50s, probably early '50s.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay.

MR. BROWN: And just as we were finishing up the session, there was a knock on her studio door and it was Fairfield Porter. And she said, "Oh, Fairfield, you've come just in time. We're just finishing up and then we're going to a party. Can you come with us?" And he said okay. And then he said, "Where is the party?" And she said, "Oh, it's at Phil Guston's."

And there was silence. And then he said, "I don't think I can go there." And Elaine said, "What nasty thing did you say about him in your last article in *Art News*?" [They laugh.] And he said, "I said his recent paintings looked like socks that had been darned." [Laughs.] End of story.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, that's a good story. And then the other person that we talked a little bit later was about David Hockney. You said that you wanted me to —

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes. The first evening he arrived in Los Angeles, sent by Stephen Spender, Christopher Isherwood and Don Bachardy gave a dinner party for him. And they invited me and Paul, since we were supposed to be artists. And he was traveling with a guy whose name I've forgotten, but anyway, he immediately began an unending recital with lots of humor in it.

And one thing I remember, he said, "Last week, in London at the Redfern Gallery, I was at an opening" — I forget whose, if he even told me — "and this woman came up to me and said, 'My husband and I would be very happy if you would join us for dinner after this reception.'" And he said, "Oh, I suddenly realized that it was Margaret Rose." And he said, "People like that can have me once." [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: So we talked, just very briefly, about Don Bachardy and Christopher Isherwood. And when did — you didn't actually say when you met or how you met, or how that friendship —

MR. BROWN: I met Chris when he was — before he knew Don. I went down for a weekend from Berkeley — was an undergraduate there in their B.A. program — at the invitation of the Stravinskys for the premiere of a *cantata* that he'd finished writing. And we were joined — we were taken to Bel Air for lunch on Sunday by a man named Edward James. Have you heard of him? He was supposed to be the illegitimate son of one of Victoria's sons — don't ask me which one.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. [Laughs.] Somehow he was related to Queen Victoria, you mean?

MR. BROWN: Yeah. And they said, "Buy the most expensive things." He's very rich. And at this luncheon was Christopher Isherwood, and that's how I met him. But I didn't — and he had his earlier boyfriend with him, who was a charming guy whose name I can't remember at the moment. And then when Paul and I moved down a couple of years later to L.A., he was, first, a boyfriend of the brother of Don and then he found Don, who was 40 years younger, and it was a marvelous match.

MR. WEINBERG: So you actually knew Don before he really was an artist, right, in a way?

MR. BROWN: He was just beginning and I could see a great deal of talent. In fact, we found him a studio in the

little building that I told you about on Ocean Park. And he asked me to set up something and I set up something — a still life with a lemon in it. And all three of us painted little pictures. Some of mine are still around. And we had a show called “The Lemon and Art.” And we invited Cecil Beaton and about five people, and they all signed their names. I found it the other day and sent it to Don.

MR. WEINBERG: Ah, they all signed their names on a card or —

MR. BROWN: Well, a little brochure we made, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, a little brochure. How nice.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, and so Don has it, I guess, somewhere. And then, quite early, we decided, the three of us, to draw at their house — had a wonderful dining room with a big mirror so we could get interesting reflections. And this happened every week for the whole length of the time we were there. And when Cecil Beaton — as I think I told you yesterday — came to do *My Fair Lady*, he joined the group, too.

MR. WEINBERG: So he drew, too?

MR. BROWN: He drew too. I never saw his drawings. He did buy one of mine that I did there.

MR. WEINBERG: And was this all working from a male nude?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, we always had male, nude models.

MR. WEINBERG: And was there a sort of self-conscious sense, at all, I mean, looking back, that this was a kind of gay community that you sort of had formed?

MR. BROWN: I think when I came to California, I was totally out of the closet, and all of our friends were gay — well, except the Stravinskys. And they knew and they didn’t give a damn.

MR. WEINBERG: So this is when — you’re talking about, really — in Los Angeles?

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. Because that wasn’t so true of Berkeley. Many of your close friends — or the artist friends — many of them were straight.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes. All the Bay Area figurative painters, except Paul and me, were. And I think Dick Diebenkorn had a hard time with it, although he did become a good friend.

MR. WEINBERG: So when you moved to Los Angeles, it seems like that group was more, you know —

MR. BROWN: I think everybody knew we were gay. We were living together. How could they possibly not know?

MR. WEINBERG: Well, I was thinking more, it seemed, also, that you know, as you were connecting with Don and Christopher Isherwood, and other gay artists in Los Angeles, was there — I don’t know, also was there —

MR. BROWN: Well, I don’t know if Billy Al Bengston was a gay man. I don’t think so. He was a great friend of Don’s, not of mine. And I didn’t dislike him; I just didn’t know him.

MR. WEINBERG: I wondered, sort of, I guess almost thinking like at the — I guess, going through a lot of the letters and the archives, it made me very aware that, you know, most of the times, when you were getting or writing a letter from somebody who was gay, who you know is gay after the fact, it’s very guarded and there’s very little --

And then suddenly in the late ’50s, I found letters where, suddenly, people were talking about it and — John Button — I had mentioned John Button. And I wondered, again, you know, when you were sitting, talking with each other and working from the male model, was there a kind of openness, at least among the group?

MR. BROWN: Oh yes, a total openness.

MR. WEINBERG: Right.

MR. BROWN: And I think all the boys were gay that posed for us. But it wasn’t a sexual evening. It was a very business —

MR. WEINBERG: No, no. I meant in a certain sense, was there a sense of — I guess I’m trying to get at, was there a certain sense of freedom about that, a certain exhilaration?

MR. BROWN: Oh, I think very much so. I think I was still a little bit stupid — in fact, very stupid about it. I remember telling Christoper — whose Diaries, the next volume, are coming out this year, and I fear to read what he says about me — I remember definitely once saying that I disapproved of masturbation, which was such a lie. And I was doing it daily myself, you know. [Laughs.] And that haunts me a bit. I mean, why did I do that? To impress him?

MR. WEINBERG: Well, where did — I'm wondering what did the context of that conversation — how did it come up? How did it come up, so to speak?

MR. BROWN: I don't know. That was early in our relationship, and that never happened again.

MR. WEINBERG: Interesting.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: And was he someone who was, seemingly, very open about sexuality in a way that maybe —

MR. BROWN: He sure was, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, and so there was a certain kind of — yeah. So that's very interesting. We kind of got up to the point — I spoke very little about you and Paul, and I think that's going to come back and forth in all this. But one of the things about your work which is quite remarkable is the way in which the male nude figures so often in your work. And that doesn't seem to be so true of other artists. Paul — some of the —

MR. BROWN: Paul, for instance, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, more in the private work but not in the public. But you always kept it in there, it seems, in the most public way. And did that get you in trouble? Was that a —

MR. BROWN: Well, I think a lot about sex. In fact, since it's what I do besides paint — or look for — I connect the two and I think that if I weren't sexual, I wouldn't paint.

MR. WEINBERG: I see. So for you, it's like a necessary subject to —

MR. BROWN: Well, it comes out, yeah. I'm very aware that I, perhaps, overdo it, but —

MR. WEINBERG: I don't think so. Why do you say that?

MR. BROWN: Oh, because I think, for very stupid reasons, such as that people hesitate to buy them.

MR. WEINBERG: I see, so it's more of a —

MR. BROWN: From the point of view of the dealer, they shrug.

MR. WEINBERG: And have you had actual dealers tell you not to paint male nudes?

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. WEINBERG: No?

MR. BROWN: I wouldn't stay with them.

MR. WEINBERG: But a reticence, maybe, to show some of the work, or —

MR. BROWN: Yes, I think some of them had — less and less now.

MR. WEINBERG: I would only throw this out here just to see what your reaction is to it: It's hard to imagine anybody saying to Matisse, you paint too many female nudes. So I wonder —

MR. BROWN: I've always thought of that. I mean, it's so stupid that the heteros get away with anything they want and we're so confined.

MR. WEINBERG: Right. Did Paul ever tell you not to paint so many male nudes or —

MR. BROWN: No, no.

MR. WEINBERG: Never an issue?

MR. BROWN: Oh, no.

MR. WEINBERG: Did you and Paul ever collaborate on a painting together, or on a theme or a —

MR. BROWN: No, but we — I think we were each other's best critic, especially when I did a lousy painting. I would come ask Paul to look at it. I wanted him to tell me it was getting somewhere. He never did. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: I was going to say, did you ever fight about paintings?

MR. BROWN: No, because I respected his opinion. I appreciated the fact that he never lied. And I was strict with him, too. But it's easier to be on the giving end than the receiving end. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: That's nice, that's nice.

MR. BROWN: But no, I think we valued each other very deeply in that way, and I still think he's an underrated painter.

MR. WEINBERG: I don't know how much you want to talk about your relationship with Paul.

MR. BROWN: As much as you want.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, well, you know, of course, as a gay couple, myself — you know, as part of a gay couple, I'm interested in — and you know, we've talked a little bit later about how gay couples, sometimes, have different relationships — or negotiate those relationships in ways where maybe we're more honest about it. But you said you were best friends and partners, and I —

MR. BROWN: We started out having a lot of sex together and gradually, that diminished and he almost turned into a brother. And we both had affairs with other guys. They were acknowledged.

I mean, I still see — Paul came in one night — we were living on Jersey Street in the '70s or '80s — and said he'd been out and he'd had sex with this man who insisted that Paul come home and tell me about it, which made him like me already. And I still see him. And he was an addict and going nowhere, and Paul sent him to school and library school, and he works at the public library here, has a nice house with a guy he's lived with for a long time.

MR. WEINBERG: Are you allowed to say his name?

MR. BROWN: Sorry?

MR. WEINBERG: Can you say his name?

MR. BROWN: Oh, sure. His name is — oh, god — [Laughs] — if I'm asked a direct question, my mind goes blank.

MR. WEINBERG: I'm exactly the same way. Well, we can come back to that.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. WEINBERG: Or we can fill it in later. And that was smooth sailing, in this kind of a relationship? Was there a time in the beginning — often, in those kinds of relationships —

MR. BROWN: I think when he first came over to our house and was sleeping with Paul, we had separate bedrooms. He was afraid that I would try to join the activity, which I never intended to. But then, nothing. And I told him that I liked him before I met him for telling Paul to tell me this. I thought that was extraordinarily kind.

MR. WEINBERG: But I'm wondering, going back to the beginning, when your relationship was sort of changing and you were becoming, as you said, more brothers, was there a time when that was difficult — when you felt —

MR. BROWN: It may have been on Paul. I was maybe more promiscuous than he. But he never complained to me about it.

MR. WEINBERG: Did it sometimes get competitive a little bit?

MR. BROWN: No, I don't think so. Not at all.

MR. WEINBERG: And in terms of your — the other thing one always wonders about — I always say it's great that Nick and I are not in the same profession — but did it ever get hard, both being painters, both —

MR. BROWN: Yes, it did. We had some friends — rich friends — named Mason Wells and Frank Hamilton, who

tried to be painters but they weren't. But they were very rich. And they always praised Paul's painting and put me down. And once they invited us to Europe, all expenses paid including the travel by them, to eat in three-star restaurants or something. And I refused to go.

And even though Frank, actually, has an apartment here but lives in Palm Springs, we've never become close again. I thought that was pretty intolerable at the time. And I can imagine why, because they thought of me as a rich boy and that Paul came up from nowhere, which he did. Paul's story is remarkable. And I think they were failures themselves as painters and — this is my rationale for the behavior — but it doesn't matter. Otherwise, there wasn't too much of that.

MR. WEINBERG: And also, it seems like your careers were at different points. Sometimes you had great success; sometimes he had less success; and sometimes —

MR. BROWN: Well, my only real — the coming out for both of us, really, was the article in *Life* magazine. And that got me a gallery and then I immediately sent slides of Paul's work and Felix immediately enlisted Paul. And so then we moved to L.A., as I told you, and began — both of us began selling.

And then I think Paul zoomed way past me. He did well at Jean Béguin's. I was in Jean Béguin's and nothing much happened so I quit. And Jean Béguin, at that point, was certainly the gallery in town. Maybe it still is, I don't know. I never go downtown.

MR. WEINBERG: So one thing we didn't talk about is teaching. Did you do a lot of teaching?

MR. BROWN: Paul did more. He taught in Hawaii. He taught in Los Angeles. He taught in New Mexico. I taught one summer at Stanford because Nate wanted to see me more. And I taught one semester at the University of Kansas. And I taught at the Art Institute when I was — had a class, everybody was older than I. [They laugh.] And then I taught at U.C. Davis.

MR. WEINBERG: And was that important, for you to teach? Did you like it? Or it wasn't —

MR. BROWN: No, I didn't like it and the reason why — I liked the kids a lot — was that I didn't think I was a very good teacher. And I also taught as a T.A. [Teaching Assistant] when I was in graduate school.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, at Berkeley.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. That's when there were four sections of 2-A drawing. And the kids had to choose between, oh, I don't know, Erle Loran — and I forget the fourth — and David Park and me. And David Park and my class filled up right away. [They laugh.] And it really pissed off Erle. And as I told you, David did me the honor of exchanging classes once in a while. I would teach his and he'd teach mine.

MR. WEINBERG: That's sweet. So you go from back to — what brings you from L.A. back to San Francisco?

MR. BROWN: Well, we'd moved away from — even though we were in Malibu, it was very smoggy in those days and I didn't want any more of it. We had a lovely house on Hill that later burned down in a big fire and moved to Santa Barbara for a few years.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, was Paul teaching there?

MR. BROWN: Paul was teaching and I wasn't. And then we moved to New Hampshire because I'd spent my summers there, and May Sarton told us how marvelous it was. And so we moved to a town fairly near her.

MR. WEINBERG: And when would this be? You know, this was in the '60s, right?

MR. BROWN: Yes, late '60s. And we found it was an enormous mistake. And we bought a house — a nice house with a huge forest behind it — and there was a lot of upkeep, most of which I let Paul do, of course. [They laugh.] He took care of me. And I could see Paul growing a year older every day. And we moved in and —

MR. WEINBERG: And why did you need to be taken care of?

MR. BROWN: Oh, well, he cooked and that sort of thing, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: So he cooked and he took care of — he was more domestic?

MR. BROWN: He was much more domestic. He was the gardener at our house and — not there, but when we later lived in Noe Valley. And I said, "For Christmas, I'm selling this damn house and we'll move back to California." And he'd had it there, and so we finally got back and rented an apartment very near the ocean and — well —

MR. WEINBERG: No, this is important. This is actually — so you went back to Los Angeles or San Francisco?

MR. BROWN: No, to Los Angeles.

MR. WEINBERG: So back to Los Angeles.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm, and stayed there a couple of years; then moved to Santa Barbara for a brief time and then came back up here to Berkeley, actually. One of our buddies was — built houses. And he built a house next to his own in the hills. He lived with another guy.

And we moved into that for two or three years and then the other guy decided he wanted much more rent — and I think he wanted to get rid of us — so we found our house on Jersey Street [San Francisco], which we loved. We bought it in about 1970 and lived in it 30 years. That was a very happy time in my life.

MR. WEINBERG: And that's a Victorian house?

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Did you see that ever, maybe?

MR. WEINBERG: No, no, I never did. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: Yeah, well, it was a big two-story. Well, it had an ample basement, which made a studio for both of us for a while.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. Was Paul teaching at this time?

MR. BROWN: Sorry?

MR. WEINBERG: Was Paul teaching? What brought you to — why back to this area, particularly? Because your friends were here?

MR. BROWN: Well actually, when this friend of Jerry's who built the house in Berkeley told us he wanted more rent — I think he wanted us out of there. I think he was jealous or something. I don't know. He was crazy.

MR. WEINBERG: But I'm just wondering why San Francisco again.

MR. BROWN: Well, we tried to buy another house in Berkeley.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay — or Berkeley. I mean, you're talking more neighborhoods but why this area of the world?

MR. BROWN: I think Los Angeles was too big and Santa Barbara was too rich and boring. And I didn't know San Francisco, but what little I did, I liked a lot.

MR. WEINBERG: And New York was never — it's interesting because it seems like you never considered going to New York.

MR. BROWN: Never thought of New York again. I used to visit it till all my friends were dead there.

MR. WEINBERG: Was any part of that because of a — because I was going to ask you what did you think of pop art and minimalism, of what was going on in, you know, the big movements of the '60s. Was there a certain sense that, that was not what you were interested in?

MR. BROWN: Well, my closest relation with pop art would be Wayne Thiebaud. And of course, he was not unhappy getting a show in New York but he was very unhappy being confused with the pop artists.

MR. WEINBERG: I guess — I'm sorry I keep pressing you on this but I'm sort of — you know, I guess through my whole life until very recently, it was like, if you're going to be an artist, you have to live in New York and show your work in New York. And New York is the place, right? And I'm wondering why you resisted the — well, I got it, sort of, in the '50s but here you are moving around again and I'm wondering why —

MR. BROWN: Well, when I left New York the final time, Tom Hess said, "That's a fatal move if you want to get ahead." And I did it — I think I told you — because I felt, both in Paris and — I was circling around these very accomplished artists and not doing all that well myself with my work. And I thought it would be good to get away.

MR. WEINBERG: I understood that in 1952, but I'm wondering why in the '60s, maybe, you were reticent. Because you had gone to New Hampshire, why you would have — it seems like New York, in that, would have been — you just decided New York was not it? Or you didn't like New York?

MR. BROWN: We both — Paul had lived in New York, too, after he got out of the Army. And I think we both wanted something else.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. And did you have conversations, and what did you feel about pop and minimalism? I know you knew Wayne Thiebaud in a literal way but what was your reaction to it as art? I mean, did you — just like you told me that you didn't think much of Jackson Pollock, what did you think of Andy Warhol and —

MR. BROWN: I didn't think of him. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Meaning you didn't like it?

MR. BROWN: It was of no importance, although when I read all the comments, I was amused. And I think I thought he's a very shrewd cat. And I don't dislike Andy Warhol. I just don't think about it.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. I didn't mean, you know, the whole New York art scene. So it's not something — you weren't really spending a lot of time also trying to keep up with what was going on in New York?

MR. BROWN: Oh, not at all. And Jasper Johns and company interested me not at all, although I did go to their shows.

MR. WEINBERG: Did you think about them at all in terms of the fact that they were gay, or was that of any —

MR. BROWN: I thought in terms of — that they were gay and in the closet. And neither Paul nor I were.

MR. WEINBERG: Had you met them, or how did you meet them?

MR. BROWN: Elaine [de Kooning] took me to Rauschenberg's studio before he was famous, and he seemed like a nice enough guy. I think he was talented. But I never met Johns.

MR. WEINBERG: I seem to remember something about you having some contact with John Cage.

MR. BROWN: Oh yes, well, I lived on the Lower East Side in a five-story walk-up building and the only other person on that floor was John Cage. I told you the [Alberto] Giacometti story, or did I?

MR. WEINBERG: No, no, you haven't — not me. You've told other people.

MR. BROWN: Well, just before I came back — I'm terrible with dates — from Europe, one of the many times, I was drawing in Mary Callery's studio, a nude female. And there was a knock on the door and it was Giacometti. And he came in. We'd just begun. And I got out a large piece of paper and board and charcoal and an easel for him, and he did a very beautiful drawing — quite big, like this.

And he worked on a it a couple of hours. And it was about noon when we finished up. And he talked the whole time he was drawing. And he had no interest in this drawing. He just walked out the door. And Mary said, "Well, you might as well take it." So I put it in my portfolio.

And when I got back to New York, I had no place to live. And I knew this wonderful and really crazy girl named Sonia Sekula, and she said she was going to Europe and I could sublet her apartment. She didn't say anything about John Cage, who turned out to be the only other person on that floor, the fifth floor.

And soon we became good friends. And he was a good cook and I've never been a cook at all, so I would eat many, many meals there with some interesting people — never large dinner parties, but intense. And so I began to feel very guilty, so one day, I brought him the Giacometti drawing. He took it to Paris and had Giacometti sign it and then sold it and gave the proceeds to the Merce Cunningham Dance Company.

MR. WEINBERG: That's a nice story. But it's funny because I would have thought, though, John Cage's work and you would have — did you have much shop talk? I mean, you don't —

MR. BROWN: Oh, he hated — I was a good friend of Sam Barber and he just couldn't stand that stuff.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, right, musically.

MR. BROWN: And on the other hand, I liked Cage rhythmically and I loved the guy — he was very funny. But I heard a string quartet at a concert somewhere and I thought it was just unbearably bad and so inept. I mean, it wasn't a case of not understanding it, like it might be with an Alban Berg; I just thought it was a horrible piece of music. But that's that.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, I would think, also — you know, all I know about John Cage is his, what is it, *4'33* [1952] or

whatever —

MR. BROWN: I saw the first performance with Sonia. And it was in — you know, there were 30 people there at most. David Tudor was the pianist and he went up and shut the keyboard. Sonia picked up a drunk on the way and said, “You want to come with us to a concert?” So he kept saying, “When is this going to begin, anyway?” [They laugh.] John couldn’t take it. He took him to the elevator and — [Laughs] — sent him out. But anyway —

MR. WEINBERG: That’s a good story.

MR. BROWN: Then a little later, there used to be in the *New York Review of Books*, Robert Craft interviewing Stravinsky. At first, maybe, Stravinsky answered some questions; later on, it was obvious that Craft both wrote the answers and the questions. [They laugh.]

And in one of these, Craft says, “What do you think of the music of John Cage?” And he said — Stravinsky supposedly said, “Well, I liked it very much. I look forward to works of the same kind that are much longer in the future.” [Laughs.] I didn’t phrase it very well; you get the idea.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, yeah. But did you feel any kind of hostility towards this kind of work? I mean, because I see your work, Paul’s work — and to be frank, you know, a lot of the artists that you are associated with, whether you like it or not — as being, in a way, very much the opposite of that kind of work.

MR. BROWN: Oh, sure. He did — he asked for a little painting and he did hang it. [They laugh.] But I think that was because I was there. I don’t know.

MR. WEINBERG: So did you think it was crazy stuff or did you just think —

MR. BROWN: No, John — no, I thought he was very, very good rhythmically and something new that I had never heard. He was very critical of people like [Samuel] Barber. He said it was just trivial nonsense.

MR. WEINBERG: I guess the anti-art aspect — I mean, you also mentioned meeting Marcel Duchamp, as well, and Dada —

MR. BROWN: Oh, at Mary Callery’s, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: You know, kind of the Dadaist emphasis or the minimalist emphasis — you just felt, maybe, that this is other work and it’s not like your work and so it’s fine?

MR. BROWN: Oh, no, I was very — Duchamp fascinated me and I was very impressed with the *Nude Descending a Staircase* [1912]which I knew pretty early on. And Miró, who was there at the same time, as I told you, at Mary Callery’s, I do not consider an important artist for me. I have no judgment whether he’s good or bad or anything like that but it doesn’t interest me at all.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, that’s good. So maybe we should start — what time is it?

MR. BROWN: Oh, it’s only 11:25.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, so let’s get the book out. Watch the cord. [Pause.] What I’d like to do is just to sort of go through — we’ll do it with paintings —

[Off-site conversation.]

MR. WEINBERG: The one careful thing we have to try to do is name the titles of the paintings because otherwise, this interview will be completely incomprehensible. Oh, some of them are untitled but we can describe them.

MR. : There’s also the page number.

MR. WEINBERG: And the page numbers and things like that. We’re looking —

MR. BROWN: That I did —

MR. WEINBERG: Wait a second, wait a second. Okay, so we’re looking at this beautiful monograph, which is authored by John Arthur, called *Theophilus Brown: Paintings, Collages & Drawings* [Chameleon Press: 2007]. And we’re looking, now, at some of the — you called them football paintings.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. WEINBERG: Which is on page 17. And you were just about to say something about them.

MR. BROWN: I did that as a classroom project.

MR. WEINBERG: So this is *Untitled, 1953*.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. WEINBERG: Meaning what?

MR. BROWN: I did it when I was in graduate school and turned it in as an assignment, and then I gave it to a cousin of mine in Davenport.

MR. WEINBERG: And is it one that is particularly — you feel, particularly successful, or — it looks, first of all, like it even has newspaper embedded in it. Does it or not? It's a collage.

MR. BROWN: I don't think I ever used newspaper, no.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, okay, it looks almost like there's some kind of writing in it but it's hard to see. It's a collage so I'm wondering what — is it just paper?

MR. BROWN: No, I think — yeah, I think that is collage. It's got to be.

MR. WEINBERG: It actually says tempera on panel but it looks like it's cutout pieces of paper.

MR. BROWN: This certainly looks like a cutout shape.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, yeah, interesting. Okay, we'll go through that. Oh, these are great ones. So here's one from 1956.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, that would be in the *Life* —

MR. WEINBERG: And here's the 1955 one, which was in *Life* magazine.

MR. BROWN: And they told me that I put this same color red shirt on opposing members of the team. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: That's great. And there is this marvelous way in which the figures could be seen as sort of fighting with each other, but they're also kind of embracing, which is kind of — they're in close contact.

MR. BROWN: Well, of course, I liked things like this — nice, big butt there.

MR. WEINBERG: The emphasis on butts.

MR. BROWN: This looks like a big dick, doesn't it?

MR. WEINBERG: At the time, did anybody pick up on the homoerotic content?

MR. BROWN: If they did, they didn't tell me.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay.

MR. BROWN: Oh, and this is "The Lemon and Art" I was telling you about. And these are about exactly the size they are —

MR. WEINBERG: So we're looking, now, at some still lives from 1964, actually. And one of them has a very prominent lemon in it.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Those are quite beautiful.

MR. BROWN: Those were in that little show, "The Lemon and Art."

MR. WEINBERG: And how do you sort of see still life as figuring in your career? Is it something that you did much of?

MR. BROWN: No. When I'm stuck — [They laugh].

MR. WEINBERG: Well, that's interesting. So when you're stuck, how does it help you get through that?

MR. BROWN: Well, something to work on. And of course, you vary them. I mean, I'm sure the reflection didn't look anything like it does in the painting.

MR. WEINBERG: All right, so here are some great — *Two Men in an Interior* from 1960. For some reason, I felt like this was Paul but I —

MR. BROWN: No, they're invented.

MR. WEINBERG: They're just invented?

MR. BROWN: Yeah. I did portraits of Paul but —

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, we'll get to those. Here's another one: *Untitled, 1962*. It has a kind of almost [Edvard] Munch-like quality.

MR. BROWN: I am a great fan of Munch.

MR. WEINBERG: Anything to say about these? This is a painting that's in the collection of John Modell.

MR. BROWN: Yes, he has the most of my work of any private collector.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, okay. Do you want to talk about — how did that come about?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, he's gay and he bought quite a few pictures of mine and one of me. And he loves music, too, so we went to the Marlboro [Chamber Music] Festival four or five summers in a row, which was in southern Vermont. I don't know if you've ever heard of it.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, yeah, definitely. My god, I have so many great recordings —

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: And when did this first start? When did he first start buying your work?

MR. BROWN: These are the questions I can't answer. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, I'm sorry. Like, was it in the early — was it around the time when the painting was done? It says '62, so —

MR. BROWN: Yeah, that would be a fair guess, yeah. Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Is he still alive?

MR. BROWN: Yes, he is. He's younger than I am. He has Hepatitis C, though, which is the bad one.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, I'm sorry. And when you say he's a gay collector, did that seem to be an important part of the thinking —

MR. BROWN: It has nothing to do with our relationship, for instance.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, I didn't mean necessarily that you were — no, no, I didn't mean that. You always jump to that. [They laugh.] I'm not getting at that. I meant, did he particularly — did he have other paintings by gay artists? Did he have nudes?

MR. BROWN: I don't think so. I don't think the gayness in the painting influences him at all.

MR. WEINBERG: Influenced him at all. He just liked your work?

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, that was a bonus, as it were. [Laughs.] Okay, oh, these are great ones. This is one of —

MR. BROWN: That's in the Oakland museum.

MR. WEINBERG: — the *Muscatine Diver* [1962-63].

MR. BROWN: I'll tell you why it was called *Muscatine Diver*. Muscatine is a little river — I mean, town on the Mississippi about 20 miles north of Moline. And we used to go on steamboats for dancing parties when we were on high school, and we would always stop at Muscatine. And when I was painting this picture, I invented the

background and it reminded me of the view from the boat of Muscatine. So I liked the word “Muscatine” so I just stuck it in. [Laughs.]

MR. WEINBERG: And you say that you invented the background but that implies — did you — it seems like the whole painting was invented but did you actually work from photographs or models?

MR. BROWN: Probably, the diver was from a photograph. And I think the other figure was invented.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. And were you — because I immediately think of Eakins’ *Swimming* [1885] and I think of Walt Whitman —

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes, that picture — yeah. Well, I knew that very well and I’m a great Eakins fan.

MR. WEINBERG: Mm-hmm, and what does a picture like this kind of mean to you, besides sort of young men swimming, if that is — are these two men because that could be a woman. I assume it’s a man.

MR. BROWN: No, it’s a man.

MR. WEINBERG: It is a man.

MR. BROWN: Of course.

MR. WEINBERG: Of course. [They laugh.] What does a theme like that mean to you? I know you’re reticent to put words to it but you mentioned —

MR. BROWN: Oh, I’m not reticent so much as confused as what to say. I think they’re all sexual, frankly — but not primarily, I hope. See, I even stuck a girl in here.

MR. WEINBERG: This is *The Swing* from 1966. Interesting — in ’66 it says acrylic on canvas, I notice, and the *Muscatine Diver* of ’62-’63 is oil. Is there a shift that happens when you shift over to acrylic?

MR. BROWN: Yes, just then I realized I couldn’t really tolerate the fumes from terps. I love oil but I just stopped using it. I didn’t have a well-ventilated studio.

MR. WEINBERG: And did you feel — was there a struggle to make that shift?

MR. BROWN: Yes, because I thought I was losing some richness that oils give that I think acrylics finally can’t do, although I’ve sort of adjusted to them now and they do have advantages of drying quickly. You can over-paint with the greatest ease. So now it’s no big deal.

MR. WEINBERG: And you jokingly sort of said, well, I put a woman in that one.

MR. BROWN: Oh, no, no, no. I’m just silly.

MR. WEINBERG: No, but it’s called *The Swing*. Where is this theme coming from? Or was it just a kind of fantasy?

MR. BROWN: I doubt it. I bet I saw something like it in a magazine or — I used to subscribe to nudist magazines, use them a lot.

MR. WEINBERG: Now, that’s interesting. I don’t think I knew that. [They laugh.] Tell us about that. What’s a nudist magazine?

MR. BROWN: Well, it’s the easiest way to see male and female nudes doing various things. They aren’t. They aren’t — their purpose is not to be sexy but to advocate nudism.

MR. WEINBERG: I see.

MR. BROWN: In fact, when I was in Santa Barbara, I had a chiropractor there who went to a nudist camp and I spent a day in the nudist camp. And it was very boring. [They laugh.] I mean, everybody’s very prudish about it, even though -- my dick withered. [They laugh.] Took me a week to find it.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, often, I’ve found that the people who are nudists are not necessarily the ones —

MR. BROWN: Who should be. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: So you didn’t become a nudist even though you subscribed to nudist magazines.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I couldn’t wait to get home again. I mean, it was a boring day, actually. But I learned a lot.

MR. WEINBERG: There are, of course, these marvelous photographs by Diane Arbus of the nudists. She went to a particularly seedy one and took marvelous photographs, and she said some of the same things that you're saying about how, in fact, a place of freedom is actually a place of surveillance, where — because you really are not supposed to get erections and you can't — or you have so many and if you get too many, they throw you out, you know, right? So it actually makes it more difficult to — anyway, that's very interesting. So you got these magazines and you'd use them for source material, in essence.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: I wonder if they still have such magazines.

MR. BROWN: You can buy them but they are very expensive because they've gone out of printing.

MR. WEINBERG: That's what I meant — used, but I don't think there is — like, *Nudist Life* — I wonder if that still is in subscription or whatever if there is such a thing.

MR. BROWN: I haven't seen any for years.

MR. WEINBERG: This is an important painting because it's key to this book, at least: *Sun and Moon* from 1960.

MR. BROWN: Somebody told me that if this is the sun then this should be on the other side of the reflection. I said, "Oh, to hell with you." [They laugh.] It's a tiny painting.

MR. WEINBERG: Yes, yeah. That's one thing I've noticed, is that sometimes it's hard to say — like, I look at a painting like that and I think, oh, god, that could be huge, where the *Muscatine Diver* looks very small and that's actually a huge painting. And this one's a very small painting.

MR. BROWN: It's not much bigger than that.

MR. WEINBERG: Right. Is that something you're happy about or what do you think about scale and painting?

MR. BROWN: I don't think much — I think about scale within a painting, but not about scale and painting. I like to do big canvases but I haven't done a lot of them — I mean, huge ones — partly because of studio problems. That's a picture I liked.

MR. WEINBERG: This is *Untitled,* 1964, which is a man and a horse.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Horses figure in a lot of your paintings.

MR. BROWN: Sorry?

MR. WEINBERG: Horses figure a lot in your paintings.

MR. BROWN: I'm very — I think horses are beautiful animals.

MR. WEINBERG: And do you have any experience with horses or were you a horse rider, a horse fancier?

MR. BROWN: Yes. When I was 12 years old in Moline, somebody took me out to somebody's farm and put me on a horse — kind of a gentle horse — and it galloped away and I got a hard-on and came back with cum all over my pants. [They laugh.] And I never rode a horse again. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Goodness! Have you ever told that story before?

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. WEINBERG: No, that sounds — that's right out of *Equus*. And so is that something we're supposed to think about when we look at your paintings of horses, I wonder. [They laugh.]

MR. BROWN: It's better if you don't think at all.

MR. WEINBERG: So was that a traumatic experience or a wondrous experience —

MR. BROWN: Embarrassing.

MR. WEINBERG: Embarrassing.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah, because I still believed that sex was evil.

MR. WEINBERG: But when you tell that story, is that something that is — you think of it as something behind these pictures with horses or is that just a —

MR. BROWN: No, nothing to do —

MR. WEINBERG: I think immediately, of course, when I look at these pictures, I think — because it's a painting that's meant so much to me because it's in the Museum of Modern Art — is the Picasso, *Boy with a Horse* [*Boy Leading a Horse*, 1906].

MR. BROWN: Oh, that's a wonderful picture. I know exactly — the boy is on the right side and horse — yeah, that's a great picture. Well, Picasso, obviously, has been a huge influence in my life.

MR. WEINBERG: And another painter that I think of when I look at your work and I wondered whether — because he's not — obviously, everybody knows Picasso, right — but I think of Puvis. Is he someone that you look at, at all?

MR. BROWN: [Pierre] Puvis de Chavannes?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Well, a lot of people have said that, and to be very frank, it doesn't mean much to me.

MR. WEINBERG: I see, because he's, of course, a big influence on Picasso so people see —

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: I wondered if sometimes, artists go back to the source, you know and sort of say, ah, Picasso — what was Picasso looking at?

MR. BROWN: I've seen some, but they don't grab me.

MR. WEINBERG: They don't grab you?

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. WEINBERG: I always thought he was a wonderful painter and I'd love to see more of his work.

MR. BROWN: I might change my mind. I haven't seen a Puvis for 30 years.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, yeah. Well, they never have shows of his work. He was a big influence on [Georges] Seurat, also. And I would think —

MR. BROWN: Really? That's interesting.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, that Seurat would be somebody, of course, because of the themes of people by the water and —

MR. BROWN: Well, Seurat, I'm a great fan of.

MR. WEINBERG: It's interesting because we kind of — the beginning of the book, it's kind of randomly brought together. This is a marvelous portrait.

MR. BROWN: I think John Modell owns that, too. Does that say —

MR. WEINBERG: No, actually, it says private collection. This is *Untitled, 1962*.

MR. BROWN: He didn't want too many of them named —

MR. WEINBERG: I see. And this is man sort of sitting in a chair with a robe opened up.

MR. BROWN: I think that was Freddy Halsted.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, okay. And why don't you talk about him? Many of your listeners, as they say, or people reading this, will not know who Freddy Halsted was.

MR. BROWN: Well, his boyfriend, John Rose, who just sent me a book called Bill and Paul, was a pupil — John

Rose was a pupil of Paul's in the early '60s when we moved to Los Angeles. And through John Rose, we met Freddy. And Freddy was a real charmer, and I asked him if he would pose for me and he said, sure.

MR. WEINBERG: And at that time, what did he do? What was he?

MR. BROWN: He was a gardener and a very free spirit. John entered a movie contest in something like Buenos Aires and won second prize or something. And Freddy said, "Well, if he can do something, I can just as well." And so he bought a camera and made that famous first porno movie of his. I forget what it's named.

And anyway, while he was posing, he was nude and sitting in a chair and his dick was straight down when he started or on the side or something. And anyway, when he resumed the pose, it was not where it was supposed to be so I went over and picked it up and put it where it should be, and he said, "No, I'm not in that business anymore!" [They laugh.] Anyway, it's sad he committed suicide, you know.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, I didn't know that.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: So he posed for you a lot?

MR. BROWN: No, no. I think maybe only once.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, okay. I think, just for the record — so this is, I think, too early to be him.

MR. BROWN: Oh, that isn't Freddy.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, no, that's what I'm thinking. Yeah, that's not — this was 1962. So that would have been in the '70s, right, this thing with Freddy Halsted.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: But it's good because I wanted to ask — so just for the record, that's a big portrait, as I remember, of him — the Halsted painting. This is a sketch. But it is similar — a similar pose.

MR. BROWN: Oh, really?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, yeah. And here, we're looking at — sometimes it's hard to tell the gender of your subjects.

MR. BROWN: Oh, that's a girl.

MR. WEINBERG: That seems like a girl but it could be a fat, slightly hippy boy. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: That would be a drawing that I did at Don Bachardy's in the dining room with the mirror, and then painted it later.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. So this is *Untitled, 1964*, oil on paper, 14-by-17, on page 36. And you're saying that, that was one of these pictures that you did with Don Bachardy and —

MR. BROWN: At Don's, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: So that would have been '64, so that gives us the dates you were —

MR. BROWN: Yeah, well, that's good to know.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. Here's one from 1968 of a woman — two women, right?

MR. BROWN: Two women.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. This face is very — appears a lot in your work, even if it — and you're saying it's a kind of —

MR. BROWN: This is pretty well made-up. In fact, I don't remember the history but I never saw two women in a field like that. [They laugh.] And I don't remember if everything is invented because I — some pictures with figures are totally invented.

MR. WEINBERG: And a picture like that often evokes some kind of a story but it isn't? You mentioned, actually, off the interview, that there was a moment when you and Paul were sort of experimenting with Surrealism.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes.

MR. WEINBERG: And when was that? Was that around in the later ’60s?

MR. BROWN: You answer. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Because there is something of that, you know, narrative of a kind of dream — well, let’s say, dreamscape.

MR. BROWN: You can make a better guess than I —

[END OF CD 4 Track 1.]

MR. WEINBERG: No, what I’m wondering is that — is this what you’re talking about in the late ’60s?

MR. BROWN: No, I don’t think so at all. They were more — maybe there are some later in the book.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, we’ll look at those later and we’ll figure that out. But there does seem an attempt to sort of create sort of dreamscapes or, sort of, out-of-time —

MR. BROWN: That would not be of that period.

MR. WEINBERG: I see. Okay, and then we’ll look — all right, so here, they begin to break down into themes.

MR. BROWN: That’s Don Bachardy’s.

MR. WEINBERG: Yes, this is a wonderful picture. I actually reproduced it in *Male Desire* [Harry Abrams: 2005] when I —

MR. BROWN: Oh, that’s right.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, from 1968. And I love this idea of everyone sort of holding hands. And of course, one thinks of Matisse here, *The Dance*.

MR. BROWN: Oh, well, I love that painting, *The Dance*. I don’t think I was thinking of Matisse. Probably — I don’t know what I was thinking then.

MR. WEINBERG: But and why did this end up in Don’s collection?

MR. BROWN: I think he liked it and I think it was — no, I think it was in a show of Felix Landau’s. I think they bought it.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, okay. It wasn’t a trade.

MR. BROWN: No, no.

MR. WEINBERG: This is *The Chase* —

MR. BROWN: Now, that, I invented totally, woman and all.

MR. WEINBERG: And I notice in one version, there’s a head and in another one, there’s a —

MR. BROWN: That’s the first version and that’s the second version.

MR. WEINBERG: And are they meant to be seen together, or two different versions?

MR. BROWN: That’s — it’s the same picture.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, I see what you mean. You mean you reworked it.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: I see, and this is the final version.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: I see. And why was there a photograph of it? For a while, it had no head and you felt it was

finished and then you —

MR. BROWN: Well, somebody — as you see, it's only in black and white. And it was in my studio and one day, I thought, oh, I'll change it. I don't necessarily like one version better than the other.

MR. WEINBERG: Is this one of the paintings that took a very long time to finish?

MR. BROWN: I think it was — it took a while, yeah. I think I — well, especially inventing everything took me some time.

MR. WEINBERG: A lot of artists don't like to do — I think you're an artist that likes to come back to a painting many years later and rework it?

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes. The dates don't mean a thing. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Do you want to comment about that, or why you feel that's a good —

MR. BROWN: No. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: You said I could ask you — you didn't say you'd necessarily answer me; you said I could ask you anything.

MR. BROWN: Oh, you can.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, no, but I meant is that something that you think you shouldn't be doing but you do it anyway — you go back and rework it?

MR. BROWN: Oh, no, I have no feeling of —

MR. WEINBERG: I say this because Nick used to get mad at me because he'd think I'd finish a painting and then he'd come in and I'd totally repainted it. He used to get upset about that.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Well, sometimes you lose them that way.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. I find sometimes, though, if there's a bad painting underneath a good painting, sometimes it makes the — it does something to the painting. Working on an old painting can make a better painting, somehow. The thing underneath comes through.

MR. BROWN: Well, you might as well work over a bad painting or throw it away, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: So let's — this is so out of — oh, these are just fantastic. I'm looking at *Woman and Deer* from 1966. And the red hill —

MR. BROWN: I think that one's in Kansas, isn't it?

MR. WEINBERG: Doesn't say.

MR. BROWN: It is.

MR. WEINBERG: This one is destroyed, it says.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I destroyed a lot of the paintings that I should have kept and kept a lot that I should have destroyed. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: And when you would destroy a painting, you just hated it and it would have to be out of the studio? Destroying a painting is quite a —

MR. BROWN: Paul and I would have bonfires.

MR. WEINBERG: Wow.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Tell me about that.

MR. BROWN: Well, this is mostly when we were moving and didn't want to cart all the stuff with us, when we were living in New Hampshire for those misbegotten six months.

MR. WEINBERG: And there was nobody — supposedly, [Paul] Cezanne would throw paintings out his window and people in the neighborhood retrieved some of them. Right after he died, they found out he was — you know, might have been a successful artist so they — but there was nobody to stop you.

This blue, I think, is a very — you know, is like a blue that appears a lot in your paintings, this color and this color range: the blue, this incredibly deep red, bluish purple — actually, the color range that I associate with French painting. Does it have a particular meaning to you, these kind of colors?

MR. BROWN: Well, I think each color has its own emotional appeal, don't you? Hard to say more than that for me. I haven't looked at this book for years.

MR. WEINBERG: The beach is a big theme for you. We're looking, here, and each painting is —

MR. BROWN: Oh, well, it's an excuse for nudity.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, it's interesting. But frequently, people — so you say that and I — but often, people are just — and this is something that happens in David Park's painting, too — is that guys are naked but they're just standing around, you know?

MR. BROWN: Now, this one —

MR. WEINBERG: As they are here. This is 1968.

MR. BROWN: Some woman — it's owned by someone, a woman down here. But another woman told me she liked it before I repainted it, meaning the way it is now. So it had an earlier version that, apparently, I fucked up.

MR. WEINBERG: But what was it — [They laugh] — yeah, I love it when people tell you things like that — they liked it better before — like you could do something about that. [They laugh.] Yeah, I love people like that. And what was — what did it look like before? So here, you have a thing where —

MR. BROWN: I think it was still the same arrangement of guys. I think I just over-painted, probably stretched the shadows. I have no idea anymore.

MR. WEINBERG: But so here, you have, like — you have five guys and they seem to be in some kind of a conversation. And then off by himself is another guy —

MR. BROWN: This guy here.

MR. WEINBERG: — with, sort of, his legs spread in an almost exhibitionist way.

MR. BROWN: Does he have a dick?

MR. WEINBERG: He has a dick.

MR. BROWN: Oh, good.

MR. WEINBERG: And he seems to be kind of almost exhibitionist about it. And you wonder, what are they talking about?

MR. BROWN: Well, he probably wants to be admitted to this group, you see.

MR. WEINBERG: Mm-hmm. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: I'm giving you all this horse shit, you understand. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Well, it's curious. Like, what's going on here? I kind of want to know what — you know, what all this means.

MR. BROWN: Does it mean anything to you pictorially?

MR. WEINBERG: Yes, yes.

MR. BROWN: Well —

MR. WEINBERG: I'm more interested in what it means to you, pictorially. What I think doesn't matter.

MR. BROWN: You know the definition of mind over matter?

MR. WEINBERG: No.

MR. BROWN: I don't mind if you don't matter. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. Also, the two little palm trees are charming, too, out in the water.

MR. BROWN: With their little tops shining at the surface of the sea.

MR. WEINBERG: And the sea is a theme. I mean, in the '60s are you spending a lot of time on the water, at the beaches? Did you go to the beaches a lot?

MR. BROWN: Yes, well, in Malibu, we swam every morning in the ocean, and also in Santa Monica. I love the sea.

MR. WEINBERG: So when you moved to San Francisco, you gave up on that?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. I've been at the coast but it's very cold. And no, I've not done any — I used to walk along the beach but that's about all.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, right, right. So that was a big change.

MR. BROWN: That was a big change, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. And also, coming from the Midwest to the sea — I mean, that's the other great attraction of California. I mean, that's what California was all about, was the sea and the water and everything.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Oh, of course we had the Mississippi River, but it wasn't a river one swam in.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. So here's *Two Figures on a Rock*, 1968.

MR. BROWN: I like that painting. That belongs to a —

MR. WEINBERG: Looking at *Two Figures in a Field*. So you're saying that you like *Two Figures on a Rock* from '68?

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. WEINBERG: Which is owned by a collection of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Chi [ph] in San Francisco.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah, he has quite a — they have quite a collection of my stuff.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, okay. And the theme of rock climbing is a big theme in your painting.

MR. BROWN: Well, all you have to do is look in that —

MR. WEINBERG: Mm-hmm, yeah. What does that — kind of, what does that bring to mind? Were you a rock climber?

MR. BROWN: I did a lot of rock climbing when I was a kid in New Hampshire but I don't think that has much to do with painting rock climbers later. I think it was just a nice way to look at boys. [Laughs.]

MR. WEINBERG: And girls. I see girls here. So is part of it finding themes that are sort of believable nudity, I guess I could have called them — like, situations in which people can find themselves naked or nearly naked?

MR. BROWN: Well, I think that they're fairly plausible — not more than that.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, there's an interesting tension between the idea of painting people just in the studio, you know, where it's obvious that you've got a model and they're in the studio and that's a very contained — and in some ways, artificial — setting.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. WEINBERG: And then it seems like at this time, you're trying to figure out ways to take those studio figures and place them out in a landscape.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

MR. WEINBERG: And was that something that you were struggling with or was it a —

MR. BROWN: Yes. As a matter of fact, looking at this —

MR. WEINBERG: *Two Figures in a Field*.

MR. BROWN: — I remember having a hell of a time getting, well, both the figures and particularly the background working at all for me. And that took a long time, that painting. It's quite big. I don't know if it mentions it there.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, it's —

MR. BROWN: For me.

MR. WEINBERG: — by-40 [inches], yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: You know, that's an interesting relationship between you and Paul, is as Paul's work goes on, he gets more and more involved with just working directly from life, right?

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes. And he would set up — actually, none of those still lives were set up. He would buy one flower and paint it this way and then paint it this way.

MR. WEINBERG: Ah, interesting.

MR. BROWN: He would make a whole bouquet out of one flower. [Laughs.] And a lot of things were totally invented.

MR. WEINBERG: I see. But there would be a real object that he would work from, but he'd have to — but the whole setup was invented but — almost collage.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, there was no still life but there were individual objects that he used, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: But you were inventing entire landscapes, usually, or are they also in a funny way —

MR. BROWN: Oh, no, that's totally — I mean, this is reminiscent of the southwest for me, the *mesas.*

MR. WEINBERG: Right. But you're not, like — you might have a postcard of a photograph or would you work from —

MR. BROWN: No, I don't think anything like that.

MR. WEINBERG: Kind of [Marsden] Hartley-like clouds here, too, a little bit.

MR. BROWN: They're hell to paint. See, another horse.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. There's a horse with a boy.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Well, is that a little boy?

MR. WEINBERG: That's a little boy.

MR. BROWN: I had to get it in somewhere. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: There are two naked women on a beach. This is called *Untitled, 1986-'90*, so it's four years. And there's this little boy in the front who looks very real, like he's a real little boy — like he's based on some boy that you knew. But no?

MR. BROWN: I don't know. I don't remember now.

MR. WEINBERG: Sweet. And then this is actually a donkey, I think. We're looking at *Untitled, 1993*.

MR. BROWN: It was probably a failed attempt at painting a horse.

MR. WEINBERG: A horse? Oh, yeah, because it does have male genitals, the horse. Do donkeys have genitals?

MR. BROWN: I never looked. [Laughs.]

MR. WEINBERG: I don't know anything about how you make a donkey or whatever.

MR. BROWN: You know, not that it matters, but it is noon and is this a good place?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, why not?

MR. BROWN: It doesn't matter.

MR. WEINBERG: No, no, it's important to eat because I'm hungry —

[END OF CD 4.]

MR. WEINBERG: All right. This is Jonathan Weinberg interviewing William Theophilus Brown at 1661 Pine Street, San Francisco, California, August 24th, 2010, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number five. It's around 1 o'clock.

MR. BROWN: One-ten [1:10].

MR. WEINBERG: One-ten. And we are in the process of looking at some of Theophilus' or Bill's paintings, and just thinking about it. We're now looking at some pictures of *Untitled* from 1986-'90 and we were just talking about the fact that Bill sometimes work on the same painting over a long period of time. And we were also talking about the theme of the horse and the theme of rock climbing. And do you have any other thoughts about that?

MR. BROWN: The woman used to be a man.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, so this is a painting — *Untitled, 1990* — in which there's a man sitting on some rocks in the water and a standing woman who used to be a man, you said. How did you change that?

MR. BROWN: I just repainted the whole figure. You mean for what reason?

MR. WEINBERG: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I don't really know.

MR. WEINBERG: There's a face of a woman that just appears over and over again. She usually has this dark, long hair, right, and she's in both these paintings. She's standing and she's on the horse. Is that — who is this woman? [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: She doesn't exist.

MR. WEINBERG: She doesn't exist but do you have any associations?

MR. BROWN: Not offhand but I like the shape — this one continuous shape that it makes down to the shoulders.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, that's a good answer. It just occurred to me, were you ever in therapy?

MR. BROWN: Yes, when I was in Los Angeles, I went to a Jungian therapist that I liked a lot, and I would always bring him a dream, dreamt the morning of the appointment. And he wrote a book called *Dream: The Vision of the Night* [Boston, Sigo: 1964]. His name is Max Zeller. And he wrote a paragraph on my dreams, and they're fairly interesting. I remember when I finally left him, he said, "Oh, don't leave me to those Beverly Hills housewives who dream of shopping lists." [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Do you remember any of the dreams?

MR. BROWN: Yes, one of the first ones that he — I have to sing an important part in the opera of [Richard] Strauss, which I had never seen, *Die Frau ohne Schatten — Woman without a Shadow*. But just before I go onstage, I don't remember a note. So I think that if I see the score, it will all come back to me in a flash, or at least, that's my hope.

So I ask them for the score and they bring me *Porgy and Bess*. [They laugh.] Then a man who is singing the opera tells me that his last note is just before my first note, which is a major third higher than his note. And his last note is a G and I figure out, in my dream, B natural. [They laugh.] And I also get the — it goes on from there, but it's quite a funny dream.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, keep going.

MR. BROWN: I'd have to get out the book.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, and you actually kept a book of your dreams?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, well, I mean, this is the book that he wrote about —

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, so he actually wrote about the dreams that you told him?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah, this would be all — he used several dreams.

MR. WEINBERG: I see. Oh, okay.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, and he made me feel much easier about myself and my homosexuality and all that sort of thing.

MR. WEINBERG: Is that why you went to him?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, I think it was still a slight problem for me. Maybe it never goes away, I don't know.

MR. WEINBERG: And did you go to a Jungian because you believed in ideas about archetypes and —

MR. BROWN: I guess I didn't believe in Freudians. I had a friend, a poet named Muriel Rukeyser, who went to a Freudian. And she said in the first meeting, "I dreamed of a church steeple." And he said, "Ah, a phallus." And she went again and she said, "I dreamed of a phallus." [They laugh.] That was their last meeting. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: And so back to archetypes and [Carl] Jung, did you read Jung?

MR. BROWN: I once read most of his autobiography and was very impressed with him. He must have been an extraordinary man. And it ends with some sort of paragraph in which he says, "I think I know nothing at all about anything."

MR. WEINBERG: But there was no connection, or you didn't feel any connection between ideas Jung was dealing with and the kind of painting you were doing? It didn't influence — or did it influence your painting to any degree?

MR. BROWN: No, and the dreams had very little to do with painting, actually.

MR. WEINBERG: And was making art in any way part of the psychoanalytic or the therapeutic process? Did he have you make drawings?

MR. BROWN: No, but he bought one when I left him.

MR. WEINBERG: That's nice.

MR. BROWN: Very flattering.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: More horses.

MR. WEINBERG: More horses. We're looking at *Untitled, 1990*. I mean, that's actually an interesting question: Why are so many of your paintings untitled?

MR. BROWN: Oh, I think they're limiting — titles.

MR. WEINBERG: And so you felt — because I know often, dealers don't like naming paintings Untitled. They prefer titles. So you feel like you don't want to —

MR. BROWN: There was a period when I first started painting of very elaborate, meaningless-to-me titles, like assumptions or something like that. And I thought, to hell with all of that. So I just — it was just a piece of work that — I really don't have any titles for them. That's a fairly small painting that belonged to Alice Adams.

MR. WEINBERG: And it has an elephant in it. Now, Alice Adams — tell us about that. When did you meet her? I know that she's one of your friends.

MR. BROWN: It's strange, I met her through a woman named Nell Sinton, who was older than I. And Paul and I would be there for dinner. She was quite rich and she was a pretty good artist and had a great sense of humor. And one day, the other dinner guests were Alice and her then-boyfriend. I don't think they were married.

And slowly, we got to know each other quite well, and after Nell's death, I used to have lunch with Alice on a fairly regular basis. And then one day, she said she was going to have lunch with Diane Johnson, and I said, "Who's that?" And she said, "Well, she's a writer and she writes for the *New York Review of Books*," and so forth. And then at some point, we discovered that both Diane and I were born in Moline, Illinois.

And of course, we've become very close friends and we still see each other, Alice being dead, of course. So Paul and I saw a great deal of Alice and she had quite a few paintings of mine, at one point. And this is her gay son who owns this picture. This is fairly small.

MR. WEINBERG: And this has an elephant in it, as well.

MR. BROWN: Oh, well, you know, I had — it's just another object to me.

MR. WEINBERG: One of the ways of sort of looking at these pictures is that they're —

MR. BROWN: I hardly remember that one.

MR. WEINBERG: — is that they are kind of edenic — you know, they're kind of pastoral — as a way to think about them. Do you think about them that way? Do you think of them as pastorals?

MR. BROWN: Well, I love the country.

MR. WEINBERG: But are they kind of pre-civilization, post-civilization?

MR. BROWN: Or just another world.

MR. WEINBERG: That's a strange one — *Bird Chasing Man*. This one has a title.

MR. BROWN: I didn't — that's not mine. Or is that your title?

MR. WEINBERG: It's what it says: *Bird Chasing Man*, 1980.

MR. BROWN: I never noticed it. I certainly didn't name it.

MR. WEINBERG: See, that's the problem with giving paintings *Untitled*. People come along and title them if you don't give them titles.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: In any case, there's a bird chasing a man. What's going on there?

MR. BROWN: Well, it's a bird and a man and they just happen to be there together. Exactly, there's no story in it at all. I probably was — had other things going on back here and I suddenly just stuck in a bird.

MR. WEINBERG: And there's also this red sun —

MR. BROWN: Behind his head.

MR. WEINBERG: — behind his head. This one has a kind of quality that almost reminds me of your later abstractions.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Well, this is sort of maybe one of Paul and my surreal paintings, or semi-surreal.

MR. WEINBERG: There's another painting here — *Untitled, 1991* — of a kind of group, almost like it's a dinner party. But they're all naked in front of those water lilies.

MR. BROWN: Well, it could be another party.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. [Laughs.] But they're outside —

MR. BROWN: Naked bunch.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, one woman is sitting on a tree stump.

MR. BROWN: Tree stump in the reds, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: No, I just mean, sort of, one of them has her arms crossed. They're sort of talking, doesn't it seem?

MR. BROWN: I like the way they're all hunched up on one side.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, they are not in a particularly pastoral —

MR. BROWN: No, they're from the city.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, but they're in a kind of Monet-like —

MR. BROWN: This was a huge painting and it is very —

MR. WEINBERG: Which one?

MR. BROWN: This one.

MR. WEINBERG: *Nudes on a* —

MR. BROWN: And it's very, very poorly reproduced. I like that painting as one of my best, and you would never know it. This is a much brighter color and it's a lousy reproduction.

MR. WEINBERG: Now, why do you think it's one of your best?

MR. BROWN: If you see it, maybe you would understand. I just think it's well-composed and painted. It pleases me in a way that very few of them do.

MR. WEINBERG: And when a painting doesn't please you, why doesn't it? Let's try to get at that through a different way. What tends to bother you when a picture doesn't please you?

MR. BROWN: Either I destroy it or I repaint it at some point. What displeases me greatly is the inaccuracy of the reproduction.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. Here's quite a later one: *Untitled, 1997*.

MR. BROWN: Oh, that was in a show in New York.

MR. WEINBERG: It's a nice painting. It's a square format, which is somewhat unusual for you, isn't it?

MR. BROWN: Yes, very. Often, private collection means I don't know where in the hell it is. Does it say? Oh, do this at your pace. I'm not —

MR. WEINBERG: No, no — oh, this is one of my favorites: *Open Door, 1980*. What's happening there? And that's the same woman.

MR. BROWN: With her hair, yes. What is happening?

MR. WEINBERG: This one seems particularly a Matisse-like painting.

MR. BROWN: The question is, is he putting on his shirt or taking it off?

MR. WEINBERG: And it reminds — it's Matisse-like colors but it's almost like a Balthus-like situation. And the painting *Encounter, 1992* —

MR. BROWN: This belongs to — I don't know if you know the Armstrongs and the Hatfields?

MR. WEINBERG: No.

MR. BROWN: It's a pretty big painting.

MR. WEINBERG: It's a beauty. I know that you had an encounter with Balthus [Balthazar Klossowski de Rola], as well, right?

MR. BROWN: I spent an afternoon once with him, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: And do you like his work?

MR. BROWN: Very, very much, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: This is beautiful because the open door — the way the door is right in the middle — and it's something like a studio situation.

MR. BROWN: I have no idea of the origin or where these people came from. I remember working very hard on this one.

MR. WEINBERG: And when you say — what were you working on when you were working very hard on it?

MR. BROWN: Well, trying to get — that was an elaborate floor for me — trying to get the perspective right here

and trying to get some interaction between the two figures.

MR. WEINBERG: And would something like this, in these paintings — would they have begun with a model modeling these figures?

MR. BROWN: Yes but they changed greatly without a model, including their gestures. They were not related, really, at first. Not that they are now, but they seem to be connected with an arm movement.

MR. WEINBERG: And it's interesting because this one is less like a studio situation but the drawings on the wall make it seem like a studio — having something to do with an art studio — while this one, *Encounter*, has none.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, all that's an invented studio.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. Do you think of this character as being something like a self-portrait, in some ways?

MR. BROWN: No. This one?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. Well, it's similar — the same guy, really.

MR. BROWN: No, I haven't — I've done a few self-portraits but they're drawings. I like the hand stuck in that one.

MR. WEINBERG: This is *Untitled, 1992*, and there's a man with a hand who actually looks a little bit like you. And there's a woman and a man with towels. They have these towels.

MR. BROWN: Beach towels.

MR. WEINBERG: Beach towels. And the hand seems like he's saying stop, right?

MR. BROWN: I'm sorry?

MR. WEINBERG: His hand gesture is almost a gesture of saying — of stop.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. Don't go much further.

MR. WEINBERG: And then here, we have *Race* from 1991.

MR. BROWN: I think that's funny — this man has pants on and this one doesn't.

MR. WEINBERG: And there's a little child back there.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. WEINBERG: And why does one have pants on and one doesn't?

MR. BROWN: That's a good question that I can't answer. [Laughs.]

MR. WEINBERG: Or you won't.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I would if I could.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. *Figures by a River, 2006*, a nude.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I've changed that and I still have it.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, that's interesting. So it's been reproduced but it wasn't finished, or you decided —

MR. BROWN: No, I decided to change it quite a bit.

MR. WEINBERG: Wow, that's unusual to let a painting be reproduced and sign it and just decide —

MR. BROWN: It's not unusual. I do it quite a bit.

MR. WEINBERG: *Nudes on a Rock, 2006*. That's a beauty. Or was it a beauty? Or is it still a beauty like that — [Laughs] — or have you changed it?

MR. BROWN: Does it say where it is?

MR. WEINBERG: Collection of the artist. Both of them are in your collection.

MR. BROWN: It might be in the storage. I have a huge amount of paintings in storage.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, this is a whole new theme — urban and industrial landscapes.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes, that began in the late ’80s. And I went around to all the industrial areas in both San Francisco and Alameda and the other side and drew sketches on the site. Is that a sketch? And then took photographs, too, for information and went home and painted the pictures in my studio.

MR. WEINBERG: And that was a big departure for you. I mean, you went from doing this pastoral —

MR. BROWN: Yeah, and no figures in them.

MR. WEINBERG: And no figures. What was that about?

MR. BROWN: Oh, I probably — I think figures always draw the eye in and I didn’t want — I wanted the picture to be about the buildings, not about people. And I thought the buildings were so much more beautiful than the houses people built, and I still believe that. I think that some of these buildings built for other purposes — maybe the function comes through as the beauty, I don’t know.

MR. WEINBERG: Was there something about these particular areas that — it seems like such a dramatic change of theme.

MR. BROWN: It was.

MR. WEINBERG: Did you feel like things weren’t working in your work at that point or you needed a whole new —

MR. BROWN: See, that’s a question I can’t answer.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay. And what was the response to the work? Did you feel like it was —

MR. BROWN: I think it was fairly well-received and most of them were sold. That was —

[Cross talk.]

MR. BROWN: That’s a dockyard, yeah. That belongs to Diane Johnson, who I was telling you about.

MR. WEINBERG: That’s a tiny little painting.

MR. BROWN: That lives in Paris. Now, this is —

MR. WEINBERG: That’s a beauty — *Pedestrian Crossing*. But that’s 1966.

MR. BROWN: Yes, Paul and I — this is the Pacific Coast Highway, and we would cross this bridge, come down, and this was our way to our morning swim every morning. You don’t see where the stairs land and the land behind this sand hill here.

MR. WEINBERG: So that’s in Malibu, or where is that?

MR. BROWN: It’s in Santa Monica.

MR. WEINBERG: And this is in the Hirshhorn [Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.].

MR. BROWN: Hirshhorn? Oh, well, that’s nice. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: And now we’re back up to 1985, *Underpass Oakland*.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, I used to go swimming at the Oakland Y — nude swimming, by the way — and I would pass this. And so I just stopped and drew it.

MR. WEINBERG: Here’s one from 1983, *Untitled*, and I see that it’s owned by Béguin — Mr. and Mrs. Jean Béguin, it says.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah, I guess they do have every one.

MR. WEINBERG: Was he showing these works then?

MR. BROWN: No, he’d quit, by then, Béguin. He wasn’t selling much.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, but he bought one of your paintings. That’s a beauty, here — *Untitled*, ’87-’88. What are

these structures, these sort of —

MR. BROWN: They're grain elevators.

MR. WEINBERG: They are grain elevators, okay. Here's one: *Untitled, 1989*.

MR. BROWN: That belongs to my gay masseur and his boyfriend.

MR. WEINBERG: Goodness. And then here's one from — a huge one, 54-by-76 [inches]. It says collection of the artist.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I'm so happy to own it. [They laugh.] There are a lot of them, aren't there?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, they're beautiful. They have a quality that also reminds me of Italian painting.

MR. BROWN: Well, I was a great fan of Decarrico and I think some of that comes out in these.

MR. WEINBERG: There's a dog, it appears, here, in the sense — or that's a figure. *Untitled, '88* — it's in a private collection — a little dog in front of a big oil tank.

MR. BROWN: This is collection of the artist.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: I like that one.

MR. WEINBERG: This is *Untitled, 1989*. What do you like about this one?

MR. BROWN: Everything. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: I think, also, of Charles Sheeler in some of these themes. Was he —

MR. BROWN: Yes, that's inevitable.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. Do you like those photographs or the paintings, or —

MR. BROWN: Oh, I'm not — I don't think much about him but I think he'd like these kind of shapes a lot. I don't think he was an influence. He may have been.

MR. WEINBERG: It might be more the photographs than the paintings. Okay, here's a great portrait of —

MR. BROWN: Paul.

MR. WEINBERG: — Paul.

MR. BROWN: And this is a self-portrait of me.

MR. WEINBERG: From 1964.

MR. BROWN: Oh, those I drew from photographs and they're in the Smithsonian, I think.

MR. WEINBERG: Yes. You know, I was trying to figure that out — why would you suddenly do pictures of Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac in —

MR. BROWN: I was a fan of Kerouac's; Ginsberg, no. I really didn't read him. I'm not against him. And why I drew him, I have no idea, at this point.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, it's interesting that Ginsberg was gay and Kerouac was, I guess, bisexual. Were you aware of that then?

MR. BROWN: I think I was, yeah. Here's our painting class. That's Mark Adams and Beth Van Hoesen and Gordon Cook and Wayne and me.

MR. WEINBERG: And here's a painting from '82.

MR. BROWN: Oh, that's Mark and Beth and me.

MR. WEINBERG: And those were good times?

MR. BROWN: They were wonderful. I loved that girl.

MR. WEINBERG: And you were saying before to me that you wouldn't talk — weren't allowed to talk, right?

MR. BROWN: That I wouldn't —

MR. WEINBERG: That you weren't allowed to talk when you worked from a model, you were saying.

MR. BROWN: Oh, no, not in this class.

MR. WEINBERG: So it was very intense.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: And how long would it go for?

MR. BROWN: There were long poses. There would be one pose for the whole three hours with, of course, the usual breaks. And we had a rather long coffee break, which was fun.

MR. WEINBERG: And mostly working from male models, or —

MR. BROWN: Oh, no. Probably the reverse, but they did toss in — Mark had an early career with a guy named Minor White who was a fairly well-known photographer. And then he married Beth, so he was bisexual.

MR. WEINBERG: When you said early career you mean he had an affair with Minor White?

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, okay. You should clarify — [Laughs] — I don't know what you mean by career.

MR. BROWN: [Cross talk] — an affair with Major White. [Laughs.]

MR. WEINBERG: You said affair or career? I thought you said career. You meant affair.

MR. BROWN: Affair.

MR. WEINBERG: Affair.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, that's interesting. Yes, I was thinking — and is he still alive?

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay.

MR. BROWN: She's still alive and Gordon's dead. And of course, these two are supposedly living.

MR. WEINBERG: [Laughs.] I won't pursue that — supposedly living. This is *Jamie and David* from 1999. You were talking to us before, off the record, about Jamie — who he is and —

MR. BROWN: Oh, Jamie was somebody that went — he was a sailor.

MR. WEINBERG: And his last name?

MR. BROWN: Yates — Y-A-T-E-S. And he saw a show at MOMA of paintings of Paul's. Paul had a retrospective there. And he was so fascinated that he wrote to Paul, and Paul answered. And when he got out of the Navy, he settled in San Francisco and Paul sort of took him under his wing.

And he lived with us for a while, and then I didn't pay much attention to him. And then one day, I remember instantly, when I was in the kitchen, I looked up and — gee, he's a beautiful boy. And so he finally ended up living in my studio for a long, long time. He's in Seattle now but we still write letters to each other. He lived with Don Bachardy for a while, too, but he's very bright and charming. But everything he does, he messes up.

MR. WEINBERG: And he's not an artist, is he?

MR. BROWN: He could be — a poet, lots of things. But I still see him — Don has given up totally on him.

MR. WEINBERG: And who's David here?

MR. BROWN: David Murdoch. He's married. He was a masseur, and we had a thing going and his wife was in the next room and knew about it and didn't care. And about six months ago — they live in Pennsylvania — he came out here and he stayed with me on a rollaway bed here, in this room, and we resumed our old activities. It was lovely. He's still very beautiful. That was very exciting.

MR. WEINBERG: And so here's a painting of Kevin Kierney [sp], 1976.

MR. BROWN: Well, when I was teaching at Davis the last time I had a teaching assistant, a girl — an English girl — and she, one day, introduced me to her boyfriend, who was Kevin, who was in the graduate school, the art department. And they moved to Berkeley about when we did and they had no money.

They were living in, I think, a railroad car or something. And we hired them to paint our house that we'd just bought. And so a friendship developed. He's a pretty good painter. He stopped it long ago. He got married to another girl and went into the construction business and lives well.

MR. WEINBERG: And I noticed that there's a saw and he's sort of set up as if he were an architect in this.

MR. BROWN: This was done in the basement of our house on Jersey Street.

MR. WEINBERG: It makes him look like he has something to do with construction.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, that's pretty accurate of the room. That's in the Met, you saw.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. This is a portrait of D.K., 1964. Who's D.K.?

MR. BROWN: [Pause.] I don't know.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh. [They laugh.] This is *Man in a Red Chair* from '62.

MR. BROWN: That's been reproduced a lot.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, anything to say about that? No.

MR. BROWN: Oh, that was one of Paul's students.

MR. WEINBERG: This is Peter — how do you pronounce that?

MR. BROWN: Liashkov [ph].

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, '69.

MR. BROWN: He was a mad Russian, just as he looks there, and a pretty good painter. And this is Hilde Heidt, who — you've probably never heard of Horace Heidt, who had a band in California, in Los Angeles, and Hilde was the daughter. She was a pupil of Paul when he was teaching in Los Angeles.

And in the same class was a guy named Bill Inhoff [sp]. And they've been together since, although I don't think they got married. And she inherited a lot of money from her dad and they have three houses: one in Mendocino, one in Los Angeles and one near the — I don't know — Yellowstone.

MR. WEINBERG: This one is great but it also has a kind of formality that you don't normally see in your portraits. And it almost has a kind of German look to it, as well. I love the pattern of the dress.

MR. BROWN: She made that dress. We're still very good friends.

MR. WEINBERG: I think this is a very — well, I guess it reminds me of [Max] Beckmann a little bit.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah. I like Beckmann, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Very successful.

MR. BROWN: I had dinner once with him at Mary Callery's.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, what was that like?

MR. BROWN: It was some hell. I went, I got there and Mary said, "See what Mr. Beckmann wants to drink." And he said some ginger ale. And nobody knew where ginger ale was in that house, and finally Mary found a can of it or something and brought it to him and he said, "You don't think I'd drink that stuff, do you?" [They laugh.] That was my opening.

MR. WEINBERG: And that's all you remember of him?

MR. BROWN: Well, it's enough to give you the idea.

MR. WEINBERG: Buck McCreery [sp].

MR. BROWN: Oh, he was a beautiful boy.

MR. WEINBERG: That's a nice portrait. And then Michael McDowell [sp].

MR. BROWN: That's the guy — we met him in Santa Barbara and he was even more beautiful than he looks there. And once, we took a trip to New York together, staying in the same rooms, but we never — he told me later that one night when I was asleep, he came over to me with a hard-on — [Laughs] — and had I been awake — but we never had sex. And he's basically a hetero.

MR. WEINBERG: Interesting skull there. Is that something —

MR. BROWN: Oh, that's a horse skull somebody gave me, and I think in the kitchen, there's a monotype I made of it. Did you see that?

MR. WEINBERG: No, I'll look at that.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, I made many monotypes of it.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, it's beautiful. Let's see, this is a picture where the geometry is very, very powerful — you know, the grid and the way everything lines up in the background, right angles.

MR. BROWN: I seem to be very conscious of that. These are tiny. They're both pretty good likenesses of Paul.

MR. WEINBERG: He seems pleased to pose for you. Was he or was he impatient?

MR. BROWN: I doubt it. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Now, why do you say that? These are two from 1999.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I think — have you posed for anyone?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. Nick loves posing. He does. I draw him all the time.

MR. BROWN: I find it difficult to do.

MR. WEINBERG: And he did, also?

MR. BROWN: I didn't ask him.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, okay. Oh, you mean but he was posing. He wasn't just, like, doing something else and you were painting him.

MR. BROWN: No, those are poses, yeah. But small paintings. He wasn't there for a long time.

MR. WEINBERG: They were fast?

MR. BROWN: I probably worked on them after he finished posing. You know who that is?

MR. WEINBERG: That's Evie Lincoln. That's beautiful. And she looks very much like this mysterious woman who's in a lot of your paintings. She's from 1993 so she had already —

MR. BROWN: She does, indeed — that hair shape. And that was her wonderful cat, Buster.

MR. WEINBERG: Wonderful yellow chair.

MR. BROWN: That's my masseur.

MR. WEINBERG: Robert Schneider from 1998. Is he still your masseur?

MR. BROWN: Sorry?

MR. WEINBERG: Is he still your masseur?

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. WEINBERG: You seem very loyal to people once you make friends with them.

MR. BROWN: Well, how could you not stay loyal with a beautiful man like that? He's a very sweet guy.

MR. WEINBERG: *Woman in a Yellow Dress, 1990*.

MR. BROWN: No memory of it.

MR. WEINBERG: Was she really wearing a yellow dress?

MR. BROWN: Oh, if you say so. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Here's *Woman Red and Blue*.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I think a lot of that's invented.

MR. WEINBERG: Now, this is one of my favorites, this *Untitled, 1995*, which has this —

MR. BROWN: The Campbells have that.

MR. WEINBERG: That combination of the blue and the red that I particularly associate with your work.

MR. BROWN: Oh, really? Yeah, with a little yellow peeking through.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, I think this is a Matisse blue. I don't know what you think of it as. What would you describe that blue as?

MR. BROWN: Blue.

MR. WEINBERG: Blue. [They laugh.]

MR. : The abstractions are similar to that — your new abstractions.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, I would say that. I mean, there's a way that — here, you have one from 1995, which was before you were doing abstractions, but a lot of the abstractions look to me like that —

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah, I think I've always been conscious of structure. This is an interesting self-portrait. Somebody said, well, why is this halo around your head? Well, it's because the whole background was black at one point and I decided it needed to be changed, so I heaped the green over. And at one point, instead of going into — while I was still doing it — I just made a sweep with my brush of the semi-circle and then I thought, "That isn't bad. I think I'll leave it."

MR. WEINBERG: So we're looking — that's *Self-Portrait, 1998*, which is in the collection of Penny and Dewey Bunnell, Land O'Lakes, Wisconsin.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I don't know if you've ever heard of the band called *America*?

MR. WEINBERG: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROWN: He's the guy. He's a sweetheart. There was this private dealer who was a scoundrel. And one day, he called me and said, "I have this handsome guy here who wants you to do his portrait. And I've sent him over to your house, and I said it would be $175 and you can send me my half in the mail." I was so fucking mad at him.

And this sweet guy arrives and I said, "Before we do anything, we have to talk about the price." And he said, yeah, I realize it's not very much money. I said, no, not at all. I said, we'll go in there. I'll do two drawings in 20 or 30 minutes, of you. If I like one and if you like one, the same one, it's yours for free. He was a little surprised but we did that, and that's what happened.

And the dealer was furious and went downtown and complained to other dealers. And they all said, you got exactly what you deserved. [They laugh.] One of them was a guy named Herbert Hoover, who was a dealer in town. I don't know — he had some relation to the president. But he and a tough cookie, Adrian Fish — do you know her?

MR. WEINBERG: No.

MR. BROWN: She has the best art bookstore in town. Told me this joke: This guy comes up to them while they're at a cocktail party and says, "Everybody thinks I'm gay but I'm really not." And Herbert Hoover said, "Well, I won't tell anybody your dirty little secret." [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: That's funny. So one of the things that occurred to me when I was at the Bechtel opening for the —

MR. BROWN: At MOMA?

MR. WEINBERG: No, at SF MOMA — is how small the San Francisco art world seems. Is that true?

MR. BROWN: Well, since I'm not even in it anymore, I really don't know. It seems to me there are a lot of people painting but I don't pay much attention.

MR. WEINBERG: When you were — if that were true — and I mean, I'm not going to disprove that one way or the other — but when you felt like you were in it, when you —

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah, in the good old days with Dick and Elmer and —

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, it seems like it was a small —

MR. BROWN: That was a small community and we all would keep seeing each other and in a sense, it was small, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: But even in the '70s and '80s, it seemed small. Like, everybody seems to know everybody in the — there seems to be, like, a handful of good galleries and everybody seems to know everybody in them.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, it's a small town — less than a million.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. Has that ever been a problem for you, since, that, you know, you weren't — or was that a good thing, that it was a small town?

MR. BROWN: I think it's a good thing.

MR. WEINBERG: It's also an art world that is particularly associated with figuration — you know, not just Bay Area but —

MR. BROWN: That's funny because, of course, Los Angeles was considered a far more important place while we were living down there. But now it's sort of faded. I think in the East, San Francisco is more recognized. But I don't know. Maybe that's not true.

MR. WEINBERG: I'm not supposed to say. [Laughs.] That's how it feels when you ask a question and the person says —

[Cross talk.]

MR. WEINBERG: I have no comment on that. [They laugh.] So all right, let's move on. Oh, here we have the naked self-portrait that we were just talking about — 1998. Well, you mentioned that you did — to me, off record — that MacDowell, when you were — was that the first time you did a naked self-portrait?

MR. BROWN: Oh, no.

MR. WEINBERG: So when was the first one?

MR. BROWN: What date is this?

MR. WEINBERG: This one's very late — 1998.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I think I've done them since I was a kid — at least, in my 20s.

MR. WEINBERG: And did you realize at the time that it was a weird thing to do — or unusual? I shouldn't say weird but unusual.

MR. BROWN: No, because I thought of Picasso. He drew all these erotic things in his old age, even.

MR. WEINBERG: That's true.

MR. BROWN: No big deal. It was — when I painted this self-portrait, I did spend a great deal of time on the dick

so it wouldn't look too large or too small.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, dicks — penises are funny that way. You have to make them — I've said that they're the ear of the body.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, right. [Laughs.]

MR. WEINBERG: Because ears, you have to put them in but you don't want people looking at them too much. And penises are like that. You know, you have to put them in but you don't want people just looking at the penis. They look at them anyway.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, you look at them anyway.

MR. WEINBERG: Why do you think that is? Why do you think that Americans have so much trouble with penises?

MR. BROWN: I think it's our religion, probably, mostly — not that I have any but religion is creepy. It will try to make you feel that sex is evil instead of good.

MR. WEINBERG: Did you notice that when people come to see your work sometimes, or had come to see your work, and there were a lot of male nudes, they'd get uncomfortable?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, when I had this show — the catalog, I'm going to try to get you — a lot of — I heard indirectly that a lot of people were shocked. I thought, oh my god, you know. At this age, they all have children. What in the hell? This is hypocritical.

MR. WEINBERG: So in 2010, people are still uncomfortable with it?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, I think a lot of people are. And these are fairly sophisticated people. It fascinates me, too. I mean, why in the hell — but of course, I think women are jealous, don't you? [They laugh.] And I don't know a man whose best friend isn't his dick. [Laughs.]

MR. WEINBERG: So this is *Self-Portrait, 1997*. One thing I'll say is you don't flatter yourself. In this one, you have a big red nose.

MR. BROWN: Oh, you don't think so?

MR. WEINBERG: That you have a big red nose in real life or —

MR. BROWN: No, that I'm not flattering myself.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, that doesn't seem like a very flattering image of yourself.

MR. BROWN: Oh, good.

MR. WEINBERG: It's a good painting but I don't think it's, you know — okay, now we're in the —

MR. BROWN: Oh, the collage period.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, we still have two more self-portraits but I don't know if you have anything to say about these.

MR. BROWN: Well, I did a whole bunch of them at one time. And I rather like that one.

MR. WEINBERG: That's great. And it's nice that these collectors own self-portraits of you.

MR. BROWN: Collection of Paul Wonner. I have that in my studio, actually.

MR. WEINBERG: Nice. So here we go —

MR. BROWN: This is funny because I did it in 1972.

MR. WEINBERG: So that's the very first one, was done in 1972. So now we're looking at abstraction, and it's from these cutouts.

MR. BROWN: This is just a drawing cut up and pasted down.

MR. WEINBERG: Could you talk a little bit about how you make these abstractions?

MR. BROWN: Not this one.

MR. WEINBERG: That's from very early but the later —

MR. BROWN: But these —

MR. WEINBERG: — which first started in and around 2001, you said.

MR. BROWN: These are the very early ones.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, so we're looking at the two *Untitled*, 2001, page 113.

MR. BROWN: I think I told you that I peeled off a hunk, which I showed you this morning, of paint and put it aside because I thought it was such a beautiful shape.

MR. WEINBERG: So you peeled it off from what?

MR. BROWN: A peel-off palette. And I just put it in a drawer and one day, when I was stuck with my painting, I got it out and made my first little collage. And then, that was fascinating to me so I — these are all very, very early. I've got that one on the back wall and there are some in the entrance hall.

MR. WEINBERG: Two thousand and one [2001], really, was when it started.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, that was the first year I did them.

MR. WEINBERG: And was that a big break for you, to suddenly do pictures where there wasn't a figure or —

MR. BROWN: Well, it was and it was a new kind of pleasure for me. At the beginning it was mostly all fun. I worked at them but it was a very new challenge and I loved doing them.

MR. WEINBERG: And what was the response of the — did you have a dealer at that point?

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes, I've had a dealer since the football paintings came out, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: And what did they suddenly think? So you were doing non-figurative pictures.

MR. BROWN: Didn't seem to bother them, and when I had a show, Kenneth Baker, the reviewer here, hated my figurative painting but he gave me a very, very good show on my collage. More of a comment on him than me, I think, but on the other hand, it was nice because — I don't even remember that one. Does it belong to someone? Doesn't matter.

MR. WEINBERG: Here's one that's very red from 2001.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, you see, these are very early. Well, you saw later ones.

MR. WEINBERG: So you take the paint, you peel it off and then you — how do you produce the — at a certain point, you start to make them consciously? Because initially, they were leftovers from other pictures, right?

MR. BROWN: They were never leftovers from other pictures. They were —

MR. WEINBERG: I mean, they were the remnant of —

MR. BROWN: I would paint three or four sheets and — smear paint on them — and then cut the pieces out as I thought they might be useful, and then pasted them together. And I often go back and pull off of a piece and —

MR. WEINBERG: But the very first one was just a leftover from — you had painted something else, right?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: But then you just self-consciously decided to make them for themselves.

MR. BROWN: Yes, exactly, yeah. It took a long while for me to make my first one because I just put that shape in a drawer and it was maybe a couple of months later that I did something about it.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, so then you pull them off the sheets and then you cut them up?

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm.

MR. WEINBERG: And then you glue them onto a piece of cardboard or metal or —

MR. BROWN: That's right. Yes, exactly.

MR. WEINBERG: And then would you paint back into them?

MR. BROWN: Sometimes. I did yesterday on one I showed you. Yeah, anything goes.

MR. WEINBERG: And when you apply the paint to the palette, you use layers of paint and scrape it or —

MR. BROWN: Yes, I have a — what are they called — plastic straight edge. What would you call these things?

MR. : A ruler or —

MR. BROWN: Well, sort of what you might spread cement and smooth it out with, with that thing.

MR. WEINBERG: Some kind of a palette knife, you mean.

MR. BROWN: No, it's a — oh, god.

MR. WEINBERG: A trowel?

MR. BROWN: Something like that, only it's a flat surface, yeah. Yeah. There's a word for it but I don't know what it is.

MR. WEINBERG: And then you said you use combs, like afro combs or —

MR. BROWN: Well, this girl that I — woman, I'd see her — had a son with very unruly hair and he had a very thick, thick widely spaced, thick comb. And I said, I need this more than he does. And she said, here. And so that's how I began. And then I bought — this would be an ordinary comb, this width. I don't know if there are any with the one she gave me here or not. Now, that's the one I painted yesterday. I painted this orange on this.

MR. WEINBERG: So we're looking at page 117, *Untitled, 2002*, which no longer looks like this, as of yesterday.

MR. BROWN: I think it looks better. You saw it this morning, actually.

MR. WEINBERG: I'm sure it looks better but it's still disconcerting, as an art historian, to know that the pictures in this book may not be like this anymore. [They laugh.] But we're trying to set the record for the Archives of American Art.

MR. BROWN: I think you may have seen that one this morning.

MR. WEINBERG: I think we did. This is *Untitled, 2003*.

MR. BROWN: That is maybe one of the three in the triptych, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: I think so — *Untitled, 2004*. These are larger.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. I don't even remember that. That would be the original comb.

MR. WEINBERG: One of the effects you get — it's much more sophisticated of an effect but I don't know if you've ever seen it before — but they make these weird things for children to almost — it creates an effect like finger painting, where it's a kind of black sheet and it's covered with plastic. And you shake it or something and then you can draw on it and the colors come through in this way. And then when you're done, you shake it again and then it can become — and then you can start all over again. And it's got an oily color. Have you ever seen that?

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. WEINBERG: No? [Laughs.] We should get you one and send it to you. I think you'd have fun just seeing it. Because you're getting an effect that's something like that but making it permanent and much more beautiful. But like, for example, if I didn't know you and I had to write something about the work, I would say, oh, well, obviously —

MR. BROWN: I knew about that.

MR. WEINBERG: You knew about that or used that when you were a child or something.

MR. BROWN: I don't even remember that one, or hardly this one.

MR. WEINBERG: I mean, one of the things that's interesting, too, is you get a very oily effect, although it's all

acrylic and plastic. They look very oil-painted.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, in a funny way, they do. See, this would obviously be pasted down over there and that black stripe.

MR. WEINBERG: This is *Untitled, 2006*, on page 121. And there, you get the strong blue-red.

MR. BROWN: I love this turquoise color.

MR. WEINBERG: The turquoise color is also a Theophilus Brown color —

MR. BROWN: It's right out of the jar.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, often, acrylic — the best colors — you want the — the intensity of the color in acrylic is very powerful.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, which I couldn't get — if you use a brush, you lose that intensity. Oh, that's a portrait of André Previn that we did at his house.

MR. WEINBERG: So we're looking at drawings now. And you were friends with André Previn?

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah — very, very good. He was studying a manuscript on his piano.

MR. WEINBERG: And was this the time when he was the conductor for *My Fair Lady*, or how was it — was it through Cecil Beaton? Because I know that he —

MR. BROWN: I don't know — he was living with a very talented wife named Dory. I think it was his second wife. He had many wives.

MR. WEINBERG: He was married to —

MR. : Mia Farrow.

MR. WEINBERG: Mia Farrow and then he was married to the songwriter —

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah, and then he was also married to one of the great German violinists. She left him.

MR. WEINBERG: And he started out, of course, as a musical conductor and then he became a great classical conductor.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Oh, he was — by age 21, he was the chief director at MGM [Metro Goldwyn Mayer] or wherever the hell it was, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, unusual history, though, to start sort of popular —

MR. BROWN: He was born in Berlin. Yeah, I remember going with —

MR. WEINBERG: So you met him through — who did you say you met him through?

MR. BROWN: I think he bought a painting. And then we were invited, Paul and I, to many parties. And sometimes there were only just the two of us, or whatever. He commissioned me to do a portrait of his wife, Dory. I don't know what ever happened to it. He also commissioned Nate to do one, which I think was quite successful. And I remember —

MR. WEINBERG: Just for the record, Nate —

MR. BROWN: Nate Oliveira. Yeah, I should have — anyway, Nate and Paul and I were sitting there and there was a photographer there who was taking pictures of André and Nate and Paul but not of me. And I said, "Why don't you take any pictures of me?" And he said, "Because you don't look like an artist." [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: And what were you wearing at that moment?

MR. BROWN: I don't know.

MR. WEINBERG: Tiny jacket or something? You were dressed in a clown suit. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: I think I was dressed like they were. Anyway —

MR. WEINBERG: That's a funny story.

MR. BROWN: And I remember, I said, "What are you studying the score of?" And he said, "Oh, it happens to be an overture by [Felix] Mendelssohn." And I said, "Is it the *Hebrides Overture*? Da-da-da-dee-dee-da." And he said, "Oh my god, you know it!" [They laugh] I was very proud of myself. Now, these are drawings — this is the Ludendorff Bridge that was bombed about two days after we crossed it — the only bridge across the Rhine that the Germans left in the Second World War.

MR. WEINBERG: So we're looking at early drawing from when you were in the Army.

MR. BROWN: I kept notebooks in the Army. Doesn't it say the Ludendorff Bridge was bombed today?

MR. WEINBERG: Yes, and it has the date in the European format, which is very interesting — 17 of March, 1945.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, well, anyway, I have books of these drawings. Most of them are in the Archives of American Art. That's the *Peacable Kingdom*.

MR. WEINBERG: Here, again, is one of the football drawings.

MR. BROWN: That's a lousy reproduction. It's much more intense in color.

MR. WEINBERG: We're looking at *Boxers*, 1952.

MR. BROWN: I like that one.

MR. WEINBERG: You still own it.

MR. BROWN: Now, this is interesting. A woman I know on the peninsula owns this.

MR. WEINBERG: This is *Untitled, 1990*, pencil and acrylic on paper.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, and obviously, it's three versions of the same painting. And I said to her, "Which is the final version?" It looks as though this — that the author thought was the first, the second and the third. Can you guess which is the final version? It isn't this.

MR. WEINBERG: You're asking me?

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: I can't say.

MR. BROWN: It's this one.

MR. WEINBERG: I can't say. I won't say.

MR. BROWN: Crazy story.

MR. WEINBERG: And that's what you're saying now — it's the final version. Is it the final version?

MR. BROWN: That was the final version. I didn't know it until she told me.

[END OF CD 5.]

MR. WEINBERG: [In progress] — because you no longer own any of these.

MR. BROWN: I'm sorry?

MR. WEINBERG: You no longer own any of these.

MR. BROWN: This is one painting painted on top of —

MR. WEINBERG: I got it. You mean, in other words —

MR. BROWN: That's the first version; that's the second; and that's the third.

MR. WEINBERG: I got it. So this is the same painting, three different versions.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: I see. And this is the painting that she owns.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. So this probably was the first version.

MR. WEINBERG: I see. And these weren't really drawn. I got it. I thought these were three different versions of the same thing. I see.

MR. BROWN: Well, I didn't explain it very well.

MR. WEINBERG: No, no, I'm — and it says that right here, too. That would have been my clue. [They laugh.] Yeah, I would have guessed, actually, that this was the final version because it was more —

MR. BROWN: Oh, it was, yeah.

MR. : And which one is that? In the center?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yes. You would, too?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, it looks more worked.

MR. BROWN: Good for you.

MR. WEINBERG: And it's better than the other two.

MR. BROWN: Here we are, back to André [Previn?]. Why is that?

MR. WEINBERG: That was because each chapter begins with a detail and that's the full image.

MR. BROWN: Oh, just some drawings.

MR. WEINBERG: These are nice drawings.

MR. BROWN: I like that drawing.

MR. WEINBERG: This is *Untitled, 1990*, with a man and a woman posing. And it looks like it's from a class — I mean, a session, right?

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, so they're not just posing for you.

MR. BROWN: Absolutely.

MR. WEINBERG: They're posing for a group, right? That looks quite worked. So you go back, even — you don't just —

MR. BROWN: I worked on that a long time. The girl, Hilde Heidt, who was in the long dress that I showed you, owns the painting, and the guy she lives with.

MR. WEINBERG: You mean, so it's a painting based on this?

MR. BROWN: No, no, they bought it.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, okay, because here, it says collection of the artist but that was — since, they've bought it.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, that was before it was sold.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, nice. Oh, I know Bill Scott.

MR. BROWN: You do?

MR. WEINBERG: Yes, he's a painter. I know him very — not very well.

MR. BROWN: I know him a little.

MR. WEINBERG: *Untitled, 1981*. These are interesting because I would think these are — I don't quite see why these are in the drawing section of the book because I would think these are just as much paintings as the others were paintings.

MR. BROWN: Of course they are.

MR. WEINBERG: [Laughs.] But just, I'm not quite sure why —

MR. BROWN: I saw another picture of this the other day and it didn't look as good as this, and I hoped this is the final version and not the other one, but I don't know.

MR. WEINBERG: So again, some of these may have been reworked since they've been in the book. That's extraordinary. And to you — you mentioned — I don't know if it was on the tape — but what does drawing mean to you? You draw. I'm somebody that doesn't draw much. I always want to go to painting so I paint and paint and —

MR. BROWN: Well, the other version was in color, too, but it lacked — I didn't have the two together but it lacked something that I think this painting has that I like.

MR. WEINBERG: We're looking at *Male Figure* —

[Cross talk.]

MR. WEINBERG: — 1995 on page 135. But I'm wondering just what does drawing mean to you because you're such a painter and there are some painters who don't draw at all. You know, they just paint. So drawing, as a kind of practice —

MR. BROWN: Well, I just think it works as a design. And of course, I like the subject matter. Now, these are interesting.

MR. WEINBERG: Four portraits of Theophilus — William Theophilus Brown.

MR. BROWN: David Park, Dick Diebenkorn, Don Bachardy and Paul. This is not a very good one.

MR. WEINBERG: [They laugh.] I was going to say that. I think it's a nice picture. It's not a very flattering — that's not very flattering.

MR. BROWN: No, no. I don't know —

MR. WEINBERG: But I think it's a good picture.

MR. BROWN: I don't even know if it's me. They just put it in. [They laugh.] But these are — oh, after David died, his widow sent me three of these — three different drawings that David had done of me. When a model didn't appear, we posed for each other.

MR. WEINBERG: That's sweet. Okay, so we've done that. That was good. Okay, so there are things that have come up more about your biography. You went to MacDowell [Colony, NH]. How did that happen, and around when in your history?

MR. BROWN: It was about '68 or '69. There was a girl named Josephine Carson, a writer who was a good friend of mine, and she suggested that we apply. And so we applied together and we were both accepted. And so off we went. I think I was given an eight-week grant, or maybe longer. I left after four or five.

It was sort of boring. But that's where I met this wonderful girl, Janet Frame. And she would come and stay with us for a long time. I'll show you — this is exhibitionism. No, you're fine. [Pause.] It's funny — [pause] — I don't know. I can sit there and look together with —

[Audio break.]

MR. BROWN: Well, this won't be much of a help, I'm afraid. Maybe you don't want to look at them.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, we could maybe — what is it that you want to show me? Just pictures of you?

MR. BROWN: That's it. I mean, I thought you'd like to see, maybe —

MR. WEINBERG: I would like to see.

MR. BROWN: There.

MR. WEINBERG: Nice.

MR. BROWN: Those go on for pages and pages. But I think if we're doing an interview, they don't have — they aren't — you saw that, right?

MR. WEINBERG: Well, we could also take some photographs.

MR. BROWN: Whatever you want to do.

MR. WEINBERG: Or this is the kind of thing that you might want to send to the Archives of American Art at some point —

MR. BROWN: I don't know, but anyway —

MR. WEINBERG: — or have them at least microfilm it. So we're looking at photographs of Bill over the years.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: And many of them naked. He was a very good-looking man.

MR. BROWN: Well, you see, because — [They laugh] — I like that.

MR. WEINBERG: That's very sexy. And who took that picture?

MR. BROWN: I think his name is Basil Langston [sp], something like that.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, okay. Oh, these are all from the MacDowell Colony at the same time.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, that's wonderful. That really would be a wonderful thing to have at the archives. It's wonderful — very self-contained.

MR. BROWN: Do you have other new artists at the archives — nude artists?

MR. WEINBERG: Yes, yes, there are some. I can tell you about that later after the interview is over. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: Well, we should go on with the interview, I know.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, so you went to — so this was at MacDowell but you're only — one of the things is you told me this story of, you were there and you sort of didn't know what to do because it's out in the woods, right?

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. WEINBERG: Right. You said the first thing — you were talking about doing a nude self-portrait.

MR. BROWN: Well, there was nothing in the studio and it was a huge studio. And the window showed some dead birch trees, which didn't last too long as a subject matter. So I thought, what the hell. There was this little mirror on the floor. And that was almost the first drawing I did. And then they brought me a big mirror — one that you could adjust on its —

MR. WEINBERG: So first, there was a broken mirror and you did — what did you do with it?

MR. BROWN: The broken mirror — after I got the big mirror — here it is — I did — I used it and made all these drawings that the walls are plastered with. Well, here are some of them.

MR. WEINBERG: Of you naked — self-portraits.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah. It interests me, like, why — I kind of would think that you wouldn't want to be in the woods by yourself — well, not by yourself but —

MR. BROWN: It wasn't exactly in the woods. It was on a big ranch. Then I would invent — I mean, these would be three different views of myself. I didn't keep a lot of those and I'm sort of sorry I didn't. Anyway —

MR. WEINBERG: Fascinating. So but it was good for meeting people but you left early?

MR. BROWN: Yes. Janet Frame and this Josephine Carson that I went with, and I went to Boston together, which

wasn't too far away, and spent a night there. And then the next day, I drove them back and returned the car to my sister, who was not too far away, and flew back here. I liked being there but I'd had it.

MR. WEINBERG: And other prizes and things that you've done and, you know, fellowships? Have you done any of those kinds of things?

MR. BROWN: Oh, no, very little, very little. I've never applied to anything else. No, I don't think I've got much to tell you in the way of things there.

MR. WEINBERG: All right. So I mean, we can continue but are there questions that you feel like we should be — things that we should be talking about that we're not talking about?

MR. BROWN: Oh, I think you've extracted more from me than I thought I had inside. [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: We still need to keep extracting. What time is it? We have another half an hour of extracting to do, at least. [Laughs.] One thing we can talk more about is — let's see, we can talk about different things — one thing we can talk a little bit more about that I don't know if we have here is the relationship to abstraction to figuration in your work.

Because you said — a few times, you've said that, well, actually, it turns out that these so-called abstract paintings that you're doing now aren't so abstract. I kind of wondered what you meant by that.

MR. BROWN: I think there's always a sense of form in them. I'm very conscious of that and how the objects relate to each other. Abstract, to me, means taking an object and abstracting it, and non-objective art is quite a different thing. You begin with no given objects and horse around and usually, it doesn't turn into a figure thing. Would you agree with that statement?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: One of the things we talked about yesterday after the interview is, I talked a little bit about that idea that different — it seems to me different generations approach a painting, almost, in different ways. For Matisse and Picasso, abstraction was something like what you describe — you know, they started with some motif and then they simplify and they break it down or they destroy it, as Picasso said.

And then there's a different, later generation — and I think you're somewhere at that point — where, in your mind, what a good painting looks like is almost like an abstract — like, you start, almost, with the abstraction and you try to pull a figure out, almost. It's like you're trying to find the figure again. Is that possible?

MR. BROWN: Yes, that's possible, although I don't think it's true in my collages. I think they are truly —

MR. WEINBERG: Now, in the last 10 years, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. But I think in my painting, it's still very much the case — in fact, maybe more so. And sometimes that bothers me. I'm wondering if I'm just doing the same old thing and maybe less good than I used to be able to do it. That's one of my concerns at the moment.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, it is an — you know, we laugh a little bit about it but it's an extraordinary thing for an artist to have certain works reproduced and then find out that they actually have changed them after they were reproduced. Usually, you know, there's always the story, well — you know, there's an argument in art history — well, is this Cezanne finished or not? And the answer is, it's finished because Cezanne stopped working on it, so it's finished, you know.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, exactly.

MR. WEINBERG: But in a certain way, you can say, well, you know, he let it be reproduced so it's finished. But now we know that in the case of Theophilus Brown, it's not finished until you take the picture away from him, right? So that's a kind of odd thing to do, in a way, almost.

MR. BROWN: That's true, yeah. I have some pictures in a gallery today that I didn't show you that are almost there, I think, but I have things that I've got to do to them. And there are other pictures that I've finished but nothing happens and I don't know what to do with them, except abandon them, you know.

MR. WEINBERG: But when you say — so nothing happens but when you say — that's an interesting idea, like abandoning a work. So you know, for some artists, you have different works and some are better than others and, you know, you stop working on them but you don't abandon them. It's just that you finish them. But for you

—

MR. BROWN: Well, there's one in my studio that, unless a flash of lightning strikes, I don't know what to do with it. I've worked on it just as long as many finished paintings that I like, or like enough to keep. And I can't think of anything that might bring it to life at this point so it just sits there.

MR. WEINBERG: But for you, it isn't — I guess, well, so there's a certain sense in which works of art maybe represent who you are and what you're feeling at a particular moment.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I think very much so.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, so if you go back to a picture that you started eight years ago, do you —

MR. BROWN: Is that a different person?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, does that worry you?

MR. BROWN: At that time, yeah. Yeah, it's a crazy world. That's why I like it.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, I always think about Picasso's [*Les*] *Demoiselles d'Avignon* in that, supposedly, when he did that, nobody knew what to do with it. They thought it was crazy. And he rolled it up and put it away for a year.

MR. BROWN: Did he?

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: I didn't know that.

MR. WEINBERG: So sometimes the artist doesn't know — that's the thing, you know — whether they did something good or not.

MR. BROWN: Well, earlier in this book, one of the pictures you liked with a woman figure, I burned. And I kept a couple of others, which, later, I burned because I realized that I burned the best one. And I burned them because we were traveling and — I think I told you we were moving and I didn't see any reason to haul this piece of junk back with me. This was when we lived in New Hampshire and then moved back to Los Angeles.

MR. WEINBERG: It's a sort of sad — you know, it's a sort of hard thing, works of art — you know, to abandon them or leave them or, you know. [Laughs.] And when you criticized Paul's work — I'm going back to this idea — I'm kind of trying to figure out what it is, when you say it doesn't work, it's not alive, and try to get some sense of that. And maybe you can't but —

MR. BROWN: Of course, I'm using my own criteria. But our criteria had enough in common so that we were of great help to each other. And I didn't always take his advice, nor he, mine. But mostly, we did, and he helped me out of a lot of pitfalls — had a very good eye, I thought.

MR. WEINBERG: And because, you know, I didn't see Paul — probably didn't see you guys for quite a while and so the last few years, was he painting right up till he died?

MR. BROWN: He was. The last week before he was hospitalized, he was painting every day.

MR. WEINBERG: And was it still in the series — because I love the series of — where he's painting figures. Was he working, still, on those things where he's in the pictures himself, he's doing those watercolors of —

MR. BROWN: Oh, yeah, with —

MR. : Models with flowers.

MR. WEINBERG: No, not models with flowers. That was earlier. But he was doing a series of him painting models, so he would be in the picture.

MR. BROWN: That's right, that's right. They're very self-deprecating self-portraits.

MR. WEINBERG: Right, but it was a — yeah, kind of totally not like Picasso but the setup, you know — artist and the model, really, is what you would call it. I think that's what they were called when they were reproduced.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Cezanne was a big influence in his last years.

MR. WEINBERG: The photograph that's at the archive is of you — it's a very self-conscious picture. So you were involved in this picture. The two of you are holding hands in this very clear way that you're partners. It's not just two guys — you know, you're holding hands with your partner and then you're standing in front of one of those watercolors of the artist and his model. So it's like you're saying, we're gay. [They laugh.] We're not just friends.

MR. BROWN: Oh, that was a wonderful thing, as I told you earlier. There was no closet when we — there was a friend that I met named John Lehmann through Chris and Don, and he was the editor of the Hogarth Press in Virginia Woolf's basement.

And he told me that Virginia would come down in the middle of the morning with a bathrobe on and say, "Come up and have some tea and tell me about your bugger boys." [They laugh.] And after they died, he wrote a book called *Thrown to the Wolves* [1979]. [Laughs.] And there was a review of the book — Don Bachardy told me this — in *The London Times* and it said, "John Lehman has finally come out of the closet smelling of mothballs." [They laugh.]

MR. WEINBERG: Oh, god. The British are so mean. Here's a question, actually, I did want to ask you — going from the funny to the really depressing — but so you're in San Francisco in 1981, and actually, the '80s were pretty bad, in terms of AIDS. And how did that —

MR. BROWN: Oh, we lost some of our closest friends who died almost immediately — I mean, a matter of weeks or months because there was no —

MR. WEINBERG: I know it's depressing but it's so important, particularly in the context of the Archives of American Art, where there isn't a lot of stuff about that — you know, what — if you could even sort of remember, like, what was the first time you heard about it or the first person you knew who was sick?

MR. BROWN: Our closest friend had — he was a lawyer for gay rights activists and a collector of our stuff — Don Knutson — was the first victim. And that was — that really hit us both very, very hard. And then, of course, we went to get our own tests and I remember the horrible wait of three days to find out the answer. And what a relief it was. And I think it did — it certainly made me more careful after that.

MR. WEINBERG: What was the effect in San Francisco because I know San Francisco was probably — it was a smaller city, had the largest —

MR. BROWN: Heavily, heavily, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Probably was the most-affected community.

MR. BROWN: Awful lot of talk about it and a lot of visiting dying friends. It was a miserable time.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: And it's very hard to read, now, that the infection rate is not slowing down that great — that much. And I think in Russia, it's terrible, isn't it?

MR. WEINBERG: Other friends who were close that, you know, you want to particularly remember or —

MR. BROWN: Well, one of the boys who I said was my masseur, his friend has AIDS. But he got the medicine in time and he got AIDS in the '80s, and he seems perfectly all right, although I guess he's on a lifetime dose of medicine. And the two of them have sex all the time but the masseur, of course, never caught it. But I'm not sure —

MR. WEINBERG: Right, right. I'm thinking more in terms of the — I was thinking more in the early period.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. How does it affect Yale?

MR. WEINBERG: Well, you know, I was thinking more in the early '80s, and it was just so devastating, in terms of my own world and my closest friends and — you know, rather than more what is going on now. I was thinking more back then, in the '80s. But that was a long time ago, actually. It doesn't seem, to me, so long, but it was 30 years ago.

I remember, actually, even — reading about it the first time and not believing it. It seemed so unbelievable that there was such a thing, such a disease. That's impossible. So now other things in terms of regrets, wishes, things that happened, things you're planning? Do you have any plans, dreams?

MR. BROWN: Well, there's always death. [They laugh.]

[Cross talk.]

MR. BROWN: As everybody says about death, I don't mind the fact of death itself. It's the way you die and how you die that is a little scary.

MR. WEINBERG: And it must be so difficult for you because so many of your friends of your own age are no longer here.

MR. BROWN: An awful lot of people die here, of course, as they should. But still, it's a little spooky.

MR. WEINBERG: Yes. And you seem to have dealt very well with Paul — with, you know, the sense that, you know, obviously —

MR. BROWN: Paul had a bad case of pneumonia the year before he died and I think he never recovered from it, although he went on. And since I saw him every day, I wasn't as conscious as other people outside us were, of seeing the decline. Then one morning a week before he died, he called me and he said, "I can't get out of bed." And I went upstairs and — this was at 7:00 in the morning — and called the nurse station.

They got an ambulance and took him to the hospital and he died six days later. And they don't know why or what. I visited him the morning he died, and there was that sweet little face looking up at me. And he was conscious. And he called me in and said, "There's been change for the worse." And I went back with the friend I was just trying to remember the name of — Everett Erlinson [sp] —

MR. WEINBERG: And I'm sorry because my memory is going — and who was he?

MR. BROWN: He was the boyfriend that Paul educated.

MR. WEINBERG: Okay, okay.

MR. BROWN: Really salvaged his life. And I still see him. And anyway, by the time I got back, he was unconscious, had oxygen tubes up his nostrils and I could hear his lungs filling up with liquid and it was horrible. And I keep reliving that day.

MR. WEINBERG: I'm sorry. We're never — it's one of the terrible things about Americans and, actually, art and everything else — it never prepares you. I mean, most — it does the opposite.

Every movie, just — that's the biggest lie. I mean, they always have these deathbed scenes in movies and they're always — like Greta Garbo in *Camille* [1936] or whatever, right? [Laughs.] It's all beautiful and everything and they just cut out all the terror and the horror because nobody can bear to face it. And so as a result, we're not really prepared.

MR. BROWN: Nope, that's true.

MR. WEINBERG: Maybe that's better in the long run but it's sort of, you know — but it also seems like, as an outsider, it seems that your relationship was so strong that you didn't have the kind of guilt that a lot of people have when someone passes.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I did have some guilt. I felt that I never really did my share of the work. He really did take care of me and I let him. And well, I don't know. On the other hand, I realize that, in some ways, I salvaged his life, too, because with the little money I had, we could afford to buy a house.

He could quit teaching and he began selling. And considering where he came from and what his prospects were, they were pretty grim. And he lived 20 years longer than any other male had in his family. So it could have been worse.

MR. WEINBERG: And you know, I know that he's been interviewed for the Archives of American Art but I actually haven't read that interview. Would you say that he comes from a very grim — meaning just because he came from a very poor family or with a —

MR. BROWN: Well, they were very poor. His mother was crazy. She was kind of a wonderful woman. I met her a couple of times. But Paul and his little sister would — they lived in a slum of Tucson, and the screen door would be locked and the mother on the inside would say, "Go away, I don't want you here anymore," and things like that to he [sic] and his sister. And his father was working for the railroad so he was almost never home.

MR. WEINBERG: And how old was he when this was happening?

MR. BROWN: I suppose from about five [years old] on.

[Cross talk.]

MR. WEINBERG: Because at 35, it wouldn't have been — but if he was five, that's a problem.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, but he went to CCAC when he was about 16 or 17 and his father said, "Well, that's a good idea because I don't know what else you can do." And he did it and he got a job. And fortunately, some family — painter family — gave him a room and helped him. And then he got in the Army and came along and, fortunately, he could type so he spent the four-and-a-half years in the Army in Texas.

And since I couldn't — [Laughs] — anyway, I like what Norman Mailer said. He was in the Army two years and he said they were the two worst years of his life and the two most important. I think, certainly, they were for me, as a kind of a rich, spoiled kid. I had a lot to learn.

MR. WEINBERG: So say a lot that you were a rich spoiled kid. How rich were you, I was just wondering?

MR. BROWN: Oh, well, not that — but we were — Moline's main industry was John Deere plows and it was stratified according to where your father stood in the hierarchy, and my father was a director and head of the experimental — so we were pretty far up. And we had two maids and a big house and —

MR. WEINBERG: But did you inherit a lot of money from your parents?

MR. BROWN: I would say around $100,000, which enabled us to buy a house at one point and things like that. No, it was a huge boost. That was a great advantage, probably, over what most people get.

MR. WEINBERG: But we're not talking millions and millions, as they say — millions and millions.

MR. BROWN: No, thank god. It wouldn't have helped. Is this yours or mine?

MR. WEINBERG: Yours.

MR. BROWN: Oh, thank you.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, I think part of love, actually, is being able to accept people who take care of you and are generous to you. That's actually a big part of love. It's not just — people think it's all about giving but it's actually about being able to take.

MR. BROWN: Gracefully, yeah.

MR. WEINBERG: Without feeling resentment or anger about it, or feeling dependent.

MR. BROWN: Well, with Paul, my money hardly compared with what he did for me. I feel much more indebted to him — well, we didn't really feel indebted to each other. That was not in the equation.

MR. WEINBERG: That's what I meant. It's a kind of — because it's a partnership, you know.

MR. BROWN: It really was.

MR. WEINBERG: Yeah, so it must have been very hard to go on the last few years without him.

MR. BROWN: It changed my life totally after he died. I don't know — and I've never looked for anyone else.

MR. WEINBERG: And does the art help, in a way?

MR. BROWN: It does. It's the only thing that I really like to do left. I like to see people and listen to music and things like that, but if I had to stay here all day, it would be very hard on me. I'm not that big a reader and I don't play bridge and all the things they manage to come up with to amuse the people here. And so getting to the studio is still very important to me.

MR. WEINBERG: One thing I need to ask you is the decision to come here. Why did you decide —

MR. BROWN: Because Paul thought that he was going to be in a wheelchair. He had something — a disc problem.

MR. WEINBERG: And we should say that you're in a — what would you call this community?

MR. BROWN: A retirement center.

MR. WEINBERG: Or an assisted-living retirement center, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, it's called The Towers. But so we came in and about six months after we came here — there's a whole medical facility on the second floor here — they sent Paul to — no, I drove him to — they made an appointment at a hospital. I think some doctors here had examined him. I dropped him off at the hospital and he limped in. And that afternoon, they called me to pick him up and he walked out perfectly natural and never had another problem. [They laugh.] I don't know what in the hell they did.

MR. WEINBERG: I was going to say, what did they do?

MR. BROWN: I don't know but it was such a miracle and so wonderful. And also, it got us in here, which is, I think, important at this point. At that point, they had all sorts of regulations about how old. They wouldn't take anybody over 82 and I was 82, and I just got under the wire and somebody had just died who owned this room, or was in it before, and so I got in very — and it's perfect for my needs — and so I was very, very lucky.

MR. WEINBERG: So it's worked out. It's given you the ability to be free —

MR. BROWN: You know, I think it has worked out. I mean, of course, old age is a bitch and there's so much maintenance, you know. [Laughs.] There's a doctor for the feet and another one for the knees and another one for both sides here and then one up to the lungs and heart and teeth and, well, you know how it is.

MR. WEINBERG: Well, to tell you the truth, it's the same when you're in your 50s. I get all those things, too. And then I think how I'm going to make it to where you are and I can barely get along. But anyway, I think this is a good point.

[END OF INTERVIEW]