## A TEI Project

# Interview of George Heard Hamilton

## Contents



# 1. Transcript

### 1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE
### AUGUST 7, 1991

RIKALA

> I'd like to start today asking you about your family biography a bit and about yourself. Usually we start with the most straightforward-type questions of when and where were you born.

HAMILTON

> I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on June 23, 1910.

RIKALA

> Is your family from Pittsburgh originally?

HAMILTON

Yes. I'd like to think we were fifth generation, got there just as the Indians left about. That's not quite true. I think we were at least three or four, which counts for quite a bit when you realize that Pittsburgh was really sort of the last frontier of the East and the first of the Middle West in many people's minds. My father's father [Albert Hamilton] had with his brother established a glass factory, which was not uncommon in western Pennsylvania and Ohio in the nineteenth century, where very good glass was produced. Ours was commercial glass. The factory did very well. No cause for complaint. My mother's father [George Heard] had been in the oil and gas business. I remember as a very small child, probably four years old, one summer evening when we were at my grandfather's country house southwest of Pittsburgh being gotten out of bed and taken to see an oil well come in. And this involved a great deal of flames from natural gas, [laughter] which is all I remember. I don't remember whether the oil actually spurted up into the air. But this was hands-on experience, because it was in western Pennsylvania north of Pittsburgh near Erie that oil was first discovered in this country, in the 1840s I guess it was. So I feel sort of tied in with a long American background, which has only two unfortunate aspects to it, if you want to hear about them.In 1660, my mother's mother's father's family were already in Salem, Massachusetts. And in 1696 there occurred the witchcraft trials. My seventh great-grandfather, Jeremiah Neale, was a witness in the trial of one of the witches who had had the misfortune, as his wife lay seriously ill, to bring her a bowl of porridge, which she ate and died the next day. Now, this was definite proof, of course, that Goody--whatever her name was, I've forgotten it at the moment--was a witch.The witchcraft scare in Salem was a repetition of episodes like that that occurred in the early seventeenth century in England and had been strenuously put down by the government. The British government was appalled when they heard that this had broken out in Salem, and they sent over commissioners to settle the matter. But the commissioners got there after forty people, both men and women, had been hanged in most instances, and in three cases pressed to death with stones. This is the last medieval episode like that in this country until the McCarthy witchcraft in the twentieth century. [laughter] But what's very interesting is that Jeremiah Neale's wife already had the smallpox, so the porridge or the gruel or whatever it was just pushed her on, it didn't kill her. And then the story went

that Jeremiah left as soon as word came that the crown commissioners were on their way to Salem. Which means that the moment they disembarked in Boston, I think the brush fires were lit to get the news to Salem. Because lots of the people involved did flee. One of them who fled--and this has always interested me--his name was Henry Eliot. And he was on the jury. This means that as my grandfather was giving his testimony, he must have looked Mr. Eliot straight in the eye, and Mr. Eliot looked at him. Mr. Eliot left at once and made his way through the unbroken forest fifteen miles to that place the Bostonians call "Wooburn," but it seems to be it ought to be Woburn. There he hid until everything died down. I only learned this a few years ago reading a biography of his great-great-great grandson, who was known as T. S. Eliot, whom I consider a very great poet. And the thought that Granddaddy Neale looked into the eye of Tom Eliot's granddaddy is kind of exciting. [laughter] Though nothing can be done about it. The other story is that one of my mother's ancestors had been a captain in the militia very late in the eighteenth century and had helped get rid of the Indians in western Pennsylvania by burning them alive in their wigwams. Now, this is a horrifying story, but the fact is that the eastern Indians did not live in wigwams, which were a form of portable housing which you folded up and put on a horse. They lived in longhouses made of slabs of wood and moss and so on. And I don't think those would have burnt quite so quickly, and I don't think granddaddy did burn them alive.But that's all-- The background is old America. We're as old as you get in those parts. They were respectable people. Not one of them on either side of the family, so far as I know, ever was at all interested deeply in art, music, or letters. Except that my mother's father, my grandfather Heard, did have a set of two volumes of Walt Whitman's poems, The Leaves of Grass and The Two Rivulets, autographed by Whitman, which means that he had mailed a coupon or something off to the good gray poet in Camden, New Jersey, who in his last years when he wasn't very well-to-do was happy to autograph and sell copies of his books. But those were the only books in my grandfather's library that were of any literary interest. I have no way of knowing whether he read them. He died when I was only five, so I have only a faint memory of him. But my own interest in art and letters and music is sort of sui generis, and I can't account for it. I suppose-- I know my brother, my only sibling, had no interest at all.

RIKALA

What does your brother do?

HAMILTON

Well, my brother [Frank A. Hamilton]-- He died a few years ago. He was a younger brother, three years younger. He went to Princeton [University], which was our father's college. But my father had been obliged to leave it when his father was shot dead by a defaulting book¬keeper in New York. The glass company had an office in New York. My grandfather, Albert Hamilton, learned about this and went on to face the man, find out what was going wrong, and the man drew a gun and shot him and then shot himself. I was so sorry about that; there could have been no trial or anything. This all happened eight years before I was born. So nobody ever spoke very much about my grandfather. But that was a terrible, of course, family tragedy. And it meant that my father and his twin brother, who were in their sophomore year in college, were called home by their older brother to help run the glass factory. My mother [Georgia Heard Hamilton] really never forgave her brother-in-law for doing that, because as she pointed out, they could have gone through college, because there was himself and their uncle to run the glass factory, and it wasn't all that great a deal way back in 1902. But anyway, my father was one of those Princetonians who are more Princetonian than need be, rather like the people here at Williams [College].

RIKALA

What do you mean?

HAMILTON

Well, Yale [University] is so sophisticated you can talk to a man all evening at a party and not realize he went to Yale. He doesn't tell you. But these other people tell you right away where they went to college, and, instantly, a rapport is established. And it's a very curious collegiate spirit.But, no, this was a great disappointment to him [Hamilton's father]. If he had lived, I would have had to go to Princeton, and my life would have been totally different. [laughter]My brother did go there, but he didn't care much for it. He had gone to Choate [School], and he got such a good education at Choate that when he got to Princeton, the freshman year was just terrible. This was way back in the early thirties. And I'm sure it was repetitive and boring and whatnot. So he

left. Now, what he did, he went to work in the glass factory, and he also worked as a sort of reporter on the newspaper. Then the war came along, the second war. He enlisted and was in it from '41 to '45, four years stationed in Hawaii all that time, where the whole mess had begun for us. But it was boring because nothing happened.And then, when he was mustered out of the army, he moved to Santa Fe [New Mexico], where he married and had four children and had a happy life. But he never did anything. He spent his whole time--and whether this has anything to do with me or not, I don't know--trying to create a fuel-less engine, which would have made him a trillionaire. But another word for fuel-less engine is a perpetual motion machine. And that, you know, is-- The engine did run for a couple of seconds, but the inevitable toll of gravity and friction ended it.Now, in all that time, living in Santa Fe, he saw it develop into a great cultural capital of the Southwest with a wonderful opera company and eventually an orchestra and ballet, chamber music-- You name it. And he hated all this; he loathed it. He thought it was an intrusion of eastern effete fads. And in a sense, it was, of course. Well, it was opposed to everything I had worked at as a teacher and educator and museum person and so on, to bring culture to people, to help them understand the good things in life. And he was exactly the opposite. It may have been sibling rivalry. I have a suspicion-- That came to me many, many, many, many years later when I was visiting them, that it was. And I felt very badly about it, but goodness, when you're in your late forties, both of you, what can you do about it? Nothing. But it was uphill work for me as a child, when I was already into these things, trying to get him to cooperate. The little girl in the neighborhood and I put on a production of Romeo and Juliet. [laughter] I think we were eleven and twelve. And all I knew about it was [Charles] Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare. I'd never seen it. And it was a rip-snorting performance. [laughter] It occurred in the living room of my grandmother's house, where we lived, and the curtain was the sliding door, and the audience consisted of my mother and the cook. Of course it's terrible in these egalitarian days to indicate that your family had servants, but we did have a cook and what was called an upstairs girl. Imagine. And the cook stood it for the first twenty minutes, and then she left to get lunch. But the play only lasted twenty-two minutes. [laughter] I was Romeo, and our little friend was Juliet. My brother was the Capulets and the Montagues and Tybalt and the County Paris and all the other characters. [laughter] And he hated it. I thought it was very distinguished, so many roles in this important production.

But he never saw the point. I think I missed the point too. [laughter]Because it wasn't the same play which I finally saw with the famous actor Edward [H.] Sothern and his wife Julia Marlowe. But Julia Marlowe was sick that day, so we had an understudy. But my mother and my uncle, who went with us to the Saturday matinee, felt that Sothern was a little bit too well along for the part. And I felt he was much too big around the middle for the young Romeo, as I gathered. [laughter] Oh, Romeo's about eighteen, isn't he, and Juliet's fourteen. Maybe he's only sixteen. Here was this man, whom I discovered a few months ago, looking things up, at that particular time in life was twelve years older than my mother was.

RIKALA

Oh, dear.

HAMILTON

Now, this is-- And the American audience swallowed it, you see. Well, this indicates I was crazy about the stage, and I was. I wanted to do things in it, but try as I could, I never got a toehold even. And that's a great-- I'm very pleased, because I would have been a bad actor. [laughter] Instead, well, I became--

RIKALA

Your interest, as you mentioned, arts, letters, and music, is something that you sought out, then, as a child?

HAMILTON

Yes, I really had to do it on my own. And let me just say, I talk about-- This book I'm trying to produce is a guide to how to think about art in the late twentieth century, and it involves music and literature and the arts. Because I have never been able to tell-- You see, any difference in my experience of a painting or a poem or a play-- The aesthetic experience is the same as in any art. So I was tracking all these things down at once. And in Pittsburgh, fortunately, there was something called the Carnegie International Exhibition which occurred every year in the fall at the Carnegie Institute, as they called it. It's now the Museum of Art at the Carnegie Institute. It's a very, very good small museum. It was not a very good art department because it was in the hands of arch-conservatives even up into the 1940s. You can't make much

headway in a museum if you're an arch-conservative. The director in my lifetime out there was Homer Saint-Gaudens. Gaudens, the son of Augustus Saint-Gaudens. He was a nice person, but timid in his taste. It wasn't until 1930 that he invited Picasso to exhibit. Then, what Picasso sent or what was chosen by the international jury was a very conventional portrait of Olga Picasso in his neoclassic style of the 1930s. It's perfectly okay, but what Picasso means, of course, is cubism, and there was none of the excitement even of the cubism of the thirties, which was unfortunate.But at any rate, this exhibition was held every year. I cottoned onto it when I was about fifteen. The Carnegie Institute was within walking distance of our house. Actually, you could get there faster than if you tried to wait for the trolley, you know. So I usually went to see the marvelous fossils and the gold Pullman, miniature Pullman car that Mr. somebody-or-other, who had a private car, had done in gold. I don't know why that was ever created, but it was something to look at. There were stuffed birds and fish, oh, you name it. Then these few rooms devoted to art. And here this exhibition was held. Well, when I was seventeen-- The exhibitions were fairly conventional. You got a good survey of American painting. Actually, Winslow Homer had been the first artist to win the first prize at the first exhibition in 1896 with a painting which was bought by the institute. It's called The Shipwreck. A very good picture. And this was-- I don't know whether you can call that daring or not in 1896, because Homer was already a recognized artist. There was no risk involved, certainly. Well, the American paintings were really a very good cross section. I won't bother you with the names of them, but all of the important names were there.The Europeans were skewed somehow. I remember one year they thought it would be more interesting to have groups of five, six, eight pictures by a few artists instead of more pictures by many. And there were eight Spanish pictures by a Spanish artist named [José Gutíerrez] Solana which were very dark, gloomy, dull. And I have never heard of Solana since--ever. [laughter] This was, of course, a mistake. Well. In 1927 they awarded the first prize to Matisse, and the newspapers hit the ceiling. Critics-- There were three papers, one in the morning, two in the evening. They said this was a disgrace and shocking and dreadful and everything.Now, I was in school in Pittsburgh, in a day school, country day school, where I got an excellent, rigorous, old-fashioned, boring education. Six years of Latin.

My goodness.

HAMILTON

When we spent a whole year on the Aeneid, the teacher never ever explained that it was a poem, which would have had great interest, I think, to discuss it as a poem, instead of just the grammar of it. But at any rate, I had learned enough to wonder whether the critics could be right. I don't know how at seventeen you do that, but I suppose it was by finding them patently wrong. So I went one Saturday afternoon to the exhibition to see this terrible picture. Well, in the first place, I was surprised. I thought it was going to be the size of that thing, but it was only about so big. It was a small still life. I couldn't see anything dangerous, revolutionary, pornographic, or whatnot about it. And I looked at it for quite a long time. If you measure it in minutes it was probably not very many, but even minutes when you're seventeen can be endless. I finally decided that the critics were all wrong, that this was a very fine, well-put-together, beautiful picture. I had no knowledge of any other Matisse. I had really very little knowledge of French painting at all. There were no art classes in school. I have always felt that that experience was of the greatest consequence, because it made me, in the first place, want to take a second look at criticism to make sure that the people were really on the right track. How does one know one is on the right track? But I just had the feeling that I had taken the proper measure of this painting. Now, interestingly enough, the picture is in the official catalog resumé in a small reproduction, but to my knowledge it has never been exhibited. I've never seen it since. It's in a private collection elsewhere (I don't know whose private collection), and it would be so fascinating to see it now--what is it, seventy years later practically, or not that much, sixty--and see how it measures up. But that isn't important. The important part is that I began to think seriously and became convinced more and more that the principal problem with art and the public is that nobody takes the time to look or listen or see. And they take other people's advice or other people's opinions. It has shocked, I think, a good section of the American public to know that in this dreadful [Robert] Mapplethorpe controversy, what was it, a year ago, that the people who condemned the exhibition had not seen the offending photographs. Now, in what other civilized country--? Well, I suppose in all civilized countries this happens, but isn't it shameful that we would do that? The same thing occurred with this month's exhibition a few

weeks ago at the Smithsonian [Institution] about the wild West ["The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier"]. The two congressmen who condemned it had not seen it. They may have seen the catalog, and apparently the problem was mostly catalog material in the sense that it was the labels. But I have talked to people who saw it, some of them American historians, others just ordinary people, who said it wasn't offensive at all. It was what you knew, that we had exploited the Indians and so on. At any rate, this is not looking things straight in the eye. So there we are still stuck back in 1927.

RIKALA

Did your family have particular philosophical or political values? You mentioned in passing about art museums and a conservative point of view from a directorship, any of that. Did your family have some sort of political value that you've carried through your life? Or is it something, again, that you've formulated?

HAMILTON

I can't speak for my father because he died when I was eight. He died of influenza at eleven o'clock of the day the armistice was signed; it went into effect November 11. And that was a dreadful loss, terrible. Had he lived, I'm not sure that I would have been able to become the person I did. I would have had to go to Princeton, I'm sure of that. And Princeton at that time would not have given me the freedom of exploration that Yale did. Somehow I knew that. I don't know how I knew it, but-- Except that the school library subscribed to the Yale Weekly Bulletin. I've never understood why, because nobody in Pittsburgh would go to an event in New Haven [Connecticut] just for the afternoon, you know. But once a week, this long white sheet would appear, and I would study it. And there were all kinds of things I wanted to see and do and whatnot. They didn't have anything like that for Princeton. Whether Princeton had it or not I don't know. Also, Yale was my mother's family. And I think if one really toted them up, there would be something like ten or eleven uncles and cousins who had gone to Yale. But I don't remember either of my mother's two brothers, who were graduates, ever trying to urge me to go or talking about it. One of them lived in Sewickley, the suburb down the river. We didn't see him very often. And the other brother, who lived at

home with us for a while until he married, we didn't ever talk about anything very interesting. I mean, I don't know why.Now, they had no position about art, which you asked about, that I can think of. The women-- My mother and my grandmother [Margaret N. Heard] were women, really, of the nineteenth century. They devoted themselves to their families and their housekeeping and so on. My mother did like to go to concerts. And we had awfully good concerts. I don't know if they were better or worse than what they are now, but I heard the Boston Symphony there, I heard the Chicago Opera. It was sort of hard to go, because these were things in the evening during the school week. Well, I did hear [Serge] Koussevitzky conduct twice, and, you know, things like that are tremendously exciting if you're discovering them for the first time. I can't speak for my grandmother. I remember her, but I was three when she died. My mother, I know she respected the finer things of life, and she would go to the theater and she would go to concerts, but she was not so good about going to art exhibitions. And the only ones that really mattered were these international ones. I can't think-- There were no galleries in Pittsburgh at that time. I never recall, never thought about that. But they were just good people who were not culturally involved. Now, Pittsburgh's own culture was not much to think about in those days. It had had an orchestra in the early part of the century, and the conductor who made a great thing of it was Victor Herbert, who in addition to his music for the operettas was a serious composer and apparently an excellent conductor. But when he left, the symphony seems to have faded away, and it only really was revived after I had left Pittsburgh. Now, of course, it's a very good symphony. So we didn't have that. It was not a town where there were people who I ran into who read very much, except novels, or thought very much. Of course, people my own age didn't. And my mother never remarried and lived really quite a retired life, so I didn't meet many older people. I do know this episode which I think is kind of unusual: [laughter] A friend of my mother's had married, in her thirties, a man very much older who was interested in local history and wrote about Fort Duquesne and things like that. Bess, as my mother's friend's name was, was very loyal to this man ever so much older, but as soon as he died, within a year or so, she married a man her own age, a widower, who was a professor of chemistry at the University of Pittsburgh.Now, the University of Pittsburgh in those days was not an important university, but it was a university with graduate programs and everything. It was one of three. There

was the Catholic university, Duquesne [University], but everybody in my family was very anti-Catholic, for the simple reason that their only acquaintance with Catholicism was through the Irish maids. This is no way to study religion, because the maids didn't know anything about it. They just were born into it. So, being Presbyterians and Episcopalians, we had that sort of feeling that Catholicism was the pope, and the pope would ruin us, and so on. That was rather effectively squelched when [John F.] Kennedy became president, because the pope didn't do it. Now, there were these universities. There was the Catholic university, which I think was really very good, especially in Catholic education. There was the University of Pittsburgh. And then way ahead of both of the others was the Carnegie Institute of Technology, which had been founded by Andrew Carnegie and which had a remarkable school of the drama, believe it or not. Many important people in the history of the American theater graduated from there. And I saw several of their plays when I was sixteen, seventeen; they were very good. Wonderful Shakespeare. Every year in April for the Bard's birthday they gave a Shakespearean play, and by now they must have done the whole cycle of thirty-seven plays at least two or three times. And that really was a first-class institution, but it was largely technological, you see. It specialized in engineering and mathematics, things like that. That's now joined up with Mellon Institute, and it's Carnegie-Mellon University. But the Mellon Institute wasn't in existence when I was there. Now, Bess married this chemist at the University of Pittsburgh, and everybody was horrified. She had stepped several rungs down the social ladder. He was a professor. This was a term of contempt. I remember people saying, you know, "Those who can do, and those who can't teach." [laughter] All I ever wanted to do really was to teach. So that's why I didn't do it in Pittsburgh. [laughter] But everybody came around to feeling that Bess's new husband wasn't so bad when it was discovered that he had published a book, a chemistry textbook, that had gone into many editions and had brought in lots of royalties. There you hit the chord that made Pittsburgh and Cleveland and Chicago and Saint Louis and Minneapolis tick; of course, it was money. Money, money, money. I can't remember what this man's name was, but at least people could respect him because he had made some money from his teaching, believe it or not. Then I went away at the age of eighteen, of course, to Yale and rather effectively, and perhaps unfortunately, put Pittsburgh behind me. There is nobody living there now except a cousin on each side of the family. My other

cousins, three of them live in the East: one in New Haven, one in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and one in Wolfeboro, New Hampshire. My brother, you see, went and lived in New Mexico, and there's that curious splitting, the dispersion of the nuclear family. When I read obituaries I'm always so astounded that the person may be survived by seven children, of whom none seems to live closer than three hundred miles away. That is a sociological factor that I don't understand.But at any rate, I left Pittsburgh and never have spent any time in it except, when I was in college, vacations--some vacations, not all, and certainly not the summer vacations. And that's that. When I go back there I'm absolutely astounded our house still stands. I always feel it should have a plaque on it saying I was born there, but it hasn't and won't. But that's okay. [laughter] Minor matter. But I don't know anybody there anymore, and there's no reason to go back.At any rate, what I did was sort of come home, you see. I came back to New England. And my wife [Polly Wiggin Hamilton]'s ancestors, too, are all New Englanders. She had one who lived in New Hampshire in the eighteenth century. Made so much money there he went off to London. First American--he was still a colonist--the first American to make a fortune living in London. Then he lost it all. Then he made another fortune and paid back everybody whom he owed, so he's gone down in the family history as a saint. But that has nothing to do with me.

## 1.2. TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO
## AUGUST 7, 1991

HAMILTON

I've been working on this book about how to look at art, which is a simplistic way of stating it. I began thinking about how I ever myself got into it. As I thought back, I came across a very curious experience, or so it seems to me now. When I was a small child, as I mentioned, we'd spend the summer at my grandfather's place in Little Washington, it's called. It was outside of Washington, Pennsylvania, about forty miles in the southwest corner from Pittsburgh. And it was a very simple house which he built. I think it was finished in 1906, and he had eight or nine years there before he died there in 1915. I don't remember much about the house, but I do remember that summers were kind of magical. I always loved summer better than winter anyway because of its freedom, so to speak.I remember becoming fascinated

with his garden, which was both flowers and vegetables. Perhaps that's why I spend all my waking time in the summer now trying to get things to grow in this clay soil. In the vegetable garden in the early summer--I think we probably went down in late June and stayed through August (my grandfather commuted)--I found this little, round, green, globe-shaped vegetable growing, and as the summer came along, it got bigger and bigger and it began to turn yellow. And of course you know it was a pumpkin. Whether I knew it was a pumpkin I don't know, but I would go down every morning as soon as I got up and go and look at it and hold it and care for it and be amazed at its shape, because it became ribbed, you know, and became a beautiful, beautiful pumpkin. But along mid-life or so of the pumpkin's life, I accidently moved it too rapidly or too roughly--after all, I was only four at the most--and I knew something terrible had happened. I had broken the stem. And I've always thought that was the time that death came into my world, because I knew the pumpkin could no longer continue to grow. It was going to die. I didn't realize it would, of course, live in a state of half-life through the fall. But at any rate, that was an early sorrow. I remember it as a time of deep amazement and bewilderment and grief. But also, by fondling that pumpkin, which is really what I did, I was learning about shape, form, three-dimensional mass in a way maybe that other children just haven't had that opportunity. Because how else am I to account for the fact that all my life I have been more interested really in sculpture than in painting? If you look around this room, there are one, two, three, four paintings, and there is one-- There is a Bernard Meadows behind you, Rodin, two; Marini, three; Archipenko, four; another Meadows, five; a Chinese horse, six; an Elisabeth Frink, seven; and Calder, eight. Twice the number of pictures are three-dimensional objects. I trace all that back to the pumpkin. Not that I have any feeling against paintings. I think they're wonderful. But these are real; the others are images. And there is something about the substance and the life of something existing freely in three-dimensional space. So when I got into the graduate school--just to jump ahead a little bit--and had to select a subject for the thesis-- The thesis had to run about a hundred pages, you know, really a small book. I wanted to do something American for the reason that everything that my fellow students in the graduate school were studying was European, and they didn't go to Europe. When you do a master's degree, you do it in-- Does it take two years?

Yes. You spent from your B.A. to your M.A.--

HAMILTON

Yes. The master's degree at Yale was a two-year degree. You couldn't get it after one year; it was really two. It was that way at Harvard [University] also. And then you had a third year for your Ph.D. and writing your dissertation. So you really were well along, but the chances of going abroad between those two years in the late Depression were not all that easy.So I wanted to write about something that I could see and know, and not just look at pictures in books. And I chose the subject of Hezekiah Augur, who was a local New Haven sculptor who had begun life carving furniture parts. That's a long story that really doesn't belong here. I discovered a lost Augur, and it was all quite exciting. It's the only book-length study of this poor, forgotten figure that's in existence. It's never been published, but it exists in typescript. And I loved it. I thought it was great fun and exciting, the research in the newspapers to discover what's related to his work, and so on. But it was a three-dimensionality situation. And that all goes back to the pumpkin. So anyway, there we are. Now, what should we talk about?

RIKALA

I think talking about going to Yale-- If your father had been at Princeton and your mother had Yale connections, how did you decide? Or what's the turning point in your arrival and going to--?

HAMILTON

Well, I knew that I never wanted to go to Princeton.

RIKALA

That was just a given.

HAMILTON

My father was a sort of hero figure. He was to my mother. Although he'd only been there for a year and a half, I knew that I could never do at Princeton what he'd done. All he had actually done was to be on the track team, and that was the last thing I thought I wanted to do. But, you know, sportsmen are heroes in our society. I just saw myself as being a terrible runner-up to his qualities. I'm sure he was a marvelous person. I loved him dearly. I remember

that. But I had-- Pittsburgh was a great Princeton town. You heard an awful lot about Princeton, and you knew that the Princeton graduates drank a great deal. I don't know that they drank any more than the Yale people, but for some peculiar reason I had a feeling that Yale had a higher intellectual tone--I don't know how I could have gotten that. And of course it was true. I think Princeton today is a very fine university, but peculiarly the Princeton people I see don't seem to have been as well educated somehow in the things that matter as they were at Yale or Harvard.Now, I couldn't go to Harvard for a ridiculous reason. That was that Harvard men were all snobs. [laughter] And what this really means is that the very few who went from Pittsburgh to Harvard, perhaps because they were so few, were perhaps snobbish. [laughter] And so I-- Later on I sort of thought that this was perhaps regrettable. Because if I had gone to Harvard, I would have gotten into a much more developed art situation than was possible at Yale. But I would have lost out in some other ways about the art situation, too. Anyway, I didn't. That was that. I think Harvard is perhaps the greatest university among the older ones, but I think Yale comes very close to it. After all, it's the third oldest. [laughter] There we are.

RIKALA

You entered in 1928.

HAMILTON

The fall of 1928.

RIKALA

And did you live in the residence halls?

HAMILTON

Oh, yes, the whole time.

RIKALA

Can you tell me a little bit about your perceptions of the social makeup of the students and perhaps New Haven at that time, coming from Pittsburgh?

HAMILTON

Well, I learned one thing very quickly, and that is that you never married a New Haven girl. [laughter] They were all dreadful. [laughter] Stupid-- I don't mean stupid--unattractive daughters of professors. You never married a New Haven girl, which I did. [laughter] Her father wasn't a professor. He had been a businessman, and he had died by the time I got to know Polly. But her uncle was pretty good; he was the counsel for the university, the university's principal lawyer. There's a little medal right behind you that the university gave him, the so-called Yale Medal, for his loyal services. Now, that's the first thing I learned about New Haven society--we can perhaps come back to that in a moment--except an undergraduate really doesn't know anything about New Haven society, only those who came from New Haven families and who had friends who would bring them into it. But I didn't know anybody in New Haven as an undergraduate at all.

RIKALA

The university is quite insular that way?

HAMILTON

The university, of course, was huge already when I got there in '28. They had put together a few years before the freshman year at Yale college and added a freshman year to the Sheffield Scientific School, which had only a three-year course in technology. And they made that a four-year course, too. So that we had 930 students.

RIKALA

My goodness.

HAMILTON

Now, that's larger than many educational institutions. And coming from a small school, day school, not having gone to one of the eastern prep schools was a social disadvantage inevitably. But curiously, this little school I went to had three of us from the graduating class go, which is a far larger percentage than came from Andover or Saint Paul's or Groton or anything like that. I don't understand that at all. It speaks well for what I described as a good but dull academic education. But I found right away what I wanted. Within a few weeks I had made a couple of acquaintances, which did me well, and I started

a little freshman magazine. It came out mimeographed. It was called Helicon. Helicon was the mountain where the muses in Greece lived. It only lasted through three issues, naturally.But one of our contributors was the son of Eugene O'Neill, who was by way of being a friend. He was such an odd young man that he really didn't have any friends. He came to a very unhappy end. He took his own life later on when he was teaching classics at Yale. He was somebody who was dominated by his father. He was a very tragic example of somebody who could not, in his own way, live up to his father's eminence. Well, he was in a different field. He was very, very good in classics. Edited the Greek dramatists and so on, but-- Anyway. I haven't thought about Gene O'Neill in years and years. No, I had a wonderful time. Yale was one hour and twenty minutes away from New York by train. Princeton was about the same length of time. But when my mother took me-- She wanted to make sure that I knew what I was doing when I chose Yale over Princeton, and the thing to do was go and visit these places for a day. What can you do in a day? Well, you can do quite a lot. So we went. It was April 30. Now, remember, this is April 30, 1928, and I'm to enter a college, or whatever it is, in September.So we went-- We took the overnight train to New York, and then we took the train down to Princeton. And I found to my horror that it wasn't a direct train. You had to get off at Princeton junction and change. That I didn't care for. We got to Princeton in the pouring rain. I never saw a more beautiful place. The magnolias were out. Flowering trees and bulbs. Everything was absolutely gorgeous. [laughter] And it rained and rained and rained. The man we went to see--I think it was Dean [Christian] Gauss, the famous Dean Gauss--was very nice. And I thought it was a fine place. Then the next day we went up to New Haven. That was the first of May. And it was bitter cold, brilliant sunshine, nowhere near as pretty as Princeton. I loved it. I just knew that this was where I belonged. We talked to the dean [Percy T. Walden], and he was just as nice as the dean in Princeton. So I then, believe it or not, applied for admission. In May. Nowadays you have to start a year ahead of time.

RIKALA

Apply a year and a half-- Yes.

HAMILTON

And in August or late July, I got word I had been admitted. Actually, we applied to both. Got admitted to both. That was it. Yes, my mother felt it would be good to apply to Princeton in case I was turned down by Yale. I have never since understood why I was admitted with such terrible marks on the college boards, because I got sixty in algebra, and that's not really a passing grade, you know. And I did terribly in French. But those were the days when colleges were looking for people. So I wrote Princeton and said I was sorry I couldn't come and went to Yale.Yale was one hour and twenty minutes from New York on a direct train. This was great, wonderful. You could go down to the theater, and you could get back at one o'clock in the morning. I saw more plays, more operas, more concerts in New York than I saw in New Haven. We also had an active theater, the Schubert Theater, a commercial theater, which had two plays a week all through my college years. No, not senior year, because by then the Depression had really hit, and they only had one. [laughter] But we had one on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, one on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and I'd go to both.I learned about the drama the hard way by seeing all these things that opened in New Haven and never made it to Boston and then to Broadway. Terrible plays. [laughter] There was one about some people at the South Pole, some explorers, and the curtain never rose higher than about eight feet off the stage because they were supposed to be under the ice in these things where they were living out the tragedy of their existence. That was a well-deserved catastrophe.But later on, of course, when I was grown up and living there, we saw things like South Pacific, My Fair Lady before they opened. Made up our own minds whether they were any good. We saw Gertrude Lawrence in the Siamese thing, what was that called? It was called Anna and the King of Siam in the book.

RIKALA

The King and I?

HAMILTON

The King and I. Yes, we saw Yul Brenner and Gertrude Lawrence in living flesh. So that was wonderful, because we had great actresses and actors when I was a student. And all this-- Then there was the Yale School of the Drama.

RIKALA

So were you a part of that?

HAMILTON

Well, I was a part of it in the sense that they produced plays mostly of their own manufacture, which were inevitably dreadful. And then famous classics, which were sometimes good, often dreadful. [laughter] Students could go free if they agreed to write a critique and have it in by the following Thursday. So my roommate [James F. Green] and I, we subscribed to this, and we went and sat through these terrible plays and wrote these devastatingly awful critiques. I think that system lasted two years, and then the college stopped it, because they just couldn't go through with reading these things. But I'll never forget how shortchanged I felt.We went one night--it was in the spring--to a performance of Swinburne's The Four Marys, which is about Mary, Queen of Scots, and Mary Seton, and there are two other Marys in there. And it all ended up with the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, behind a scrim. The whole thing was played behind the scrim, and it was unbelievably boring. It was in some kind of blank verse. I bet it was its only performance in this country, ever. [laughter]And then we came out, and in those days it was a tradition that when spring really arrived and the weather was warm, you had a riot. You derailed the trolley cars, and you defaced automobiles, and you threw yards and yards of toilet paper out the windows and festooned the trees. And some people got beaten up by the police. It was a real thing. And here we come out of the theater, Jim and I, and here's this wonderful, wonderful riot going on. Art and life.

RIKALA

Art and life in the same--

HAMILTON

Conflict. But I majored in English, and that was interesting, because in those days you elected to take honors. I guess they only took those that they felt would deserve honors at the end, because it would be terrible, wouldn't it, to flunk an honors course. [laughter] That had the advantage that you were relieved from some of those tiresome requirements for chemistry and things like that. You could take all the English courses you really wanted or needed. But it had also the obligation to write a great number of papers. And this

occasionally became burdensome. I remember writing and writing and writing these papers on my little Remington typewriter, which finally broke its keys when I was a graduate student, it got such use. I learned to write, so that was wonderful, because I've never had any blockage about that. Now that the computer just encourages you to write, and it's ever so much easier, it just flows out. Some of the writing is good, some is not so good, but never mind. But that-- Learning that was as important as anything else. The funny thing about a college education is, I had all these famous professors--Chauncey Brewster, Dr. [Tucker] Brooke, Sam [Samuel Burdett] Hemingway, and all the great lights in the age of [Samuel] Johnson and Elizabethan drama--but I can't remember a word that any of them said. Now, I will be-- My sixtieth reunion will be next year. So that goes back sixty years and more, and maybe there's no reason why I should remember it. But I never have been able to.And of all of these wonderful people, the only one that I can think who had any influence at all was not the most famous, the most renowned. He never published anything except an edited anthology. His name was Alexander Witherspoon. May his name be ever blessed, because he was a real intellectual. Now, oddly enough, some of these other people really weren't. They had sacrificed intellectuality for showmanship, and they were very good. They riveted your attention, but they didn't hold your mind. Witherspoon gave a course in seventeenth-century English poetry, which was Donne and Marvell and all those people. And he had the habit-- You had to write a weekly paper. This is really the English system, endless, endless writing of papers. He would go over those papers with a very, very fine red pencil, the kind that you twisted in and out so it came out of a little hole. Very narrow point. He would mark up my papers, not only for misspellings, but for punctuation and of course for syntax and grammar and everything else. This was really like going back to school. But school was not so good as that. Here was somebody with a real mind helping me become a stylist. I didn't realize it at the time. But I often think when I'm putting in a semicolon, "Would Alex Witherspoon really want it there?" you know. It's funny how that little bit of special treatment-- I know that a few of his students really realized how great he was in that sense of teaching, which is what is not always available in the great university. Then when-- I had very little art. I never enrolled in an art course. But I went to the museum all the time, the art gallery, and the new branch, a wing of which had just opened when I got there. And I went to lectures.

RIKALA

Lectures given at the museum?

HAMILTON

At the museum, in the art gallery, yes. Can't remember any now. But I remember doing it. [laughter] Of course, universities are great for the lectures they offer, but the students, the undergraduates, are very sparse. They are here at Williams. We have wonderful lectures. I mean, they sound wonderful, but very few students, undergraduates, ever come at the Clark Art Institute. But they aren't as wonderful as they sound, usually.

RIKALA

You mentioned that you took the train to the theater in New York. Did you attend the museums in New York, as well?

HAMILTON

Oh, yes. The Metropolitan [Museum of Art], the Frick [Collection]-- I was in the class of '32. The Frick didn't open as a public museum, I think, until the winter of '31. You see, they had to wait until Mrs. Frick died. He died in 1916, I think. She lived another fourteen years. But I went to see that as soon as it was open. I don't think I ever got to the [Pierpont] Morgan Library. I got to the Museum of Modern Art, which opened in the Hecksher Building in the spring of 1929, which was the spring of my freshman year. Certainly by the next year, I had become a member. I'm one of the oldest members. I'm also-- I'm not only a trustee, I'm now an emeritus trustee. [laughter] So that has been a relationship, you see, that started really very early on.Was I interested in modern art? Yes. And I know how that started too. There was a man at Yale named Theodore Sizer.

RIKALA

He taught art appreciation?

HAMILTON

Yes. Who had five daughters and finally one son, who was born on my birthday in 1933. His oldest daughter [Caroline Sizer Cochran] is my wife's oldest and dearest friend. So I married into a family that had close connections

with the Sizers. But before that, I had known of Tubby Sizer and I had gone and listened to his lectures or his course or something. Because I knew him well enough so that he knew me, and that is important for this story. We graduated on the twenty-second of June, the day before my twenty-second birthday, so I really got through college at twenty-one, pretty good. Twenty-two the next day. That day, the twenty-second of June, the stock market is said to have hit its lowest level. There were just no jobs. The Great Depression was at its greatest. And a very close friend of mine, John I. H. Baur--we called him Jack Baur--who was later director of the Whitney Museum [of American Art]-- We'd become very good friends all through college and afterwards. We were sitting under an elm tree on the lawn in the courtyard of Branford College, beneath the Harkness Tower--the sky as blue as you could get--wondering what we were going to do. We hadn't raised a finger to find a job. [laughter] We were in the exam period waiting to graduate. There was no use looking for jobs because there weren't any. My mother had always said that I would go to Oxford [University] after college and study English literature. Well, I didn't want to go to Oxford and study English literature. I'd read everything, I thought, worth reading, as one does when one is young. I wanted something else to do. Jack had also majored in English, and he felt sort of the same way. And here we were. It was a very hot, humid, cloudy day in June, and we suddenly decided--I think it was really mutual; I can't think that I told him or he told me--why not come back to Yale and study the history of art, since we were both interested in art? And I said, "Fine. Let's go and ask Tubby Sizer about it right away." So we walked half a block to his office. He was in it. And he was overcome with enthusiasm; he was a very enthusiastic person. He thought this was just the greatest thing. I realized afterwards why shouldn't he, because these were the first two students that had ever turned up for a serious graduate program. Because that fall they were going to start this system of two great French scholars, Marcel Aubert, a medieval archaeologist, and Henri Focillon, who was sort of a Renaissance person, who were going to come--Aubert in the fall and Focillon in the spring term--and teach us. They needed students desperately, and here were two students. Most students would have been put off by the fact that Aubert and Focillon were going to teach in French. They didn't know any English. Focillon tried to learn it by going to the movies. Aubert refused. He was a Frenchman; he was not going to sully his lips with English. [laughter] He was wonderful. He always brought a

pair of pearl gray gloves into the lectures and then put them on the lectern. And picked them up when he left, never forgot them. I've never seen any professor do that. So anyway, Jack and I enrolled in the graduate school. There had been a couple of students in the years before, but it hadn't amounted to very much, because the history of art was simply a couple of courses taught by professors in the art school. We weren't aware of this, it really was on such shaky footing. But this gave us something to do. Of course, the tuition was modest in the extreme, and our families could keep us going on a small allowance, and that was okay. So we started off, and it really was a wild roller coaster. [laughter] The French. We got so that we were not only understanding the lectures, but also conversing with Aubert and Focillon. I could no more do it now because my French has left me. But it was really, really wonderful and exciting. And we had other courses I can't remember-- Oh, I know, I had a course where I was the only pupil of a man named Daniel Varney Thompson, Jr., whose brother was Randall Thompson, the American composer. He was a brilliant Harvard graduate who was a sort of lost sheep at Yale. He was extraordinarily self-possessed and, I suppose, intellectually arrogant. He quarreled with the dean who was the chairman of the art department, and he left. But I was given some grueling instruction by him.

RIKALA

In what subject?

HAMILTON

In the technique of graduate study. Footnotes and things like that. Respect for your sources. What did we study? We studied what he was interested in, which was the technique of medieval manuscript painting, because he was preparing an edition. I think he had already published the first volume of Gennino Gennini, who was an Italian artist, sort of follower of Giotto in the fourteenth century. Gennino Gennini's treatise is a famous one, and everybody who goes into medieval art should know it.But what happened was that Thompson knew of a manuscript in the University of Naples, and he had photostats of it. It was in Latin. Fortunately, it had been transcribed. He set me to work translating the thing out of the Latin. How on earth did I ever do that? [laughter] I'd not had a course in Latin since freshman year. But I managed. It wasn't difficult. It wasn't literary Latin; it was a craftsman saying, "Take two

pots, and in one pot put vegetables and in the other fish, and then mix them up and blend them and you'll have the proper glue," and all this and that. And this was published--it was my first publication--by Daniel Varney Thompson, Jr., assistant professor in the history of art, Yale University, and George Heard Hamilton, and nothing below that at all. [laughter] In a small edition of fifteen hundred copies. It's out of print, and it's unread. But it was. I was very grateful towards him to have my name for the first time on a title page. He became a very important scientist in the war, in the second war. He was attached somehow to British secret service or something. But after that, he never went back into academic life, and I don't really know what he did. I saw him only once later on; he was an older man and ill, and he's dead now. But he got me started, along with Focillon.

## 1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE
## AUGUST 7, 1991

RIKALA

How did it come about that [Marcel] Aubert and [Henri] Focillon were brought to Yale [University]? What was the relationship to the department, or--?

HAMILTON

The reason, or it seems to have been, is that Dean Everett Victor Meeks, who was dean of the Yale art school, had-- He was one of those young men who went abroad to study architecture at the--

RIKALA

École des Beaux-Arts?

HAMILTON

École des Beaux-Arts. He became Frenchified and always loved everything French and went, for some unearthly reason-- I think somebody did explain this to me once, but it either didn't seem to carry much water or for some reason I forgot it. He felt that the best thing that could happen to teaching of art history would be to have French people come.Now, you see, '32 is already-- Hitler is already well advanced, and the scholars are beginning to arrive from Germany. The German scholars were being snapped up by Harvard [University] and other places and especially NYU [New York University], the

Institute of Fine Arts there. So that was sort of the thing to do, was to snag important scholars. Well, Dean Meeks was violently anti-German, you see, being so French, so he didn't want any Germans around. Why not have French people?Now, I really don't know how he found out about these people. They were both very distinguished. Aubert was conventional, conservative, academic. Focillon was liberal. He would have voted with the left. Aubert would have voted with the right, politically. Aubert's mind was fixated on medieval archaeology. He couldn't talk about anything else. Focillon's mind was fixated on the world of ideas. He could talk about anything. I remember a conversation once about Proust. It was a crowded room in the faculty club. I was sitting on the floor at his feet, and we were talking about Proust in rather elegant French, I thought. He was marvelous. He knew everything. Where Aubert-- There was no Madame Aubert. She of course didn't come. He just came. But there was Madame Focillon, who never left his side. She was a wonderful woman. Tante Guiguite we called her; her name was Marguerite. He had to have somebody because he was almost blind. He had-- I imagine it was macular degeneration, because he could only see out of his left eye, and only if he held what he was reading up this way. Very disconcerting. But he had read everything before his eyes became so bad. Then of course along came the war, and he could not go back to France. I mean, after the fall of France. He would have been taken by the Nazis. Aubert went through it all with no problem at all. I suspect that-- Focillon was suspected by the Nazis of being a communist. Apparently he was not a communist, because the system is too rigid to suit him, but he was far-out and left to the radical socialists and so on. So he was a wonderfully sort of liberating influence in our own country at that time, when things were sort of dismal politically. It was the last days of Hoover, you see, and the beginning of Roosevelt. That was the fall of '32. And he was wonderful. He loved his students in a way that Aubert didn't. But Aubert's scholarship was impeccable, and he produced a number of medievalists. Not only the two Yale people who became members of the faculty, Sumner Crosby, who worked on Saint-Denis, and Charles Seymour, who did his dissertation on the Cathedral [Notre-Dame] of Noyon-- Noyon. Wasn't that it? And Bobby [Robert] Branner, who was professor at Columbia [University], who died very tragically in his forties. And lots of other people whose names I can't remember because I'm not a medievalist. But they were in a sense inspired by Aubert.

RIKALA

Can you put your finger on any particular interest of why medieval studies and medieval culture seems to have been at its height in this period in the United States? Other universities as well seem to be--

HAMILTON

Well, I think there must have been a lot of reasons. It attracted wealthy collectors, for instance. George Blumenthal with his great collection of medieval things at the Metropolitan Museum [of Art]. The best of Henry Walter's collection in Baltimore [in the Walters Art Gallery] are probably the medieval things. We had an extraordinary development of neo-medieval architecture. Our greatest church designer was Ralph Adams Cram. Saint Thomas's Church in New York. I went in it a few months ago. It's still a magnificent design. It has nothing whatever to do with American culture except insofar as that culture went through a medieval phase in the twentieth century, sort of repeating the phase of the 1840s and 1850s when we got the Smithsonian Institution on the Mall in Washington.

RIKALA

And that coincides with, sort of, the neo-Gothic in England, and so that somehow you can make more sense of that, or understand it. But I'm very curious about this twentieth-century influence in the medieval.

HAMILTON

What would be some other reasons? Medieval history. We had a couple of medieval historians. We had a Japanese who taught Carolingian history. Yes, he died-- He was retired, and he died. He lived on in the graduate school. He was a single man. He had no family, no connections with the world at all, only a nephew living in Japan. So the secretary of the university-- He hated doing these things. He said the faculty always died on Saturday and the news office was closed, so he couldn't get the release of the obituary out until Monday. It was so awkward with the funeral arrangements on Sunday, and so on. He cabled the nephew in Japan and said, "Your revered uncle has passed away. What disposition do you wish us to make with his remains?" And the cable came back right away, two words: "Send head."

RIKALA

My goodness.

HAMILTON

Isn't that marvelous? It's my best story about modern Japan. [laughter]

RIKALA

My goodness.

HAMILTON

"Send head." So the poor secretary, he explained to the fashionable undertakers that all they had to do was cut off the head and put it in a box. [laughter] Creepy, creepy. No, your question is interesting. I know that the first art school in an American college or university opened at Yale in 1866. It was constructed during the Civil War. It was Gothic revival. To it was added in 1928, with a bridge over High Street, a larger building for the art museum which was twelfth-century south French Romanesque. In this twelfth-century southern Romanesque building there were to be two huge halls as you came in, the one to the left for Egyptian, the one to the right for Greek and Roman. We didn't have anything Greek or Roman or Egyptian to speak of, about half a dozen things which would not have looked very well in the vaulted halls of Gothic tracery, or Romanesque tracery, so-- Then the Harkness Quadrangle, which was finished in 1921, is perhaps the most beautiful building at Yale, with its Gothic tower, which is an extraordinarily sensitive and original design based upon a tower in England, in Boston. There the students were obliged to live in medieval rooms without enough daylight. It was called "darkness quadrangle" by the students. But this was very much part of that 1920s culture. The library, which was opened in 1931 and was under construction from the late 1920s, was designed in imitation of a fortified cathedral with a nave and an altar. The delivery desk for the books resembles a medieval altar. The law school is medieval. The graduate school is medieval. There was a very, very popular course in Chaucer, who was a medieval poet if there ever were one. The reaction against that came when I was an undergraduate, when some students a little bit ahead of me started an undergraduate publication called the Harkness Hoot. And that in its very first issues denounced the medievalism and called for an architecture that we now call International Style.

International Style got that term in '31, actually, so all these things are happening simultaneously.

RIKALA

Were you ever a part of the Harkness Hoot?

HAMILTON

No. I disapproved of it, actually. I was very conservative. [laughter] They stood for a kind of a militancy, but I've never found any reason myself to be militant. But they did publish a sonnet of mine, a rather conventional sonnet. I knew all of the editors; they were friends. But in those days I was sort of back in the past, too.

RIKALA

Could you describe a bit your daily routines as a graduate student?

HAMILTON

Oh, that would be the dreariest thing on earth.

RIKALA

Well--

HAMILTON

What you did? You got up in the morning and you went off to classes. No, your classes were usually in the afternoon. The mornings were spent working. It was nothing different from what happens all over the country. I lived in the hall of graduate studies, which was a Gothic building. Terribly small rooms. But--

RIKALA

And at this point there must have been more of a social life to your existence.

HAMILTON

Oh, yes. Oh, I had much more fun as a graduate student. Yes, I met a lot of people. Boys and girls and-- Not a lot. I met enough to keep busy. Some people up in Waterbury [Connecticut] I came to know. I became very fond of them. Still am, poor souls. They are now in their eighties, too. Very ill. It was--

Those were very pleasant years. And in the middle of them came the repeal of Prohibition.

RIKALA

Really?

HAMILTON

That was quite exciting. [laughter] One had drunk, of course, bootleg alcohol as a student, but I never had a drink until the fall of my sophomore year, because my family was totally teetotal and it was totally prohibitionist, you see, when I was growing up.So a friend of my roommate's, who was a class ahead of us, from Kansas City, asked me to go to the football game with him. He asked me to meet him in his room at one o'clock and take the trolley out, and I did. And he said, "Do you want a drink?" It was the first time anybody--I was nineteen--ever offered me a drink. I said, "Well, yes," to be polite. So I had a Scotch and water. And I thought it tasted pretty terrible. [laughter] Awful. From there on, of course, I was introduced to all the other things, too. But the thing about the end of Prohibition that strikes me now as so funny-- It was December 5, 1933. And Jack [John I. H.] Baur and his wife-- He had married the day after we graduated. He and I and Marjorie [Baur]--that was his first wife--and somebody else-- I can't remember now who that was. Another boy. There were the four of us. And we got in a car. I don't know whether it was his car or my car. I don't think I even had a car. We started off to drive to New York--it was a Saturday, December 5--in order to have our first legal drink in New York City. [laughter] And it was snowing. We got as far as Milford [Connecticut] on Route 1, because the Merritt Parkway wasn't finished and the New England Thruway hadn't even been thought of. The snows were so terrible we had to turn back. They were really awful. And you know what we did? We parked at the railroad station and took the train to New York. [laughter]

RIKALA

Determined to get there.

HAMILTON

Isn't this wonderful? So we arrived there in the middle of the afternoon and we had our first legal drink at a New York bar. Then we came back, I guess. We didn't go to the theater or anything else. This is youth, youth, youth. So foolish. But it was fun.

RIKALA

Now, where did you meet your wife [Polly Wiggin Hamilton]?

HAMILTON

She was a student of mine. Not only-- You're not supposed to marry your students; you're not supposed to marry a New Haven girl. And this was-- We met six years before we were married. I used to give a party for the dean, Dean Meeks, who was the dean of the art school. He was not very tall, but he was completely circular like that vase, the stoutest man. He did die soon after he retired at the age of sixty-seven. It's amazing he lived so long. He was rather distinguished looking. He had a beard and so on. And he was really very nice. Not frightfully interesting. But he was the head of the program, so I-- The fall of 1939, I guess, I gave a cocktail party for him and the graduate students. I was writing the invitations in an office I shared with two women on the staff of the art gallery. I was on the staff of the art gallery, too, so that's why we all had this office together. I said, "I hope I've got everybody I should have down for this party." I don't know why there was no official list. They said, "Well, have you invited Polly Wiggin?" I said, "Who?" "Polly Wiggin." I said, "What a strange name." [laughter] They said, "Don't you know her?" And I said, "No." "Well, she's the niece of Fritz Wiggin." And I said, "Who is he?" "Well, he's the university lawyer." "Oh. Well. Yes. I'll invite her." So they gave me her address, and I wrote a nice little note. I had this small apartment out on Whitney Avenue, and it was filled full of the dean, who took up most of the sofa, [laughter] and the other people standing around. There was a knock at the door, and I went and opened it, and I said, "Oh, you must be Miss Wiggin." And she said, "Yes." I wasn't even an assistant professor. I was only an instructor. From that time on we hit it off, and she's been my wife for almost forty-six years. But that's jumping ahead just a bit.

RIKALA

That's jumping ahead, yes. You mentioned that your friend-- You and Jack Baur both enrolled in the school. Did he study art history as well? What did he go on to do?

HAMILTON

Oh, yes. You see, this is why I didn't want to get into the box he was in. He wrote his master's thesis on the development of the baroque altar. The most ridiculous thing. He was an agnostic in the first place. All the baroque altars were over in Europe in the baroque churches. None of them was here. And I didn't want to do that. I wanted to write on something I could see. He didn't really see the baroque altars until-- You know what we did? We all went abroad together in '33--I'd forgotten about that--and he did see the baroque altars. We went to Rome, and he dragged us all around to look at them. No, he saw them. I shouldn't malign him that way. But his interests were not in sculpture, architecture, or anything about painting. And American painting, that developed when he went to the Brooklyn Museum, after he graduated, as a curator of American art. Then, from then on, after a distinguished career there, he went to the Whitney [Museum of American Art] as the director.

RIKALA

How was the program shaped, then, as a brand-new program and presumably with a handful of students?

HAMILTON

Well, I think it was shaped the way any one is. You have your courses, and you try to distribute them so that they will cover the field. We never succeeded in having a course in classic art. I tried so hard when I was the director of graduate studies.The best we ever did was to get the director of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek in Copenhagen [Vagn Poulsen], which has a splendid collection of classic marbles, to come as a visiting lecturer for the fall term. What do you suppose he chose to give his seminar on? Images of Alexander the Great! Now, Alexander the Great lived in the Hellenistic era when they were awfully good at portraiture, so there are a great many portraits of Alexander the Great, and being good portraits, they all look exactly like him. [laughter] It was so disappointing. I remember for years and years and years we had these drawers in the slide collection with portraits of Alexander the

Great. Somebody new to the faculty would say, "What are these all for?" And I said, "That's Professor [Poulsen] of Copenhagen's graduate course."

RIKALA

Whom did you do your master's thesis with, then? How did that come about?

HAMILTON

I did my thesis on Hezekiah Auger. I suppose Theodore Sizer had as much to do with it as anything, but I think I sort of did it all on my own. Nobody was at all interested in this antiquarian subject. But it was really fascinating, because Hezekiah Auger, who was of very humble origins, was a cabinetmaker, of furniture, you see. He doesn't seem to have made chairs, but he made legs for chairs, you know, and legs for tables and beds and things like that. He must have done them on some kind of a lathe, because Samuel F. B. Morse, who later invented the telegraph but then was a painter, rather a good painter, and who lived at that time in New Haven, got ahold of Auger. Because Morse was interested in inventing a machine to weave woolen epaulets for military uniforms, and he wanted Auger's help. And that machine is in the New Haven Colony Historical Society. Now, the next step in that relationship was that Morse invented a carving machine, sort of like a pantograph, and got Auger to carve some sculptures with this thing. Auger, with the machine helping him, possibly carved the first marble by an American sculptor. The date is a little obscure, but it might be earlier than John Frazee, who otherwise has the claim to be the first American marble sculptor. I hope it's Auger, but-- What he did was to make a copy of a bust of the Apollo Belvedere. Now the bust is lost. Everywhere I go, when I hear there's a bust of the Apollo I ask to see it, but it always turns out to be Italian nineteenth century and very slick. Auger's carving was very crude.But then he went on and made a group of Jeptha and his daughter, and Jeptha's about this high and the daughter's about this high. You know, Jeptha swore if God gave him victory he would kill the first living thing he met when he got home, and of course it was his daughter. A terrible story in the Old Testament. Like Agamemnon and Iphigenia. Well, at any rate, Auger did these two little figures which are in the Yale Art Gallery. The Jeptha is based, I discovered, on a seventeenth-century engraving of a statue of Mars in the Capitoline Museum in Rome, which was in Montfaucon's Antiquities, a French book published in the eighteenth century which was in the old

eighteenth-century college library, which was kind of nice, though Auger hadn't gone to Yale. He couldn't afford to do that. But the vice president of the United States paid a trip to New England and stopped off especially at New Haven to see this group. They're just awful, you know, and his-- [Martin] Van Buren himself, later to be the president, coming to see it. It got in all the papers, the vice president comes to see this. It was really fascinating getting into those byways of American history. What I also found myself doing was reading in the New Haven newspaper the accounts of the Battle of Waterloo, Napoleon's retreat to Paris, his abdication, and finally the episode when he was captured by the British, the news arriving three weeks later. But there it was, the whole battle all described and the political turmoil and everything. Hot news. [laughter] Then I finally found Auger's diary, which was lent me by a member of the family. He carved a memorial to a Miss Thompson, which I searched for in the New Haven cemetery without any luck. It was May 1. The thesis had to be all done up and typed and everything by May 15, and I was still looking for Miss Thompson's memorial. And standing there in the graveyard, I thought, "Well. Could it be in the church where the funeral was held?" So I went to the church, which was on the green, and it was the first of May, and down at the bottom of the green the Communist Party was having a parade. Those were the days when we still had communists.

RIKALA

May Day.

HAMILTON

May Day, indeed. That was not any good, but it was, you know, a little tiny document to add to American art. I should have published it. The diaries were not very interesting because he just listed the number of chair rungs that he'd sold to somebody, you know, and then $50 for Miss Thompson's memorial. But life swept me on beyond it, and I never got back to it.

RIKALA

Well, how about if we wrap up for the time being.

HAMILTON

Fine. [tape recorder off] The Carnegie Institute. Have you ever been in Pittsburgh and seen the Carnegie Institute?

RIKALA

No. I don't know it.

HAMILTON

There are four big statues of philosophers in bronze in front of the main part of the building. They were put up there I suppose about the time I was born, about 1910. Now, why should I--? I had never really been out of Pittsburgh except for the summers on the New England coast. I'd been to New York once during a Christmas vacation when I was sixteen, 1926, and it was my first visit to the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art]. Why should I--? And I told you I was interested in sculpture-- Why should I have known from the beginning that those four sculptures were not very good when I had no criteria for comparison? They were the only over-life-sized bronze statues of seated elderly gentlemen in flowing robes I had ever seen. Now, I'd seen photographs of things, but I hadn't paid much attention to them. I didn't know anything about Gothic art at the age of sixteen, Renaissance sculpture. Why did I know that they weren't very good? Now, you may find it very hard to believe that I didn't know they were very good, but I know I did. This is my experience. Does this suggest that there is something innate, not acquired, an apprehension of quality?Now, you go into a museum career, and you very quickly hear about people who have "an eye" and people who don't have "an eye." It's always in the singular. He or she has got an eye. He or she can tell what's good at once. Now, presumably that eye is sharpened--ugly verb there--by experience, by comparison, by a great deal of travel and thought and reading and conversation and everything. Okay. That may be the final polish on it, but is there something that you are born with that tells you that this or that is not very good? Now, I think this is quite peculiar. I don't know. I don't dare discuss it with my friends in the profession because so many of them have very good eyes. I just throw this out. If ever in your future life you have any reason to-- If you find anybody who's had the same experience, telephone me at once.

RIKALA

The whole notion of being critical, or having critical faculties capacity, to be discerning or know when you're uneasy about something, is that in keeping with how you were feeling as a youth when you saw these sculptures? Because I know I feel that way too when I think something is not-- I'm often labeled as someone terribly critical, but not critical in just an opinionated or bitchy sense, but--

HAMILTON

Not in a negative sense.

RIKALA

--somehow having this--

HAMILTON

You have to get the wheat out of the chaff. My wife says I'm much too negative, and I say I'm not negative at all. It's just that I see the faults. She says, "You're looking for the faults." I say, "No. I don't want to find the faults." For instance, I didn't want to find any fault in Beethoven. I grew up trying to play his sonatas, you know, on the piano. Played them miserably. I'll never forget Toscanini conducting Beethoven, you know; it was so thrilling and exciting. It sounds terrible now on the recordings. It's all taken too fast. But I have come to feel that Beethoven is essentially vulgar. There is a kind of an-- I claim to have no prejudices at all. I have fought my way out of the prejudices I was taught, and it's hard going sometimes. I remember years ago, my best friend on the college faculty [Carroll Meeks] was a little older than I, four years older. He was an architectural historian. We used to-- We both had houses in Edgartown [Massachusetts], on [Martha's] Vineyard too. We would go there in the summer. I wrote my books down there. He thought I went to play, but I wrote my books.We'd go to the yacht club for lunch, and the yacht club had terrible, terrible, terrible restrictions, you know, on its membership. There was a man named Metcalf from Rhode Island who had the largest sloop in the world, and he wanted to belong to the yacht club. The yacht club didn't want him to belong because it was suspected he had changed his name. This was never, of course, talked about very openly, but it was murmured and whispered and confided that we must do everything we can to keep Metcalf out of the yacht club. My friend Carroll Meeks and I finally said, "You know, it's

the most tiresome occupation in the summer to worry about Mr. Metcalf. It's all racial prejudice, and it's a terrible bore." I don't know who said these things first. I know I had the sense at the time it was-- We were absolutely unanimous and instinctively reached this position. We said, "You know, if we just gave up all these things--" Because Edgartown was already being inundated with tourists. We hated tourists. They were a generic class of people who were terrible, and they still are. I still hate them. [laughter] But that-- Nothing to do with race or religion and occupation. So we stopped. We just gave up prejudice. And it's the most wonderful experience. I feel so sorry for friends of mine here in Williamstown [Massachusetts] who are still worrying about these awful things, you know. "Are the blacks really more intelligent than whites?" It doesn't matter. So how did I get off on that subject? This is what happens when you grow older. You can never remember the beginning of the paragraph.

RIKALA

Well, we were talking about being critical. Innate critical faculty.

HAMILTON

Yes. We've come a long way. Well, we'll just forget that. Wipe out the whole business about the Edgartown yacht club.

RIKALA

You were at school together with Carroll Meeks.

HAMILTON

Well, he had graduated from Yale the year I came. Then he went into the school of architecture and got an architectural degree, and then was hired to be the assistant to Dean Meeks. They were no relation unless way, way back. Then he eventually ended up as a professor of architectural history.

## 1.4. SECOND PART AUGUST 8, 1991

RIKALA

Let's retrace a little bit from yesterday and begin today discussing the period after completing your master's thesis and your decision to do a Ph.D. in art history. What were some of the factors that determined your plan of study

and what were your professional aspirations at this point? You mentioned that after you'd finished your bachelor's degree you hadn't looked for work, and you and Jack Baur together decided to go into graduate school. After finishing your master's degree, what were you thinking at that time? How did your professional career goals change or form?

HAMILTON

Well, those are good questions, but let me say right at the beginning that they were formed for me. I've had three jobs in my life, and I never looked for any of them. They were always sort of forced upon me or offered to me. For that reason I've been unable to help my children, because I don't know how you go about getting a job. In the second year of the M.A., I hoped that I would find employment. But I was really too busy trying to finish that thesis on Hezekiah Auger and taking courses with Focillon and Aubert and anything to worry much about the future. The future suddenly turned up when Theodore Sizer asked me to come into his office and said that if I would be interested, there was a job down at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore. Well, I said, "What's that?" I'd never even heard of it. Well, he told me that it was the collection of Henry Walters and his father W. T. Walters, which Henry had bequeathed to the city of Baltimore on his death in '31. This was in '34. And that a team of young art historians was being formed to transform it from a private collection into a public museum. Would I be interested? Well, it was the first time anybody had ever mentioned a job to me, so I said, "Certainly."I went to Baltimore and was interviewed by Mr. Morgan Marshall. He had some job. Administrator, I think it was. It turned out that his father had been the contractor that had built the building in 1907, so Mr. Marshall knew everything there was to be known about the building, and blessings on him, because he was a sainted person coping with a raft of five young art historians. He knew nothing at all about art, but maybe that saved him. [laughter] But I'll never forget that we were looking around the collection, part of which was sort of still on the walls while the other rooms were being painted, and so on. There was a small early painting by Ingres of Raphael and his mistress. It was a charming picture, and there are several replicas of it which Ingres painted. Mr. Marshall looked at me and said, "Don't you see a lot of Rubens in that picture?" Well, Rubens was an artist whom Ingres detested. So I was a little bit nonplussed. I mean, Mr. Marshall was in his late sixties and

I was twenty-four. I've always been very respectful of older people, and I didn't want to hurt his feelings. So I finally produced a remark. I said, "Well, that is a very interesting idea." Which indeed it was, because it was so startling. I learned later that Mr. Marshall had been given this question by the governing board to ask young people. If I had said, "Oh, yes. You're so right," he would have known I was wrong. So I squeaked through that thanks to my education. [laughter]

RIKALA

Tests in life.

HAMILTON

And I was there for two years. I had no expectation of doing anything other than staying there the rest of my life. It was a hectic experience, because I came the first of October--I was the last one to arrive; the others had been hired in the summer--and we had until the fourth of November to get the galleries rehung and opened for the public opening.

## 1.5. TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO
## AUGUST 8, 1991

RIKALA

Did you have previous gallery experience?

HAMILTON

None.

RIKALA

None. So it was hands-on.

HAMILTON

Hands-on learning by doing. There must have been a hundred thousand objects, ranging from monumental classic sculpture to Lalique glass statuettes of naked ladies which Mr. Walters had bought. Everything had to be cataloged, which meant measuring and describing them as fast as possible. My field was post-Renaissance. In other words, I did everything eighteenth and nineteenth century. There was nothing twentieth century because Mr.

Walters hated the twentieth century, as most distinguished collectors did in that period. And I had to learn very quickly.There were trunks and trunks full of textiles, not only European but North African. I had to catalog them. I knew nothing about textiles. They'd never crossed my line of vision before. But I'd take home books from the Enoch Pratt Free Library [of Baltimore City], a marvelous library, on textiles and read them in the evening. I learned about twill and satin weave and warp and woof and all those things, and managed, in a short time, to catalog these hundreds of pieces of cloth.Then there was Sèvres porcelain, and certain things which looked like Sèvres porcelain but weren't, and those had to be catalogued. I had to distinguish the ones that were and the ones that weren't, and I'd had no experience whatever in ceramics and ironwork, and you name it--as well as nineteenth-century paintings and prints and drawings. Well, it was really extraordinarily fortunate that I was thrown sort of like the-- Well, I can't think of an analogy, but I was pushed as fast as one possibly could be through five or ten years of museum training. It was going wonderfully and it was exciting, and I liked Baltimore and I liked the people. I thought they had very peculiar customs. I was invited to the cotillion, which is the great party the Baltimore bachelors in the nineteenth century used to give once a year to entertain the hostesses who had had them to dinner during the year. The hostesses brought along their daughters and in this way introduced them into society. Well, it had developed into a marvelous ball. I had met a young lady, and her mother asked me if I'd be interested in going, taking her to the bachelors' cotillion, and I said I would like very much to. And she said, "Well, I'm very happy that you can come, Mr. Hamilton, but I want you to understand that this is the only time in your life that you will ever be invited." Well, I thought it was the most peculiar thing to say to anybody whom you were inviting to a party, but she very quickly explained why I could never be invited again. That was because I hadn't been born in Baltimore. Well, I had to give them credit for being very proud of their city. They wanted to keep the bloodlines pure. [laughter]But in the late spring, in April, I had a letter from Dean Meeks saying that someone had left the art faculty and would I come back. He was also hiring at the same time a classmate of mine, Sumner Crosby, who had developed as a medievalist under Aubert. Well, there were two things about it. I really wanted to teach. And I had done some teaching that very year in the spring at Goucher College, which was still in downtown Baltimore, a course in modern art, curiously

enough. Twentieth-century. How I had learned about twentieth-century art I don't know, except I had been a faithful visitor to the Museum of Modern Art in New York as soon as it was founded in 1929. I think I must certainly have audited Theodore Sizer's course. I'm sure I said something like that yesterday, because-- Oh, I remember when we went to see the Cone collection. Miss Etta Cone was still alive in Baltimore, and I knew exactly what she had, the Picassos and the Matisses in particular and other French paintings. They were no surprise to me. And Miss Cone was delightful and charming. It was a wonderful afternoon.But I turned up at Yale. Not to teach modern art, because Tubby Sizer was still doing that, but rather a course in French painting from the late Middle Ages to the end of the nineteenth century, with my friend Carroll Meeks, who did French architecture. That course we taught for about five or six years, and it was great fun. It was a good course. It was an interplay between Carroll's ideas about architecture and mine about other things, and--

RIKALA

Was that an undergraduate course?

HAMILTON

This was an undergraduate course. I, with all that experience in Sèvres porcelain behind me, gave some lectures on ceramics. Carroll, who was quite outspoken, said afterwards he thought they were awfully good. He said, "You're always so much better when you don't know very much about the subject." [laughter] Well. That bears thinking over, even in later life. I taught that and a course in Italian Renaissance painting, for which my qualifications were extremely slight. But everybody begins somewhere.What this developed into eventually of course was that when the war came, Sizer went into the army with a commission, to the army in Italy, and I could not go into the army. I tried to enlist, but my eyesight was so poor. I've been very myopic since the age of ten. So I was one of those people that held down the fort so there would be someplace for the veterans to return to.

RIKALA

To come back to.

HAMILTON

We kept things going, I'm glad to say. But it was then, when Sizer went away, that I took over the modern course, which became the principal interest of my remaining twenty-five years at Yale. But I only had the M.A., and you asked what were my ambitions. Well, I had really realized my ambition when at the age of twenty-six I returned to Yale as an instructor.

RIKALA

That's extraordinary.

HAMILTON

The other carrot that Yale held out was it was going to double my salary. When I was hired in Baltimore, I was the fifth person. The others were all a little bit older. They'd had much more experience. Dorothy [Eugenia] Miner was really a pupil of Belle da Costa Green at the [Pierpoint] Morgan Library. She was great on medieval manuscript painting. Dorothy Hill was a graduate of Johns Hopkins [University] in classic art and was a really distinguished classicist already. Edward King, who had gone to Princeton [University] and had studied under [Charles Rufus] Morey and [Ernest T.] DeWald and so on, knew all about Renaissance painting. And Marvin Ross, who was from Harvard [University]. Dorothy Miner had gone to Columbia, so it was a wonderful assembly of people from all the great eastern universities. Marvin Ross from Harvard was awfully good about medieval ivories and metalwork and Byzantine art. Excellent Byzantine art. And I was new. I was callow. I was ignorant compared to these people, who had been out in the world for a few years. I learned an awful lot from them, and we became very good friends. Ed King is still alive in his mid-nineties, and he was the oldest of them then, and a friend of Alfred Barr, interestingly enough, from Princeton days. So that was a marvelous group, and I was sorry to leave them, but-- And I was sorry to leave the Walters. I loved the museum work, but I loved teaching a little bit more. So I was the fifth one hired, and all they could pay me was the money that was left over from the municipal grant, which was $1,000. I worked for one year at $1,000. The Boston cleaning women in the statehouse, government employees in Boston, struck that winter for an increase in their salaries of $1,200. So I was paid less than a scrubwoman. And I thought the scrubwomen were doing pretty well. [laughter] But then they raised it to $1,200 the next year, and Yale held out the princely sum of $2,400 in 1936, on which I was

supposed to live. If I had been a married instructor, I wonder what ever would have happened. But I took it and began there. Now, I only had an M.A., and the question eventually began to arise what to do about a Ph.D. Yale had at that time no Ph.D. in art history. They had one in something called history, arts, and letters, which was a very stylish and very gentlemanly program in which you took courses in history, art history, and literature. My colleagues were getting degrees in that field. Sumner Crosby and Charles Seymour in medieval architecture, and I think also George [A.] Kubler. Kubler was a little younger than we were, two or three years younger. The question was, should I do that? But I had certain reservations about history, arts, and letters professionally. I was not quite sure what other colleges and universities thought of it as a degree, and it was an odd one because you couldn't publish very easily history, arts, and letters. You could publish in any one of those fields, but binding them all together is a little different. So I dragged my heels on it, and finally Yale decided to create a degree in history of art. There was no way out of not going into it and getting it. But that was fairly simple. It really was, because I had had two years already. I needed to take only a couple of more courses, and I think I really only took one and that was in French history. Then I wrote a dissertation. The war had started. We were at war. Let me just go back and say that I've always been more innocent than the times required. After eleven years at Yale-- Could it have been eleven years, 1936 to '47? Well, it was. I realized that I was doing-- I had two jobs. One was an instructor in the history of art, and the other was the assistant curator to Theodore Sizer as associate director of the art gallery and then director of the art gallery, as he became. In those days, the university operated also on Saturday mornings. That stopped when the war started. But here I was not being aware that I was teaching a full-time teaching schedule and also was expected to be a full-time curator. This was dumb. [laughter]

RIKALA

It's an awful lot of work.

HAMILTON

I felt sort of shortchanged when I woke up to the fact that I was really being asked to do more than I could take care of, and I suppose that was one of the reasons I postponed the Ph.D., because there just didn't seem to be any

time.Now, peculiarly enough-- Time in its winged chariot rolls through the heavens, and in 1966 I find myself here in Williamstown doing three things. I have a full-time job as the director, the second director, of the Clark Art Institute and the first professional museum person to take it. I also have a teaching appointment as professor of art; it's actually history of art, but they call it art in the college. And I'm also--and this was one of the reasons I came--charged by the trustees of the Clark and the president of Williams College to create a graduate department because of the great resources, supposedly, of the Clark Art Institute for something a little bit beyond undergraduate research. Here I am doing these three things-- Which also involves building a multimillion-dollar addition to Mr. [Robert Sterling] Clark's little marble museum in order to house the institute's work, which is research, a great library. And the organization, the creation, and the supervision of a graduate program. I don't quite understand why I get myself into these multiple situations. They're challenging, there's no doubt about it, but they are kind of wearing, and you have this awful feeling that you could be doing better if you were only doing one of them.

RIKALA

Yes, it's many hats to wear, as well.

HAMILTON

The teaching at Williams College, of course, was only one course. It was an undergraduate seminar until we had the graduate program, and then it was the graduate course in the graduate program, which I went on teaching for eight years after I retired. Anyway, I've done it. I don't recommend it to anyone. It undoubtedly meant I didn't write all the books I might have, but never mind. Much too many books to read anyway. But then I-- To come back to Yale-- Focillon was still there. He could not return to Paris after the fall of France because of his radical political beliefs. It was understood that the Nazis would pick him up right away. This was a terrible tragedy, of course, for him.

RIKALA

What institution had he been at in France?

HAMILTON

He had been at the École des Chartes, I think. He was a kind of a maverick. He didn't fit into the French professional system because he was really very liberal, not just politically, but liberal in his ideas.

RIKALA

What components made that up? What were the ingredients that made up this liberal nature of his? Can you describe him a bit?

HAMILTON

It's just the difference between a standard academic professor who teaches what he was taught and someone who thinks creatively and sees connections and inspires other people to look for things that hadn't been seen. He was wonderful. He was always challenging you. We would sit, the whole graduate program, nine or ten students crowded into one small office, and Focillon at the other end smoking a pipe and the windows closed. [laughter] It was very difficult to stay awake because of the conditions. But you would give these reports, and he would always say, "Very good. Magnifique, Monsieur Hamilton." Then you knew what the next word was going to be, and it was, "Mais--" "But--" And we all dreaded that "but." "It was magnificent, but--" Aubert told everybody who spoke French, "My, but your French is classic." [laughter] He told that to older women, you know, who belonged to the Alliance Française, who didn't speak French that well, and it was wonderful, this politeness. But Focillon's "but" was then followed with a very gentle, fatherly--not professorial at all, fatherly--exposition of everything you'd done which was inadequate or wrong or something. And your mind expanded. It wasn't just a question of dotting the "i's," it was showing you how to think better. I found it very exciting.

RIKALA

Do you think in a sense he cultivated a Yale art history method in just this way as you're describing it, a sort of lateral thinking about history?

HAMILTON

I don't know that there is a Yale system. There was only one Focillon. The awful point of it is I can't remember who did all the other graduate teaching. You see, very soon this much younger generation-- I mean Crosby and I were--

Actually, Crosby was a year older than I, eleven months older, but we were in the same class at Yale. Seymour was three years behind us, Kubler was two or something, maybe three. No, he must have-- He's very, very close. He's somewhere in there. Carroll Meeks, who taught architectural history, was four years older. There was myself, Seymour, Crosby, and Kubler. There were four of us, you see. This created really a most unfortunate situation as far as academic advancement is concerned, because how were we all to become professors? Well, we all did, one after another, and we all kept the peace.

RIKALA

Were you then the first person to graduate with this new art history degree?

HAMILTON

Oh, yes. I was the first person who ever got a degree, a Ph.D. in art history, in '42. And that is a meaningless statistic.

RIKALA

Well, it's--

HAMILTON

It's quantitative, not qualitative. [laughter]

RIKALA

Well, it's always interesting to be the first at something.

HAMILTON

Well, it did annoy me when the Sterling Library, the great library at Yale, had an exhibition of the centennial or sesquicentennial or something of the first Ph.D. awarded. The display cases in the hall of the library were filled full of Ph.D.'s, early Ph.D.'s. So I went to see about the first Ph.D. in the history of art, but it wasn't mine at all. It was one of my students, Edgar Munhall, now curator at the Frick Collection. He wrote an excellent dissertation. This is a great compliment to me in a way, but I would have thought that I might have been there as the first, you see. The one and only time that would ever happen. But--

RIKALA

I ran across Lane Faison-- Is that how you say his name?

HAMILTON

Lane Faison, yes.

RIKALA

Now, was he there at Yale at that time? And he was assistant to Focillon, yes?

HAMILTON

Yes. He was Focillon's assistant. He graduated from Williams in the class of 1929. As a matter of fact, he might buzz out here. He lives a couple of miles away. And he was at Williams. He was a student of the famous professor who created the art history program here [Karl E. Weston]. He had an M.A. from Harvard, which was a one-year proposition, and then an M.F.A. from Princeton, which was the equivalent of a doctor of philosophy without the dissertation. I don't know why he didn't go on to get the dissertation, but it may be that he was summoned. I don't know how he was summoned by Dean Meeks to come as Focillon's assistant. I know he was in Paris that summer and was able to see both Aubert and Focillon and talk to them to find out what they were like, and so on. But if you're terribly keen about that, you can ring him up and ask. I was a pupil in the first class he ever taught on his own outside of assisting Focillon. He taught a course in Sienese painting, and I'll never forget it. You know, these awful problems like what's the difference between Andrea di Bartelo and Bartelo di Andrea. You really have to go to Siena and look at them to see. But he was a good teacher and very amusing, as he still is.Oh, I remember this now. It's all coming back to me. He was called back to Williams, because he loved Williams, and Dean Meeks called me to take his place. Yes, I took Lane Faison's place. Not as Focillon's assistant, because by that time he didn't need assistance, but to do the other kinds of teaching that Lane had been doing. I guess that's how I got into the Italian Renaissance, you see, because he taught Sienese painting in the graduate school. My Italian course was an undergraduate course. Then he's been at Williams ever since, director of the Williams College Museum [of Art] for years and years, and an old and dear friend of ours.

RIKALA

Ultimately, then, what was your dissertation about?

HAMILTON

My dissertation-- Oh, this was tough because it had to be something I could see. I wasn't going to write about baroque altars with the war going on. [laughter] A wonderful woman at the Morgan Library who worked under Miss Green, whose name I've forgotten, said that they had just acquired a collection of Delacroix drawings, and would I be interested in cataloging them? Well, I really couldn't undertake to catalog things for the Morgan Library. I had enough to do at Yale because we acquired Edwin Austin Abbey's estate. He was a nineteenth-century American illustrator and oil painter who lived in England and bequeathed the estate to the British nation. They didn't want it because there weren't enough funds to keep it up. The banker, the attorney in charge of the estate in London, was an American who graduated from Yale, [laughter] so he thought maybe Yale should have it. I went over to look at it in '37, and it obviously was worthwhile. So we got it, and I had these thousands of Abbey things to catalog. That was a sort of hit-or-miss job, because there was no time. The dissertation was supposedly to have been on the Delacroix drawings at the Morgan Library. I went and looked at them and looked at them a long time, and I didn't find them very interesting. I have never been aware that they've been exhibited. [laughter] I wasn't satisfied with their quality. So I had to do the next best thing. I wanted to do it on Delacroix, I knew that. I don't know why now, but I did. So here with all of Delacroix's great paintings off there in Paris and London and so on, how could I see them? I couldn't. So I decided to do what people often did in those days, which was to make an iconographical study, or iconological study, because-- Don't forget [Erwin] Panofsky's lectures had been given at Bryn Mawr [College] in '37 or '38 and were published in '39 as Studies in Iconology. It was perfectly possible to do this because the material, such as it would be, would be in prints and drawings and so on, and not the difficulty of writing about paintings which you couldn't see. So I wrote a dissertation in a number of chapters on topics suggested that I discovered in Delacroix's work. It was never published as a dissertation, because in a sense it was never finished. The war was going on, and we were teaching not only what was left of our own courses--the course of a hundred in Italian Renaissance had sunk to thirty--but A. Whitney Griswold, later the president of Yale, but then a member of the

history department, remembered that in my modern course I had been showing Russian films such as The Birth of a Nation and all these great films which the Museum of Modern Art had just made available to educational institutions. He decided that I was exactly the person to act as the assistant to the professor of Russian history, George Vernadsky, who was one of those White Russian refugees from the First World War. We would teach an army specialized training corps for 120 soldiers who were going to be airlifted into Russia behind the German lines, which I thought was a ghastly thing to have to do. Well, they were all from the Bronx. [laughter] There may have been some Russian descendants among them, but they were more typically New York people from the Bronx. And they weren't buying anything. They saw through me right away, because I was called on the Fourth of July, which was a Saturday, by Griswold and told that these troops were arriving the next day, Sunday, and would be indoctrinated on Monday, and we would start teaching on Tuesday. Well, you can't say no, you know, in wartime, so I said, "Yes. What am I going to teach?" He said, "Well, you're going to be the assistant to Vernadsky and help him because he's elderly and doesn't understand America yet very well." His interest in Russia was entirely before the eleventh century. Very, very interesting, but of no practical concern to these people that were going to try to save Russia from the Nazis. Well, at any rate, my first teaching assignment was the geography of Siberia, because the geographer who would commute from New York was a Russian prince, and he wasn't able to get there until Wednesday. So I had overnight to prepare a lecture on the geography of Siberia. And I did. I still remember those four great rivers that flow to the north, and they're always frozen when they get to the North Sea. I remembered the names of two of them for a long time; now I've forgotten them all. [laughter] But the wonderful thing was that these 120 soldiers knew perfectly well I didn't know any more about Siberia than they did. [laughter] But we became good friends and we had fun.I ran a sort of lecture program in connection with it. I had [Vladimir] Nabokov come and talk when he was still only known as the butterfly man at Cornell [University], well before he had become so famous as a novelist. He was very interesting. I had other people who were learned in Russian topics. Professor Helen Muchnik from Smith [College] came several times. One was kept very busy, but this all of course enormously interfered with writing the dissertation, which was finished and accepted in 1942, let's see, right there before the Battle of Stalingrad, even.

Separate chapters of it have been published, two of them in the Gazette des Beaux-Arts and one in the Burlington Magazine and one in a festschrift by Belle da Costa Green at the Morgan Library. But it's too bad they've never been all put together in a little booklet. But anyway, that's water over the dam. It was interesting, because I discovered that Delacroix, for instance, had read Byron's Childe Harold, and I discovered the edition he had read of Childe Harold, because in his diary he quoted a long paragraph about Byron which nobody had ever, you know, located before. With a little bit of digging around, I discovered that it was from an introductory preface to the first French translation of the poem. So Delacroix was reading that. No, I beg your pardon. Delacroix read English, and this was an English paragraph as I remember. He was reading the poem in English from this edition, and this edition was illustrated with very curious engravings, two of which have figures which turn out to resemble figures in his own paintings. One is the self-portrait known as Hamlet, which has on the back a reference to Scott's [Bride] of Lammermoor. But her costume is very close to that of the figure in the scene of the Roman father who was nursed by his daughter, remember that? Well, there's a figure there on a tomb. I may be getting this a little bit mixed up because, after all, it's almost fifty years ago. But the other one was also interesting. Because Childe Harold gets into a battle somehow in Spain-- I don't mean Childe Harold, I mean Don Juan. Correct that when you do it. It's Don Juan. There's a woman in the battle, and the woman turns out to be like the figure of Liberty--one assumes it's Liberty--in the great painting of Liberty Leading the People. So this was all, you know, building layer upon layer of meaning, what Panofsky was able to do in his studies in iconology, but without his, of course, erudition or skill. But that was my dissertation, and it led within a few years to a most interesting event, which was that Charles Sterling, the French scholar who was a curator at the Louvre, who was living in New York and working at the Met for some of the war years-- We got to know each other, and he knew that I liked Delacroix. One day he sent me--this was after the war was over, '46, I think--a postcard saying there was a Delacroix coming up at auction which he thought I should see. The signature seemed excellent. So I went to New York on a Saturday, and I got there and found that the paintings had all been taken off exhibition and put backstage-- Unimportant. So I went and they said, "You can see it backstage." So I went-- The door opened, and out came Georges Wildenstein. So I knew that Wildenstein had

been looking at the picture, and I knew that in that case I couldn't possibly buy it. But I went in and looked at it, and the signature was superb. It was about so big, and it was an early scene, one of his sort of cabinet pictures of Milton dictating Paradise Lost to his daughters. Delacroix was very much interested in English art and English literature.So I abandoned that and went to the public library to do some work on my Russian research for the book on Russian art [The Art and Architecture of Russia]. I got hungry, so I thought I'd better go and get something to eat. I started down the steps. I always walked down the steps rather than try to go around the elevator, because the stairs at the public library are majestic and wonderful. I started down, and on the first landing there ahead of me was this enormous painting that I'd seen many, many times by that Hungarian academic painter named Munkáscy, something like that, of Milton dictating Paradise Lost to his daughters. [laughter] And I said, "That picture is saying something. It is saying, 'Get back to the American Anderson Galleries,'"--later Parke-Burnett--"'as fast as you can.'" So I grabbed a taxi and I got up there three numbers before the Delacroix came up. The auctioneer called for bids, and there was absolutely dead silence. He said, "Well, I have $500." That was the reserve, you see. "Do I hear any more?" I put up my finger. He said, "I hear $600." Anybody? Nobody. Nobody. So I got the picture.

RIKALA

That's interesting.

HAMILTON

Well, as you see, everything here except the Chinese horse is twentieth century, and that is what my wife and I have collected. I'm sorry you can't see the good things we had, because they had to be sold because of our inability to insure them. But there was this total lack of interest in Delacroix, and we never hung the picture. We lent it often. We lent it to colleges and universities in this country and museums. We lent it to the Edinburgh Festival for the Delacroix centennial in '63, we lent it to Toronto, and finally we lent it to the Louvre, and I have heard that it looked marvelous hanging next to a great religious picture of the early years. So then the time came to-- Oh, and it hung here at the Clark for several years, but I didn't feel I could offer it to the Clark. As a former director, I thought, you know, I had better stay out of that. If the

director himself realizes how beautiful it is, it's up to him to ask me if it's for sale, but he never did. So we lent it to an exhibition in Frankfurt and Zurich, which also went to Madrid and was to have come to the National Gallery [of Art], but the National Gallery canceled it because it had no blockbusters. It was only small pictures. The blockbusters don't travel anymore; they don't leave the Louvre. This was dismaying for other museums, too, around the country that had also chipped in. But that was the National Gallery's doing.So the picture finally has come to rest in Zurich. It's in the Kunsthaus. One of their major acquisitions, they said. I'm so happy that they have it and so disappointed that it isn't in an American museum. But that all comes out of the dissertation. It was a fun painting.

## 1.6. TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE
## AUGUST 8, 1991

RIKALA

It is interesting to me, and I haven't asked this in a straightforward way: At Yale [University] when you were a student and then your early teaching career, what were the impressions and influences that you obviously knew about, coming from [Erwin] Panofsky and some of the other German scholars that were in New York, in relationship to--?

HAMILTON

You mean when I was an undergraduate?

RIKALA

Yes, both as an undergraduate and then as your interests evolved.

HAMILTON

Well, there were none as an undergraduate, really.

RIKALA

A little bit too early?

HAMILTON

Yes. You see, if you get through in '32, the wave is just beginning to come. It's a hard question to answer after this lapse of time. I was aware early on that

Harvard [University] had hired Wilhelm Koehler and thought he was great and wonderful. I never heard him, never met him, never saw him, so I can't say anything about him. At NYU [New York University], I was aware of Walter Friedlaender, principally, I suppose, because that young woman--Polly Wiggin--I mentioned, who was a student of mine, we urged her to take a course with Friedlaender. I don't know how-- I don't know whether she had to go to New York once a week or what or whether she was living there, but she did, and it was a course in French painting. She gave a paper based on a report she'd written for Friedlaender very early on at the first or second of the Frick Collection art history symposia. There's a reference to this paper in something Friedlaender wrote. Then in one way or another, I got to hear Friedlaender, talked to him a couple of times. Another connection with one of the foreign scholars was Edgar Wind. Has his name arisen in any of these? He was remarkable. He was related to [Henri] Focillon because Madame [Marguerite] Focillon's first husband, I think, had been Edgar Wind's uncle. It was of course no blood relationship, but Edgar Wind really became quite a good friend. He gave two lectures at Yale, one on The Last Supper and the other onThe School of Athens, and forbade any lighting except what came from the slides. He did not want anybody to take any notes. Now, this raised certain suspicions that perhaps he wasn't quite sure that the facts were all correct and didn't want to be contradicted, and secondly that maybe he wanted to keep the material to himself to use for lectures or for publication. I don't remember much about the Leonardo lecture except that it was extraordinarily interesting. I remember The School of Athens very well because he was the first person, to my knowledge, who was able to identify all the philosophers and then study their interrelations into groups of connected philosophical thought and give us the program for the fresco. So it wasn't just--didn't occur by happenstance. It wasn't Raphael thinking up what he wanted to paint. It was some body of philosophical doctrine prepared in the Vatican. Wind was able to point to names of cardinals and people and whatnot. It was a really dazzling lecture. [laughter] The people at Yale were determined after the experience with the Leonardo that they would have some record of what he was going to do with The School of Athens, so Betsy Chase, Alice Elizabeth Chase, who was the docent for the art gallery and who gave a course in symbolism for the students in the painting school, lay flat on the floor next to the side door into the auditorium, where there was about a three-eighths-inch crack [laughter]-- I

mean an opening--between the bottom of the door and the stone floor. She lay there, and there was just enough light for her to make notes. That's perhaps why I remember the content of the lecture so well, because I could refresh my recollection with Betsy's notes. When I was asked at the time of my orals whom I wanted as the outside examiner--it's like being asked what you want for breakfast at your last meal before the death walk--I selected Edgar Wind. [laughter]

RIKALA

Really?

HAMILTON

He came, and he was wonderfully kind in the orals and helped me get through them. I remember his wife so well, Margaret [Wind]. Then he came to Smith [College] and brought with him the slides from Chicago, so that raised a little bit of difficulty with the University of Chicago faculty, where we had a couple of friends. But I then never saw Edgar after he went to Oxford [University]. He was swallowed up into English life and so on. But he had a very lively mind and an interesting personality.I was reading the other day his little book on Bellini's Feast of the Gods, and it's interesting because it is art history without the art. Since the picture has been cleaned, of course-- Have you seen it?

RIKALA

No.

HAMILTON

Oh, it's absolutely dazzling. It took them three and a half years. There's a very interesting film that the National Gallery [of Art] has, if you could get that in California and see it, which discusses the attribution to Titian of the landscape and so on. But it is so beautiful, and it looked so different when Mr. [Joseph Early] Widener had it. It had simply been overpainted and darkened and so on. You just wonder if Wind seeing it now would have anything different to say, but I suppose not, because he could write his book from a photograph. It's the identification of the mythological figures, with nothing to say about the quality of the picture. Now, this leads me to something I was thinking about while I was waiting for the coffee to heat up, which is that my life has been not solely

art historical as in a professional, in an academic, sense nor solely art historical in a museum sense; it's been both and always both. The only time that I did not simultaneously teach and curate was that very first year in Baltimore, but the second year I taught a course at Goucher College, and then the whole thirty years at Yale I was an assistant [curator] and then a curator and then for a while an associate director of the art gallery. I had a great deal to do at Yale not only with the Edwin Austin Abbey collection, but with the collections of the Société Anonyme.

RIKALA

Yes.

HAMILTON

Because that arrived four years after the Abbey. I don't know why everything always came one on top of the other. And with it arrived Miss [Katherine Sophie] Dreier, [laughter] who was very gentle and very fierce, depending upon her state of mind, and rather a dear person, but this was late in her life and she was not well. She had some trouble with her legs, and we heard it was dropsy, but that is a form of cancer, I guess. She finally died in 1952, slightly less than eleven years after she'd given the collection. There was nothing I ever could do which pleased her. Well, I shouldn't say that. I guess I pleased her a couple of times, but most of the time-- She was always dissatisfied we weren't doing enough for the collection. Well, actually, we couldn't drop everything else we were doing and concentrate solely on propagandizing for the Société Anonyme, which was what she had hoped. But--

RIKALA

How did she come to decide to give the collection to Yale?

HAMILTON

You ask these difficult questions. I think there were Yale people in her family; in fact, I'm quite sure of that. Yale was faute de mieux, because she would have much rather had it go to the Museum of Modern Art, but it wasn't going to fit in with her scheme of things.

RIKALA

Can you digress a moment? The Museum of Modern Art, it seems to me, was much more interested in sort of a canonical modernism.

HAMILTON

Well, they created the canonical modernism.

RIKALA

Right.

HAMILTON

We wouldn't have had it if it hadn't been for Alfred Barr.

RIKALA

That's true. But you say this didn't fit in--

HAMILTON

That didn't fit in at all with her ideas. She was herself, she considered, a creative artist. She had been in the Armory Show with a picture called The Blue Bowl, and there was nothing dangerous or advanced or radical about it at all. It is in some kind of foundation in Chicago that doesn't answer letters, and when it does it says, "No, we won't lend The Blue Bowl." But I think it did get into one of those reconstructed Armory Show exhibitions in the-- When we had them a few years ago. She was very conservative at first because she studied with academic artists. Then she was on the fringes of the [Walter and Louise] Arensberg group in New York, and that's where she met Duchamp, who was then a very young man. She was ten years older than he and took quite a shine to him. Then I think somewhere she saw a Kandinsky--there was one in the Armory Show--and abstract art came all over her, and she never painted anything representational again. She was not an outstanding painter, but she had enormous enthusiasm for the modern movement. How much of this was self-aggrandizement and how much genuine is very difficult to tell, because she was always promoting herself as well as these other people. But she did heroic work.You know she had the first exhibition in this country of Léger, of Miró, of Archipenko, all in little rented rooms, which she called the "Museum of Modern Art." Then in 1929, nine years after she'd started, the Museum of Modern Art called itself that. She was mortally offended. She sued them, I think, and called herself the Société Anonyme Incorporated Museum

of Modern Art, 1920, which is a long title to put on a label. It's shortened to Société Anonyme, Inc. The Depression hurt her very severely. She had inherited a good bit of money and lost an awful lot of it, as so many people did, so that her activities were curtailed and she had to give up her annual rental of rooms in New York and shows and so on. Then suddenly came this question, would Yale be interested? Well, Theodore Sizer was always interested in trying to get people to give their collections. At one point, when Duncan Phillips was having difficulties, he offered to take the Phillips collection. Duncan, you see, was a Yale graduate of the class of 1908, so there was every reason to pursue it with him, but he managed to pull himself together and continued on his own way. Yale did get great collections, the Garvin collection of American arts and crafts and so on from Yale people. So I think it was quite logical for her to think of Yale. There were no other museums, big museums, that could possibly have taken it on her terms, which were to exhibit a good bit of it all the time. Now, a good bit of it is in some respects unexhibitable, because she had as her motto "Taste good or bad is of no concern. It is the vital spark which determines it." So she bought, in large quantities, the work of painters who never really made the grade, or are, I'm afraid, not going to make it because they were working in styles which were already practiced with much more accomplishment by Picasso and Braque and Franz Marc and so on. But she was also enormously interested in helping young artists whom she felt had the divine spark but had not yet been appreciated. It's interesting that when I came to Williamstown [Massachusetts], I found here Lawrence Bloedel, Larry Bloedel, with a very large collection of American artists which includes, just like Miss Dreier's, these waifs and strays of people whom he felt deserved encouragement and bought their work, and then they didn't make it. Now, whether they will eventually be more prominent in years to come is hard to tell. Maybe they will. But it's wonderful that there are people who will support the artists. I suppose with the example of Miss Dreier, I bought two pictures by students graduating from the Yale art school, very large pictures, [laughter] and I still think they're good. But they didn't make it. One was Richard Lytle, who still paints a little, but he really has no reputation at all, and the other one was the late Arnold Bittleman, who had a few shows in New York but never made the grade there and taught at Union College and died. Both of them are interesting pictures. The Bittleman is too large to get into this house, and it's

in the cellar at the Clark [Institute of Art]. [laughter] Beautiful, beautiful sort of abstract impressionist thing that is-- It's abstract impressionist, not abstract expressionist. The Lytle is a stunning abstract study of sort of cloud forms. But, shall I say, this is all in the name of charity, I suppose, and it's praiseworthy, but it doesn't advance the cause of art history very much.

RIKALA

So Dreier's collection came in '41. You mentioned yesterday that you first met Duchamp in '42.

HAMILTON

That's right.

RIKALA

Was he coming at that point to see the collection installed? I can't remember that story.

HAMILTON

Yes. He finally got out of France.

RIKALA

And both Dreier and the Arensbergs had worked towards getting his visa situation cleared to grant him entry to--

HAMILTON

I suppose so, yes. I don't really know about that. But he came in, was it March of '42? He came to New Haven [Connecticut] for the first time-- I would say it was in the late winter. I know the leaves were off the trees. It could have been March. But that's that.

RIKALA

You mentioned yesterday that you already thought Duchamp was dead.

HAMILTON

I did.

RIKALA

He was a little-known artist.

HAMILTON

I never had heard about him. He dropped completely out of sight. If I had been alert about these things when I was ten years old, I might have known that he and Miss Dreier-- That he went off to Argentina and Miss Dreier pursued him. They went on sailing ships. I mean steamboats, steamboats. She was not going to let him escape. But she never caught him exactly. They were-- He was the most remarkable man with her, because she was great for losing her temper. She was Germanic, and he was French. She treated him so badly in front of other people, in front of more than just myself. I couldn't see how he could take it. But he was the kind of person to whom nothing mattered, and, I suppose in those respects, it was one way to avoid feeling humiliated. He was being humiliated. I don't know, and I don't think it was because she gave him a small allowance. People have-- Samuel Johnson threw over Lord Chesterfield, remember, when he was so roped to him. So Duchamp could have thrown her over and wouldn't have starved any more than usual, because the allowance was not quite enough to keep him alive, anyway. But you could tell that she was very fond of him. But I felt for him. She was a little bit--something of a mother figure. She was ten years older, after all. But he tried to open her eyes to what we consider the real things of the modern movement, and undoubtedly without him she wouldn't have bought the Brancusi or the Braque or the Miró. She certainly probably wouldn't have bought such a daring Miró, because it's really dada, and the Léger. Her tastes were German. She'd been born in this country, born in Brooklyn, but her family were first generation. She was second. She spoke with a slight German accent, believe it or not. Very slight, but it was perceptible. So you have her buying [Johannes] Molzah, and that's one of the names that occurs to me. A cipher, and these German painters that are very hard to find even in German biographical dictionaries. Very obscure. They were bought on her annual visits there during the terrible inflation of the twenties, for nothing. For ten dollars, you see, she could buy a whole lot of paintings, which was worth millions of marks. In a way she was not taking advantage of these people because the dollars were welcome to them. Her best friend among the Germans was the Russian, Kandinsky, who was the first vice president of the Société Anonyme. He wrote her long, long letters in German, which are at Yale. They've never been

transcribed, and they're awfully hard to read. I never read them. But he was mystical in his way, the way Miss Dreier was mystical in another. But she had a beautiful Kandinsky.She had wonderful things at the end of her life. She'd had to sell a lot of them, of course, after the Depression, but the Brancusi Yellow Bird was there. A marvelous Mondrian. It was just great to see these things being lived with in a whole lot of German furniture and clutter.She also could be utterly exasperating. When I edited for her the first catalog of the collection, which the university had agreed to publish, we had enormous difficulties because she insisted on producing the biographical information. I remember with Léger, of whom in the-- It was published in 1950, and about whom in the forties we had plenty of biographical information-- I had to edit them, which means correcting them and so on, and I sent her the revised version of the biographical details. And I got the angriest telephone call. She said, "It does not matter what you think is right or wrong. This is the way I know it, and that is the way it is to be printed." So that's the way in most--in some--cases it was printed. It had to be. She would not yield. She was a compulsive sort of scholar. Everything she wrote on the typewriter she put into quadruplicate, so when she died there were these three copies, four copies of everything. This made it very difficult to accommodate her into the running of the museum. But both Polly and I became very, very fond of her. It was nerve-racking to go to lunch, because she had a pet cockatoo and she let the pet cockatoo out of its cage. It would sit on her shoulder, usually her left shoulder, during lunch, until suddenly it would fly across the table and land on yours and take off your fork or spoon just what you were about to put in your mouth. We hated that cockatoo. [laughter]

RIKALA

Did the bird live a very long life?

HAMILTON

Long life, yes. But-- [laughter]

RIKALA

So in '45 you did an exhibition.

HAMILTON

We did the exhibition of the three brothers Duchamp [Marcel Duchamp, Jacques Villon, and Raymond Duchamp-Villon].

RIKALA

And that was based in part on her collection?

HAMILTON

As I recall, it was almost entirely. I think there were a couple of loans. I couldn't find the catalog of that; it would take a lot of digging. My files are in a mess, having moved out of my office into the study here. But it was essentially what came from the Société Anonyme. We had a fine Duchamp-Villon sculpture. We had a couple of beautiful paintings by Jacques Villon, and we had the Duchamp things, including The Glass Machine, the one that almost decapitated Man Ray in the early days. It was three blades of glass of three different lengths which were fixed onto a pipe, whatever you call it, and they revolved, and they had painted arcs, black and white, on them. When they revolved you got this sort of image of something going around, but of also coming in and out. It had a French motor. We were able to get it started once with the French motor, and then it died and we had to replace the motor. And we ran it. We ran it at the opening and a couple of other times. But it really was frightfully dangerous, because while Duchamp was deeply interested in mechanics and everything, it was all mental, and there was no reason why this thing might not fall apart and snap and the glass fly out. As I say, Man Ray said he was almost decapitated when something broke in the beginning. It was made in New York in those early years. But it was exciting to have it running a while. But it was March of '45, and [George S.] Patton was pushing to Berlin, you know, and all this and that. He never got to Berlin, but we-- There were just other things in the world then.

RIKALA

You mentioned yesterday that after '42 you started to become friends with Duchamp and saw him fairly regularly.

HAMILTON

Yes. Well, then Duchamp-- He didn't come so much to New Haven to see the art, because he wasn't interested very much in other people's art. He was

interested in their personalities. I think that's what brought [Robert] Rauschenberg and [Jasper] Johns into his circle, in that they were very charming and interesting young men. He called me up once and said that he had two young friends, and they wanted to come up and see the Société Anonyme, and would I show it to them. And I said, "Of course. You know I'll do anything you want. What are their names?" And he said, "Well, it's Rauschenberg and Johns." And I said, "Fine." I had never heard of them, nor had many other people. They had just arrived in New York and had gotten to know him. So I was all ready for them, but they never came.

RIKALA

Goodness.

HAMILTON

They never showed at all. [laughter]

RIKALA

I wonder why.

HAMILTON

That was a great disappointment later on when they became famous. Later on, a few months later, their names were all over the art papers. But I saw him so often, you see, when I was translating the text in A Green Box.

RIKALA

Yes. How did that come about? How did that project--?

HAMILTON

That was suggested-- I think Richard Hamilton had a part in that, because he thought they should be translated and got Lund Humphries, the publishers in London, interested, and they agreed to publish it. Otherwise I don't really think I would have undertaken anything so horrendous as that without being sure that it was going to be published. But we began. Duchamp gave me A Green Box, which Polly and I have just given to the Williams College. They had shown it at an exhibition, and Linda Shearer, the director, was very excited about getting it. The poor box was rather battered because I would take it back and forth to New York after I had translated a few of the ninety-one

leaves. I'd go down to New York, and Duchamp and I would go over them word for word. They were very difficult to translate because the French is not only idiomatic, it's also inventive. He creates his own French words, and he uses French words in his own way. That's fine. Every creative writer should. I find words coming into my text upstairs and I look them up and they're not in the dictionary. I don't know what to do, because I can see my executors passing it on to some desperate publisher who will put it all back in correct English and it will lose the flavor. [laughter] We tried to keep Duchamp's flavor. There were occasions when I would say, "But, Marcel, that is not English." And he said, he always said, "I know it's not English, but that's the way I want it to read." So any other translation which tries to smooth out the English is being more linguistically correct, but is false to Marcel's spirit. There has been a very, very successful translation which reads beautifully, Arturo Schwartz's, the art dealer in Milan. It is certainly the translation to read if you want to read it for ease. But if you want to know what Marcel Duchamp really wanted, the other is the one which will give it to you. It was great fun doing it because we used to laugh so hard over the notes, you know. Some of them are very humorous. Duchamp had a wonderful sense of humor; he was always laughing. He was amused by human foibles. He was especially amused, I think, by art dealers. [laughter] Mystifications which he saw right through. Because he, you know, had been in a way an art dealer himself for a time when he worked with his friend, Henri Roché, in Paris. I think they were selling Brancusis or something. But that was one of the many things he did from time to time to earn a little money. But otherwise, he was a free spirit if there ever was one. You know, he's the character Luigi in Peggy Guggenheim's memoirs. That's a very shocking book; at least it was very shocking in 1948. The character Luigi is not in any way identifiable as the Duchamp which I knew. But I think he was, you know, all things to all people.For instance, this great wizard, this master of mysteries and grammatical rites and so on, is incompatible with the man who came to our house in New Haven when we had remodeled it. It was a house of 1910, and it just didn't work out. The rooms were too small. So we threw them together and we got a big living room in the back of the house. Marcel had had some reason to go to Boston, and he stopped in New Haven and came to dinner. But he wouldn't spend the night. He then took a later train to New York. Our little boy [Richard Hamilton] was about four. This was the first time Duchamp had ever seen him. The little

boy climbed right up into Duchamp's lap and sat there, and Duchamp was enchanting with him. He knew the right things to say, you know. This of course went to our hearts right away. But that side of him, that feeling for children, you would never get from these learned articles about him at all.

RIKALA

Yes, there seems to be a lot missing about his personality in the current--

HAMILTON

I think what has happened is he's been made the victim of modern criticism. He has been turned into the kind of personality which modern criticism requires--and I think I have hit upon something very profound here which will turn out to be in the next book I read by somebody else. [laughter] We use the figures of the past in our own image. We use Goethe, or Mallarmé, or something, to prove our points, and this warps their personality. It makes them into other kinds of people than they were. I think this is inevitable. It may even be necessary if they're to stay alive at all. They have to be adapted to changing conditions. But this started with Duchamp from the very beginning, with the first Ph.D. which was written about him at Princeton [University].

RIKALA

Do you recall by whom?

HAMILTON

I can't remember the name of the author. But it's unreadable. Duchamp confessed to me that he didn't know what he was writing about, but that he was nice and agreeable, and Duchamp cooperated with him. But here from the start began this tussle between the reality of Duchamp as a person and his works as real objects, and their interpretation in language. I think language is the worst thing that's ever happened to the visual arts. [laughter] I think that--This is sort of off the record. I really believe it; I'm putting it into the computer. That we should find some way to eradicate museum labels--

RIKALA

Oh, yes.

HAMILTON

Art talks, art appreciation. It gives people ideas about the things, whether they're talked about it by the docent in the presence of the work or they go to a lecture. I've given many, many lectures helping people to try to understand, and I don't think that they were really as useful as I had thought at the time. If only we could train ourselves to have the experience first before we think about it. Last December one of our symphony concerts was here. We have a good little symphony; at least it's good now that it has a good conductor. They put on a series of concerti on different instruments by different women composers this year. It sounds appalling, but wasn't. The emphasis on four concerti, anyway, on four different instruments, and then they all had to be by American women. Well, they turned out mostly to be beautiful pieces of music. I didn't hear them all, but I heard two of them, and I had good reports of the other two. The one I particularly remember-- I can't now remember the name of the composer, but it fascinated me. It was really beautiful in a modern sense, and I had a feeling that I was hearing sounds a woman would have heard rather than a man. I played with that while listening to it, and I really think that I was right. I mentioned this to a good musician, a cellist, an excellent cellist on the faculty, and he said, "Well, there was George Crumb." Well, I don't know Crumb's work except for one recording I have. I know he's highly regarded. But my one recording does not ever suggest to me that these are sounds that could have been heard by a woman as against a man. Now, of course it's wrong; it's constitutionally wrong to make this distinction. We're losing so much, because the sounds a woman hears, being different, are in a way just as beautiful, but beautiful maybe more to a man than to a woman, I don't know. But I'm holding on to that, and maybe I'll work it out. It's very difficult to do so in these days of rampant feminism, you know.

RIKALA

And gender difference.

HAMILTON

Well, that's what I'm talking about. [laughter] But goodness, Emily Dickinson's poetry is superb poetry, and it could never have been written by a man. Never. Nor could a woman have written Walt Whitman's. I think Emily Dickinson is a better poet, actually. But-- I've read all the works of both of

them. They're wonderful contemporaries. But after the concert, at the intermission-- The piece was played beforehand. A man came up to me, a clergyman actually--that has nothing to do with it--and he said, "What was I to make of that music?" And I said, "You were to make of it whatever you wanted to." "Well," he said, "what did it mean?" And I said, "Well, I only heard it for the first time, but I had a feeling that the important thing was to listen to it." And he said, "What do you mean?" "Well," I said, "you were hearing it maybe, but I'm just wondering if you were concentrating on what it was doing as music. I think then you might have felt a little bit about what it meant, but what it meant is totally untranslatable into words." "Oh," he said, "that's very interesting." Then he rushed back. He told what he'd said to his wife, and his wife said to me the next day at the faculty club, "Oh, what you told my husband was so interesting. That very idea you had--" And then she gave me my idea, which wasn't what I had told him at all. "Now, this is--" Words, words, words, words, words. And the whole-- It was a hearing experience. I just want people to stop thinking about art--

## 1.7. TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO
## AUGUST 8, 1991

HAMILTON

The point that works is the visual arts are intended to be seen. Now, of course they have gotten very mental, I mean the whole conceptual art business. That possibly reaches points where its visibility is actually a drawback. I can remember at the Guggenheim [Museum] a few years ago they had an exhibition of conceptual art, and along the inside of the railing--the little thing that keeps you from plunging into the center court--they had table cases which came all the way down the ramp. In those table cases were looseleaf notebooks of many, many pages and all open to pages, and on the pages were just numbers. Columns of numbers. One to ten, you know. This went on and on and on and on. Now, whatever statement was being made was being made at a length which proved negative, it seems to me. It canceled itself out. Fatigue set in. Irritation. Now, this sets in with so much of modern art, too, which people don't look at long enough.

RIKALA

Yes, that's true.

HAMILTON

I'm talking about really looking at something for five minutes or more. Mahler, in one of his symphonies between the first and second movements, requires--and it's never obeyed--that the orchestra conductor stop for five minutes. I think it's the Third Symphony. Well, this proves intolerable. It is intolerable for most people to look at a work of art for more than a few seconds, less than a minute. Museum tests have proven this. Years and years and years ago there was a man at Yale, Professor Robertson-- Who was run over and killed by a bicycle in front of the graduate school, believe it or not. But he had figured out that the average length of time people in museums spent looking at paintings was something in the nature of three to five seconds. He made his studies in places like the Metropolitan Museum [of Art], and the MFA [Museum of Fine Arts] in Boston. Now, that's too little if you really want to know what the thing is. It's too much if you don't care about it. Yet I have a feeling that some of the obstacles could be settled between the public and modern art if they looked at it long enough, really long enough to decide if it was good or bad. There is a painter who came to Washington--they had a retrospective in Washington last winter--and his name is [Sigmar] Polke, and he's coming to California, isn't he? He's going to be in Brooklyn in the winter. This was at the Hirshhorn [Museum and Sculpture Garden]. I try to keep up, and, you know, we were there for the month, so I went to see it. I thought it was appalling. I thought it was, in a way, a wicked waste of money on the part of the American museums to bring these things over. Oh, it is said that he's learned a lot from the late [Francis] Picabia. Well, that is the most uninteresting source of art to learn from, the late Picabia. Really. But it so lacked a sort of artisticness about it. It was dry and-- Those things which came at the very end were enormous canvases-- Well, they seemed enormous in the Hirshhorn galleries. And they were abstract. They were totally abstract. They were really like [Jules] Olitsky's color things, but darker. I thought they had some quality. One was from the San Francisco Museum [of Modern Art], and two were from San Francisco owners, and then I discovered the museum was supporting this odd thing, this exhibition. But I will be very much interested to find out what the New York critics think of this when it arrives. They didn't like it in Washington. I went back twice. I mean I went back once; I went to see the show twice. I spent more than 3.7 seconds

at most of the pictures. There were some sort of duplicate-type things, and I walked past them as quickly as I needed to, but my examination revealed nothing. Now, am I completely short-circuiting myself? Am I failing somehow to see this quality which is there, which is worth the expenditure of hundreds of thousands of dollars to assemble and tour this exhibition around the country? I don't know. I don't know. But I never will know. I'm not going to live long enough to discover whether Polke is one of the figures like Kandinsky, let's say, or let's take a German artist, [Max] Beckmann. Beckmann had so much to tell us about life. Polke was telling us about the trivialities, the superficialities, the meaninglessness of it all. Maybe that is important. Maybe he doesn't even see it that way. But here one comes up against something where even the eye can't see anything. Now, I suppose I could be persuaded if I read a book about it. That's the danger. Music should persuade you only by the sounds, not about what you read of what the person is trying to do or has succeeded in doing. I know that I have something in this belief that we're paying too little attention to the facture of material art. Because I listen to my car radio all the time, and we have two music stations, one in Albany, which is music in the morning and occasionally in the afternoon, and one in Schenectady, which is classic music, so to speak, all the time. Well, the most interesting things happen when you come on after the piece has begun and you can't recognize who did it. I'm very poor at recognizing music, and I get fooled a great deal. But I have learned that one is listening really very closely in the car, strangely enough. You're paying attention, of course, to where you're going, but you can sort of concentrate on the music.Now, serial music is difficult; you know, having no tonal center, it tends to be kind of tiresome, and enormous quantities of it were written in this country. But on three occasions in the last four years, I have turned on the radio and I thought, "Oh, my god, this is serial music." Then I realize that it is serial music with a difference. It has-- It is powerful. I say if it's powerful, it's written by some real composer. It has authority. It is worth listening to. I'm not going to say it's beautiful, but to myself it had a quality of beauty. Each time it's turned out to be Schoenberg himself. You people in California were so lucky to have had him in his later years. He was a great composer. Marvelous. But I've been to the Marlboro [music festival] [Massachusetts], ensemble where they played one of the divertimento for chamber. It was really wonderful. I came out, and here were two German people, a very elderly lady and her niece, and they said, "How did

you like that?" [laughter] And I said, "Oh, I thought it was just wonderful." "You did? It was dreadful. We tried not to listen." Well, I thought that's a very strange way. What if they had tried to listen? You know, in terms of modern art, especially the contemporary things now, as well as the contemporary things also when I began teaching, it was hard work. Not so much with students, because they have not such built-in prejudices as older people. But my life took me out into lectures with clubs and societies and so on where people wanted to know what the truth was about Mondrian or Paul Klee, and I would try to tell them. Again and again I discovered that they would not look. There are people in this town who will not go to exhibitions at the college museum where the modern art, the contemporary art, takes place, because they know they will not like them. How do they ever read a book? Don't they know they're not going to like it? Well, I suppose there are authors they wouldn't read. There are authors I won't read either--Dickens. But that's another matter. I have done my Dickens. [laughter] I don't have to do it again. Now, the trouble with art history, you see, is that it sidetracks you into working with photographs, slides, colored photographs, colored slides, which you very easily learn to substitute for the effort of crossing the street, let's say in New Haven, to go into the art gallery and look at the real thing. I was shocked at how I myself did this when I was teaching in the graduate program here at Williams. I once started-- I always gave a term's course on impressionism, because Mr. [Robert Sterling] Clark's French impressionists are really quite spectacular for a single person to put together. One year, I started the first class in the gallery. This is a little difficult when tourists or visitors are likely to come in, but I started it there. I said, "These are the real things, and you must know these things." Then we went back into the new building where the seminar rooms are, and we never, ever, ever returned. I was content to stay with the slides. I knew that this was naughty of me; I should have rubbed their noses in it over and over and over again. We have instituted a rule--or rather I haven't, but my successor as head of the program has--that every student must know every work in the museum, which apparently means even the works in storage. I don't think the director would enjoy that. But I just wonder how many really do spend any time looking at these things.I had a colleague at Yale whose field was architecture. Now, this is a slightly different matter because it's very hard to look. The architecture is never where you are. [laughter]

RIKALA

Exactly. The paintings sometimes travel to your neighborhood.

HAMILTON

Paintings sometimes travel, and you sometimes have paintings in your neighborhood, and you have a little bit of architecture. But if your passionate interest is Gothic parish churches, you have to go to England. You can't see any of them here. So this friend of mine--and you'll realize who it is--the things he teaches the students are not in New Haven, and they have to be seen in the photographs. But he has a flair for the dramatic, and he can get himself so excited about the photograph, the image in the photograph, that I think he forgets that this is highly selective. I've watched him putting his slides together, manipulating photographs. It's fine, and he gives a wonderful lecture. The students love it and it is entrancing, but it is something else than the experience of the work of art. But of course so many people don't know how to look at architecture anyway, so they might as well learn. But then I've watched little children being taught. We have a rather good program for little children at the Clark. Maybe one should limit art appreciation to little children, because they have no prejudices.

RIKALA

Yes, indeed.

HAMILTON

But the older people are hopeless.

RIKALA

Yes, and children know how to respond with emotion and--

HAMILTON

And to color and to shape and to--

RIKALA

Yes, and to these relations, special relations and shapes, as you say. Yes, that's quite different. Somewhere along the line we are trained to be refined and lose some of those skills, those responses.

HAMILTON

I think a lot of people are aware of this, but I don't know how they're getting out of it. I haven't taught now, even graduate students, since '85; that's six years ago. I haven't taught undergraduates since '72. I have no idea at all what the teaching at Williams College is now. I know that Williams College prides itself on having one of the most distinguished teaching systems. But am I to believe that? I mean, that's produced from their publicity bureau. I know that certain students like certain courses and dislike others. That's always been true. I know that when I bought my computer, I was assigned a student to help me with it. He was more of a harm than a help because he was so intelligent that he would say, "Oh, you don't need to know all that introductory stuff. Let's just go right on." It was months before I could catch up with the help of a handbook on the introductory stuff which he hadn't taught me. He had grown up in a village of 150 people in central Alaska. The government, the U.S. government, had exams prepared in the University of Nebraska, flown to Seattle, put on commuter flights, and dropped in this little tiny town of 150 people, where he had, of course, no school life. You can't have a team of anything with the children produced by 150 people. He applied to two colleges, Harvard and Williams College. He was accepted by both. He was that good. He chose Williams, and I think, in a way, wisely, because he would be completely lost in anything so very large and miscellaneous as Harvard. I sort of think so. I may be entirely wrong. He may have been bright enough that he could have swum upstream in any circumstance. But--Just a minute ago I thought, "What am I arriving at?" Then I remembered, and now I've forgotten. Isn't that too bad. There was some point. His name was Daniel Boone, by the way, and he was a distant descendant of the great frontiersman. But it will come back or it won't. [tape recorder off]

RIKALA

I thought we'd continue at this point talking about some of the writing you've done, some of the written work, since you explained how busy you are. You were working in the galleries and museums, teaching. You also began a fair amount of publishing, which comes to fruition in the early fifties, but I imagine you were hard at work during the forties and-- What I was thinking about specifically, because you tipped me off a bit, was talking about the Russian that you encountered.

HAMILTON

Oh, yes. I didn't mean to tip you off. [laughter]

RIKALA

Well, one of the questions that came up in preparation for this interview was the curiosity knowing--

HAMILTON

How that ever happened.

RIKALA

--how that came about and-- You obviously studied Russian.

HAMILTON

Well, I can answer those questions. The Russian book [The Art and Architecture of Russia] grew out of my experiences during the war helping Professor George Vernadsky with the Russian program for the army specialized training soldiers. What happened-- How it actually came about was that Nikolaus Pevsner had been appointed editor of the series, which the Pelican Press was going to publish, of something like thirty-seven volumes on the history of art. He came to this country searching for authors and came to New Haven. But it was in the latter part of March, and my wife and I were down south for a brief spring vacation. However, my colleagues-- Oh, he said, "Whom do you know who would be good on the twentieth century, a book on modern art?" And my kind colleagues said, "Well, have you thought of George Hamilton?" And he said, "No, but I will."So when I got home ten days later, there was a note from Pevsner asking me if I'd meet him at a hotel in New York, the Prince David Hotel I think it was, where all the English people stay. I went down, and he told me my friends had said this, and that he was sorry, but that he had already given the contract for that to Alfred Barr. I said, "Well, that's fine. You've got a very, very, very distinguished person and I have no objections. How could I?" But I said, "I have a suggestion. Do you have a book on Russian art planned?" He said, "Why Russian art?" And I said, "Well, your series, which starts I think in the primitive painting in Europe, goes through Egypt and Greece and Rome and on down to the present, but it doesn't include Russia, and Russia is a European country." "Well," he said, "yes, it is.

What about the art?" And I said, "Well, all I know about it is what I've been reading in this work I did during the war for the army, and I find it extraordinarily interesting. It's a combination of Eastern and Western characteristics, and it's a real contribution to the European style of neoclassicism," which is the area that interested me most. "Well," he said, "that's interesting. I'll think it over."So a couple of months later I got a letter from him asking me if I'd do it. I said, "Yes, I'll do it, but there's no point in doing it unless I can go to Russia, because I have to see the things. I assume that as the piece wears on that I'll be able to do that." So it was on those terms that I signed the contract and started to work. After I'd gotten the plan mapped out and begun wrestling with some of the problems--the problems were endless [laughter]-- I went to Washington to see about a visa for going to Russia. I went to the embassy, the consulate or whatever it was, where I was very politely, if somewhat distantly, received. After I'd explained what I was doing, the man I was talking to said, "Well, we would be very happy to welcome you to Russia. You do understand, don't you, that you would have to travel with an Intourist guide, you could not go by yourself anywhere, and there would be many places that would be restricted. But we would be very happy, if you accept those conditions, to have you come. The only trouble is, having to come as you would under the auspices of Intourist, I regret to tell you that Intourist was shut down in 1939 and has not yet reopened." So that was the door slammed flat in my face. So I wrote Pevsner and said, "What do we do?" And he said, "We'll go ahead with the book. Maybe you'll get there eventually." So the Cold War got colder as I kept writing the book. I finally finished it in '51. I took the manuscript to London, gave it to him in a little restaurant in Soho. He said it was the first time he'd ever had a manuscript delivered ahead of time. I think I was two days ahead of the deadline. [laughter] But there was no possibility of getting to Russia. None at all. But he said he would go ahead with it. Now, he did. The interesting part of it is that it is on the whole accurate. I think there is-- Yes, there is one factual error which I made, which no one would notice, I don't think, except the one person who eventually told me about it. I said, "Yes, I know." That is there is a cathedral on the Nevsky Prospekt in Saint Petersburg, Leningrad, in which I talked about the best view of it was from the north transept--no, south transept. This was because I was following the orientation of Western European churches, and I was all wrong, because the Orthodox church pays no attention to the

orientation of the choir in the east. They put it anywhere they want where it will fit better. This cathedral is sited in relation to the Nevsky Prospekt, the great avenue, not anything else. So one person did say, "I wandered around trying to find which was the north transept that you described, but it didn't work." Well, that was the only thing I could find when I got there. Now, how do you write a book about things which you've never seen? I must confess it was difficult, and I solved it by remembering that if you're an art historian, you are an historian of facts. So the artistic valuations in it are based upon consensus of opinion. You can't go very far wrong in the major monuments. It's like those in Europe; everybody knows what they are. The one problem I felt I had difficulty with was with the icons. I had never liked icons very much. I thought they were sort of inferior to Byzantine ones. Well, they're different. They aren't inferior, they're different in their own way, and they're-- As I discovered when I finally got there in '64, they're remarkable. But the book held up for quite a while after it was published, I think, on the basis that it was the only seriously researched study of Russian art available in English. Now, Tanya whatever her name is--and we'll have to look it up [Tanya Tchistrakova]--who was the wife of the curator in the British Museum, she was a Russian. She took great exception to the fact that I had been awarded this contract. She felt she should have it. This is interesting for two reasons. One, she then published a small paperback in which there were quite a number of--I felt--quite a number of what I knew were errors and what I felt were misjudgments. It was not dependable. Where my work erred occasionally was because later Soviet research proved that the dates were a few years plus or minus. But hers was really sort of skewed. Then I had occasion to meet her in London and discovered that her husband was a distant cousin of my wife's. [laughter] That is an inessential relationship, but in Russia everything is very peculiar, as I discovered when I got there. But at any rate, it became a standard volume. Several friends took it with them--you know, it weighs about four pounds--they took it with them to the Soviet Union and used it as a guidebook. I took it myself and made some minor adjustments in it. It is still in print, but its sales have declined to something like five in England and three in the United States and one in New Zealand a year, so it's there but it's not read. [laughter] It has since been rather gloriously replaced by a number of new books with marvelous color illustrations. The lack of color is the serious handicap in those Pelican volumes. But--

RIKALA

You also did another volume.

HAMILTON

Well, I did the one on-- It has the thrilling title--imagine if you were thinking of an eyecatcher-- It's called Painting and Sculpture in Europe, 1880-1940. Flat. That sells very well. Mostly in this country, oddly enough. It's used as a textbook. It was not written as a textbook. The condition for all the books was that they shouldn't be written from the point of view of the educated reader. Not the reader being educated, which you'd use a textbook for. And it's the book of all that I like the best. I don't know, it seems to be-- It seems to say what I really know what I'm saying. The Russian one is okay, but as George Kubler said-- I gave him a copy when it was published. He said, "It's very dry." [laughter] Well, of course it lacks the immediacy of actual experience.But I finally got to Russia free of charge, interestingly enough. The Archives of American Art, which was founded in Detroit, was having one of those junkets in 1964 where you pay a lot of money and get a guided trip, and they needed somebody to go with them, some learned person, as all these sort of college things do. The head of the Archives of American Art was a friend of mine [William Woolfenden], and he called me in the middle of August of '64, and he said, "We're in great difficulties because all the Russians we've asked to go have chickened out, and would you come?" I said, "Well, I don't know how I can come and guide people around because I've never been there before. I ought to go first, but I can't do that. But let me think it over." So I thought it over, and I asked the chairman of the department if I could go. I would miss three weeks of classes, but I said, "But look here, I've spent years and years on this book, and here's a great chance." So they said, "Sure. Go." So I went, and I had to give the group lectures and so on, and I didn't care much for the lectures, but never mind. [laughter] But we got into the Great Catherine Palace at Tsarskoe Selo, which is one of those tiresome palaces which has room after room after room, and you go down a long corridor between them, you know. It had been restored after having been extensively bombed and damaged by the Germans. Everything had been packed out and sent to eastern Russia and then brought back and put together again. There were 104 people on this trip. I was the 105th. So we had an Intourist guide at the head of the people, and I was at the end. As we got to the end room, I said to the

people around me, I said, "If you will look to the right on this wall-- I don't know what she's going to tell you, but if you look to the right, you will see the first portrait of the Empress Catherine after she had had her husband murdered and had ascended the throne herself, and she's on horseback. It's one of the first equestrian portraits in the European style." Then I thought, "What am I talking about? How do I know it's there?" Well, we went in, turned the corner, and there it was, which indicates the authenticity of the Soviet government's restoration of their own treasures. But that was a very interesting book to write because there was no precedent for it in English. I had to set up my own standards.

RIKALA

Did you learn Russian some?

HAMILTON

Yes. I learned enough to read Russian art history. That's not quite as difficult as it sounds. The main problem is the enormous vocabulary. But even that was better in art history, because Russian art history came into the world at the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth, probably with the development of-- Around the French embassy in Saint Petersburg. French scholars were important there. The principal history of Russian art, by Igor Grabar [Istoriia Russkago Iskusstva], shows you how influential the French were, because the syntax is French, which means it's very much like English. There are a lot of Latin words. There are some Greek words, which were familiar, and therefore you can get along. You can read it. You have to look up words occasionally, but it's not too difficult. Even contemporary Soviet publications on architecture and so on were not so very much more difficult than German, we'll say. What was impossible was to read a page of Chekhov or Tolstoy. Impossible. Not only was the vocabulary immensely larger, but the syntax, the thought process, was totally different.

RIKALA

How interesting.

HAMILTON

So that's the story of the Russian book. It's never come out in paper. I sort of wish it had. We had a second edition with a color plate as the frontispiece, but that hasn't sold much at all. So there we are.

RIKALA

What do you think of the series as a whole? Did it live up to Pevsner's conception of it? The ideas behind it, or--?

HAMILTON

I think it's very useful. In the volumes I've used, I've found what I wanted. Though there was one volume by a Harvard professor that amused me, because in Washington two years ago, there was a Veronese exhibition, and I went to see it, and I was surprised. The pictures were not all first-rate. But even the first-rate ones struck me as being the work of a kind of second-rate personality. I don't mean that he forged checks or anything, but an artistic personality. Not a Tintoretto. And sort of narrow dimensions. The finest picture there was one in the Metropolitan of Mars and Venus, which is really beautiful, but in the whole exhibition he never reached that point again. Now, I have seen wonderful murals in a church in Venice, Saint Sebastiano, which indicate what he could do at his best. But I asked this Harvard professor if I was right in feeling that was kind of a shortened, well, restricted artistic experience. He said, "That is exactly what I've written in my book. Read it." So I came home, and the first thing I did was to turn to his book. He hadn't written anything of the sort. [laughter] He hadn't even written around it. He had written another kind of straightforward, traditional art history, and it was wonderful. But, yes, I think the series is pretty good. I haven't read them all, worked in them all.

RIKALA

Was it meant to be a commercial venture, or was it meant to be a--? Well, because they aren't really textbooks, but yet they are--

HAMILTON

It was for the general educated reader. It was for the person who was interested in special fields. Pevsner had offered me-- No, he said he couldn't offer me the modern book, but would I be interested in the eighteenth-

century one, the French dix-huitième. And I said, "Well, no, no, not really. I don't communicate very well with the French eighteenth century." No. That was not sour grapes, because I didn't want to spend four years doing French eighteenth century.

RIKALA

The other volume that you did do is the turn of the century, the end of the century, the 1880s to 1940s in Europe, and that one you did as a second big project.

HAMILTON

Oh, then what happened was Douglas Cooper, the famous Douglas Cooper had-- He was going to do that for Pevsner, and they had some kind of a falling-out. Douglas Cooper had fallings-out with every kind of person. It was rather an honor to have a falling-out with him. And Pevsner said here he was, caught in the middle, and would I rescue him by doing it. I'll never forget that his letter came when we were down on Martha's Vineyard. What was I going to do? I decided, well, why not. Having done one, I figured I could do another. This one, of course, came much more easily, and it was very, very interesting to do. I must say I wish I were doing it now, or maybe not, because I had to work so hard to find the materials, the facts, and so on. This is back in the sixties. Now some of the obscure artists that I wanted to characterize, they have monographs devoted to them. Extraordinary. And that, as I say, sells very well. It is used a great deal in Texas. I'm happy because of the royalties, but I don't know particularly why Texas. I'm not sure if I were an undergraduate I would want to read it now. Well, I think it's a little-- Textbooks now are so much better. Look at H. W. [Horst Woldemar] Janson's History of Art, you know, which [H. N.] Abrams poured millions of dollars in and got millions of dollars out of it with those beautiful colored illustrations. I did a book for Abrams. It's called-- What it is--

RIKALA

Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture.

HAMILTON

The color plates in that--there are twenty or so--they're marvelous, stunning. They give it a big lift. But I never read back in that book if I want to look something up. I look it up in the Pelican.

RIKALA

Yes.

HAMILTON

The Pelican is only '80 to '40, that sixty years, and the Abrams starts at the very end of the eighteenth century, so it's a little thinner.

RIKALA

A useful book, though. Both of them were central to my undergraduate--

HAMILTON

Really?

RIKALA

Oh, yes.

HAMILTON

Oh, then you're sitting here--

RIKALA

Yes.

## 1.8. TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE
## AUGUST 8, 1991

RIKALA

The other important book during this period is Manet and His Critics, which also happened in '54, same time as The Art and Architecture of Russia. Obviously, we've been talking about your interest in the role of the critic. I'm wondering how much that work was a part of your thinking both in the museum, in the classroom, and then in writing. Is that a product of sort of a crystallization of your thoughts at that time?

HAMILTON

Well, that's sort of hard to answer. That book-- I've always been interested in reading criticism. If we go all the way back to Pittsburgh in 1927, I was puzzled by the virulent criticism of the Matisse, remember?

RIKALA

Yes.

HAMILTON

So I wanted to go see for myself. I hadn't thought about that connection until just now. So obviously, that's gone on a long time. During the war, there was a series published in Geneva [Switzerland] of small books about artists and the current contemporary opinions of them. There was one on Géricault and one on Manet and others. I can't remember exactly what the titles were, but I read in the Manet one and was much interested in it. Just at that time, George Wittenborn, who had that bookshop in New York, wrote and asked if I would be willing to translate it. I started to translate it, and then he changed his mind. This was about 1946, '45 or '46.

RIKALA

I'm sorry, I didn't catch the title of translating--

HAMILTON

Well, this was a book called Manet-- Well, it was about Manet and contemporary opinion of him. I don't think it was called Manet et ses critiques. It might have been, though. And I started translating it. I didn't get very far when Wittenborn changed his mind and abandoned the project. By that time I had gotten deep enough into it to realize that I was much interested in Manet and his critics criticizing actual works. This was more general opinions about Manet. So I put these ideas together and offered them to Wittenborn in place of the book he wanted, and he expressed an interest, but then he faltered on that, too. So I kept on. It was difficult in those days to track down contemporary opinions of Manet. I had to go all the way to the Vassar [College] library in Poughkeepsie [New York] to get one small three-sentence reference to him that seemed important. It was not in any other library in the East. I did a lot of work at Columbia [University], in the New York Public

Library, and so on and so on and so on, and put it all together. Then Yale University's new series of history of art publications [Yale Publications in the History of Art] decided they would publish-- Now, at the same-- This was sort of intercollated with the Russian book; they were both going on at somehow the same time. I know I worked very hard the summer of 1947. I remember July of '47 in Vermont. We had rented a little house, and I spent all July on the Manet book. I know that the winter of 1950 we rented an apartment during the Christmas vacation and I worked at Columbia on their Russian materials. So these two things were going on. Another instance of trying to do too many different things at once. But I finally finished it, and it was published ten days ahead of the Russian book. So everybody thought I was an absolute genius to have two books coming out at once, but they had taken eight years or so, the whole thing. Curiously, the Manet book is still used.

RIKALA

Yes.

HAMILTON

The Yale [University] Press got very discouraged because it didn't sell, so they raised the price from $3.50 to $5.00. Don't ask me the logic of that. So it sold less. Then it was remaindered, and there was a clause in the contract that it was not to be remaindered without advising me of the possibility of buying copies. A student came in one day and said, "I was so glad to find your book." I said, "Where?" "Times Square." I said, "Where on Times Square?" And then he mentioned a remainder bookshop, a chain. I thought, "Oh, gee. I should go down there and gobble them up." But I didn't. But then the Yale press sold the rights to [W. W.] Norton for a paperback, and Norton published the paperback, and that appeared in every museum shop. And I would get, you know, royalties of $11.34 or-- Then, believe it or not, in '86 I think, Yale telephones and says they have bought back the rights from Norton, and they are going to bring out another paperback.

RIKALA

Oh.

HAMILTON

I thought to myself, "If you'd behaved right in the first place and hadn't remaindered it and hadn't advised me and hadn't sold it off, you wouldn't have to go to this trouble." But I accepted the invitation to write a short page introduction on how I felt about it after that length of time, and that was interesting. It has sold. It's sort of stopped now, but it sold fairly well for a while. I was able there to state two things: One, which I decided to put into a question after they had already approved it as a declarative statement, which spoiled it, but they said they had to get ready for the Christmas rush. If they had waited two days, it would have been much better. I will put it as a question: Should not any critical system--I don't think those were the words--should not any criticism which enables us to understand more about a work of art be taken seriously? And I can't remember the sentence that followed, but that was the meaning of my statement. Don't get so upset about neo-Marxist criticism, feminist criticism, deconstructionist, neostructuralism. Take it calmly. If it helps understanding, shouldn't it be taken seriously? Which I believe. I think it should. We were talking about deconstruction earlier. There's something in it which is a little bit helpful. And then it ended up with a reply from a critic in the Burlington Magazine, or something, to the effect that I should have included a discussion of the successful works at the salon. I mean, in 1863 when theDéjeuner sur l'herbe was in the salon des réfusés, what were the successful things? What were the successful things at the salons from which Manet was rejected completely, which happened several times? Well, very interesting, but it would have doubled the size of the book.

RIKALA

Yes.

HAMILTON

So I then proved that there was-- I think I proved that that would really not be worth the trouble by listing some of the people who had won. Since they are totally forgotten, let it go at that. [laughter]

RIKALA

Your interest now in Manet's painting.

HAMILTON

I haven't the vaguest idea how I got onto this.

RIKALA

No, I'm asking you about your writing.

HAMILTON

Oh. Well, you have this. This is the book with the essays.

RIKALA

Yes.

HAMILTON

Now, I don't think-- I don't know that it's ever going to be completed. I'm eighty-one, and I'm suffering from several things all at once, and-- But it's marvelous at eighty-one to have something that is so compelling that you work at it every day.

RIKALA

Oh, yes.

HAMILTON

It will have these various essays. I'm going to bring together possibly, I don't know, my three or four essays on Cézanne which were published between '56 and '81. If they're put together, it will be perhaps the evidence of a critique. The first was a paper on Cézanne and Bergson, in which I postulated that Cézanne's work is a record in time, which for Bergson of course was the great element of reality, the durational element. I made a terrible mistake there. Having looked long at Duncan Phillips's Mont-Sainte-Victoire, which we borrowed from Mr. Phillips for an exhibition at Yale celebrating the liberation of Paris in the summer of '44-- So I had an opportunity of studying it, and I decided that this was a typical instance of Cézanne's durationalism, because the little houses in the valley are all painted at different angles. Well, nobody's objected to that. But when we went to the villa in Venito where the Veronese frescoes are-- I can't remember the name of it--

RIKALA

The Palladian?

HAMILTON

The Palladian villa, yes.

RIKALA

The Villa Barbaro.

HAMILTON

Is that it? It's up on a hill.

RIKALA

Yes, at Nasar?

HAMILTON

Yes, Nasar. I stood out on the grounds in front, and I looked down into the valley, and here was a dead ringer for the valley at Aix[-en-Provence]. Here were a whole lot of little houses, and they were all facing more or less in the same direction. Distance seemed to solve the problem. Maybe I was right the first time. I don't know, I'll have to go back to Nasar. [laughter] But that essay has been of interest to a number of people I know who occasionally talk to me about it. Not so much anymore because '56 is a long time ago. Then there was an essay on Cézanne and his critics. That was published in Bill [William S.] Rubin's book for the exhibition of the late Cézanne at the Museum of Modern Art several years ago [Cézanne: the Late Work: essays]. Now, interestingly--Remember that Douglas Cooper didn't do the job for Pevsner. Douglas Cooper then reviewed my book in the TLS [Times Literary Supplement]. Those were the days when the reviews were anonymous, so you could slug around as you wanted to. Well, I learned that he was going to do it--Pevsner wrote and said--so then the TLS arrived. I was a subscriber then. I didn't know what to do, whether to read it or not. If the criticisms are really bad, I don't read them. It gets very depressing and whatnot. I glance through to make sure about mistakes, you see, but if they just don't like it, that's their problem, not mine. [laughter] Anyway, Cooper was very favorable. It was a front-page review continued inside, and he had a few differences of opinion, which is perfectly all right, but to my amazement it was levelheaded and generous, except he didn't like the section on Max Ernst because he thought it was humorless. I thought the whole surrealist section was very good, and while there weren't

any intentional laughs planned-- It wasn't humor, it was just-- Now comes this essay on Cézanne and his critics, which was a semantic problem. The language used, the condemnatory language to dismiss Cézanne from the beginning until his death and the year afterwards, is very, very interesting because-- No, it's not all condemnatory. I found that criticism follows a queer cycle where the words reverse themselves. The word for "childish," "This is childish," becomes used in the sense of "This is childlike," meaning pure, innocent, you see. And this made a long article. There are several words. I can't think of any more at the time, at the moment. But I thought it was a fascinating study of what happens to critical language, because most critics faced with new art are unable to find words to express what is new about it. They can only say what it isn't. So the words are all negative. Then when art becomes acceptable, you can say what it is. You have found the words. But they're the same words, they're just turned inside out. So that appeared. And Cooper reviewed that volume. He excoriated everybody else and said the only good thing was mine. Now, what do I and Douglas Cooper have in common? [laughter] The last essay is on the problem of, I think, Cézanne's eyesight. It is known that he had diabetes. To the extent that everybody said he had diabetes, that appeared in Emile Bernard's article on him in the Mercure de France the year after he died, and no one has ever said he did not have diabetes. Now, he had certain physical characteristics which were typical of the diabetic. He had a flushed face, bloodshot eyes, and whatnot, and so I think we can take that for granted. [John] Rewald tells me that there is no hope of finding any clinical evidence from a physician in Aix. I presume he's tried, you see. That's just all gone. And Cézanne did die in 1906. So, working on the hypothesis that he had diabetes, I then realized that diabetes affects the eyesight, leading in many cases to blindness. If you look at the late paintings, the wonderful late paintings of Mont-Sainte-Victoire, from the idea that he is seeing less distinctly, you have a possible clue to the change in his technique. Now, the general theory is that he went through, you know, a primitive stage and then maturity and then the old age or baroque phase. Meyer Schapiro said in his Abrams volume on Cézanne [Cézanne] that the-- It was a baroque phase in the mountains, surge upward with an explosion of vital force and all this and that, which is one way of looking at it. But there is actually nothing baroque about these pictures. There is no baroque structure, there is no baroque color, chiaroscuro, or anything. I have been thinking about this for a long, long, time,

that it is a matter of a diminished visual acuity. Now, my own visual problems began in '77, when my retinas became torn and detached and had to be put together again in Boston. I had great hopes that I would learn something from that experience. Well, all I learned was-- This was in a Boston hospital, so naturally it had on the wall opposite the bed--I was there twelve days--a color reproduction of Van Gogh'sSunflowers in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. I knew that the day before the operation there were eleven blossoms, but when I came out of the anesthetic, there weren't any. It was just a yellowish-orange blur. The day after that there was one blossom. Then four days later I had the operation on the other eye. And that was the same problem. With the two eyes working at different speeds, you see, by the time I had the second operation I could see three sunflowers with one eye and none with the other. Finally, on the twelfth day, when I left the hospital, I was able to see them all. This had nothing to do with Cézanne, but with Van Gogh. The other problem were these cataracts. I thought, "Goodness, could Cézanne have had cataracts?" But I couldn't make any head or tail out of them except-- As a matter of fact, the only thing I did see which was negative was the yellowish darkening. It's this sort of browny-brown tone that you get, and there's nothing like that brown tone in Cézanne's work, though there it has been identified with people who have had cataracts. So it's not retinas and it's not cataracts. The third thing could be just a general increase in visual weakness. Well, what happens is that I delivered my essay as a lecture at the Institut de France, of all places, in the fall of '81, when John Rewald rounds up a group of scholars to speak about Claude Monet, the occasion being a celebration of Mrs. DeWitt Wallace [Lila Acheson Wallace]'s generosity in giving $2 million for the restoration of the gardens at Giverny. So John had told me several years ago that he was going to have this and that he wanted me to come and talk. I forgot about it, and I thought he had. Suddenly it all fell into place. And it was most interesting. We were feted like kings and queens on the Readers' Digest money. Most generous. Wonderful dinners in the best restaurants, and so on. Special luncheon at Giverny on the day that the museum was closed to the public. And I gave the lecture. There were other very interesting talks. Robert Herbert and Charles [F.] Stuckey and other important scholars spoke. I had to write it out, because the lectures were to be published. I got it all written, and it was published. And the publisher, whose name I had better not mention, allowed each essayist two copies of the book and no offprints.

RIKALA

That's crazy.

HAMILTON

I tried mimeographing it myself, because the college wouldn't do it since I didn't own the copyright. The copyright was held by the publisher. So I've had no way of getting that essay distributed, because I wanted it to be discussed. I wanted to know what was wrong if it was wrong and what was right if it was right.

RIKALA

Yes, of course.

HAMILTON

No way of knowing at all. So I was thinking of reprinting that in a book of my own with the other two. Oh. There's to be a third essay, which is "The Real Cézanne." I'm hung up on that because of John Rewald's taking endless time with his catalogue raisonné. He has all the computer equipment anybody could need, but the poor man isn't very well, and he's had great sorrow in his life. I doubt that we're ever going to see it, but I need his computer information to put together a list of all the paintings which were bought and sold in Cézanne's lifetime, because that is evidence of acceptance, in the first place, and of some kind of relationship with one's society. Which might, putting them all together, give us some idea of what Cézanne looked like at the beginning. Now, you see, the great Mont-Sainte-Victoire pictures don't count because they were not bought and sold in his lifetime, not even exhibited. So I want to try to do that.And that would be matched in the Manet section by an article on Manet's sitters. Manet is such a peculiar personality, because we know really little about what he felt or thought.

RIKALA

Even though there are some--

HAMILTON

We know more about his politics than anything else. He was way to the left. He hated Louis Napoleon--

RIKALA

Yes.

HAMILTON

--and admired people like Rochefort, the radical journalist who was born a member of the French nobility. He ended up in jail after he took part in the Commune. That's very interesting, you see; that shows this Manet as being anti-establishment. But what he really felt or thought we don't know, because there are no letters, there are no essays, there are no conversations, no interviews even like that funny one by Monet with Claude Roger-Marx, which is not a verbatim interview, but gives us a very good idea of what Monet was thinking in the early 1900s. My hope would be that we could find something out about Manet's psychology if we looked at all the people whom he chose to paint. Not the portraits that were commissioned, if there were any; I can't remember at the moment. Would this tell us whom he liked? Well, of course we know a good bit about his friends, but put it together in terms of his artistic statement. Whether I'll ever get around to that, I don't know.

RIKALA

Do you know why there are no letters? Did he dispose of them? Any such stories?

HAMILTON

They're never mentioned. I have one which Mrs. Roy Hunt-- Well, she was a bridesmaid at my mother's wedding years ago, and they lived near us in Pittsburgh. She was a great book collector. At one time or another she bought a little note by Manet, and then gave it to me after I published the book, which was very sweet. But it doesn't say anything. It just says, "Thank you so much. I'll be delighted to come to dinner on June 10." [laughter] He was very polite. That's all it says. Most Frenchmen are very polite. [laughter] But there's nothing revelatory at all. Antonin Proust's memoirs were published in '97, and that's fourteen years after he died, and a long time after the episodes that Proust recalls. Well, you have 660 letters by Vincent van Gogh, which enable anybody to become an amateur psychiatrist and say what his trouble was. He tells all in his letters to his brother and a certain few friends. Manet, nothing. Now, maybe the family destroyed-- No, the family wouldn't have destroyed

letters he'd written because they wouldn't have them. Maybe the friends found them boring and tore them up. [laughter]

RIKALA

That is quite a mystery, isn't it.

HAMILTON

You learn nothing about him from his paintings. RIKALA: No. They're quite distant somehow.

HAMILTON

They're very distant. They're contradictory. The Déjeuner is described in these books as a snarl of contradictions. As you untie them, then they tie themselves up in little knots in another direction. So this is rather intriguing. Now, it runs entirely contrary to the New Criticism, or any other kind of criticism that admits the fact that the artist had a life which he had to live. You're not supposed to do that anymore. The New Criticism in literature taught that the work was the only thing that you had. You were to confine yourself entirely to that. I don't follow that. You can't throw out the personality of somebody like Michelangelo.

RIKALA

No, of course not.

HAMILTON

Leonardo. You can't-- Rubens. Rubens is a master diplomat, you know; all of that is in his paintings. What's the point of throwing it out?

RIKALA

Do you think that's some sort of modern disinterest in biography?

HAMILTON

Well, yes, in the--

RIKALA

Again in this almost anonymous creative act.

HAMILTON

Don't forget that the people who wrote books called Authors I Have Known told you about what the authors were like. There's a whole nineteenth-century school of biographical criticism, and that so often veered into the sentimental and the untrue. But that's no reason to ignore it, because everything you can know about a thing so complicated as works of art is helpful. What would you make of Gaugin's paintings of the South Seas if you didn't know that he'd gone there?

RIKALA

Yes, or even why he might be intrigued.

HAMILTON

You might have thought they were more wonderful. More wonderful than they are. [laughter] So. But I think that's about all I can tell you-- This book, it's getting out of hand. It's growing too much in some directions, not in others. I'm sort of hoping that I will be able to put it in some shape, but I can't imagine publishers lining up at the front door to get their--

RIKALA

Do you see that literature and art history--or spinning off of art history--has changed much? I just encountered a book the other day by O. K. [Otto-Karl] Werckmeister called Citadel Culture. It was very expressive of his own political views, how he's seen politics change, and he does it through some of what he's learned in art history or taught in art history.

HAMILTON

Really?

RIKALA

But he also-- There's a bit on [Jürgen] Habermas, there's a bit on Umberto Eco, and then there's a bit on James Sterling. They're all kind of-- It's all quite lateral; it lines up very interestingly. I haven't read the book; I was only just looking at it. But I was quite fascinated that this very interesting art historian finds it appropriate to also give reflections on, you know, his concept of-- You

know, his world view. I was wondering, you know, in a sense how art history has really evolved in the past fifty or sixty years.

HAMILTON

I don't read much art history.

RIKALA

Well, I don't know if I'd even call that art history. It just was curious that--

HAMILTON

Well, let's just take straightforward art history such as a new study of somebody's sculpture. I don't read much of that. For the past couple of years I haven't been able to read much of anything anyway because these cataracts have been going on longer than anybody thought they would, and books are being printed more and more, as we pointed out, in this very dense type.

RIKALA

Yes, very difficult.

HAMILTON

I can read this now that I have my new glasses, but three months ago I wouldn't have been able to read this at all.

RIKALA

Really.

HAMILTON

What I do read in here is rather interesting, you know. There seem to be a lot of ideas there. So, to answer this question--

RIKALA

I was just curious, taking Werckmeister as an example, how all the skills that he learned as an art historian and as a teacher come around in a book that's very much about culture and society now. Donald Preziosi writes about that as well.

HAMILTON

I find him rather hard to read. Sort of tedious, actually. But I looked forward so from the title of the book, the recent one, and it was too wordy. I have never taught art history from a political point of view, partly because political painting is rarely of much interest in art history, and I got very tired in the thirties of hearing Goya constantly, you know, put forward as the great champion of liberty and everything else. Well, I had never seen-- I hadn't been to Madrid, so I hadn't seen the big pictures of the second and third of May and whatnot. I did think that the prints of the Disasters of the War were horrendous, but as far as being a comment upon the French invasion of Spain, it struck me that it was sort of stupid to produce them, since they weren't published until 1863 or something, long after his death, so they didn't really operate as propaganda. I really lost interest in Goya to such an extent that when the Yale department was asked to prepare a new edition of Helen Gardner's Art through the Ages and I was given the nineteenth century, I left him out. [laughter] I forgot all about him. I thought his best work was eighteenth century, those tapestry cartoons and so on. The person who was doing the eighteenth century didn't like Goya either and thought he belonged in the nineteenth. So we had to rustle up a section on Goya for the next printing. That was very embarrassing.

RIKALA

That's funny.

HAMILTON

But I then went to Madrid just to see Goya, and I found out he was a remarkable and wonderful, wonderful painter. But I still thought that the paintings were more interesting as art than as propaganda. The converse of that is that propaganda art usually is more interesting as propaganda than art. So I'm really interested now in the politicization of art, because I say anything that helps you understand it should be taken seriously. But I'm too old to do anything about it when I don't have to. I don't have to give lectures anymore, I don't have to talk about it. But I would like to read-- Who is this Werckmeister?

RIKALA

Werckmeister. I'll bring by a copy tomorrow.

HAMILTON

Oh, I'd like to see it.

RIKALA

I was just fascinated by it, too.I'd like now to talk about your work in the museums. We've kind of talked through your writing. I'm juggling all these professions that you were doing. You became involved at the very beginning of your career with the museum, the art gallery at Yale, and stayed with it for as long as you were at Yale.

HAMILTON

Until the end. I mean, my last job was as director of the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. RIKALA: Yes. So have you ever felt--? The skills that you learned becoming a museum director are skills that you learned firsthand, but is there anything in particular about your education or your interest that brought you into the museum world that you could--?

HAMILTON

Well, since my higher education is in English literature, it would seem the answer is no, except in Pittsburgh I had gone to the museum, the art museum, from an early age. When I went to New York for the first time, I went first of all to the Metropolitan Museum [of Art]. My first trip to Europe-- That's interesting. My first trip to Europe was when I was nineteen.

RIKALA

You mentioned a study trip that the students went on from Yale. Was that it, or was this an earlier--?

HAMILTON

That was '33 when I went over with these two friends, three friends and the wife of one of them. No, that's '33. The first trip in '29 I learned something I hadn't expected to learn, but I was keen on English history, and I'd always been-- I had a sort of sentimental feeling for poor Charles I, who had his head cut off, and-- So we went to many historic sights and museums. I still remember how I went to that great hall, Westminster Hall in the houses of Parliament, the only survival of the old palace where the trial of Charles I was

held, and there's a cross on the pavement, which is where he stood when he was sentenced to death, and so on. I thought this was going to be really moving, and I realized it wasn't at all. The historical event had happened so long ago, it was so far over and done with, and the real thing was that magnificent hall. Thirteenth century. Well, at nineteen you don't think very deeply about these things, but I have ever since remembered how really disappointing it was that history could not be recaptured.Now, I must say that I don't avoid historical places, and I've always been disappointed that even when I was only twenty miles away from it I couldn't get to the courthouse at Appomattox to see where Lee surrendered to Grant: That's one of the rooms I want to be in at one time or another. No, it's just that art is alive and history is dead, except insofar as it lives in our imagination or influences our lives. The Constitution seems to be being killed. It may eventually become a dead document, which is rather terrifying.

RIKALA

Yes, it's very sad.

HAMILTON

But after all, times change. But it-- What was the question?

RIKALA

The question had to do with your career choices or education that brought you towards a museum--

HAMILTON

There is nothing, nothing at all that leads up to it except that I was always fascinated in looking at works of art. But I never when I was in college would have dreamt of what I was asked to do. I did not choose my career, as I said the first time; it was chosen for me by other people. I fought desperately against leaving Yale and coming here to Williamstown.

RIKALA

Really?

HAMILTON

Yes. It took a very long time for me to make up my mind. I had been here as the third Robert Sterling Clark visiting professor. Clark had died in '56, and the trustees of his foundation--he divided his money between his foundation and the Clark Art Institute and his family--created a professorship in his memory. Pope-Hennessey, later Sir John Pope-Hennessey, was the first lecturer; the second was Ellis; later Sir Ellis Waterhouse; and the third one was plain George Hamilton, still George Hamilton. And I liked Williams College. I liked Williamstown [Massachusetts] very much, but after all, Yale was part of my past. I'd lived there since 1928 except for two years away. Towards the end of that year, 1966--it was a full-year appointment then; it's just one term's time now--the trustees came and asked me if I would consider being the associate director. Well, the director, Peter Guille, was a young man who as a youngster had been taken on by Mr. Clark as a sort of surrogate son because he had no children. Guille was the son of an English silver dealer who sold Mr. Clark his huge collection of eighteenth-century English silver. Then he became the clerk of the works when Clark built this museum, and he stayed on as the administrator, Mr. Clark himself being the first director. But Clark died fourteen months after he opened the museum, and Peter Guille just slipped into the job as director. Well, his only experience was as a silver dealer and a horseman. Mr. Clark showered him with horses, and he rode in steeplechases and told me he'd broken every bone in his body. He had rather a grim time of it as director because he didn't really know what to do. Clark's charter specified that these works were given to the people of Massachusetts and by extension the United States for their enjoyment and use in education and so on. It's a remarkable charter. It was not Mr. Clark's doing; it was the Boston lawyers working in the spirit of the nineteenth-century charitable ideals. He [Guille] just didn't know how to do that. And the trustees were getting a little uneasy, and ten years had elapsed since Mr. Clark had died, so they came to me.Don't ask me how they found me. The president turned up in my office in New Haven [Connecticut] one day to talk about whether there could be a graduate program. Well, I fought that idea tooth and nail. I said, "You cannot have a graduate program in a country town. You have to have a university library." "Well," he said, "we'll create the library." Anyway, I didn't really want to be the associate director to this man, who was frankly quite disagreeable and alienated the public. But, you know, they twisted my arm and then the other arm and so on. Yale wanted me to stay and raised my salary, so they

raised the proffered salary. So the two met way up in what seemed like a lot of money, but then I realized I had the Massachusetts income tax. There was none in Connecticut, so I lost. [laughter] But I finally decided to come, oh, for a great many reasons. I had done everything at Yale I could beside being a master of a college, a dean, or the president, and I didn't want to be any of those things. But I was a full professor, I had been director of undergraduate studies, director of graduate studies, and I would be fifty-five when I came here, and for the remaining thirteen years--

## 1.9. TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE TWO
## AUGUST 8, 1991

RIKALA

You retired at fifty-five?

HAMILTON

I retired from Yale at fifty-five.

RIKALA

Fifty-five, yes.

HAMILTON

In late middle life I came up here. It was very complicated. I finally decided to come, believe it or not, in that great Hall of the Soviets in the heart of the Moscow Kremlin in early October of 1964. [laughter] It's a marvelous building. It was the only really modern building then in Russia, so maybe that persuaded me. But there were many reasons. One was that our children were reaching a difficult age in school where they would be out of elementary school, and there was nothing really for them to go to. They were still too young to go away to school. The New Haven public school system was poor, and this place had an excellent little private school. Very, very good. That was one reason for coming. The other reason for coming was that I had rather had my curatorial activity at Yale curtailed when Andrew [Carnduff] Ritchie came as the director, because he was very jealous of his prerogatives and a little bit annoyed--I don't blame him at all--that the faculty were curators in the field of their specialty.

RIKALA

Specialization.

HAMILTON

So Charles Seymour was a curator of Renaissance art and Kubler of Mexican and John Phillips of American and me of the modern. Of course, Andrew Ritchie was a modernist coming from the Museum of Modern Art, and he had every reason to believe that he should do that part of it. I didn't quarrel with him at all. I quite agreed. But it meant that I couldn't go on putting on the exhibitions which I'd been doing, of which a couple were really quite successful in terms of interesting people. Here I would be-- For having started in 1934 in a museum, I would at last be the director at one, and a very interesting one. So all of those things put together slightly overbalanced the scale in favor of Williamstown. I still miss the library.

RIKALA

So you have created a graduate program in art history.

HAMILTON

Yes, it's working. It's okay intellectually. It suffers from a social disadvantage in that the Clark Art Institute is half a mile from the college, and that, I assure you, is too far to walk. [laughter] No student is going to walk that distance. Therefore, the graduate students, who are housed in an old fraternity house which is two doors down from the Clark, are effectively cut off from any relationship with the undergraduate body. If they were stuck down right in the middle of the undergraduate body, they would be effectively cut off from any relation with it, because they are one year older than the seniors, and that means they are old and worn-out and better be avoided. [laughter] So that's too bad.We've done everything we can to try to bring them together, but I guess not vigorously enough. I don't blame the undergraduates-- They call them students here because they don't think of the graduate students. I don't blame the students for not wanting to associate with people who are vigorously studying art history. But even so, we had eighty applications, I'm told, last January for admission. We take ten unless there are some extra good ones or some who can pay their own way, which is helpful. Most of them can't. I can understand that, and we do have fairly generous fellowships. But

eighty is a goodly number, and we have a feeling that this is going to be a good class that comes in next month.We have placed-- Or rather, our graduates have found good jobs. One is the print curator in the Saint Louis [Art] Museum, a man named Peter Hero, who has been director of the Oregon Arts Council and director of the Portland, Maine, School of Art and is now back in California or Texas running some enormous community arts program. He was one of our first students. Gary Berger, the director of the Berkshire Museum and now head of the conservation lab here at the Clark, is a graduate of the program. These are all good jobs, and there are more which I can't list, but it's impressive when you look at it. There are a considerable number of students whom we have never heard from, 10, 12 percent, but that's normal, and there are others who've changed their minds and gone into other careers. There are still more who are still in graduate school. We've gotten them into Harvard [University] and Yale and Princeton [University] and Columbia and Stanford [University], and that's very good. The future looks pretty good. We desperately need money, and Mr. Clark left a written statement that the institute was to have first claim on funds from his foundation. The foundation refuses to recognize that because it's not legal.

RIKALA

Why isn't it legal?

HAMILTON

It wasn't notarized. It wasn't included in the will. It's heartbreaking. So they spend their money on all kinds of things that Mr. Clark would have hated. [laughter] He was interested in horses, whiskey, and beautiful women, and paintings. His wife was the most beautiful woman he had ever known. He had but one; he was faithful to her. He was not interested in whales. [laughter] He was interested in medical research. He was not interested in struggling black colleges, which need all the help they can get, but I know from reading his letters that he would not care to have his money spent that way. So times change, and we can't tap that wonderful resource. The foundation, before this new chain of directors came in, was most generous. It paid the hundreds of thousands of dollars for the red granite which clothes the structure of the new building. It bought a Dutch scholar's library, which gave them the basis for creating a library. It paid for the painting, the first acquisition by the trustees,

an altar piece by Ugolino da Siena, which is very interesting because it was suggested by John Pope-Hennessey as a good buy when he was here as the Clark professor. Mr. Clark did not care for medieval art. [laughter] So we have that rather dutiful altar piece. They paid for the Fragonard portrait just before I came. Now they won't do a thing, not a thing. So that's sort of in-house conversation, but--No, the graduate program is nothing to be ashamed of. I thought it was a terrible risk. I couldn't see how so remote-- We are really terribly far from any centers. I know the cities of the Midwest are far away, too, but in the East we think of ourselves as being close. There's a three-hour drive to Boston, and it's longer to New York. We used to do it more often, and occasionally even to New York in a day, all down and back in a day, but you can't do that anymore. The bus service to Boston is reduced to one bus in each direction a day, which is inconvenient. There's only one bus to New York a day, and back. So curiously, as the century grows older and the world becomes more modern, we become more cut off.

RIKALA

You become more remote here.

HAMILTON

More remote, yes. There used to be forty-three trains a day in and out of the little railroad station. You could go down there. It's at the foot of Cole Avenue; it's still existing, a little sort of stone structure. You could get on a train. The next morning you could get off in Chicago. That was the end of the line. You can't do that anymore.

RIKALA

Oh, that's a shame.

HAMILTON

Yes, it really is, especially since the airlines seem to be in a position nearing collapse financially. I put my faith in a good library, and that we have. The trustees, they said, "How much will it cost?" and I said, "Well, it will cost a minimum of a million dollars." "A million dollars just for books?" I said, "Yes. You're going to have to get the older books which are out of print and expensive. You have to have them. You cannot-- If you want the graduate

program, you have to have the library." These men were almost all lawyers, and all they knew about libraries were those law books that lawyers have. They didn't realize how students have to have access to the knowledge of the past, and so on. So they finally were generous.They're getting a little stingy now, but we do, through a very gifted librarian, Michael Rinehart, who is now editor of the Bibliography of the History of Art journal published by the Getty [Center for the Study of Art and the Humanities]-- He was here from the first. And he bought spectacularly well. He was Harvard educated and studied at the Courtauld [Institute] after he graduated, and he knew what books were. Julius Held when he retired from Barnard [College] and moved here was just astounded at the books we had in Dutch and Flemish, which he needed. Wonderful. Of course, now books are getting more costly. You can buy fewer with the same amount of money.

RIKALA

Yes.

HAMILTON

It's awful. Terrible.

RIKALA

Yes. They are very, very expensive again.

## 1.10. TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE ONE
## AUGUST 9, 1991

HAMILTON

--the Communist Party, but marks in a sense that the conditions of production determine the intellectual values. Is [Robert] Rauschenberg's art political?

RIKALA

It certainly comments on the political. I don't know. Would that therefore make it political per se?

HAMILTON

Well, I don't know because I have great trouble with his art. Every once in a while he seems to me to do something which is art, and the rest is-- I don't know. The works never have a center.

RIKALA

That's true.

HAMILTON

Now, this is intentional, but it's tiresome. In the "High [and] Low: [Modern Art and Popular Culture]" exhibition which is now in California [at the Museum of Contemporary Art]--

RIKALA

Yes.

HAMILTON

--in Los Angeles, which Kirk Varnedoe, who is a graduate of Williams College, curated at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It got a terrible reception in New York from the critics. Hilton Kramer was personally insulting in the New Criterion, and Varnedoe was terribly upset. Now he's thrilled that the critics in Los Angeles have been so favorable. But in that show, which was not an interesting show-- The trouble was-- You haven't seen it.

RIKALA

No, I haven't.

HAMILTON

Well, if you have a chance, see if this rings true. It looked like a graduate student presentation for the doctor's degree of the-- The visual documentation of the thesis. [laughter]

RIKALA

A show and tell kind.

HAMILTON

It's the kind of show that you put on here in the Williams College Museum [of Art], or our graduate students will put on in the Clark [Art Institute] to prove a

point, so that questions of quality, visual relationship of things on a wall, even the problem of quality and quality-- There were too many cubist collages. There were twenty-nine of them, and five would have made the point, not twenty-nine, you see. And it was all very tiresome that way.But there was a Rauschenberg which was in the section called graffiti, which looked like, oh, torn billboards and collages, things like that. Here was a Rauschenberg; it's in a private collection whose name I always forget. It's a big, broad canvas, and across the middle of it are these pasted bits of things with red paint and whatnot, some of it dripping down. It is a stunning thing to look at. Now, you can't often say that a Rauschenberg is stunning to look at. It has real quality, and I'm terribly interested in quality, and I won't bore you with the reasons why. If you aren't interested in quality, you've lost the whole point of making things, because you have to make them good, bad, or better. I just wish Rauschenberg had explored that vein a little bit more. You could still do it with a rubber tire around the stuffed goat's neck, you know. But he has his own way of doing things. There's now an article about him in the Smithsonian magazine, that his show has reached Washington, so I'll-- You can ring me up in a month or so and I'll tell you what I think.

RIKALA

Okay. I will--

HAMILTON

But let's get back to the point in hand.

RIKALA

Well, I'd like to know a bit about your perceived role in the museum at the Yale Art Gallery, and what the relationship was with other museums. I mean, there was the Museum of Modern Art, there's the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art]. I would like an evaluation of the Yale museum in relationship to other New England or East Coast museums and your role in that.

HAMILTON

Well, among college museums, the Yale Art Gallery, as it's called, is very old. It's the oldest, in the first place. It dates back to 1832. When the university bought Colonel John Trumbull's collection of paintings, but it didn't have its

building-- It had a building of its own to begin with called the Trumbull Gallery, which had been the treasurer's office, and the building was a cute little neoclassic structure: It's now destroyed. Then it existed as a couple of rooms in the art school, which is the oldest collegiate art school in the country, having started in 1866. Then it finally got a building of its own in 1928 connected by a bridge to the art school, when the connection between the art gallery and the art school was very close. It was less close in my time because the art school remained very conservative until about 1948 or so, when Josef Albers came as the chairman. He kicked out all the old plaster casts, which was a wicked thing to do, because they were old plaster casts, which means in some cases they had been made from the actual classic works of art and therefore weren't all soft and smoothed off the way that reproductions are nowadays. But Albers had no place in his philosophy for older art. Absolutely none. This meant that there was a break, obviously, between a practicing art school and a museum of historical art. The students never came, and so on. It was one of those dogmatic situations that happened in the twentieth century.But in the course of time, and especially in the twentieth century, the Yale Art Gallery had acquired some notable collections, first in 1871 a collection of so-called Italian primitives, which meant fourteenth-fifteenth-century Italian painting of the Jarves collection. Then came in the early nineteenth century a wonderful collection of Greek vases-- I'm thinking of only the big things. Then in the thirties the Garvan collection of American arts and crafts, with the superb furniture and silver of real museum quality. Now, all this is based upon the collection of Colonel Trumbull's paintings. Trumbull is of great historical importance because he was Washington's aide-de-camp. He was present at things like the Battle of Dorchester Heights, and so on, and knew all the people of the revolution. He got from Jefferson a floor plan of where the people stood the day they signed the Declaration of Independence--this is only ten years after the Declaration of Independence was signed--so his historical place in the foundation of the republic is secure. As an artist his talents were rather insecure because as a child he had lost the sight of one eye, and his paintings tend towards the two dimensional rather than the three. But at his best, in his smaller works, he has a lifelike eighteenth-century quality. This was a fine thing to build a museum upon. Then later on there came, as we already said, in 1941, the [Katherine Sophie] Dreier collection of the Société Anonyme. So there is a wonderful body of teaching materials, and

as well splendid works of art for the public to see, so it is the public art museum for central southern Connecticut. Well, there's nothing actually in southern Connecticut comparable to it. Bridgeport and Stamford haven't anything, and the museum in New London is very small. Now, it is perhaps secondary-- I shouldn't say perhaps. Any Harvard [University] person listening to this would know what I meant. Harvard is renowned for the Fogg Art Museum, which has wonderful collections of painting and silver and everything else. There is the collection of the Rhode Island School of Design Museum [of Art] in Providence, which is very, very good indeed. All of these museums, college museums, are qualitatively in a class with a museum like the one in Worcester, which is the next finest public museum in New England after the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. So, anyway, the Yale museum is very, very good. It is, of course, a teaching museum. Its first obligation is to the university, not to the town, but recently it has sort of amended that to include a board of friends, you know, of local people who are interested and will support it. With the arrival in the 1960s of the [Yale] Center for British Art across the street, the Mellon collection, you have really quite a body of material there. The museum in my day was fairly static. They didn't have a very active exhibition program, which is what a museum now depends upon to continue to attract visitors, because visitors can't be expected to return over and over and over again to see the same paintings. But in recent years there have been-- Well, were there exceptional exhibitions in my day? I can't think of any temporary exhibition at all when I was a student, but when I was a student I was in English literature, so I was more likely to go to one of the amateur productions of a lesser Shakespearean comedy than to be aware of what was going on in the art museum. In my own time, we did have exhibitions. That was one of the things--

RIKALA

That you worked on.

HAMILTON

I did, but I could never do more than a really serious one once every two years. I remember one on Venetian landscape painting of the eighteenth century which was a really stylish exhibition. We borrowed good works from around the country, and W. G. Constable, the curator of painting at the Boston

Museum, came and talked. That was commendable. It was small, but commendable. Then we had our Duchamp exhibition in '45.

RIKALA

Yes. And that traveled.

HAMILTON

That traveled to three or four other colleges. Then we had a traveling exhibition of the Edward Austin Abbey Shakespearean drawings, which kept going for a long time, but it never made much of a--never reached the popular press. Abbey was a very graceful artist, but not a man of great power and certainly of no inventive skills. He didn't push art ahead into the twentieth century. But that was part of my curatorial duties. The first exhibi¬tion of the Abbey collection was a big exhibition of the paintings and drawings. This went on, and in a modest way.This was rather true of the Fogg, too. The Fogg only puts on a major exhibition every four or five years. For one thing, they've become more and more expensive, and for another thing they're enormously time-consuming in ways which don't advance the search for knowledge. All the bookkeeping. All the correspondence and so on. But nowadays the Yale Art Gallery's most recent important showing was the Winslow Homer watercolors, which was organized by Helen Cooper, who is the curator of American art there now. That was a splendid exhibition. But it's awfully hard to say what importance the museum has for society as a whole when you're inside it.

RIKALA

Yes, I suppose so.

HAMILTON

You think it's the most important thing, obviously. Well, it isn't. [laughter] People have a great many more thoughts on their mind--interests on their mind--than the museum, and I realized that so well when I came here to the Clark. Because here is an absolutely first-class collection of paintings. There are some that aren't as good as others, but there are masterpieces there. And we do have an active exhibition program. But the townspeople never come.Now, Mr. Clark was felled by a paralytic stroke five months after he had

opened his museum. It opened with only three galleries finished, but they were hung with paintings, with the marvelous Renoirs and so on. When he was able to leave the hospital in North Adams [Massachusetts], he was brought to the museum, where he and Mrs. Clark had created a little apartment for themselves. That was in the design from the beginning. It is the room where the Fragonard is over the mantle¬piece. That was two single bedrooms and a connecting bath. Then they closed off the whole south gallery, that very long gallery, which was their living room. Terrible shape. [laughter] He lived there until October of the following year, '56, when he died. And his funeral was held in the room where the Renoir paintings are. So all this time he was ill, the local grocer had delivered every Friday to the back door of the institute a load of meats and fruits and vegetables and everything they needed for Mr. and Mrs. Clark and the nurse. That was in '56. I came here in 1966, and in 1968 John Brooks--Jock Brooks, as he's called--who came as my assistant director and is now the associate director-- He was made a member of the board of trade, which is good for our public relations. He asked if we could have a reception for the board of trade after dinner some evening, coffee and brandy. And I said, "Certainly. It would be a wonderful idea." So among the people who came to the meeting was the grocer, who was also our grocer by that time, and I was delighted to see him there. His first name was Ken, and I said, "Ken, it's wonderful you're here," and so on. And he said, "Well, you know, it's the first time I've ever been in." I said, "The first time." He said, "Yes. I used to bring Mr. Clark $250 worth of vegetables every Friday." And I said, "And you never came in on Sundays, your day off?" "Never," he said. Now, that was symptomatic of the whole town. This was a rich man's folly, you know, and they were frightened. It was what Robert Coles talked about, the Harvard psychologist who works with children. The children of Boston, the underprivileged children, so to speak, are afraid to go in the Museum of Fine Arts, which is happy to welcome them, but it's too awesome to come. And this would be true of their parents, too. So there's a terrible social obstacle that exists probably in differing degrees around the country. It's hard to believe when you go to the Metropolitan on a Sunday and there's an attendance that is four times the population of this town. But anyway, in terms of the population of New York City, it's just a miniscule fraction. So I think this is a very difficult problem which museums are trying to overcome, probably more successfully than in my day. They have better experience now.

But it probably is built in the nature of the situation. Let's also remember that not everybody's interested in art. So if you cancel out them, you would have a much smaller potential audience.

RIKALA

But there is something curious about the nature of the social situation that you talk about. At least at Yale, the art gallery does have a sense of being on the periphery. You don't have to venture into this sacred university. You can drive around the side and hop into the gallery.

HAMILTON

Well, it's right there on the main street.

RIKALA

It's on the main street, exactly, so that's more accessible. But it is a curiosity.

HAMILTON

So I've really been completely out of touch with it since I left in '66. I have a feeling one shouldn't drag one's self around. We have professors here at Williams who will not stop teaching even after they've retired. They really keep on and on and on, and I don't think this is a good idea. I think that when you retire, you should leave it to your successors and not in any way get underfoot. So that's why when I left Yale after thirty years, I left it. I concentrated on the situation here. When I retired from the Clark, I kept an office, but that was because I was teaching and I had to have an office to see the students there, because the graduate classes were taught there. But as soon as I retired from teaching, I gave up the office. Now, to my everlasting regret, I had to throw out all my-- I had to throw out 98 percent, at least, of my accumulated notes, because there wasn't any room for them here at home, and you can't put them in storage. That's hopeless. So I've lost that sort of background of my life. [laughter] I have to make it up as I go along, the way I am with you.

RIKALA

Yes. [laughter] I like that, though. When you left Yale in the mid-sixties, wasn't Yale at that time also undergoing a big change in faculty?

HAMILTON

I would say that it underwent it right afterwards.

RIKALA

Afterwards.

HAMILTON

When I left, there was no-- Two things had not yet happened. One, the student turmoil. That really began in '67-'68. Wasn't Kent State '68? We were already up here. And we had our troubles here. They weren't at all pleasant, but they were nowhere near as bad as they were at Harvard and other places--Kent State [University] and California, [University of California] Berkeley, and so on. Nowhere near as bad. It was just a ruckus, sort of, in a gentleman's parlor, but it was-- It was very annoying, especially because it was racial rather than academic. But it was solved by a very brilliant dean who stood out all night in the rain at Eastertime talking to the students, who had occupied the administration building and the switchboards, which meant the security and everything. They had thirteen unnegotiable demands. And that dean succeeded in negotiating twelve of them.

RIKALA

Oh, that's amazing.

HAMILTON

The last one was very easily resolved, because they named the reserve book room where the books were on reserve for classes in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King and hung a huge portrait of him. That solved everything. No shots were fired. But at Yale, of course, what happened later on-- And I do regret that I wasn't there to know what went on. But that was the takeover of the English department by the deconstructionists. I wasn't aware at all of its happening until it had happened, and it's now gone, apparently, with the disgrace of Paul de Man, which I think we talked about at--

RIKALA

Yes, I think off tape, though.

HAMILTON

I wish I'd been there because I wouldn't have such difficulty understanding deconstruction now, but it may well be that I shouldn't be embarrassed, that there is nothing to understand. I've been looking into this MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] book on Duchamp [Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century], and I'm amazed and awed by the splendor of these people's scholarship. But I had the awful suspicion that it was about nothing at all, that Duchamp himself would have deplored it. So deconstructionism, in that sense-- Sort of a tempest in a teapot, who knows. But-- No, no, everything exciting happened after I went.

RIKALA

Could you recall for me any particular interesting changes in the art history faculty around the time that you were leaving that sort of represent this environment?

HAMILTON

In the thirty years that I was on the faculty, the faculty continued to grow and to expand, as the faculties at Yale had in the twentieth century. The appointments we made from outside the body of Yale alumnithat were there, the [Sumner] Crosby/[Charles] Seymour/ [George] Kubler/[Carroll] Meeks/Hamilton, the five of them, were just like us. Of the people-- I seem to remember having hired Jules Prown. I think I did. RIKALA: Is he the person who worked very closely with Lou Kahn on the British Center?

HAMILTON

Yes. He's an Americanist, and it was very interesting that he was the first director of the Mellon art center, but that's the way it worked. But Jules Prown is a very sound teacher and scholar and an admirable person. Another one that I was able to secure was Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann, a Dutch scholar who was working at Harvard at the time, and he came to teach Dutch and Flemish painting. A marvelous man. Everything that's good about Calvinism is enshrined in Egbert Haverkamp. He is the soul of honesty. He has pink cheeks, blue eyes. He's just great. To my enormous regret, he left Yale to join the Institute of Fine Arts at NYU [New York University], which of course is the premier body of great art historical scholars in the East. It's greatly to his

credit that he's there, but I'm sorry that Yale lost him. Those people were just coming along, and they-- Like the rest of us. We were art historians.

RIKALA

Did you have something to do with Kurt Forster coming to Yale?

HAMILTON

No, but I remember when he did.But the tremendous change that has happened since I left and which has happened all over the country is the coming of the women. So far as I can tell--and I don't have the catalogs, here but I can think it out pretty well--both the art department and the Yale Art Gallery are now staffed more than 50 percent by women. Now, this is a totally different situation, and it's a quantitative statement I'm making, not in any sense qualitative. But it is qualitative to the extent that inevitably everything is different. In the art gallery it is interesting, because it is inconceivable that important positions there will ever be filled by men as long as the present director is that particular woman. Now, this is a change which is going on which is difficult for me, who hasn't been there for twenty-six years, to understand, because I've not been in it. My friends who are in it aren't puzzled by my puzzlement. But I am deeply puzzled when the president of Yale at this most recent commencement, at the conclusion of his baccalaureate so-called sermon, said-- Now, when I graduated, I am convinced that President [James Rowland]Angell said, "Gentlemen of the graduating class," and then we all rose and got his final message. This time President [Benno] Schmidt said, "Women and men of Yale." Now, that is a direct, colloquial translation of "ladies and gentlemen." But it has a totally different impact. Maybe not meaning, but impact. I have said to a couple of Yale friends who were there, "What did you think?" And they said, "Well, what's wrong with that?" So obviously Yale has changed enormously. I don't go to commencement here any longer, because after you've been to fifty of them, they've lost all freshness. [laughter] Nobody can tell me whether President [Francis] Oakley made such a statement as "Women and men of Williams." I know, as a matter of fact, that the older Williams alumni would have been appalled, and the new ones wouldn't have noticed it. But that is really a tremendous change.I think what I myself feel is unfortunate is that this change cannot occur-- It's a necessary change. I'm not fighting it, but I regret to see it occurring in terms of

causing tension. And it does cause tension, because one group which had always had the say no longer has the say and feels itself dispossessed. I am enraged when a woman walking through a door lets it slam in my face, when I would never let it slam in the face of a woman, and I am always enchanted when a woman undergraduate says, "Thank you" when I hold the door open for her. I always say, "You're welcome," which no student ever does. But that's an old man speaking. It's just that times have changed, and it's very hard to keep up with them. But we do have brilliant women on the faculty, and curiously, for reasons which I do not understand, there have been cases of gross unfairness, one this past year, where a woman of great intellectual distinction, who is supposed to have just published the best book ever on one of those early Anglo-Saxon poets, a woman enormously popular with the students, was denied tenure in favor of a less distinguished woman. The reason which is largely believed around the college is that the distinguished woman was denied tenure because she had a husband and children. The woman who got tenure does not have a husband and children, and probably will never. She's not interested in that. That's terrible.

RIKALA

But a better academic catch, not having family? That hardly seems to ring true.

HAMILTON

People were really brokenhearted. I had never heard this woman lecture, but-- In Williams, all the townspeople, everybody can go to the lectures; you only have to get permission. Many of our friends had attended her course, her popular course in English literature of the nineteenth century, and thought she was wonderful. Now, that is no reason to-- [laughter] I would never appoint anybody because they were popular with the townspeople, but it indicates that there was a sort of zip about her which the other person doesn't seem to have had. RIKALA: Well, there has been-- You're bringing up an interesting issue, and perhaps we can stay with it just for a moment more, of a change that's occurred. Being politically correct seems to be the path to follow, that in the case of a tenure vote or--

HAMILTON

This is PC, isn't it?

RIKALA

Yes.

HAMILTON

That was PC working right there.

RIKALA

Yes, and as we seem to be realizing, being politically correct may not necessarily be the right thing to do. Just as you described the women and men of the graduating class, how that rings odd to your ear, that it just sounds like a way for the president to be politically correct, but it doesn't really sound very formal or polite.

HAMILTON

You see, if he had said, "Men and women," would--? Now, Yale went co-ed, you know, and women are there, and they're wonderful and brilliant and everything else, and nobody's cross with them at all. If he had said "men and women," would the women have been as disturbed by that as it's possible that the men were disturbed by the "women and men"? I think it would not have been the same. I'm not quite sure which way it was. Maybe this was better. But it is a change.Now, all my life, all my professional life, I have worked with women. Back there in the Walters [Art Gallery], there were five of us. Actually, there were six, because-- Well, I should mention the registrar, Winifred Kennedy, who was a graduate of Simmons Business College in Cambridge. We were half and half, and there was absolutely no gender difficulties at all. When I went to Yale, there were no women on the faculty, but there were women on the staff of the art gallery, secretaries who were really acting as assistant curators who were my dearest friends, and I had no sense of problems with them. Now, it is true they were not doing exactly the same work, so we didn't run into that problem of the same pay for the same work, but we were working together in the same project. Then here at the Clark we had no woman-- We had a very small staff. There was no staff when I came. There was me and the superintendent and a secretary who couldn't take shorthand, so we had to get another secretary. Now there's a staff of

teens. Now the librarian is a woman, wonderful. But I have never had a sense of conflict with women until the women arrived and conflicted with me. I mean, the slamming of the door is symbolic. It happens, but it symbolizes other situations in the faculty club where they talk a little louder to attract attention to the fact that they're there. Now, this is unnecessary, and it's sort of foolish. I don't know who these women are. I know instantly that they're faculty because they dress in a certain way, they act a certain way, they talk-- They talk about their classes and everything. But they're uneasy, I suppose. Oh, would that we were a state institution and had solved this problem ages and ages ago. Or isn't it solved in state institutions?

RIKALA

No. It's just as difficult.

HAMILTON

But it's tiresome. That's what I object to about it. So what I talked about about race prejudice the other day, it's just so tedious. Boring. Religious prejudice. Any kind. Nobody believes me.

## 1.11. TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE TWO
## AUGUST 9, 1991

HAMILTON

The question is what the discipline has become nowadays. If I were to be asked what it was, I wouldn't really know what to say, because I have been out of it. What puzzles me, however, and this may be more true in terms of studies of contemporary art, contemporary literature, and so on, is the attempt, well-- To say to politicize them puts too strong a sense of partisan politics on it, but it is to try to discover everything about the art to the neglect of the thing that makes it particularly a work of art. Now, if you were going to take in English literature George Eliot's Middlemarch, which is in the opinion of almost everybody I've talked to about it one of the great, monumental accomplishments in English fiction. It's a marvelous novel. It's also, of course, an extraordinary account of English society in a time thirty to forty years before it was published. It's very interesting. It has such a contemporary ring to it, you forget it's all taking place in the 1840s. But to read that entirely as a

social document, which is conceivable and I suspect is done, is to lose one of the most satisfying experiences that a reader can have. Now, a satisfying experience is scarcely ever a political or a sociological experience. That is interesting. That can be intellectually or, in the partisan sense, interesting. But that curious kind of warm glow that suffuses you in the presence of great beauty, which is another way for saying perfection, accomplishment, a marvelous mastering of all the tasks which one encounters as a novelist successfully or as a musician with a symphony-- That peculiar thing that is different from everything else. If that is being lost--and certainly in the deconstructionist literary philosophy it is lost--because it was never even looked for, and deconstruction doesn't even permit you to look for it--then there is an emptiness. There's a black hole. That is what frightens me about contemporary scholarship in art history. It also disturbs me-- Well, that's too strong a word. It also puzzles me in certain relationships of contemporary art, notably in the museum of which I am trustee-- Technically, I am trustee emeritus; therefore I have no vote any longer, but I do sit on the acquisitions committee. I'm very puzzled that works of contemporary art can no longer or are no longer acquired or selected, chosen, discussed on the basis of what we used to judge them by. Now, to take a recent artist like Matisse, who is perhaps the easiest of the really great moderns to come in contact with for the first time, so to speak, the question of beauty is there. The work is visually so enchanting, so ingratiating that you're captivated, and it's only later that you realize what extraordinary powers of synthesis, illumination, and so on, Matisse possessed. But that kind of painting is no longer performed. The kind of art that we get are assemblages, you know, and constructions and things, and they really have to be judged on all sorts of mysterious sociological grounds. Therefore I seem to see the center sort of falling out of what I've built my life upon. Now, saying that, I know I speak as an older scholar. I'm actually a very old scholar now. I feel old. I feel like cracking apart other people's ideas, and that should be-- What I've said should be taken only as an opinion; it is not in any way perhaps even a demonstrable fact. But it makes me a little uneasy that the younger generation coming along may never, never be encouraged to have the experiences which are basic to some of the really notable accomplishments in recent times. The creation of a great art museum, of a great symphony orchestra, of a great operatic company have all been built upon the conception of bringing the best, not the worst, not the

mediocre. Can you imagine a symphony that was dedicated to playing only second-class music? [laughter] Or bad operas? Or inferior works of art? But, of course, a reversal doesn't always prove the positiveness of any other side of the issue.

RIKALA

What you're getting at is that the notion of the experiential has somehow become suspect, and that the faculties of being analytical or being contextual have replaced the experiential quality. I wonder, too, why that--if you might go on a bit more to--

HAMILTON

The one is objective. The other is subjective, isn't it. Is it that we distrust subjective judgments? No, because we make them all the time. We think we have great presidents, and our only basis for that is a subjective opinion. We think we have great senators in Massachusetts. Even the flawed senator [Edward M. "Ted" Kennedy] is great in his concern for the poor, the handicapped, which no longer concern the government with the whole. The other senator who doesn't seem very great has shown in recent weeks extraordinary astuteness; that's Senator [John F.] Kerry. Well, I can't get into politics. That doesn't belong to art history. But, of course, experiential also means the experience which I'm talking about. In the Boston Museum [of Fine Art], there are a series of rooms on the ground floor which contain the collection of Forsyth Wicks, Mr. Wicks's collection of eighteenth-century French decorative arts, furniture, china, porcelain, silver, that kind of thing. He had exquisite taste. There is something that is almost a curse word now. He had exquisite taste in these things. I was hoping that we could secure them for Yale because we have these wonderful decorative arts from the American colonial and early republican period in this country. Mr. Wicks was a Yale graduate. But his connections were more with Boston, and so the Boston Museum got them. Now, I told you yesterday that I had been offered that--[Nikolaus] Pevsner had offered me the book on eighteenth-century French art for the Pelican series, and I really wasn't interested in writing it. It still is not a period that I spend much time looking at. I think it had great, great figures, but it's just not in my line of interest. Whenever I go there to the Boston Museum, I usually find myself walking through the Wicks rooms because I have to do

them to get to certain American things that I like to look at. Every time I go through, I'm amazed that there's no one at all there. No one.Now, I've since discovered that one reason for this is that the Boston Museum charges, for those who are not members, a fee of six dollars, an entrance fee which must be as high as any museum comes. When I mentioned this to a Bostonian who has been a trustee of the museum, he said, "Well, that's perfectly all right. The museum's open free on Saturday mornings." And I said, "Well, yes, but there are a whole lot of people that want to come in the week time. Not everybody can come on Saturday mornings. Secondly, I think the fee is too high." And he said, "That's a ridiculous statement because you pay that much to go to a movie." Well, I couldn't tell him that his was a ridiculous statement because going to a movie and to the Boston Museum are two entirely different things. [laughter] You just don't equate them. It's apples and oranges. But that is one of the reasons that there's nobody there. But I suspect if I went on a Saturday morning, it would be vacant, too. Now, here is the inability of people, myself included, enthusiastically to embrace the qualitative character, the magnificent quality of these things. I think it's rather sad. Perhaps these rooms are in the wrong position; you know, they are sort of down in the ground floor, which is a kind of basement area-- Well, no, it's on the ground, but the main floors are up above. But still, there's a curious decline of interest in that sort of thing. When I was teaching at Yale and there were only male undergraduates, I would often tell them that life was this constant series of having to make choices, and that the history of art was a very good way to learn how to choose between two things. You choose the best of the work of a master, which enables you to choose a master. You are able to discriminate between the false and the genuine, which you have to do really with your eyesight. This was before the latest developments in electrochemistry and everything. But you go to college to learn to select, to choose, to find the best. They never objected. They always wrote this down and went away. But I would also say, "Gentlemen"--because that is how we referred to them [laughter]--"Gentlemen, every time you buy a necktie--" Now, don't forget they came to class in neckties until the Second World War. "When you choose one, you have made a selection. You may not even have been conscious of the choice." That's what's interesting about choosing, because how do you decide on what you want? It is your inner psychology which is deciding, but that psychology can be improved, refined, and so on, by making more and more

choices. Can you imagine anybody today talking about selecting neckties? Because there social fashion has changed. But of even being concerned that the students make a choice?

RIKALA

What's very interesting, what you're pointing out, is that somewhere we've reevaluated, or there is a reevaluation or a transvaluation going on of what cultural signs of taste are. Somewhere we've lost taste, good taste, or something has happened. The question of qualitative has fallen down the rungs of the ladder, perhaps. Or it hasn't, but it's being juggled or punched at or something. The curiosity is why that's occurred, or at what point.

HAMILTON

What is the use of these wonderful museums? What is the use of courses in the history of art if we don't still try to help people to see? Well, I'm not going to answer that question for you. But this is all apropos, I hope, of your original question as to what the history of art was like in the old days. I will tell you this: it was un-self-conscious.

RIKALA

Really? And now it's extraordinarily--

HAMILTON

You just were an art historian. You weren't taking a position.

RIKALA

Yes, and now it's extraordinarily self-conscious, it seems.

HAMILTON

I know. We've had a tremendous struggle here at the college museum, which was founded by this Professor Karl [E.] Weston in 1929, more than fifty years ago. It was supposed to be a museum for the college courses and for anybody else that wanted to come, but there was no attempt whatever to attract the general public from outside, and there was no particular effort to get the whole college involved. It was for the-- The courses taught the students in the history of art, and works were bought to illustrate historical points, but they were always works of the best quality when that could be bought on very

slender purchase funds or a donor could be persuaded to give it. That was abruptly cast aside when Thomas Krens became the director, because he was only interested, being himself a painter, in immediately contemporary art. He took everything off the walls and out of the galleries, except the medieval stone sculptures, which were too hard to move, and the Assyrian bas reliefs, and filled it full of contemporary work. That brought the museum more into the late twentieth century than it had ever been; it really hadn't quite caught up to it. It was sort of always fifteen years behind the times. But the destruction--or rather the elimination--of the older works really undercut the purpose of the museum. So when Krens left and they had to get a new director, they sought someone who could get the show back on the rails again. They had to select the best person. No point in selecting a second-rate person. So curiously, the best person who applied was a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, Linda Shearer, whom I had known the whole four years she'd been at the museum and had enormously admired and respected her. No one here, of course, knew that I had been for thirty years or twenty years, whatever it is, a trustee at the Museum of Modern Art. It never occurred to them. So they never asked me. I never knew she came up here. When she did come, I was in Washington, so I had nothing to do with her appointment. But she is a spectacularly good museum director. She is the first professional in the several directors they've had from the beginning, the first professional museum director, and she is entirely committed to contemporary art, just like Krens. But she knows, she understands-- I mean, she understands the problem and she knows how to resolve it, and she has brought out of the gloom many of the older works. She has an exhibition of American painting, which is not contemporary, from the museum's collections, and this is going on for two years. But here is a very interesting example of how difficult it is at the end of the century to make sense out of past values and how sad in a way, because what is a life unless it has a memory? I don't think animals have memories. I think they have elaborate intuitive-- I mean, a bird can fly when it's very little. I mean, the parent has to push the bird out of the nest. What does the bird do? It flies, and that's a genetic situation, because it has been born with the genes that tell it how to fly. But human beings aren't quite like animals. We think unfortunately sometimes. [laughter] But where would we be if we couldn't remember what we had done in the past? The beauty of aging, really, is that your experiences become richer because they occur within a continuing

context which you may not really be aware of. But when we go tonight to Cooperstown to hear this first American production of an opera by Mozart, we will be hearing that in the context of all his other operas. We will be evaluating it in those terms, which will be different from the people who evaluated hearing a Mozart opera for the first time, if there is such a person. Their likes and dislikes will not be the likes and dislikes of the people that know what Mozart was capable of. I have no idea whether it's going to be a bore or a brilliant surprise, but that will be based upon a lifetime of listening to music.Now, to throw all that away, as so much contemporary criticism wants to do, is to impoverish us. I'm sorry if that sounds old-fashioned, but it's what I believe. So there you are. Shadows closing in. [laughter] Why, even that silly garden of mine that I work so hard at has a meaning because of what it was last year and the year before. Its particular meaning this year is it isn't so good as it used to be. There are reasons for that. Some I could not control, such as the climate last winter, for the last two years. Second, ailments in the family, operations and so on, have kept me from working in it. But the garden is a constantly reremembered experience for me, if not for you. You come to it as an uneducated person. [laughter]

RIKALA

Yes. I can visualize.

HAMILTON

Except you can compare it with other gardens you've known, and you therefore know that it isn't very good. What disturbed me so when we had these two garden parties on those hot days in July were the people that came out and said, "What glorious flowers," you know, and they were not glorious. [laughter] They shouldn't have said it. If they were saying it to make me feel good, I appreciated it, but I didn't respect them. [laughter] If they said it because they thought they were glorious, I respected them even less. [laughter] So that's the way it works. Everything in life is seen in relation to everything else. Ask me another question.

RIKALA

You were involved in various aspects of modern art. I would like to go back and talk a bit more about Duchamp and perhaps how he became a little part

of your career interests and how, when presented with something like an interesting artist in your life, one becomes involved-- The relationship, the nature of the relationship. So perhaps we can retrace a minute. You mentioned that you met him in '42. You worked on the Dreier collection. You put together a small exhibition, and then you worked together with Duchamp doing some of the translations. I would like you to elaborate more on just how those things become a part of one's life, maybe in a more abstract sense, and then we can get into talking a bit more about Duchamp.

HAMILTON

Well, don't forget that I came to know Duchamp because of the inexorable workings of history. Having thought he was dead, I had no expectation of ever seeing him in the flesh. Perhaps in heaven, but I know he didn't think he was going to go to heaven. [laughter] That was because Miss Dreier decided to give the collection to Yale. So Duchamp became in a way part of my professional obligations. [laughter] Now, I've met a lot of artists, but I've known only a very few. Partly it's because I am not gregarious by nature. Partly because artists, most artists, despise art historians. I don't blame them. I mean, they're not interested in the past; necessarily, they're busy being creative in the present, and they don't like art historians any more than they like critics. But I have known-- I've known two very well. One was Marcel Duchamp; the other was Josef Albers. If ever there was black and white, it was those two people. I knew Albers also professionally because he became the chairman of the painting and sculpture department at the art school. They were utterly fascinating as people, because Duchamp was totally self-effacing. If you looked at him, he might disappear into the wall or something. Albers was totally present with you. Albers was always on the defensive because it had taken his career so long to develop in this country. He had come here-- Of course, Hitler, you know, had destroyed the Bauhaus and everything, and artists of his persuasion were anathema to der Führer, so he and his wife Annie [Albers] had come here. He'd taught at Black Mountain College and earning no money at all there, and then Yale mysteriously picked him. This conservative institution, which was still teaching tempera painting, the technique of the fourteenth-century Florentine disciples of Giotto, believe it or not, picked this wild radical who was exceptionally egotistical, which I found very hard to take because I really am not egotistical.An instance is-- Albers and

I used to have lunch once a month, more or less, for several years. I once said to him, "Josef--" This was at the height of the abstract expressionist movement, when [Mark] Rothko and [Barnett] Newman and all those wonderful people were riding high and [Jackson] Pollock was still alive and everything. I said, "Josef, which of the abstract expressionists do you admire the most?" Have I told you this?

RIKALA

No.

HAMILTON

He said, "I don't admire any of them." I said, "You don't admire any of them? What about Rothko, whose work, like yours, is sort of minimalist?" He said, "I don't admire him at all." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yes. They make me--" I can't remember his exact words, whether "They make me want to vomit," or maybe he made the sounds of vomiting.

RIKALA

My goodness.

HAMILTON

Well, I was shocked. I said, "Well, whom do you admire?" He struck his chest, "Myself."

RIKALA

My goodness.

HAMILTON

Well, it was-- We had to skip the meeting the next month because it took me that long to adjust to anybody who was so self-concentrated. I must say there was another great artist whom I knew even better, and that was Naum Gabo. There's a beautiful Gabo around here, which is not visible because the stand which holds it up, which he designed, has broken, and so it's lying down upstairs. But Gabo, similarly, was the only artist in the world. Everybody else was of no account. He was deeply disturbed by the fact that I was even historically interested in surrealism. He despised it. Now, my wife [Polly Wiggin Hamilton] says that you've got to be understanding of these people,

that they are creative artists and they naturally are concerned with what they're doing. "Well," I said, "I'm concerned with what I'm doing as much as they. I've earned my living by it," and so on. "Well," she said, "they don't always earn their living." [laughter] So we have discussed this often back and forth. But I still am fascinated with the fact that Duchamp's egotism was exactly the opposite. It was a non-egotism as intense as their positive one was. It was very disconcerting because you had the feeling that nothing mattered, not even himself. Gabo, nothing mattered but himself. I mean, with Albers and Gabo. But to that you add their wives, to whom they were devoted, and these people were civilized people. It was just the intimate conversation. But with Duchamp, there was a negativeness, an emptiness, a nothingness which always immensely puzzled me. It is in a sense that emptiness and nothingness which enabled him to completely upset the art world. When nothing matters--

RIKALA

Yes, what's left?

HAMILTON

It was part of his extraordinary charm, his sweetness. He made no demands. He was the easiest person. If you had an idea, it was a great idea, because it really didn't matter about ideas. Of course, he had his own ideas. He worked very, very hard to put them into operation. That last mysterious tableau vivant in the Philadelphia Museum [of Art].

RIKALA

Yes.

HAMILTON

Have you seen it, looked through the hole?

RIKALA

Yes, that's what I went to see. Did you know about that in advance?

HAMILTON

Nobody did.

RIKALA

Nobody did?

HAMILTON

Only Teeny [Duchamp], his wife.

RIKALA

I mean, having seen it now as an installation-- Obviously I've only ever seen photographs. I saw the waterfall. I'd forgotten that, you know, the waterfall is part of the title. I'd forgotten about the waterfall. Suddenly I saw something in it that I'd never seen before. The hand is just so oddly scaled, and how your eyes-- My eyesight isn't terrific always, either, but you see the edges of the brick work very, very clearly. It's lit in such a way that you can't help but look at the way the brick has been broken. Then everything else is just out of your reach. It's really hard to see clearly, purposefully. You can't see it clearly. It's so frustrating, and it's so mysterious and wonderful because of that. It's really the most, I don't know, the most unusual experience to go and see it and watch people then also come out of the little room and watch them kind of walk away and shake their head, you know, and not understand or not-- [laughter]

HAMILTON

Of course, it's the opposite of The [Large] Glass. It's The Bride Stripped Bare [by her Bachelors, Even]. Among all those fallen leaves and that ridiculous waterfall, which is put together out of pieces of a tin can. You know, the water comes down over the little rotating blades. Well, I was talking about this mysterious emptiness, and my last student-- Well, the student in the last class I ever taught, in the fall of 1985 here, we were talking about Duchamp. He was very much interested in him. I can't remember whether I said to him, "Have you ever wondered what his relation is to Max Stirner?" or whether he found it. I would love to think that I gave him the idea. But I don't know. I'm like those awful people in the Iran-Contra [United States Senate hearings] who can't remember. [laughter] I'm convinced that [Ronald W.] Reagan couldn't remember because he couldn't remember anything ever. But I should be able to remember this because this boy went on-- He went to the library, he got out Max Stirner, and it turned out to be exactly what I thought it would. It's a famous book about negativism, that nothing matters. Stirner had a very

mysterious career. He was a little odd. The book is very depressing. Duchamp refers to Stirner twice in the course of his life, once in a lecture he gave in the Middle West some time, and another-- No, maybe that's the same thing. There's a typescript of the lecture in the Philadelphia Museum, which this boy went and read down there. Then he wrote a very interesting paper about it. I was convinced it should be published, because Stirner has never been brought into the literature the way he should have been. He sent it at my urging to the Journal for Aesthetics and Art Criticism, where it should be published, even though nobody reads it, but they didn't want it. Now he's just gotten an M.A. at the Institute of Fine Arts at NYU in movie making and is going into documentary film. I'm afraid that he's past the point of being interested in this.

RIKALA

He's lost it, yes.

HAMILTON

But it was so gratifying that somebody really at the very end came up with an excellent paper on an unexplored aspect of Duchamp. But this emptiness was what I most recall about him. The fact that everything was okay. So when everything is okay then nothing is wrong, and they cancel each other out. It was that aspect of his life which once one sort of understood it explained so much the intense separateness. You cannot call it loneliness. Loneliness you would never associate with him; everybody loved him. He had great friends, spectacularly interesting people. But he must have been by himself a very great deal. He asked nothing, and in that respect he was just so different from these other painters I've known, younger ones coming through the Yale art school. Of course, many of them never developed as mature artists, but nobody was ever like Duchamp that I ran across. There were such tremendous egotists. There was Hans--that man who did the dada films in German--

RIKALA

Oh.

HAMILTON

Hans Richter.

RIKALA

Richter, yes.

HAMILTON

Hans Richter, who ran for many, many years the film studio at New York University and had been part of the dada movement at the very beginning. He was interesting, he was amusing, he was witty, and he was so self-centered that when the German government awarded him the verdienst Kreuz--curiously that's the service medal and has a French title, Pour la Mérite--he gathered together everybody practically off the streets to come to a ceremony which was held at the Yale Art Gallery. He was another person who was always presenting himself.There was poor Yves Tanguy, who was always a little drunk. But artists come in all shapes and sizes. Even some art historians are sometimes always a little drunk. [laughter]

RIKALA

Have you ever made art yourself, an artist streak in you?

HAMILTON

No. I would love to. Somewhere early on I remembered [Bernard] Berenson's caution: Don't try to be an artist, because if you do, you will judge other art by your own. Curiously, there's a good bit of truth in that. But I had no real interest in doing it. I did paint some pictures, but-- One's upstairs. It's nothing at all; it's just a souvenir of a summer day.What I really wanted to be was a great actor. After that I wanted to be a great singer. I really wanted to be a heldentenor and sing the whole Ring of the Niebelung. But I have no voice; I can't keep a tune. I try to play the piano and I have a terrible time. I've been trying to play it since I was eleven years old, which is seventy years. [laughter] I'm no better now than I was when I was thirteen. No, I didn't have any of that talent for self-expression. Oh, I also wanted to be a poet, and I wrote poetry all the time I was in school and college. I really hoped that somehow I would find the time to become the great American poet. I remember thinking about that at commencement. That sermon that I mentioned that President Angell gave, and I thought, "Well, I'll be the great American poet." Because he was the most wonderful university president. He was so funny, he was so witty, and he was so sound. He was not a Yale man, either. The first president of

Yale--except for the first presidents--not to have graduated from the place. Oh, he was wonderful. He really inspired you. Well, why not be inspired to be a poet? But I learned something just the other day. I'm having a terrible time with a museum south of here which asked me to be the editor in chief of their catalogue raisonné. I said, "I'm too old and I live too far away; I don't want to do it." Well, they pressured me, just as I was pressured into coming up here to run the Clark Art Institute, which was successful. I was pressured into saying, well, I would act as the editor in chief providing I didn't have to do much except write an article on the history of the collection. This started off in 1983, and we've been at it eight years. I've had serious trouble with my eyes lasting for three years, and they seem to be solved now, but that really put me out of commission for a while. At their urgent pressure I wrote a draft, a ninety-page draft of this article, as fast as I could in order to get it done by the deadline, which had to be extended a month, and it was a draft. I said it was not publishable; it would have to be worked on. They were to use it as they pleased because it was supposed to be historical, but there was a great deal of critical material in it, and the man writing the critical material could excerpt that, because I in writing it had gotten more interested in the critical point of view.Well, a year ago back came an eight-thousand-word condensation. It is dreadful. I said, "I cannot put my name to this." This raised a whole lot of troubles for deadlines. And I said, "It is not me speaking." Well, fortunately a wonderful German woman on the staff understands what me speaking means. She said, "It is not your voice." And I said, "No, it isn't at all. It's a dull, prosaic voice." I began to realize that this was written by somebody just out of a first-rate college where he got a poor education in how to write English, which happens over and over and over again. Then looking at it the other day, I thought to myself, "You know, this person--" I happen to know it's a young man, although I don't really know him. "But I bet he has never tried to write poetry."

## 1.12. TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE ONE
## AUGUST 9, 1991

HAMILTON

I have to start next week, now that I have my new pair of spectacles, pulling this into order.

RIKALA

So they submitted to you an eight-thousand-word draft.

HAMILTON

Yes. It takes up twenty pages, you see, and I had sent them ninety-eight. But it was-- I realize now it was a much rougher draft. I had gone on a-- Polly [Wiggin Hamilton] and I had gone on a trip around the British Isles on a National Trust tour, which was a wonderful, wonderful trip. We saw beautiful gardens and wonderful great houses and all this and that, but a great many people, perhaps a third of the 135 or so on the boat, got sick. Not intestinally, but bronchially in the throat and head. The most minor thing was colds, and the worst was something close to flu. It obviously came through the air-conditioning like the Legionnaires' disease. I got laryngitis, and that got into the eustachian tubes. We got back on August 12, and I was really laid up all summer. I could not lick this infection, you see. Meanwhile, I was trying to write this thing-- And to be held up week after week, as the draft is poor material to work with-- I'm willing to admit that. But I would think somebody hired by a distinguished museum could take poor material and turn it into something better instead of something worse.

RIKALA

Let's talk a little bit more about Duchamp.

HAMILTON

Let me just end this.

RIKALA

Okay. I'm sorry.

HAMILTON

Don't you want to know what the secret is?

RIKALA

Yes.

HAMILTON

I'm convinced this young man had never tried to write poetry. Because I realize now--I never thought about this before--when you're writing poetry, you are working with words. You are like somebody building a very complicated brick wall with a pattern on it, and you have to choose your bricks and fit them in and replace them. He had no sense that words are like bricks, that you construct with them.

RIKALA

Yes. He probably didn't listen to the words.

HAMILTON

Well, that is what I said in my letter to my German friend. I said also when you write poetry you say it aloud, because poetry is meant to be heard aloud, not read. This man has no feeling for words. That's why the whole thing is dead. I'm going to go on and change it as soon as you return to California. [laughter] Now, you want to go back to Duchamp.

RIKALA

I do a bit. I'm interested in some of the things that he participated in and how he was welcomed by the art community and how he was both helped along or not helped along. There in the West Coast Duchamp catalog, you've opened to the symposium that was held in 1949 at the San Francisco Museum of Art [now San Francisco Museum of Modern Art] in response-- It was a symposium put together by [Douglas] MacAgy in response to a previous symposium the year before at the Museum of Modern Art, which Life magazine had had a hand in, or sponsored. Life magazine had taken the position that modern art was a very negative thing. MacAgy and several others who were interested in the modern wanted to dispute that, so he put together a panel of artists and architects. Frank Lloyd Wright was there, Gregory Bateson was there, an anthropologist, and they spent time talking about the modern. I'm very interested to know how that group of people and how this continual discussion in the literature really again shaped--since we were talking about tastes and values--the American cultural sense of the modern, modern art in the late forties. This was 1949. And how these people really took an interest in making sense of that, that modern--how it became so important for that. I'm wondering if you could say something about that and also say something

about, as an art historian, your sense of participating in that. So both as an observer and as a participant.

HAMILTON

Well, that's a difficult question to answer because I was never part of the New York scene. New York was only an hour and twenty minutes away, but my-- I was always in New York as a visitor except for a few months at a time when-- Once during the war I had an apartment during a half term off where I saw principally the Museum of Modern Art people, James Thrall Soby and James Johnson Sweeney and so on. But I never was part of the downtown group of active artists. My association was with museum people.Now, the people at the Museum of Modern Art of course knew about Duchamp, so there was no sense of his being a problem. I don't honestly know how Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still would have reacted. I would have-- To hazard a guess, which means that you know you're going to say something which is wrong, I would assume that they would not have been very much interested. Because Duchamp was himself not at all interested in what they did so well, which was to paint. He was interested in thinking. The museum world, well, the modern museum of course was interested in him desperately. Alfred Barr and so on. The people at Yale [University] weren't interested in him, because I was the only one that was interested in contemporary art. My friends were specializing in Renaissance and medieval architecture. We all had our specialties. I was probably more interested in Piero della Francesca than the Piero della Francesca person was interested in Marcel Duchamp. [laughter] That's the privilege of being in the forefront. You can look all the way back. When you're back, it's harder to look forward. From the end of the train you can't see the engine.I think also that Duchamp was such a-- Secretive is not the right word, but he distanced himself from so much. I mean, he never went to the theater. He never went to a concert. He was uninterested in everything else except his little life with the things he was doing. That was a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful thing he did. But his contacts were very few, except that before this round table conference, he had come to know these younger people, John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns, as I mentioned the other day. I'm sure that-- I know he was drawn into their activities because he supplied-- He made it possible for them, for Merce Cunningham, to use The Large Glass as the scenery for one of his dances. So there he is in a really

avant-garde group. It was Cunningham, Cage, Rauschenberg, and Johns who were already then ahead of the abstract expressionists, who were the old masters. So we're putting Duchamp in a very admirable position, but not one which leads to a wide circle of relationships. I think I'm right about that. I know that I would take him to lunch, and we never seemed to run into anybody that had ever heard of him. But then we lunched at the Yale Club, and who at the Yale Club would ever have heard of Marcel Duchamp? [laughter] You know, I've been reading in this book [Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century]. It's fascinating the amount of work that these various people have put into it. I have the impression that this would not interest him. I have the impression that a great deal of it is hindsight, that they're-- I was reading that little bit about hair. Have you read that chapter?

RIKALA

I don't think so.

HAMILTON

Well, look at it, because there's a chapter on hair as a sort of fetish, sexual fetish and so on. It's true that he did wear a false beard in the Adam and Eve, and he did-- One of the readymades is a dog's comb, an animal's comb, and when you put all these things together then you have a Freudian situation. But that's not the Duchamp I knew. That is the Duchamp of scholarship. Because it's entirely possible that he himself never connected all those different things. If I were on a jury, I would have to say we must withhold a verdict that that is positively true. [laughter] Now, is this timidity? Scholars are notoriously timid, you know. I don't know.My relations with Duchamp were so much more personal than they were probing. We enjoyed each other's company. I wasn't always asking him questions. When we were translating those notes for the manuscript, I had to ask him questions about everything because I didn't understand them. There were a couple of cases where he frankly admitted he could not remember what that sentence was supposed to mean, but-- And that's all right. I really think if I had been one of these desperately serious scholars, I might not have had the friendship. I was no threat to him. I don't mean that scholars were a threat. They were a bore. He didn't enjoy sitting being asked questions hour after hour about himself. That's no reflection on

you. [laughter] So it's very difficult to say what he meant to the art world. He has obviously meant an enormous amount to younger generations of artists.

RIKALA

Well, particularly in the eighties there seems to have been a continuous interest and growing scholarly, you know, mountain of material that you can't possibly keep up with.

HAMILTON

Well, the fascinating part--you're right about the mountainous material--is the mountain of interest on the part of the practicing artists. Equivalent, do you think?

RIKALA

Well, that I couldn't say. I don't know.

HAMILTON

I would think what's going on in New York at the moment has passed somehow a little bit beyond--Duchamp-- When Duchamp digs around in the rubbish heap, it isn't threatening. The people now digging around in the rubbish heap are producing rather threatening works. This is the New York development, full of social protest. Not political, it seems to me. It's no threat to your Republican or Democratic affiliations, but it calls into question-- Why shouldn't it, when New York is collapsing and Harlem is in that dreadful shape and the Bronx worse, really? Everything's dead in the Bronx. At least they're still alive in Harlem. I don't see Duchamp in that connection at all. Duchamp is really the utter refinement of aestheticism somehow, in a reverse sense. Aestheticism is not quite what catches the eye at the moment, but whose eye is being caught.The general public is not particularly interested; it does not compose the audience for the outer fringe of art nowadays. Curiously, and I'm always puzzled by this, it's the rich. If I were to go upstairs and bring you down the address list for the trustees for the Museum of Modern Art, you would be astounded, as I always am, when I go through it and discover that they live within-- All of them live within a few blocks of each other on Park and Fifth avenues, in the most expensive area, except for those who live on Long Island or Greenwich. Yet these are the people that are deeply dedicated to the

Museum of Modern Art and buy, for their own collections, the most advanced pieces. Now, I used to, when I lived in New Haven [Connecticut], be able to go to New York whenever I wanted to for any reason. I cannot do that from here. It is too far, and it's also too expensive. As you grow older, the distance is more tiring, and you have to stay all night and all this and that. So I can no longer go to the galleries. But I sit there at the trustee meetings, and I listen to these trustees on the committees talk with the greatest knowledge and familiarity of the very, very latest--call it avant-garde--works. Works which the public hasn't even yet heard about. The extreme art. Now, this is a total reversal of what was going on in the early twentieth century. It fascinates me that people whom I suspect are of the most conservative political persuasion are dedicated--pouring out their money to support this advanced art.

RIKALA

I'm going to be naive here. Are they truly interested in--as we've talked about before--the experiential and the aesthetic qualities of these pieces?

HAMILTON

Or are they doing it for social prestige and so on? I think they're doing it for all those reasons. Agnes Gund, the new president of the museum--she was just elected in May--has been for twenty years collecting on the outer fringes. Her brother--I forget his first name, his name is Gund-- She was divorced and remarried but has not taken her new husband's name; she's gone back to her maiden name. So Mrs. Agnes Gund is, interestingly, a rather shy person, very gentle. She's delightful and charming. But her taste is frighteningly bold. She flinches at nothing. You can't help but respect her because she has nothing to gain. She has worldly possessions. She has just moved from Fifth Avenue to Park Avenue, which I suppose is a step up, I don't know, but she was living in a fine place on Fifth Avenue. The other people on the whole, as I say, it is not a question of social advancement for them. I think there are a few who fall into that category, but there are only a few.

RIKALA

Do you think, then, that it's just the nature of the market as such that those people are really the only people who can buy things, because the rest of us, you know, can hardly--?

HAMILTON

Well, actually, they bought them very cheaply in the beginning. They buy out of the first exhibitions. Actually, they're not buying the standard. They're not buying the Picassos and Braques, because those are out of everybody's reach now. They are buying the people that we admire so much. Patrons like Sergei [Ivanovich] Shchukin and Ivan [Abramovich] Morozov before the First World War are buying Matisse and Picasso. There is a very interesting chapter in the history of taste to be written about that. I suspect this is also true in Chicago and Los Angeles, that there will be people who get on the bandwagon, but those people are in every field. They don't bother me at all, except when they upset the normal course of events, such as that man Bond in Australia who paid $53 million for the Van Gogh and then goes bankrupt, and then it ends up at the Getty [Museum of Art] where it belongs. It didn't belong out in Australia with him because he was buying it for social jockeying. I think that is tiresome, unnecessary, and in a sense even antisocial.I don't see that these people's activity is antisocial. It is true that you meet very nice and interesting people among this band of trustees, and that would include the more active members, too, of the Museum of Modern Art. It has to attract money to support itself. Otherwise it would have the most dreadful deficit every year. That's because it grew too big for its britches in the Reagan years. But I really absolve almost all of the younger people and certainly the older ones-- David Rockefeller, whose collection is coming to the Museum of Modern Art, has deep, real interest in art as his mother [Abby Aldrich Rockefeller] did. She was one of the founders of the museum. There are other people there who have been with it since it started (and it started in '29, so they are in their eighties), who show up and are dedicated to keeping this museum going for what it is. Now, it has its detractors, of course, because it has to have rich people help it. But who doesn't? What do you think keeps Williams College going? What do you think keeps Stanford University? That isn't supported by the state yet, is it?

RIKALA

I don't think so, no.

HAMILTON

This is the nature of a capitalist society. If you want another kind of society, you're going to have to be content with a very, very different museum of contemporary art, where the state paying the bill makes the choices.

RIKALA

In this day of NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] grants being censored, you really don't want that.

HAMILTON

No. You wouldn't want that at all.

RIKALA

No.

HAMILTON

Isn't that frightening.

RIKALA

The grants being pulled is a very sad, sad comment on the support of the arts in this country. I think the senators should be ashamed of themselves.

HAMILTON

I think not only should the senators be ashamed, but I think also the art community should sort of be a little bit more savvy. I think that the people that put together the [Robert] Mapplethorpe exhibition could have exercised a little rudimentary caution about some of the photographs. I think the people who agreed to show the exhibition should have been quite aware of what the photographs were going to be. I'm not quite sure that that was true in some of those cases; I may be wrong. But I mean, you do not-- When you have a dog that can bite, you don't then go up and kick it. After all, if Mapplethorpe were to be shown as an absolutely first-class photographer, was it necessary to show that aspect of his photography? I myself have only seen these pictures, as I told you, in reproduction, and I've only seen four of the five "sensational" ones. I have seen other photographs of his which I found extremely distasteful. There was a whole album of ethnic photographs which don't seem to be in this exhibition. I would rather not describe them if this is going to be read by future generations, but if you poke around you can find them, and

they are anatomical and unattractive. Desperately unattractive. Where did I find this? I found it in the bookshop of the National Museum of American Art, which is part of the Smithsonian Institution, which is supported by federal funds. What a confused world we live in! Other of Mapplethorpe's photographs I think are exceptionally good, but I don't think he's the most interesting photographer. Curiously, with all of this excitement there's a certain sense of letdown.

## 1.13. SECOND PART AUGUST 11, 1991

RIKALA

Let's start this morning by exploring your role as a collector and your art pieces and your relationship with your personal interest in art aside from your professional writing and aspirations and museum work. Do you recall what piece you first bought? How did you start collecting?

HAMILTON

Yes. The first thing I ever bought was an etching, and since then I've never liked prints. [laughter] The reason-- I bought it in New York in December of 1926, which was the first visit I'd ever paid to New York. I was sixteen years old, and I was taken there by my family, who felt that my world should really be enlarged. It was wonderful. We were there for five days and went to the theater and the museums and the shops. I recommend it to everybody sixteen years old. And I was interested in art. As I've told you, I went to the Metropolitan Museum [of Art]. Somehow I ended up in Kennedy's print store, which was then on Fifth Avenue, and I wanted-- I just wanted to buy something. I suppose in a sense it was a souvenir, but also I'd been to the museum. I knew the museum in Pittsburgh, and I knew two people who collected paintings--not well, but I'd been to their houses and seen their pictures. So I sort of wanted to join the gang, but I didn't have any money. I had $25, which was a large sum in 1926, but it didn't buy very much. All I could really buy was this etching by a woman named Caroline Kennedy, and it was of the Butter Tower, the Tour de Beurre of the cathedral at Rouen. The interesting thing about this episode is that I knew as I bought it that it wasn't very interesting. It isn't that it wasn't very good. It was perfectly good--she had a small reputation as a printmaker--but it was dull. But I had it framed, and I

hung it on a wall in my room and never looked at it. I suppose in a way this taught me a lesson: buy only things which you know you have to have. Don't buy them for such external reasons as that you simply want to pose as an art collector. I never-- The next time I bought a work of art was at a sale in New York in 1937, probably, for out-of-work artists. It was in some reputable gallery, but the Depression, you see, was still going on. It wasn't as bad as it had been five years before, but we hadn't yet recovered. That wasn't to come until the early forties. For $35 I bought a framed painting--again, not for what we now consider the right reason. This was because I liked the subject. That's a terrible reason to buy a painting. It was a western scene. There were mountains in the distance, and there was a little one-horse shay sort of going along across a road parallel to the picture plane, and it reminded me of the plains of Wyoming and the Bighorn Mountains in the distance. I had two wonderful summers at a ranch--not summers, but three weeks--at a ranch in Wyoming in '30 and '31. So I bought this picture for $35. I really liked it very much. It was obvious that the artist had been influenced by Thomas Hart Benton, who was in those days a big name. Benton's work I always found somewhat caricatural, and flawed for that reason. Well, of course, he had a reputation, but-- And this was not caricatural, but it was whimsical. It was signed "C. Pollock." Well, I had never heard of an artist named C. Pollock, nor had the dealer, who was selling these pictures, you see, at rock bottom to help artists. It hung in my room in New Haven. I was by then on the faculty at Yale. It wasn't until some time much later that I discovered it was by Charles Pollock, who was one of the five Pollock brothers. Weren't there five of them?

RIKALA

Yes, I guess so.

HAMILTON

The oldest, who had a decent reputation, because he died in the New York Times a year or so ago, and he had taught in many respectable institutions in the West, in the art schools, and was well loved, which are things you can't quite say of his famous brother Jackson. [laughter] And there we are. I soon outgrew that picture, especially just because I liked it for the subject matter, and I don't know quite where it is at the moment. I suspect it's in the basement of the Clark Art Institute, in the crypt. But someday I shall give it to

a museum of American art which would be interested in the fact that it's Charles Pollock, which means a western museum. Now, from there, it was a big step two years later to that picture on the wall behind you. That was from the last of the Carnegie International Exhibitions in Pittsburgh, which I talked about the very first day, before the Second World War began. That was in '39. You couldn't have an international exhibition, of course, because the war had broken out in Europe. This was at Christmastime, and I was at home in Pittsburgh. My mother [Georgia Heard Hamilton] was very ill. She had had a paralytic stroke and only lived eight more months. I said I was going to see the show, and she said, "Well, why don't you buy something, and I'll pay for it." She didn't name a figure, but I had lived with her, been her son all my life, so I knew exactly what she would and would not want. So I saw two paintings that I liked. One was a Tanguy, a vertical Tanguy, which was $7,000. This is 1939, and that was a very heavy price, certainly for a Tanguy. It was a marvelous picture, and I wish we had had $7,000. But I also saw this picture, which I like enormously. I had never heard of the artist. Neither have you.

RIKALA

No. I don't recognize it.

HAMILTON

No, you could never possibly put a name to that. You could put a name to what you think it might look like. It might look like the Derain still lifes of the mid-1930s. But I fell in love with that picture and found that it was only $250. So I bought it. I have never regretted it, and I have looked at it more than any other work of art we have every day since I've had it, which is somewhat of an exaggeration because I'm not always here. But it's a picture which gives me extraordinary peace and unease. When I first had it in my bachelor's apartment in New Haven, I had the curious feeling that when I left the room, turned out the lights in the living room and went into the bedroom to go to bed, that all those things relaxed. [laughter]

RIKALA

All the objects?

HAMILTON

All the objects relaxed and began to talk about what had been said in front of them during the day. There were many hours with this perfect silence when I wasn't there. [laughter] I finally discovered what creates the tension, as I see it, in that picture. And that's the very simple fact that the checkerboard has too many squares. So obviously the goblet and the mandolin and everything are frightfully uncomfortable. [laughter] A chessboard that's all wrong. Now, no one on earth has ever recognized the picture, except one Sunday afternoon when the sales desk lady at the Clark called up and said that there was a gentleman to see me. And I said, "Well, who is it?" It was a Sunday afternoon. And she said, "It's a Mr. Hooch." And I said, "A Mr. Hooch? How do you spell it?" And she said, "Well, he gave me his card, and it's H-U-Y-G-H-E." I said, "Is his first name René?" She said, "Well, his first name is R-E-N-E. Is that René?" And I said, "Yes." I said, "Tell him I'll be right over." It was René Huyghe, the great French critic. He was visiting an artist who taught in the art department at Smith [College], which is just over the mountain, so I went over and brought them back-- I'd never met Huyghe, but I'd read his books, which were interesting, and so on. He came into the living room and shook hands with Polly, and he said, "Mon dieu!" And in French, "That painter is the Piero della Francesca of the twentieth century." Well, he was as far out as he'd ever been in his life, of course, [laughter] but he knew that it was Chaplain-Midi, Roger Chaplain-Midi, who had a very small reputation later as a set designer for the French stage. He was carried by [George] Wildenstein, so he was obviously in that queer category of sort of imitation modern artists that a great art gallery will sell to people who want decorative works. Now, this raises a great critical question in my mind, and perhaps in other people who wondered why I have it. How much can I see that is good in a painting that no museum would hang if I bequeathed it to them? Chaplain-Midi has no reputation. His reputation was low even in France. Yet here's a picture I would rather look at more often than I would the [Marcel] Gromaire to the left of it, which is a very good Gromaire. That was owned by Frank Crowninshield, the editor of Vanity Fair.

RIKALA

Really?

HAMILTON

Well, at any rate, this was the second picture. Then I began to, you know, save my money, because you can't just have two pictures, one small and one big. [laughter] I discovered that at auctions you could get extraordinary things. After we were married, we went to an auction of Walter Chrysler's collection. Walter Chrysler had several auctions, and he had the most erratic taste. He couldn't tell the difference between real pictures and forgeries. He was seriously burned by an unscrupulous forger in his later years.

RIKALA

Really?

HAMILTON

That's all in the record. But at one of his auctions, I bought, at an average price of $250 each, the fourth of Stuart Davis's Four Eggbeaters of 1929 and an Arp wood relief called Shirt Front and Fork, which was signed and dated 1922, which is the top year of dada. A big thing, about so big. Now both of those pictures are in or are going to important museums. The Arp is in the National Gallery [of Art] in Washington. It looks absolutely marvelous. It looks better than it ever did here or in the other two houses that we've lived in, where it always seemed a little foolish and out of place, which is-- There's a lesson in that. It's a museum work. He was not thinking of private homes the way Gromaire was, who would allow his picture to be framed--didn't mind that the dealer framed it in that nineteenth-century frame to make it look--

RIKALA

More important. [laughter]

HAMILTON

To make it look important. The other picture will be given to the Pittsburgh museum [Carnegie Institute Museum of Art]. Now, this is kind of gratifying, you see. My eye can light on things which will come into focus later on. There is a Miró from another Chrysler sale that was bought by a Japanese. The Japanese always come to the rescue at the last moment. Then through-- Because of my relations with Marcel Duchamp, I wanted Katherine [Sophie] Dreier to bequeath to Yale The [Large] Glass, because after all we had The Glass Machinealready, and we had a smaller glass picture, and why shouldn't

we have that where her things had finally come to rest, hers and Duchamp's collection? In her little booklet on the glass, she reproduced a painting by Roberto Matta, who in the forties made an enormous flash in New York with those beautiful pictures, and this was one of the handsomest of them all. It was called The Bachelors Twenty Years Later, and the black forms of the bachelors are sort of sailing through space. The picture looks exceptionally noisy. It looks like, everybody said, an atomic explosion, but it was bought two months before the explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

RIKALA

Really?

HAMILTON

So anyway, there we are. But that picture became extraordinarily sympathetic to live with. It quieted down. It became the workings of the mind, not of the outer space. But it was outer space. It always hung in our dining rooms in New Haven, in the other house in Williamstown, and here. None of my friends seem to have remembered it.

RIKALA

From house to house?

HAMILTON

From house to house.

RIKALA

Interesting.

HAMILTON

It's now in the Philadelphia Museum. It was on loan there for three years because the pictures increase, of course, fantastically in value. I have a feeling that it was dishonest of me to accept the prices that I could get for them.

## 1.14. TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE TWO AUGUST 11, 1991

RIKALA

What about your favorite painting? Do you have one now? Or one that was in addition to this story?

HAMILTON

Of course when you have children--we only have two--even if there are bank robbers in the group, you love them all.

RIKALA

Yes.

HAMILTON

The one by the piano, which is by [Jean] Metzinger, that was bought at a dealer's, Klaus Perl's, who set himself up when he came from Germany to offer paintings "for the young collector," which I thought was a brilliant idea, and I bought several things from him. I can't remember what the others were now, and they've been disposed of. But that is a very, very fine Metzinger. Metzinger is in the third rung possibly, or perhaps two minus or three plus, of cubism. He could not have done it without Picasso's analytical cubism. Never mind. He does it very well. I've had that picture since about 1943 or '44. It's dated 1918. When I practice the piano, which I do often, I often look at it, because you don't have to look at the piano when you're doing scales tiresomely. I've told people that I always see something new in it. Since-- If we call it 1944, that's forty-seven years ago. I realized that it isn't that I always find something new. [laughter] I'm rediscovering things I'd seen and forgotten. But I think this is interesting, because a work of art which you can return to again and again and not exhaust it, that's proof that it's pretty good. You see, La Bohème has lost all its fascination for me simply because I know exactly what's going to happen. In that picture I don't always know what's going to happen. It's built upon a very--I'd like to say subtle, but it may not be--sort of incomprehensible visual system of superimposed diamond shapes. They're all perfectly flat, and out of that he builds the woman in the lace bodice who is holding her hand over the fruit dish. Perfectly simply Picasso subject. But I find that enormously gratifying. In this case, of course, it's not from the subject, it's not from any associated items, but as a pictorial design. I would say that that is really great. Another picture, which curiously is at the opposite end of this complex visual scheme, is the Josef Albers in the dining room. When Albers

began his series Homages to the Square in '53, I had to part company with him, not personally, but with his ideas, because here was something I couldn't understand. I think anybody who says he or she can understand everything about modern art, poetry, the theater, politics, and whatnot, is not telling the truth, because the better things are hard to get to. Well, the art gallery asked if I would take care of a retrospective exhibition for Albers, who was having some kind of an anniversary. And I said, "Well, yes," and to myself, "What am I going to do about the Homages to the Square?" Because he was doing nothing but them, and he was the kind of person whose work you had to accept as a whole or he would be very angry. So I said to Polly, "We've got $500 in our art savings fund. Would you mind if I bought one of the Homages to the Square?" We took it down to the island with us in the summer so I could really get to know it, and perhaps then I would understand it. She said, "I think it's a good idea." So I said to Josef, "Where am I going to buy one of your Squares?" And he said, "At Sidney Janis's. He has them." So I went to Sidney Janis and I said, "Show me an Albers Square." I knew Sidney and he knew me, and so we looked at them, and I didn't see any-- I said I just couldn't live with these things. So I told that to Josef, and he said, "Well, come out to the studio." So I went out to the studio on a very hot day in May, and we looked at these things. I said, "You know, I just can't make do with any of them." And he said, "That's your fault, not mine." I said, "Yes. I know it's not your fault. But what about that one?" Just in desperation. "Oh," he said, "that's a woman's work. You don't want that. You don't want that." Now, remember, the squares were put together without pre-consideration. The colors were chosen often by chance. Often intentionally wrong in order to see what would happen. So I said, "Well, which one shall I take?"And he said, "That one." And I said, "But, Josef, that's orange, and Polly and I don't like orange, Howard Johnson roof orange." He said, "That is your problem, not mine." [laughter] But he said, "It's the best." "All right," I said. "I'll take it."So I took it and brought it home. Polly was cooking dinner because we were having a little party that evening. I said, "I'm going to hang this picture in the hall, but don't come out until I've got it hung." I knew she would hate it. So she came out. We stood at the bottom of the stairs and looked at the picture. Then we turned to each other and we said, "It's wonderful." It really is. It goes away for long periods of time to the vault at the Clark and then it comes back and stays for periods of time. And it's magical.

RIKALA

It is striking.

HAMILTON

Albers loved the exhibition. He took so many copies of the catalog for himself that we had to reprint it, which sounded as if it were a great success and a sellout, but it wasn't. Some months later I was in my study at the top of the house. I heard a foreign voice at the front door when the bell rang. Polly opened it. The door closed and she said, "Come down and see what Josef has left us." Well, here was one of his little Mexican house pictures, again very abstract, in four shades of orange. It's upstairs in our bedroom. It always has been. I said to him later-- And it was inscribed on the back. I said later, "Josef, we love your picture, but why did you give us an orange one?" He said, "Because I remembered that you always loved orange." [laughter]

RIKALA

That's a nice story.

HAMILTON

So we have two orange Albers and love them both. But that's-- Art just grows, you know. We went to spend a winter in England in 1959 and came home with several pieces of English sculpture. There's one there on the table. That's a Bernard Meadows, and that's an Elizabeth Frink by the window. There's another Meadows, and there's a Herbert Adam, that H form on the shelf by the fireplace. This was all very au courant English sculpture in '59, and we still find it livable and meaningful, but nobody ever looks at it. Nobody ever looks at the sculpture.

RIKALA

Why is that?

HAMILTON

There's the other Meadows behind you. Pictures, yes. They know their pictures. They don't see them, but they know them. I mean, they don't really look at them; they see them. But you cannot get them to look at

sculptures. That's a Rodin. It's late, but it's the head of Balzac, and it's wonderful. But nobody looks at it.

RIKALA

Why do you think that is?

HAMILTON

I think Americans are not, for some reason, spatially adjusted. I believe Vincent Scully, who has a very interesting idea that American architecture is really flat rather than three-dimensional. I think it has to do with the very harsh light in this country. You know, we are right here on the latitude of Madrid and Rome, where the light is just as strong but not harsh, because their atmospheric climate is different. I think that that has something also to do possibly with the quality of Eakins and Homer, why they're so great. Homer is not ever gentle, and Eakins is never gentle with his people either. And they're both great. But at any rate, I think that that's the reason why people see-- This is flatland. [laughter] That's a hypothesis. It's probably all wrong, but it's comfortable to live with. So that's-- The collection just grew. It stopped about '65 because the prices also grew. It just became impossible to buy, because all of these things were-- There was nothing-- There was only one work which ever cost over $1,000 and almost everything was under $500. And now that is gone. Young people can't--

RIKALA

Can't afford it.

HAMILTON

You can't even buy prints. Suppose you want a print by a modern American printmaker, it's $1,000 for the cheapest. Well, maybe young people have $1,000. Older people don't.

RIKALA

How do you account for this change in cost in art? There are obviously many theories, but as the--

HAMILTON

Well, I don't think any one would cover it.

RIKALA

Any one theory? No.

HAMILTON

I mean, any more than one-- You couldn't find one cause for the Second World War. There must be about a hundred and twelve. In a sense the debasement of value--of money value, inflation in other words--raises prices. Then there was an enormous increase in wealth among people to whom wealth meant spending money. Now, there are very rich people to whom wealth does not mean spending money, and I'll give you certain names. Rockefeller is one of them. Mellon is another. Carnegie was a third. Those people were enormously rich, and they spent a lot of money, but they spent it for worthwhile purposes. And they spent it very carefully. We have come through a period where money was to be spent and even wastefully if necessary. There is a certain contempt-- Maybe we're getting out of that. There was a contempt in the eighties for savings, and savings accounts went down. So we have an inflated sense of artistic value, or rather a deflated sense. Value became-- Artistic value became a means of a social medium. I mean, there are many prominent collectors, who are generously giving their works to the museums now, that really built the collections to foster their social prestige. I don't think that was the case in the days when I was growing up and the days just before that. I would want to talk to social historians more. Some of the great collections that went to the Metropolitan, it's conceivable that the owners advanced themselves within their own kind of society, but I sort of doubt that, I really do. I think that's only come-- That kind of thing came more recently. But look, everything else has increased in cost, even a bar of soap. Postage stamps. You can only buy three for a dollar, and they want to raise it higher next year. We're going to hire a fleet of pigeons to deliver ours. [laughter]

RIKALA

I was wondering if there's an association, though, with the cost--the increased cost of art--and a greater, or a broader, educational base in the arts, more people studying art history, more people being interested. The teaching of culture has increased seemingly, or more people go to university, more people have exposure. Would that--?

HAMILTON

You're absolutely right about that. But how many of the people studying art make the fortunes to buy it?

RIKALA

Not very many.

HAMILTON

Not one in a million that I've ever known. No, I think the-- I think it's perfectly true that more people-- I know more people study art history. Maybe the art history they're studying now isn't the kind we studied in my generation. Because, I mean, in my generation one of the things we learned was quality. They don't study that anymore. Beauty, of course, is an unusable word, strangely enough. Value really means exchange value, so that there's a discrepancy between art history and the market. After all, if you're studying neo-Marxist art history, you aren't going to be manipulating prices on the art market, are you?

RIKALA

No.

HAMILTON

That would be wicked. [laughter] But those are all difficult problems that are probably too out-of-date now to give you wise answers.

RIKALA

Well, but you might speculate for me a bit why this change from the talking about quality and beauty and value-- Those formal characteristics of art have been somehow supplanted by social or contextual questions of art study. Do you have a sense of when that shift began to occur, or is it your generation that started to teach that shifting value?

HAMILTON

Not in my generation, no, but in the generation immediately below it.

RIKALA

The people that were your students who then went out and taught.

HAMILTON

Well, I'll give you an example of something that to me was interesting. Jules Prown I believe wrote his dissertation-- Now, Jules Prown started off working for an art dealer. He worked for Norman Hirschl, who is a very good friend of ours, of Hirschl and Adler. Norman Hirschl lives in West Stockbridge, and we see a lot of him. We were talking about Jules the other day and how really good he was. He had a B.A. from Lehigh [University], and then he went into art dealing. That was what it was going to be. But he got tired of art dealing and wanted to be an art historian and a teacher. So he went to Harvard [University] and got a Ph.D. there with a dissertation--I think it was his dissertation--on the portraits of John Singleton Copley. This was just about the time that the first computers appeared. He got the idea, what if we put Copley's portraits into the computer on the basis of education, profession, age, you know, of all those Bostonians in the portraits? Actually, you didn't need a computer; you could do it yourself on a pad of paper. But it was computerized.So he wrote a life of Copley and a catalog, and the catalog contained the computerized data. How many were clergymen, how many became Harvard professors, how many became businessmen in Boston, and so on. All of these eighteenth-century worthies. Now, this was factual information. I found it fascinating. And I was astounded at the reaction of the profession. They said he had belittled it. But he was really one of the first people beginning to probe art from a sort of social science point of view. But I don't think everybody said, "Well, Prown's done it. I'll do it too." I think it was a sort of feeling of exhaustion with the old formal art history. Now, art history is not all that difficult. You know, you learn how to be an historian, and then you can do it with works of art. You really need a constant infusion of new points of view to encourage younger generations as they come along. I suppose in a way everybody tries this a little bit. I did with a chart I compiled of the ages at which an artist first makes his own personal statement, without relation to the masters he's admired or the training he has received. I did it for the French painters from Manet, from the mid-nineteenth century, on through Braque, Picasso, Miró, all this and that. I found out something very interesting, that that age is somewhere between twenty-eight and thirty-six. If it's beyond thirty-six, as it was with Matisse, it's because of a delay. Matisse

had to be a lawyer. He had to go and learn the law and practice it until his father agreed or died, and he could become a painter. You also have people who were precocious and may do it at the age of eighteen or something, but those extremes are rare. I discovered-- Having done this on paper, on a single sheet of paper, and having told my students about it, they seemed totally uninterested, [laughter] and it was true. There's nothing experiential about it. But for an historian, it's interesting, very interesting, just to see this happening.It happened to us. We went to France. We rented a car, and we drove to the south of France to Aix[-en-Provence], wanted to see where Cézanne had grown up and so on. We went in the Aix museum, which of course has no Cézannes. We turned the corner, and here was this extraordinary large picture--it seemed almost as large as that fireplace thing, but I don't think it really was--of Thetis imploring Zeus to give arms to Achilles. [laughter] But here was this enormous Zeus figure, and Thetis kneeling at his knee, and I said to Polly, I said, "You know, that's an Ingres." I'd never seen it before, and I never realized how impressive it is and foolish at the same time. I said, "That must be the first painting in which he made this statement of himself." It's not David. It's not Vien or any of the predecessors whom he had known about or worked with. "This is pure Ingres." We went and looked, and the date on it was 1811, and he was thirty-one that year. Right on the button.

RIKALA

Right there in the middle of your chart.

HAMILTON

Right in the middle. So on the boat coming back from Europe that time--yes, we had gone over and back by boat, believe it or not--was Harry Bober, who was a medievalist, a distinguished professor at the Institute of Fine Arts in New York [New York University]. We talked, and so on, and I said, "Harry, I have the most interesting computation" and told him all these things. He listened, and he said, "It doesn't mean anything. That has nothing to do--" It has nothing to do with value. That's perfectly true. But it's another, another little test, doctor's test of art and artists, which is, I think, worth keeping in the boiling pot. I should have written an article about it, but if I had written all the articles I should have, we'd have a large volume. [laughter] Life's too full of other things.

RIKALA

One of the other stories that we haven't gone over so far yet--and you've mentioned a few times--is meeting your wife. She was a student of yours, and--

HAMILTON

I told you. I opened the door, and there she was.

RIKALA

There she was at the door. She was one of your students, or some of--?

HAMILTON

She became one of my students after I opened the door. [laughter] She's a Bryn Mawr [College] graduate, majored in art history. Like everybody who went to Bryn Mawr, she had a wonderful education, and also like everybody who went to Bryn Mawr, they never let you forget it. It makes for a wonderful life. I can never boast. No, she's been a great joy. But she gave up--

RIKALA

She didn't stay in art history.

HAMILTON

No, and it's too bad, because she really-- She was onto something, which were the early paintings of Gauguin. We traveled to Denmark. Vagn Poulsen, who had somehow become a friend of mine-- He was a curator then at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek and later became the director, and he took us around to see several collectors who still had inherited or acquired the paintings which Gauguin had done in the Danish years. That was very interesting. But she enjoyed enormously being a housewife and a mother and so on, so-- [laughter]

RIKALA

Did you work in any collaborative ways? Have your ideas--?

HAMILTON

No, no.

RIKALA

Your ideas have been mostly yours, and what you've worked through your--

HAMILTON

My ideas are mine. Some of them I even thought up myself. [laughter]

RIKALA

That's good. I don't know what to say to that. [tape recorder off]

HAMILTON

You know, I'm at some distance now from my active career, because I really retired in '77. I achieved what I wanted to be, which was to be a professor at Yale. And I was. Then I achieved something I hadn't expected to achieve, which was to be a director of a museum. It was the kind of museum which was completely in accord with my talents. I never wanted to be director of the Metropolitan or anything like that.I made any number of mistakes, but when I look at everybody else, it's part of humanity to make mistakes all the time. You should have gone down that street and not the other one, but never mind. The good things that you do sort of compensate for it, and it sounds frightfully egotistical, but it isn't meant that way at all. It's just if anybody ever comes and reads these things, let them know that there was somebody who achieved what he wanted to do. It wasn't spectacular. There are no great triumphs. The world is not the better for my having been here, but I did what I could to the best of my ability. I think that-- I just wish everybody could feel that. I know some people who are so dissatisfied and wrought up over one thing or another.There's a very distinguished pupil of mine who has been obliged to retire from his teaching job. If he could be kept on until 1993, he would be able to stay at that institution as long as he lived, and he is very angry and hurt that the university said, "No. That law is not yet in effect. You are seventy, and you have to get out." When I was at Yale, one retired at sixty-five. That was it, and you could stay until sixty-eight at the pleasure of the president. When I came to Williams, the same law was in effect. I retired at sixty-seven. They protested. They did everything they could to make me stay on. I said, "No. I've been teaching all these years, I've been working in museums all these years, I've really had it." I retired, and everybody thought I was crazy. [laughter] I've been perfectly satisfied since. This friend of mine has

really been in an emotional condition over his retirement. Now, how selfish to believe that you are so good that as you approach ninety-- He would stay on. His health is perfect. He might stay on until ninety-six, and there would be no legal way to get rid of him, you see, if he were still [non] compos mentis. Worse than that, because he'd undoubtedly become a terrible bore. Anybody would. But I have a feeling that your responsibility is to step aside and let the younger people come in, because it's going to be terrible in university and college faculties if the people will not retire.

RIKALA

Yes. Yes, I mean, why train students if--?

HAMILTON

I know, and they will not therefore go into it. The best students recently have probably not been going into the graduate schools. They've been going into Wall Street. This is very perceptible here in Williams College, where in the-- Now we're in '91. This was in the eighties, the middle eighties, and it's all part of that phenomenon known as the Reagan years. The salaries on Wall Street, you know, were in the multi-thousand dollars for starters with no experience, and naturally some people who would do much better--men and women, boys and girls--as chemists or astronomers or professors of English or whatnot than they were on the stock market-- We had a wonderful girl who majored in the history of art. Her mother was a dancer in New York. She really was into both the creative arts and art history. She got a job with a brokerage firm, and she's supposed to have gotten the highest-paying job of that year's senior class. But the firm was Kidder, Peabody, and they began firing hundreds of people a few months after she went to work. I don't know what happened to her. I'm afraid to think. But it's quite possible that we're pulling out of that brain drain into the quick money market, and we'll get back on a track where the country can be governed by people with some experience.

RIKALA

Okay. Yes, but that too will-- The public at large, the general public will need to see some sort of reason to encourage people to go to school. Education will have to once again be given strong value. A career in teaching will need to be valued again. That needs to turn around.

HAMILTON

You're absolutely right, but as you speak-- Who is it that coined that phrase "as you speak"? It's some political figure. As you speak, I remember that when I went into the teaching profession, it was not highly esteemed at all. And still, it attracted many of the better brains. There is something more than money. Of course, I've always had enough. I never had too much, but I have never wanted more than what I could afford. I think this is the old Protestant work ethic. I really do. This is true of all the members of my family on both sides. They lived modestly, but they never had any brush with poverty, except this poor cousin who lies in bed all the time. He's a twentieth-century phenomenon. So I've never known hardship.Curiously, my children have known hardship right now. They are the victims of the mess that this country is in, and the fact also that they didn't want to be educated; that's probably also a twentieth-century thing. If they had stuck in college, they would have done better. But I have always been able to balance my checkbook. I haven't-- This is going to lead up to something very interesting, and it's about the tenth time in these interviews-- You'll be very glad to know that over in Cooperstown after the opera at the reception, I was telling somebody a frightfully interesting story, and I couldn't remember the punch line. [laughter] John Russell was there, you know, the critic, and I said, "John. Help me out." And he said, "What's the trouble?" I said, "Well, I've just told this lady this story, and I can't tell her the end of it. Can't you help me out? Can't you provide the punch line?" And he said, "Oh, you mean one line fits all?" [laughter]

RIKALA

Oh, that's right. My, my.

HAMILTON

So if you save the punch line for all of these stories--

RIKALA

Well, this one has to do with the value of teaching and turning around.

HAMILTON

Well, I suppose what I really meant was America has gotten mixed up in its goals. What are the political goals now? That's an almost frightening question. Why do people go into politics? What do they want to do? Do they really want to make the country better?

RIKALA

Well, what are the domestic goals?

HAMILTON

What are the domestic goals? They're not-- There is no domestic interest in getting rid of homelessness.

RIKALA

No.

HAMILTON

That to me is the most wicked situation that any civilized country has ever allowed to flourish. Did I tell you it goes back to 1978? In '78, when I was the Kress professor at the National Gallery in Washington, I would take the bus from Georgetown and I would be let out at the front entrance to the [National] Archives building, which is kitty-corner from the National Gallery [of Art]. The archives building has that great flight of steps that you can climb up. You go in, and you see the founding documents of our liberty, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. They're there, and it's all done up as if they were in a chapel, a neoclassic chapel. There is silence and awe. I would get out at the corner at the foot of those steps, and I would have to make sure that as I got off the bus I didn't step on the black men who had slept all night on the exhaust grate for that building. A few blocks away was President [James E.] Carter and the White House, and a few blocks away in the other direction were the houses of Congress. Was anybody doing anything? I was disgusted. And those people are still there.

RIKALA

Yes. And there are more of them.

HAMILTON

More of them. But this is curiously one of these questions where the individual feels totally frustrated. What can you do? What can I do? Ourselves, nothing. We can encourage other people to do something, but neither the president or the Congress seem to care.Now, whether this was always a caring country, I'm not so sure, but I do remember in my childhood that one was aware that there were charitable institutions in the city and that people did contribute to them, had a great interest in supporting them. But they didn't support the art museum. Mr. Carnegie had given the money for that, so why would anybody compete with him? [laughter] But there was a sort of tradition of public giving. But now, of course, even that is difficult because the sums involved are so enormous. No, I find at the end of the century the American situation very puzzling, disappointing, and frightening. What kind of a world is it going to be in fifty years?

RIKALA

Yes, it's hard to imagine.

HAMILTON

Send me a message, will you, and tell me how it is.

RIKALA

I will. I think we should wrap up for now.

HAMILTON

You could do it on the Ouija board, you know. [laughter]

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*Date:*