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Oral history interview with Paul Thiry, 1983 September 15-16

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Paul Thiry on September 15 & 16, 1983. The interview was conducted by Meredith Clausen for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

DATE: SEPTEMBER 15, 1983
[Tape 1; side 1]

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Mr. Thiry, you were born in Nome, Alaska, 1904, is that right?

PAUL THIRY: Yes, that's right. (chuckles)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And what sort of city was it? What was your childhood like?

PAUL THIRY: Well, at the time, of course, Nome was a rather busy place because this was the heyday of the gold rush. My father and mother came from Paris to Nome in 1903 and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Was your father Parisian too?

PAUL THIRY: And my father was Parisian, yes. As a matter of fact, he was a graduate of the Ecole Centrale, which was a military college for engineers. He graduated in the artillery division of the school. And then of course my mother lived a very fine existence, and her father was a doctor and had a background in French history.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And what was it that brought them to Alaska?

PAUL THIRY: Well, my mother and father were married in 1903 and actually they came to Nome on their honeymoon. It was kind of in the light of an adventure, but also he was the director of mining operations in Nome that was sponsored by the Belgian syndicate. And the whole thing seemed to be a rather promising possibility, but the syndicate didn't hold up their end, and where they required funds to carry on operations, the funds were not forthcoming. And as a consequence, why, my father of course became somewhat discouraged, especially when they encountered the first winter in Nome. As you know the snow piles up rather heavily in the wintertime, sometimes up to 20 feet. All of the houses get buried and people get around through tunnels under the snow. And really, all you see from the walkways on the surface is chimneys sticking out of the snow from the houses. (chuckles)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: It must have been rough on your mother to get used to.

PAUL THIRY: And then in the springtime, of course, the snow melts and everything is very wet and the place is infested with mosquitos. The first thing people do in the early springtime, after the snow is thawed-- I do mean the sun has thawed the ground-- why, everybody goes out into the fields to pick blueberries and that sort of thing. That whole part of the country is nothing but tundra, and there's nothing more than two or three feet high in the way of vegetation standing on the hills for miles around. It was an interesting experience for my parents, but on the other hand it was a very difficult situation, especially for my mother in that type of [cultural setting--Ed.].

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: How long were they there?

PAUL THIRY: Well, they were there until 1906. And then of course I was there. And they decided to go to San Francisco. He had an opportunity in San Francisco and so they moved there and bought a house and furnishings and were just barely esconced when the earthquake came on, and everything was destroyed-- the house was gone, and all of our earthly possessions, and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Where were they living in San Francisco?

PAUL THIRY: I don't recall the exact district, but they had a house and it was... Some of the names of the streets just don't come to me, but given time they may. (laughs)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And what happened after the fire? Did they...

PAUL THIRY: Well, after the fire they were-- I wouldn't say absolutely destitute, but the situation was certainly deteriorating quite rapidly, and so the French consul in Nome offered to send my father transportation back to

Nome. They didn't want to return to France, especially under the situation that existed, and so they did return to Nome. But as time went on, why things didn't really improve too much, and my mother found it really very difficult, especially in the wintertime. So in 1909, just as the ice was coming out, she took me and we went to Paris and lived in Paris for the better part of a year. We stayed with her sister who had a house on the Rue de la Victoire which was just a short ways from the Place des la Victoires, which Mansart had designed. And I could say that was of particular interest because of my father's grandfather, who was Adrian Thiry, a contemporary of Eiffel and developed many steel structures especially in greenhouse and the shaped steel fabrications; at one time they designed a group of greenhouses for the Shah of Persia, and reputedly he also was the inventor of barbed wire. That's what I was told anyway.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well was it at this time that your interest in architecture was kindled?

PAUL THIRY: (chuckles) No. I was a little young for any interests of any kind, because actually when we went to France I was only 5years old. So anyway, we returned through Seattle and we stayed at the old Lincoln Hotel. And my mother had realized that a lot of people in Nome, while a lot of them had a difficult time, a lot of them made unreasonable amounts of money. And so they, like egrets and birds of paradise, liked all the fine clothing that she had when she went to Nome. So she got the idea of bringing back clothing and hats and things from Paris, and we had to stay over at the Lincoln Hotel for a few months in order to get organized for the boat. And while she was there the people at the hotel realized that she had, while she wasn't trained as a seamstress or anything of that kind-- why most French women of any class at all learned to sew and cook, maintain house, even if they don't have to do it. And so it seems that [Faye Bayberry] was having a difficult problem with some clothing or something that had gotten lost and so the Blackwells at the hotel asked my mother if she would help, and she did. And so with that, why I guess Sarah Bernhardt came shortly after that and she had a problem [finding appropriate attire--MEREDITH CLAUSEN], and then after that, why Isadora Duncan. (chuckles)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Boy!

PAUL THIRY: So, anyway, at that time they had a roof garden on the hotel and I used to play with the Duncan children there.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: So, now how long were you in Paris? You were in and out for...

PAUL THIRY: A year.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: A year, and that was 1909?

PAUL THIRY: Nine and '10.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: There was a lot going on artistically in Paris at that time. Do you remember anything?

PAUL THIRY: Yes, well, not too much. The main thing I remember, of course, was a fleeting glimpse of Luxembourg Gardens and things of that kind. But I remember my mother got me a whole set of lead soldiers-- I mean several hundred of them-- and I lined them all up on the dining room table and when my mother's sister came in she just about blew a fuse and took a broom and swept the whole mess off onto the floor. (laughs) So that was my main memory because I was just as mad as I could be. But that didn't really help too much.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Was your mother interested in the arts? What was going on...?

PAUL THIRY: Well, she was an educated woman. Part of their education was primarily in the cultural arts and things of this kind, and so...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Did you go to any of the exhibitions in Paris at the time?

PAUL THIRY: Well I wouldn't remember really. I was a little young for remembering refinements.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, my question about when you first became interested in architecture, maybe we can return to that? Was your interest aroused now or at a somewhat later time, and who was your major mentor, or did you have one?

PAUL THIRY: Well, my entry into architecture was a kind of a strange coincidence really. My father went [back to France to go--Meredith Clausen] to war in 1914 from Nome and he didn't return, and my mother had a nervous breakdown and [we] moved into Seattle. And so I was enrolled in boarding school of Saint Martin's College [in Lacey, outside Olympia, Washington--Ed.] where they had a prep high school. I had only gone to school a few months and up to this time my mother had taught me most of what I knew. I entered in school at Saint Martin's and I went through the grade school in a year and a half, and then I entered the high school. My mother felt that as long as I was settled there, why it was better to leave me there until I graduated from high school. This was a boarding school and the things that you remember, of course, is the chants of the monks in the early morning

and the early evening. And I remember the big study halls, the big dormitories (chuckles) and everything was kind of interfraternity [communal--Ed.]. Of course, one good thing you could say is that you did have the companionship of other students, and also where I maybe never would have learned to play baseball and basketball or any of those sports, why I did learn them at Saint Martin's.

I graduated from there in 1920, when I was 15years old. And then of course at this point, I had gained a rather good education from the monks there at Saint Martin's, but I hadn't really arrived at a career. And my mother was rather narrow on the subject of careers; she thought a man should have a profession and so she thought you should be a priest. She was a very religious woman.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Was she Catholic? You were raised as a Catholic?

PAUL THIRY: Catholic, um hmm. And then of course a lawyer is professional, and a doctor is a professional. So out of this, anyway, I didn't want to be a priest (chuckles) and before I could make a decision really, why she decided that lawyers were somewhat crooks, for the most part. And so that left me medicine, and so I entered the University of Washington in 1920 in pre-med.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Oh. Had you had any thought of architecture at this time?

PAUL THIRY: No.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: None, oh.

PAUL THIRY: Well I hadn't any thought of anything, really, yet. And so I went to the university and started pre-med, and well, some parts of it I liked, especially the course where you have to draw, like in comparative anatomy, and you did dissecting and then you uncovered bones and all sorts of things, and of course you made drawings. I did rather well at that, but as a scholar and in subjects that were akin to pre-med, I didn't have too much interest, though I rather enjoyed dissecting. But, oh, one spring afternoon, it was terribly hot in the lab and you couldn't open the windows because the wind would blow the papers and we were soaked in formaldehyde (chuckles). I [was with] a group of Orientals that were very eager at the business of dissecting this cat, and I decided right there that this wasn't for me. And so in the meantime, I had seen a picture of the Villa de Medici, a watercolor rendering that one of the dean s there at the university had done. And so I asked him. I said, "What do you have to do to, to make these renderings?" And he said, "Well, I took landscape architecture, but the only thing we have that would be akin to that would be architecture."

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: So it was really an interest in drawing at that point that _____?

PAUL THIRY: So I signed up for architecture because it appeared to be something that I could do and would like to do. And of course I didn't say too much to my mother about shifting, but it finally had to come out. At first she was pretty mad about the whole thing, and then she began to think back about my father's relationship and the fact that his grandfather married a Mansart and that this Mansart presumably was a direct descendent of the architect, Mansart, and well, then, this was a profession and so maybe it was all right. (laughs)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: So you really came into the field of architecture, you were lured into it by the drawing, and not so much the building?

PAUL THIRY: That's right, that's right. And so I had gotten into some kind of lazy habits in pre-med because of my lack of interest and I carried that into my first year in architecture. Carl Gould, of course, was the head of the school, and he knew my mother, and he figured that I had capability of doing better than I was doing, so he started to ride herd on me.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And what was the date of this now? This was about...

PAUL THIRY: About 1923.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: '23. That's when you entered the architecture program?

PAUL THIRY: Um hmm. And so he started to ride herd on me and get me straightened out-- not that I was that bad, but he figured I could [do] better, you know. So every time we had a class, and especially the early morning classes, why I was the first one he'd call on, you know. He'd say, "Thiry! Stand up!" So then he would quiz me and he made it rather disagreeable if I didn't know my lesson. So I began to work hard, more from fear of him than for any other reason. But as I worked harder and I did well, why then I began to really enjoy what I was doing. And as a consequence, I did fairly well in the architectural school and then at the same time I had previously-- while I was in pre-med-- become interested in cartooning for the Sun Dodger magazine [University of Washington student magazine--Ed.], and for Tyee [University of Washington Yearbook--Ed.] and different periodicals, and I worked on The Daily [University of Washington student newspaper--Ed.] and I was quite active

in university affairs as well. And then too, when I first [came] to the university, why I actually was a stranger because there were only one or two other students from Saint Martin's, but I became acquainted through my activities, and joined a fraternity, and then of course I had more direct contact and I got more into the run of things at the university and ended up... Well, during the time I was at school, I went to Fontainebleau and I was gone for the better part of the year.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Of the year...?

PAUL THIRY: This was in 1927.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Ah, I wanted to hear more about, but before we go into that part of your career, can you tell us a little bit more about the architectural curriculum at the UW at the time? Was it a Beaux Arts curriculum?

PAUL THIRY: Oh yes. It was based on the Beaux Arts. As a matter of fact, in those days, you didn't have to go to school for three years, you know, before you started architecture; you started immediately. And this is something I feel is a deficiency now. I mean, I think the average architect fancies himself as something more than being an architect and you can't do this just by one or two courses in each subject, you know. And I think the present system is very, well, I would say that the average [student--Ed.] that wants to be an architect is entitled to be an architect in school as well as immediately thereafter. That was the case then. We took Beaux Arts problems that were issued from the Beaux Arts in New York, and of course at that time, they were pretty much geared to stylistic problems. In other words, they would state that in the Spanish period, _____ so-and-so [would] design a library, let's say, or something of that kind, and of course then you would research the period and research the Spanish architecture, whatever the style would be, and your problem was developed that way.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: How much of a premium was there put on historical accuracy?

PAUL THIRY: Well, every problem was judged in competition with the other students, and of course at that time the students were rated-- first place, second place, and mention, and so on. I think that was good because I think that if you have any pride and you have competition, why you're going to work at it, you know. And that's something that doesn't exist anymore.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: But what would happen if you came up with something original, an original design, something that wasn't historical...? My question is how much of a premium was placed on originality and how much room for it was there?

PAUL THIRY: Well, you have to consider discipline in the school. If you didn't follow the program, why then you got what they called an HC [hors concours--Ed.]; in other words, the problem was based on the program. And that was it, you see. And, so of course, if you had too many HC's, why you didn't last long from the grade standpoint.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And one could be eliminated for not following the program; if you were given the program of, say, designing a mosque in such and such a style, the historical accuracy would be one of the major criteria.

PAUL THIRY: Oh, I wouldn't say it was major, but it was a criteria that was supposed to be followed, you know.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And what were some of the other criteria?

PAUL THIRY: Well, they would give you the requirements of a problem, so many rooms, and siting, which would [be] on a hillside or in a valley, and they would state the kind of surrounding, the communities, and that sort of thing. And of course you would end up with a building with flamboyant decorations and entrances and windows and maybe with parapets and finials and all sorts of things. And still at that time we knew that, in America especially, buildings of this kind were not very durable. I mean, the roofs leaked, the windows leaked, the finials eroded, and corroded, and... (laughs)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And were difficult to keep clean.

PAUL THIRY: And were difficult to maintain and so on. And so while I didn't feel violently about this, I thought that this really wasn't going at things in the right way. And so I voiced my opinion a couple of times, but as I say, I finally lived in a state of fear because I didn't want to get into any particular trouble because of being opposed to what was going on. And then too, after all, I was just a beginner and a student and I really had no right to be impolite.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: What was the curriculum? What courses were you required to take?

PAUL THIRY: Well, every quarter of every year, we took design, for four years. And then we had a couple of years of engineering. Then too in those days, they had more respect for the fine arts than they seem to have in the school now. We took watercolor painting, modeling, and sculpture work, and things of this kind; art appreciation,

and history of architecture. And then in line with drafting, we took drafting perspective, graphics, and-- well, things of that kind. And then, of course we had electives that delved into choice of languages and then there was options for psychology, sociology, zoology...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Who were your professors at the time?

PAUL THIRY: Carl Gould of course was the head, and he was also architect for the campus, and of course he had good training. He was a Beaux Arts man from Paris, and he'd gone to Harvard and no one could question his qualifications. And I will say that he was modern in the sense that he fostered the idea of prefabrication, and actually he'd built a house for himself on Bainbridge Island that was an assembly of doors; I might say that he bought the doors and then built the house on top of the doors. (laughter) And then too he made ventures into modern, it was kind of modernistic, somewhat of basis for change in architecture. But this didn't get into our training in school.

Finally in 1927, there were three others and myself who [went to] Fontainebleau. The previous year, Walter Wurdeman, who later became a partner with Welton Becket-- who also went to Fontainebleau with me; he preceded us in school and he came back with great reports on how he enjoyed it and how much he learned. And it's true, we learned a great deal. At Fontainebleau we had illustrious professors and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Let me interrupt and ask you a question. Why, if you were at the UW, already beginning to question the Beaux Arts method, did you then go
to the fountainhead [of Beaux Arts--Ed.], if not Paris itself, then pretty close to it at the Ecole d'Beaux-Arts [in Fontainbleau].

PAUL THIRY: Well this was a special school that was set up by the American government during the first World War, and after the war was kept on, and still is. And most of the students there were-- like Rome prize, Paris prize-- they were prize students from all over the United States. And of course the professors for the most part could all speak English, like Jacque Carlu, who was also the dean of MIT at the time, was director of the School of Fontainebleau. And then we had students like Tom Locraft, he came from Catholic U., and was an excellent student, and rather well known as a student at that time. And [Allman--Ed.] Fordyce from Yale, and Percy Goodman was a Paris prize man, and that was Labatut's first year of teaching at that time. And then of course of the older professors, why there was old Laloux, who designed the Sacre Coeur [sic--Meredith Clausen] Church in Montmartre, in Paris. He was in his nineties at the time, and he had a great white beard. I remember he even had white hair on his nose. (laughs) About all you could see were eyes. And then there was Laloux, and Labatut, as I already said.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Laloux was out at Fontainebleau, not in Paris?

PAUL THIRY: Laloux was Beaux Arts and of course he was a famous architect in Paris. I was thinking of Labatut.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Ah hah.

PAUL THIRY: Labatut was a student assistant at Fontainbleau, and later became the dean of Princeton, I think maybe-- I'm not sure that he still is or not-- but a very talented architect. And of course, Percy Goodman made his way as an architect and so did Fordyce. But we sat-- Welton Beckett and Hugo Osterman, and Jack Woodmansee from the university-- we all sat in the group of some 50students from all over the United States with these foreign and English-speaking professors. We became interested in mural painting and travel and all sorts of things. And [Jean--Ed.] Despujois was a muralist at that time. And so I did one problem down in the caves of painting on the wet plaster. (laughs)

And then of course while we were at school we had two or three tours that were initiated by the school, where we went to the chateaux. I remember going to Vaux-le-Vicomte, and the owner of Vaux-le-Vicomte had gout and had his foot all wrapped up and he was sitting in a big easy chair in his library. (laughs) We had a lot of fun on those tours. One time I went up into northern France with Charles Agle, who's a planner that lives in Princeton right now, and Joe Hawthorne, whose father at that time was Charles Hawthorne, the painter at Cape Cod. And we bicycled all up through northern France, came back on boxcars and trains.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: I'm curious about the experience at the Ecole. Did you have a choice of ateliers?

PAUL THIRY: Well, no this wasn't at this school; it was in that degree. After I left Fontainebleau I spent a short time, not long, in the Atelier Gromort in Paris.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm. And was Gromort actually the patron?

PAUL THIRY: Yes.

[Tape 1; side 2]

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Okay, let's return to the question of the Fontainebleau experience. You say there weren't ateliers at...

PAUL THIRY: Not at Fontainebleau, no. The atelier system was at the Beaux Arts in Paris. And they had a number of ateliers, and as I mentioned I attended the Atelier Gromort for a while, but not too long; it was more for the experience of how they worked. [Paul Thiry later clarified the he did not actually attend Atelier Gromort but took one problem there, in landscape, as a means of study--Ed.]

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And that was in Paris?

PAUL THIRY: That was in Paris, after Fontainebleau.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And you were at Fontainebleau for what, one year?

PAUL THIRY: No, no. Fontainebleau at that time was about four months, three months.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: I see. What was the setup there? Lecture courses or...?

PAUL THIRY: Well, what they did at Fontainebleau, on Monday they would issue a problem, and then you would finish it on Friday. And you didn't have to do anything if you didn't want to.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And all students went through the same program?

PAUL THIRY: That's right.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: I see.

PAUL THIRY: They [were] all the same, and they were all, you might say, upperclassmen, and some of them university graduates. Our group was junior class; we had finished our junior year. They'd issue the problems, as I said, on Monday, and then you'd turn them in on Friday, and then they would jury the following week, and then you were graded again, you know, first medal, second medal, mention, and so on. Or you could, you could go out to the country and sketch or you could go and play the violin, or any... There were any amount of things that you could do within the fine arts range, and as long as you did them, why this all counted towards your attendance, you know. But of course a lot of the students who went there didn't really go to school; they wasted an awful lot of time. But actually living in Fontainebleau, no matter what you did, was no waste, you know. It was education by itself.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Who were your professors there?

PAUL THIRY: As I had already mentioned there were Laloux, Labatut, and company.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And Laloux, did you see much of him?

PAUL THIRY: Well he used to come in about once a month, and he'd give you one look-see at your problem that you were working on. I did most of the problems but not all of them, and other times why, as I say, we went on tours and did sketches and photographing, which of course at that time wasn't as popular as it is now.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: I'm very interested in Laloux because he has proved, in retrospect, to have been one of the most important professors, particularly for American scholars or American architectural students. What are your recollections of him? Were his comments useful to you?

PAUL THIRY: Well, as I say, he was an old man, and he didn't really say very much. I would say that as far as getting the most out of Fontainebleau, I got it out of just one encounter with Carlu. I remember one time I was working on a problem-- again getting back to the Spanish idea. Why of course Carlu was a modernist, not in the sense of Corbusier or some of those, but he had changed; it was kind of, oh, what they called the Art Nouveau at that time. And so he had a certain style of his own, and in fact he did quite a few things in Paris.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Let's see, this was what year now?

PAUL THIRY: 1927.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: 1927. This was two years after the Exposition des Arts de Decoratifs, is that right?

PAUL THIRY: Um hmm, that's right.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: How aware were you of what was going on in the decorative arts at the time?

PAUL THIRY: Oh well, you see, this was kind of more in my way of thinking; this began to open up a little different aspect. Anyway, I was designing this problem and so the day he [Carlu--Ed.] came by, the first day, why I was fussing around with a cartouche and a drawing around an entrance way-- oh, I was having myself a time trying to get this baroque attitude into this building design. And so a couple days later, he came by and he said, "Oh my, you seem to be having a very difficult time." (chuckles) And I said, "Well, I must admit I'm having a hell of a time trying to get the right type of decoration around the entrance." And he said, "Did you try nothing?" This was a very deep statement, and I had to pause and think about it. Because this is the difference between all the goulash versus nothing. And so I erased everything and just left a simple door, and the door itself was paneled, and it looked quite well. (laughs)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Oh! Well how aware were you at that time of what was going on in other architectural currents, like the modern tradition, in 1927.

PAUL THIRY: Well we read books and so on, but the printing and the distribution of books and everything wasn't quite what it is nowadays. You more or less had to search out books, and then also you had to keep track... And then of course a lot of the Art Nouveau didn't appeal to me either, because that was really no improvement over the baroque. And so it had it's faults too. It took a little time to develop an attitude of a practicing architect. And before I finally arrived at that point, this was kind of the opening statement, and gave me a good deal to think about. And after we left Fontainebleau, before I was to head out for Italy, and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Now was Paris and the Atelier Gromort in between Fontainebleau and Italy?

PAUL THIRY: That was right after Fontainebleau, you see, and I stayed in France, oh, it was two or three weeks. Becket and Wurdeman had gone ahead, and I met them in Rome.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm. So you stayed behind to go to the Atelier Gromort?

PAUL THIRY: Yeah. Then I also had another experience at that time. My mother and father of course were French, and while I was born in Nome, why I was an American citizen, but at the same time, I also was a French citizen by birth. A Frenchman could come to America and obtain American citizenship, but he never lost his French citizenship; he was always liable for conscription in the army. And of course, when I was at Fontainebleau I had exceeded the age for reporting for conscription. And the French consul in Seattle had a disagreement with my mother over some (chuckles) religious and socialistic discussions that they had, and anyway she had ordered him out of the house on one occasion. So he was rather wrathy about her. And he had the good grace to report that I was at Fontainebleau, and my French passport that I had to have-- as well as my American passport, because he wouldn't give me a visa on my American passport-- why my French passport was only good for three months. I hadn't reported in three months and I got notice to report. And so I went into Paris and went to the different military offices and so on, but all they would say to me is "Mais non, monsieur, vous est Francais." And that was it. Then too, I had to finish school, and on top of that I had a few things I wanted to do, so I stayed behind. But it was also because I was really concerned about crossing the border. And so anyway, I...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Ah hah. Did you put this time to good use as a student in the Atelier Gromort?

PAUL THIRY: Well I was a student in the sense that Gromort let me take the problem, but I wasn't really enrolled in the sense of a Beaux Arts student, you know. I had the experience as I said.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Was it difficult to get in or to get his approval for that?

PAUL THIRY: No, no. I mean, if the head of the atelier would accept you, that was all that was necessary. Of course if you came there under different circumstances, I mean, as a student for the full term and so on, why then of course the enrollment requirements are a lot different than just attending class. (chuckles)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Ah hah. Was this one of the ateliers libres, or was this part of the Ecole?

PAUL THIRY: Oh no, no. It was part of the Ecole at the time, in the Ecole building.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Can you describe the atelier? The way he ran it and who the students were?

PAUL THIRY: Well I would say that it was pretty much the same as Fontainebleau. I mean they issued a problem, and so they varied according to the nature of the problem. And at that time, why you started by doing an esquisse, and then you went into your drawing, and then you finally made a rendering, which at that time most of the students turned them as India ink washes. And some of the work, of course, was just magnificent.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Exquisite, right. What were the problems at the time? Again, were they historically based?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, the problem that I had, as I remember, was a lodge in the Alps. (chuckles) It gave you chance to exercise your artistry in landscape drawing, mountain scenery and trees and that sort of thing. And it, too,

was after the Swiss tradition, which was-- I don't know how you describe it-- it was medieval.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Do you have any major recollections of that atelier, or of Gromort personally?

PAUL THIRY: Well not too much. He was a fine gentleman and he was along in years at the time; he was quiet spoken, and he didn't find too much to criticize with what I was doing. He seemed to like it and that was about it, as I recall. I didn't really become acquainted with too many of the students because I had other friends around. Quite a few of the students from Fontainebleau stayed around Paris, and so I didn't associate too much with the [atelier--Ed.] students. And then while I could speak French after a fashion and I could understand it fairly well, why it was easier to speak English with my own pals.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Was the work that you were required to do still plans and elevations and drawings?

PAUL THIRY: That's right.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: No question of models at this point?

PAUL THIRY: No. You could make models if you wanted to, but they didn't do too much with models.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: They didn't stress them.

PAUL THIRY: Yeah, in some problems, of course, where they had a large problem that involved a whole series of buildings, let's say a parliament compound or something of that kind, they quite often did make models. But usually it was a rendering in black and white.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And do you still have your drawings from those days?

PAUL THIRY: The one I did stayed at [the Ecole des--Meredith Clausen] Beaux Arts. I have a few that I did at Fontainebleau and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: What were the texts that were being used at the time? Was Choisy still being used, and Guadet?

PAUL THIRY: I didn't get into much on text reading or anything of that kind. As I say, I never was much on the scholarly touch. (chuckles) Not at that time anyway. And I enjoyed drawing and painting and some modeling, you know, that sort of thing. Other than doing research on a particular problem, why I didn't, other than... Well, Professor Herman at the University of Washington was an excellent professor in architectural history, and as a matter of fact he taught in such an interesting way that you remembered every building that came to your attention. And when I went to France, and later to Italy, why I walked down the street and there was the building-- there was a palazzo so-and-so, and I knew them all, inside and out. That was wonderful.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, I'm very curious now about what was going on in France. You were there in Paris now, this was 1927, or was this '28?

PAUL THIRY: In 1927.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Were you aware of what was going on architecturally with the [advent of modernism--Meredith Clausen]? It was a tumultuous period, wasn't it?

PAUL THIRY: Well, not so much. You see, for the length of time we were there, at that time-- I've been there oh maybe ten, fifteen times since-- but at that time, why our time was really at Fontainebleau and geared to tours and to the old France, and visiting the countryside. And we didn't go into what was going [on] as I would right now, you see.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, did you hear anything of it at the Ecole? Was there talk of...?

PAUL THIRY: Well, not too much. The students, of course, would gather every night. We used to sit out in the courtyard there at the palace. Most of us lived at the Launoy, which was a kind of a hotel with a big courtyard in the middle; the palace was across the street, and we used to gather at the palace gates there, and usually there was somebody with a guitar or something. And then there were cafes across the street too, and so they'd sit around cafes and shoot the breeze. And so it wasn't really that kind of situation. And so as we traveled, after Fontainebleau, of course, we looked more into things. But actually, in 1927, there wasn't all that much going on...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: In Paris.

PAUL THIRY: ...in the way of new construction. There were a lot of civil constructions. I remember one time in the

course of going around-- I was going to the American Embassy in Paris-- and as I came out, why Sacco and Vanzetti and a group of demonstrators were coming up the pike, marching and screaming and so on, in automobiles, and somebody tossed a bomb that lit just about 20feet from me, and I just fell over on the pavement and the air was full of cobblestones. I don't remember anything between landing and being two blocks away-- I just got out there that fast. (laughs) Fortunately, I wasn't hit, but that was the sort of thing in the way of an experience that was outstanding.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: It was tumultuous politically, if not necessarily architecturally, huh?

PAUL THIRY: Yeah.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, what in retrospect was the most valuable aspect of your Beaux Arts training? Both here in this country and in France?

PAUL THIRY: Well, to look at it correctly, I believe in discipline, and I was taught discipline. Discipline means that you kind of obey the orders, you obey a program. Without discipline, why you have no basis for anything really. Because otherwise, if there's no order and no background, why then there's really nothing to base a future upon. And so I don't regret having the education that I had. A lot of the students nowadays are just beginning to discover the things that we knew all the time. I know for a lapse of time for about ten years the students didn't travel because they could learn more in the United States. Well consequently, I remember when Yamasaki went to India and he encountered the Taj Mahal, he was amazed. And he came back and, God, everybody wanted to listen to him and his trip and this great discovery and so. Well, this wasn't really any great thing, any great shakes as far as I was concerned. I mean it was a great piece of architecture, but I had known that years before. You understand?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Sure. In the architectural history class that you had at UW, were you using the Banister Fletcher at that time?

PAUL THIRY: Yes. And so actually I believe that to be a good sculptor or good painter, you can do anything that you want to do, assuming that you have an education. You see?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PAUL THIRY: And I think the big problem today is that people have no education, no historic background. Consequently, they don't really understand what's good or what's bad. And so we had a good grounding in the principles and design. And then as I went along I realized that it was no longer proper to do traditional things. On top of that [I realized--Ed.] what is traditional today wasn't traditional yesterday. So that every phase of architecture really was in modern architecture. I mean gothic was modern. And so now we had run out of source material for a number of reasons, one of them [was] that we didn't build the same way any more. I mean, we didn't pile stone on stone and we didn't build [with] beam and lintel; we didn't necessarily have to use an arch. There are other more refined techniques and more economical ways, and so we take from what I had learned and build on that and then realize that architecture has to be functional. It has to serve the purpose of the client, whether it's industrial, or whether it's commercial, or whether it's housing; it all has a purpose. And that purpose wasn't always found in the old ways of doing things, so we had to create new ways, new techniques, and then also we had to overcome the maintenance problem.

In the so-called Pioneer Square architecture [in Seattle--Ed.], which is interesting-- but even Gould said that that stuff was an abomination and strictly lacking not only in function but also lacking in good taste. Really the only supporting factor for that bunch of stuff is the fact that there's a certain amount of continuity, and a certain style, and there's a certain city life, you might say because of the shops and living within the structures; it brought some of the things of the old world as far as life in the city was concerned. But on the other hand, at least by the time I got out of school, I would say that 90percent of the buildings (the old style buildings that were built after the [1889--Meredith Clausen] fire), were condemned and were vacant because they had improper access, and ingress and egress, and they were fire hazards. Several earthquakes had shaken all the mortar out of the brick. The old skylights were leaking, and the old metal parts were rusting, and you know, they were real junkers. And so I believe, like in Pioneer Square, in keeping the square-- at least I did believe in it, when every building was there and they were all at the right height, and they were dedicated to a use. In fact I recommended to the city that maybe the city should buy Pioneer Square-- not the whole district, just around the square-- and use each building for a different department of city functioning. This was way back in, oh, 1930, I guess.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Ah hah!

PAUL THIRY: But of course at that time, why these buildings were for the birds, you see, and it's only been lately that people have picked them up because of the cost of new construction. And in fact I think it's devastating to go beyond Pioneer Square and to keep all that stuff up on First Avenue and try to make the new buildings [over

for reuse--Meredith Clausen]. Well, live with the old. And so it's kind of a disaster that's creating a visual slum, or else maybe the use of the buildings is up to date; it still doesn't represent a new society or new order.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: I'd like to continue talking about Seattle, but before we move on, I wonder if you could say just a little bit more about your Beaux Arts background and what you gained from it. Any of the design principles that the Beaux Arts is so highly respected for, architectural composition, or large-scale planning, or drawing, for example. What are those principles, the monumental/classical principles?

PAUL THIRY: Let's put it this way. As I pointed out, you take from history of the past, what's applicable and applies, you might say, to the present. And as you look back to these magnificent Beaux Arts programs where they involve palaces and city planning, in problems like the development of Versailles or Vaux le Vicomte and so on, there's a great deal to be learned. And especially for me, where I have always admired the plan of Washington, D.C., that was developed by L'Enfant, why my Beaux Arts training acquainted me first-hand with what L'Enfant was trying to accomplish.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Did you feel a certain sympathy with that?

PAUL THIRY: Well yes, I mean I definitely feel through my Beaux Arts training that there's something more to life than just little people, you know. If you're going to destroy nature, well then you should replace it with something that I consider wonderful. Everything that you do in the mess should be wonderful.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm. So it's the Grand Design?

PAUL THIRY: That's right, and of course I don't look at that as being elitist as some people do, as cold and boring and unfriendly. I look on it as being worthy of man's intelligence as well as his intellect and culture. And that it's very fine and _____ if it's well done. We have to attack problems of cities in great ways, recognizing problems and not be Mickey Mouse about parks and all of that. They should be a part of the grand plan. And so with the kind of education people are getting now, and everyone being equally intelligent, and understanding about all problems of architecture and design and planning, you can, you know, speak to the average grammar school graduate, and he'll give you the full treatment in how to do things. A person with Beaux Arts (chuckles) training is a contradiction to this wisdom that's exhibited by everybody in the street. And... (chuckles)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Did that Beaux Arts training give you a competitive edge when you returned to the States?

PAUL THIRY: Well I've always felt that life is competition. I never regarded life as owing me anything, other than what I could contribute to the welfare of the world and of the people. But if I did a good job, why then the good job would take care of me. I have no regrets as far as that part of it goes.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: When you started in the practice in the early thirties, weren't most of your colleagues also trained in Beaux Arts?

PAUL THIRY: Oh yes. They were all trained this way up until about, oh, I couldn't give you the exact date, but I think that the curriculum largely changed about the time that Lionel Pries left the university.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: That was post-war, what, late forties?

PAUL THIRY: I'm not sure just when he left... But even when Pries was there change had come in. Everyone up to my time and for two or three years after were all educated the same way, through the Beaux Arts system and the problems that were issued in New York at the Beaux Arts [Institute--Meredith Clausen].

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: When was it that you were first exposed to the work of the modernists? LeCorbusier, Mies, Gropius? Do you remember when you first heard about this revolutionary current?

PAUL THIRY: Well I would say, oh, about 1930 or so.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: So you didn't hear about them at all while you were abroad?

PAUL THIRY: Well, you can't say you never heard of anything at all, but I mean to the point where you made special notice, you know. And as I say, there are two types of architectural thinking. One of them is an academic approach that involves history, delving into philosophies, and this sort of thing. As opposed to the practice of architecture that deals in facts and the world as it is and the world as it should be, and this sort of thing. And so, while you're aware of things, why you don't meditate on them, or you're meditating more on [them than--Ed.] what you're doing right at the moment. But as I say, I started practice before I finished the university, because I lived in the Shoremont Apartments on the lake [Lake Washington--Ed.] and the owner of the building was going to build another apartment next door called the Lakecrest and so he asked me to design it.

[Tape 2; side 1]

PAUL THIRY: I started to say that William Duxor, the owner of the apartment-- the apartment I was living in with my mother-- wanted to build an apartment next door, and so anyway he commissioned me to be the architect. I was still in the university because I graduated that year, in 1928. He wanted a similar Normandy-style apartment, and of course I was full of Normandy style at the time because I had just traveled all through Normandy. So I designed his building for him. At the same time, why there was a contractor by the name of E. C. Edwards that built houses, and he sort of liked the traditional Normandy style houses, and so he started me designing houses; one of them was a model house, which was widely published. The trip that we had taken [abroad--Ed.] was widely published, and so it wasn't long anyway before I was esconced with an office and working and doing houses. Up until 1934, when [I] left for Japan, why I had done quite a few apartments and various houses and several churches and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well now, at what point were you exposed to the work of LeCorbusier?

PAUL THIRY: Well, actually in 1934, '35, when I was in France.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: I see. This was the first time you had returned to France-- after having left it in...?

PAUL THIRY: Well let me go on. I mean you asked me when I first encountered the modern...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Okay.

PAUL THIRY: I went to the Chicago Fair, "Century of Progress," in 1933, and that of course was the first time that I was kind of pleased with the idea that times have changed. And of course I had seen prepublication things of the fair. There were some very interesting buildings, I mean like Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion house, and, oh, there were various things and a lot of it was Art Moderne, but just the same it was a complete change, you see. And it was a new thought; they had began to recognize highways and interchanges and that sort of thing, and new structures and new ways to achieve things. So this was my first encounter and then I began after that to branch out.

But as times became more difficult-- and I had a lot of work, strangely enough, even after the '29 stock crash, why even then I had work-- but one by one my clients began to worry about spending their money, and so it finally ended up I had no more work. And I had a friend that I'd gone to school with, by the name of Matsumoto, who had previously won the Municipal League prize in New York, had gone back to Japan and he wanted me to come and work with him in Japan. And so (chuckles) I went home one day, being thoroughly disgusted when I had lost my last client, you might say, and I said to my mother, "For two cents, I'd go to Japan and work with Matsumoto." And so she said, "Well, why don't you?" And so the next day, anyway, I went down to the ticket office for the American Mail Line. At that time too there were a lot of strikes and ships were all tied up and it was kind of a mess. And so I said, "I'd like to get a ticket to Yokohama," a round trip, because I wanted to be sure to get home, and I wanted to have my ticket paid for in advance if I ran into trouble, you know. The ticket wasn't too much, as money went -- as money goes now. And so I thought, "Well, if I'm going to go there, maybe I should get a ticket to Manila and back, because I could live on the boat and have no problem as far as my daily subsistence was concerned." So the man said, "Well, if you're going to get tickets to Manila, why don't you get a ticket around the world? It's only a few dollars more." And so I said, "Well, how long would it take to go around the world?" And he said, "Well, the ticket covers about 35,000 miles and it would take about three-and-a-half, four months, if you just stayed on the boat, and visited the various ports and stuff." So I got a ticket around the world and then I took off for Japan and I worked with Matsumoto for a while.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: This was in...

PAUL THIRY: Tokyo.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: ...1934, is that right?

PAUL THIRY: Um hmm. And then of course while I was in Tokyo, why George Nakashima, who was a famous woodworker and furniture designer-- he lives in New Hope, Pennsylvania, right now-- why he was working for Antonin Raymond. I was in touch with George and so he invited me at the time, when Raymond had his summer office up in Kurazawa, up in the mountains. And so I went up there and visited with George and I became acquainted with Raymond, and Raymond was a very open sort of a person, and quite a braggart. But he had reason to brag, because to my opinion he's probably the greatest architect of the whole bunch of them, and even including Corbusier. I admired him and of course he liked that. (laughs) So he spent a lot of time talking architecture. And he took me around to the new buildings that he was building at the time. He had a great practice in Tokyo and he had about, oh, 40 or 50 draftsmen, all Japanese, working for him. And so then his wife, Naomi, did all the furniture and they actually did the weaving and materials and I don't know whatnot. And these houses were all concrete and were strictly modern in every sense of the word, really different and beautiful. And so this is what I've been thinking about.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Would you describe as modern the kind of work that he was doing?

PAUL THIRY: Oh yes, yes. Strictly. And of course they had a certain influence; they were influenced by Japanese open planning and of course the modular shoji and tatami and, you know, all that sort of thing.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: But wasn't it touched by European modernism, at this point?

PAUL THIRY: I would say it was different because he had to design for earthquake and so...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: But did he know of, and was he influenced by, the work of the modernists?

PAUL THIRY: Oh well, you see, Corbusier was well known at the time. And Corbusier of course was one of Raymond's lead-- well he was a great, I wouldn't say his teacher, but his great...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: ...mentor?

PAUL THIRY: ...mentor, yeah. And so he had great admiration. Well, I do believe that Raymond's work was superior to Corbusier's. It was more refined in a sense, and I think it was more civilized. And of course doing a total design of furniture and carpeting and curtains and everything, they were consistent with the architecture and made it a complete departure, you know. Everything was new. And the idea of the planning, especially in Japan, came halfways between the Japanese house with no furniture and a European house with furniture. So he might on some occasions, for some Japanese owner-- most of them were aristocrats-- have a Japanese part, but also built in [factory]. But obviously when you design for earthquakes such as they have in Japan, tolerance is bigger than they would be under normal conditions and so it developed a sort of style on its own, you know, just because of structural requirements.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: What about the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright on Raymond's work?

PAUL THIRY: Well, Frank Lloyd Wright, of course, designed the Imperial Hotel-- where I lived, incidentally, when I was in Tokyo. Raymond was Wright's representative and he went out to supervise the construction of the Imperial Hotel. As a matter of fact, it was because of that that he was in Japan. And he became acquainted while he was supervising the construction of the hotel with Japanese. Also he was Czechoslovakian by birth and he was appointed honorary consul, I believe, of Czechoslovakia, so that gave him access to the diplomatic circles. And so with this acquaintance and his great ability as an architect he stayed and was a very successful practitioner. And of course, while I didn't know him, you know, like George Nakashima would know him, why I became very well acquainted and when he would go on his inspection tours and so on, he'd call me and ask me if I wanted to go.

And so at one time, when I had more or less decided that I didn't want to stay in Japan indefinitely because-- oh, it was a complete reeducation in a way of life. I had to learn the language, I had to learn the various ways of counting and dimensioning. And then too, the social customs were different, and so on. And if you're going to go through the hardship of learning a new way of life, why then you should have a reason for it, and the only reason to spend that amount of time would be to stay there. And I didn't feel that I wanted to stay there indefinitely, though I went there with the idea that I might. And so...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: So you left...

PAUL THIRY: So anyway I had indicated that maybe I would, you know, take advantage of my ticket (laughs), which went around the world. So at that time, he wanted me to stay a little longer because he was trying to do the Ford automobile industrial plant there. He thought if I stayed that I could do the supervisory work on it, and so anyway I did stay longer than I had planned. The Japanese government had decided against the plant being built at that time-- it was built later. And so I left and went to Shanghai. And I worked for a while for a Chinese architect, but...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: You say for a while. Is that a couple months? Or a couple weeks?

PAUL THIRY: Oh about five or six weeks. And then while I was there, of course, I made several junkets up to Soochow, Hangchow, or Nanking, and Hong Kong, and then finally left from there and went on to Manila. And then I went from Manila to Singapore and by train to Malacca and on to Panang. And I picked up the boat in Panang and went on to Ceylon and then Bombay and I spent quite a bit of time in India.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well was it on this trip that you met Corbusier?

PAUL THIRY: Um hmm. So anyway I landed in France. And, while I didn't like to barge in on people just willy nilly, I thought I would like to meet Corbusier after what Raymond had said about him. And so I went to his office, which at that time was in the, oh, I wouldn't know whether it was a residential building or what. But you went through a great courtyard, and then you went up some steps, and you came into a kind of a gallery, which as I

remember was about a hundred feet long. And at the end of it was a kitchen table and a couple of drawing boards and a man. (chuckles) And so I walked the distance and here was Corbusier. I told him that I was a student and I was going around the world and of all the people that I had heard of, I wanted to meet him.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: You still considered yourself a student at that time, even though you'd been out and essentially practicing for a number of years?

PAUL THIRY: Um hmm. Well I was a student as far as he was concerned. And so anyway, he was kind of delighted and he took me around to a few of his jobs and, and then...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Now this was about 1935, was it?

PAUL THIRY: Yes. It was in the winter, early winter of 1935 [actually February 1935--Meredith Clausen]. And...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: So just the two of you went around?

PAUL THIRY: So he took around a few of his jobs that were close to Paris. And then he gave me letters of introduction-- some of them I still have-- to his clients. And he drew me some maps of how to get to these places and so on.

And during the course of the conversation, why I mentioned Raymond and he was mad at Raymond because Raymond presumably had copied one of his designs that he had made for a house in Brazil, in his house at Kurazawa. And so, in Corbusier's book you'll see that he mentions Raymond without benefit of design. And so, anyway I told him, I said, "You're entirely wrong." I said, "The house in Kurazawa is done with logs, you know, and timbers, and it has a tin and thatch roof, and the plan is your plan, but Raymond doesn't make any point of it. He admits that he liked the plan and he copied it, and he couldn't do anything any better." And I said, "He never talks about his house or publishes a thing or anything else that he doesn't give you credit." And I think it's too bad that you're so mad at him." "Oh," he said, "Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, c'est moi que est trompe."

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: (laughs) This is tout en francais, eh?

PAUL THIRY: And so anyway, if anything I squared [away] the thing between Raymond and Corbusier. (chuckles)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: You say that he gave you some letters of introduction to clients, so you didn't really spend too much time with him; how much did you spend with Corbusier?

PAUL THIRY: Oh I spent several hours, an afternoon. I became pretty well acquainted with him, and also he explained his work. He's kind of a teacher by natural instinct, and he liked to talk about it. And then also he felt kind of lonesome at the time because they had barred him from the fair, you know, that was developing there in Paris. And if you'll remember, he set up a tent outside the fairgrounds and displayed his work and so on, in kind of a retaliation (laughs) for being rejected. And so...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, this is interesting. The way you're describing the situation now, it's beginning to sound to me as if Raymond was actually [far] more important in the development of your own work than perhaps Corbu. Is that right?

PAUL THIRY: Oh yes. No, no. Raymond made several pertinent remarks, and then-- whereas Corbusier spoke but he wasn't carried away with the idea of conversation. Raymond, especially if you seem to be in agreement or at least if you seem to accept what he was saying, why he'd just warm to the subject, you know. And then too, I honestly respected him as an architect probably more than anyone I have encountered, before or since. And so I was just the right guy to absorb what he had to offer. (chuckles)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Had you been interested in Japanese architecture before you'd gone over there?

PAUL THIRY: Well, yes, after all I was graduated from school and I had been to France and Europe, and so I wasn't exactly just a hillbilly, going out to the country.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Were you knowing about Japanese architecture before you'd gone?

PAUL THIRY: Oh yes.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Was there an influence?

PAUL THIRY: Well this kind of appealed to me because of the planning aspects and also the prefabrication aspect. It seemed to me that this was an introduction to, not necessarily something new, but to a new way to be followed generally. You see?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PAUL THIRY: And then also Raymond, while he was influenced by the modern movement generally, and by people like Corbusier and different ones, why he was more influenced by the Japanese methods, you might say. Not the appearance so much as the techniques. And so then of course, I absorbed that not only from Raymond; I met other people in Japan like Bruno Taut. And then too quite a few Japanese architects-- some of them that I had gone to school with. And so I had an opportunity in the five or six months that I was in Japan to really absorb what was going on.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: How talked about was Frank Lloyd Wright at this point? With...

PAUL THIRY: Well, he was talked about a great deal, and especially by Raymond. As I say, Raymond went out there to represent Frank Lloyd Wright, but of course Frank Lloyd Wright, while he did the Imperial Hotel and other buildings in Japan, really was more influenced by the Japanese than the Japanese were influenced by him. And so between Mexican architecture and Japanese architecture, why Frank Lloyd Wright kind of developed a style that you could call his own. But just the same, if you're familiar with historic styles and background, why you can find all of these elements as a part of his development.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Particularly in the twenties.

PAUL THIRY: Yeah. And so, of course Raymond had personal dealings with Wright and he admired Wright and so on, but he didn't have that all-going admiration because... Well, he developed his own set of ideas, you know. And Wright was modern in a sense but not in the sense that Corbusier was modern or that Raymond was modern, you see. So Wright was something that people in this country, in house building and so on, could probably be more willing to follow than they would the so-called International Style. And, well, anyway (chuckles), I went around and then of course, I went around Europe and came back and then I stayed in Washington for a time.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: This is Washington, D.C.?

PAUL THIRY: D.C.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And this was what, '36?

PAUL THIRY: 1935. I looked into what was going on, I mean at that time it was mostly all public works, you know. And so after staying there for a few months, I went to New York and got on the boat and came home through the Panama Canal.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And why did you return to Seattle at that point?

PAUL THIRY: Well, there are two or three reasons. I mean, number one, Seattle was home and that's where my mother was. And then times weren't all that good, and finding a place for yourself in the east wasn't all that simple. And especially, you could buy into a big practice or something, but... I had gained a certain amount of reputation by this time, and I had opportunities, but it wasn't all for free, you know.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Now what kind of work had you been doing up to that point? It had been all residential?

PAUL THIRY: No, no, as I pointed out to you, at that time I had residential work, and I had done several apartments. I did several church buildings, and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And how would you describe these [works done--Meredith Clausen] before your trip? Were they...?

PAUL THIRY: Well they were what I'd call stylistic, as Alban Shay, a man I had been in partner with at one time would say, "They were traditional." (laughs)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Okay. Historicizing, then. This trip abroad then was really quite a watershed for you?

PAUL THIRY: Oh yes, and then I had opportunities too to meet architects and different people with different viewpoints and attitudes, and so it was really a great occasion as far as I was concerned. And of course being away for the better part of a year, and traveling all around the world, at that time was something unique, you know. Nowadays, practically everyone has been around the world, you know, so-speaking. But at that time, why going around the world (chuckles), visiting all the places that I've been and meeting the people that I had met, this was newsworthy and of course this was all over newspapers and of course I had no more arrived than a number of architects wanted me to go into partners with them. Also I had clients that just kind of came up out of the ground. Alban Shay offered me an opportunity to be a partner with him, and he would take care of all the business and the contracts and that sort of thing.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: That was 1935? When you came back?

PAUL THIRY: Um hmm. And then also he would let me be the architect as far as design and everything went.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Had there been any thoughts in your mind of going someplace else other than Seattle? Would you have liked to have been able to go elsewhere?

PAUL THIRY: Umm, not really.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: How did you view Seattle at the time? As a land of opportunity, unfettered by tradition? Or was it provincial...?

PAUL THIRY: Well, there really wasn't anyplace that was any different philosophically, you know.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: What about New York or San Francisco, though, as an arena for an architect?

PAUL THIRY: Well, you have to consider, number one, I'd been away for a long time, and I'd been alone. I'd gone off into faraway places and so you get just a little bit homesick. And then you're continually encountering strangers, and while you learn a great deal and you exchange viewpoints and so on, why still, you know, they're strangers, and they don't know anything about you and you don't know anything about them. So you take everything at face value. And then too, you've come to a place like New York, and it's big and you have to really live in some kind of boarding house, or you have to go out into the suburbs to work in the city. At that time, Washington, D.C., occurred to me that way, though I had a chance to stay there and work for the government in housing, but, I don't know, I had a good practice in Seattle, and so there was every reason why I should go back, you see. And I don't regret the fact that I have, despite the fact that I think I probably could have opened an office in Washington, D.C., and done it with a reasonable amount of success, you know, because I had good patronage in Washington.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Did you know John Graham [Seattle architect--Ed.] at the time?

PAUL THIRY: Oh yes.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And you knew of their firm opening up an office in New York, in the late thirties?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I knew particularly that old John Graham had opened an office in Shanghai [John Graham, Sr., was founder of the firm; his son, John Graham, is now head of the company--Ed.]. And this renews another aspect of Shanghai. He had taken into partnership an engineer...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: William Painter.

PAUL THIRY: Bill Painter. And so when I was in Shanghai, why...

[Tape 2; side 2]

PAUL THIRY: While I was in Shanghai, I met Painter, and he had been in the Navy and he been in, oh, what do you call it, raising old ships and things of this kind? Salvage. And then he had been there with Graham, and Graham had passed away, and so he had kind of established an office, engineering, and he's big... At the time, there was not too much in the way of ethics, either in Japan-- or in China, you know, it was kind of every man for himself. And so he opened up an office, really as a contractor. He would get the plans, let's say for a chemical plant that was to be built and he would analyze the plan and then he would propose a price to construct, and then also he would parallel [prepare--Ed.] a plan of his own, which showed that he could do it this way cheaper, you see. And so he was getting quite a bit of business by giving them a better and cheaper way of doing things. (laughs)

And he had developed a fairly good practice. And so one day he called me and said he wanted to talk to me and he wanted to go and visit a new building that was just finished in Shanghai and so we went up and the partitions were not in, so we looked at the bare floor of the building, and he said he was going to rent some space and he wanted me to be his architectural designer, you know. (laughs) So I said, "Well, where are the jobs?" I mean he didn't have any jobs yet, but he was going to get them, and I didn't even think that that was likely for a while. But strangely enough, sometime after I left he did fill the whole thing. (laughs) And he did do quite a thriving business. But when you mentioned Graham that recalled that. At one time when I first got out of the university, I worked in Graham's office, when I came back from Fontainebleau for a while, and I used to do a lot of the perspectives for buildings. I remember the physics building at the university, I did.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, they were doing commercial work downtown [Seattle--Ed.] at the time, weren't they, late twenties?

PAUL THIRY: Yes. I did that, and... But to get back to why I came back to Seattle, I guess that was the easy way to do things. As it turned out, why I wasn't home two weeks and I had more work than I could handle. And then I had Shay to take care of the mundane part of the practice and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Now what kind of work was this?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I came back embued with new ways to do things and Shay was willing and really didn't, frankly, care one way or the other, you know. In fact, when he encountered a new plan he would sometimes say, "Do you want traditional or modern mystic?," which always kind of griped me. (chuckles)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well when you say that [you were--Ed.] embued with these new ways, can you elaborate?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I mean flexible planning and windows and environmental considerations of siting, of climate, of view, you know. Things of this kind, which were not considered, really, in the buildings that were being built at the time.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: The principles, then you would say, of the modern movement?

PAUL THIRY: Oh yes, far out at that time. I don't compare myself to some of the people I've been talking about, but you might say as the next generation, why I did things of that type and variety [International Style--Ed.] almost exclusively. And I did this because I felt that you couldn't really plan in a flexible way and still confront styles of roofing, bay windows and all this sort of thing [that--Ed.] didn't fit in with walls of glass and... And so I would say it was modern as any architect was doing at the time, including the ones that I had more or less learned from, you know.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, the house that you built for yourself and mother over in Madison Park? That was one of the first that you did when you came back, is that right?

PAUL THIRY: Well, yes it was; it was...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: 1937.

PAUL THIRY: '36, '37. I did that, in fact at that time I did four or five houses all in similar appearance and style.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: So it was at that point really that you embraced the International Style, the modern...?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I was subject to a lot of ha-ha-ing and criticism and most of the architects, you know, seemed to enjoy criticizing and so on. Because I seemed to enjoy criticizing also. (laughs) So as far as Seattle goes, you know, I was the second coming of the Lord! (laughs)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: On what grounds were you criticized?

PAUL THIRY: Well, number one that, you know, glass and all of these ideas were not comfortable and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: When you say glass, you mean broad expanses of glass, like what? That other architects saw as nonpractical?

PAUL THIRY: Yeah, they were not practical and then too, it's just the idea that a different way of thinking, really, all by itself was a criticism of what they did. And at the time too, I was invited to speak quite often. I remember one time I was invited to speak at the Women's University Club and Mr. Gould was kind of the toastmaster. And so I spoke of flexible spaces, of the practicalities of flat roofs, of overhangs, and letting the sun in, and keeping the sun out, and building to accomodate the breeze in the summertime, and to discourage the wind in the winter, and to keep out of the rain. And then I got into subjects like building reflecting surfaces, and the dark inner parts of houses, and of sliding screens and shojis, and you know, it really denounced the American home, the idea.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: The traditional homey home.

PAUL THIRY: That's right.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Particularly the flat roof.

PAUL THIRY: And then of course, a lot of people just loved it, and then other people didn't take to it, you know. They thought I just came over from some socialist society or something. But I had my claque, you see, and I enjoyed a small, a minimum, you might say, of the potential clients. But the ones that I had were my clients.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Devoted.

PAUL THIRY: You know, they were my type of people. (laughs) And they were receptive, you see. And they wanted it, "Give me that!" And so that made it good. So everything I did more or less was after that manner. And that has more or less followed me, all my life since then. But oh, at the time, this was all new and strange to a lot of people-- particularly students and far-out society, and so I...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Were there other people practicing modern-movement...?

PAUL THIRY: Not at that time around here, no.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: You were alone. What about [Pietro--Ed.] Belluschi down in Portland?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, he didn't in my mind really go as far as I did with total change, you know. And then he worked with [John--Ed.] Yeon, whereas I worked for myself, you know. Even with Shay, [he--Ed.] never interfered with me; he took it as it came, good and bad. Belluschi was mixed up in an office-- [Albert--Ed.] Doyle's office-- and he did modern work... I just mean it wasn't the same as I was doing, you see. Belluschi, of course, was an older man than I was, and he had a more mature background, and I think he did more conservative... Well, like the Portland Art Museum, some of those things were strictly you might say modern but they weren't the kind of thing that I did. I suppose mine was more what they call International Style, but I didn't mean it to be; I just felt that way.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: How did you justify the flat roofs?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I justified it because I could turn corners and go around. I could do every damn thing I wanted to in plan, and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And you were sure they didn't leak.

PAUL THIRY: Oh no, I wasn't, you see. But the flat roof gave planning flexibility. You could go off in strange manners with a flat roof, or you could just continue and have a porch, and you could have an atrium, and you didn't have to worry about ridges and valleys and all that sort of thing. And of course I learned, as a lot of people learned, that if you don't take care of the runoff, the water, you're going to develop leaks; the quality of the roof, that is, as a function of preparation, had a good deal to do too with the weatherability. I think one of the bad things about flat roofs is people don't use good judgment as to where they use them, either on the building itself or on the siting of the building. I mean for instance, if the street is above the house, and you're looking down on a flat roof, there's water pockets and all kinds of vent pipes and stacks sticking out of it and everything; I don't care how well designed the building is, it isn't going to look good. And those are things that you have to learn.

And then you have to go to the practical aspects of design, and think there are a lot of so-called modern buildings that have gone off the path, [in] that they don't really respect the reasons for change. They just take it as a style and they design indiscriminately, you might say-- the weather, the sunlight, or even moonlight. I always, when I design a building-- You take this room that I designed outside of our house here. I thought of the moon and the shadows it would make. You think of grey days, you think of rain, you know, as an atmosphere. You have to think of shadows different objects cast-- the leaves, the branches of the trees, and all of these things have to be thought of. And if you design a room with the full consideration for all of the aspects of environment, why you don't really design one room, you design a thousand rooms within a single room. You see?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PAUL THIRY: And this is really the background of the change in architecture that I entertain. I don't do it as a style; I do it for what the so-called style accomplishes. And I think in recent years, whether it's a commercial building or a church or anything else, if you're perceptive to change and to incidental things that happen in buildings and that just come and disappear again, why you'll understand what I'm talking about.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Can you take a moment to describe what your firm was like at this time? It was small. How was it organized? Who was involved?

PAUL THIRY: Well, when I first came back from my trip around the world, as I say went into partnership with Alban Shay. We had a few draftsmen, one or two, and Shay took care of, you might say, the general outside work, and business, and contracts and that sort of thing, and I used to draw and make perspectives and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: You did the designing then?

PAUL THIRY: ...and meet with the clients and that sort of thing. And then we'd have maybe one or two people to help us and so this kind of grew in numbers, and as time went on, I of course was called on to do more lecturing and writing and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: But it still remained a small firm then?

PAUL THIRY: Oh yes. And then of course, we did some worthwhile work, but we didn't do the monster category.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Were you ever tempted to join a larger firm?

PAUL THIRY: No, as a matter of fact, the main reason I joined with Shay was he was willing to do some of the things that I didn't particularly like to do. I did them previously, but I didn't necessarily like writing specs and that sort of thing. And so he served his part and we were a good team, except that he wasn't very intense. I was uptight, if you know what I mean. And so we were together until about 1939, I think, or else '40, and then we decided to kind of part company.

I gave a talk at the Athletic Club, and it was well attended, and of course I went into great depths of modern thought and so on, and most of the ladies that attended the lecture were really distraught. (laughs) I mean with some of my ideas, maybe [about--Ed.] living Japanese style, with uniform garments, uniform tatami, uniform this, and storage, and sit on the floor, and maybe just on a bench. Then I got into all these environmental things, and of course they didn't understand all that. And so there was a lot of hubbub, and Shay's wife was the butt of a lot of it, and he was kind of upset.

And then also there didn't seem to be the advantage [to the partnership--Ed.] because I just kind of felt like I had to go my own way, you know, and so about that time I did go my own way. (chuckles) It wasn't too long after that that the war came on, but even before the war, why things were rather difficult. Anyway, we parted company on good terms, and friends.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Was most of your work at that point still residential and church?

PAUL THIRY: Mostly. Oh we did other kinds of work, but that was the mainstay. And then I opened up my office on my own and times were a little difficult but I had sufficient work to keep things together. By this time, we'd had an awful lot of work published and so my name was becoming known all over the country. I had a lot of communication and invitations to talk and I don't know whatnot, and so the time was right, you might say. But times began to tighten up, and one day I was at home-- this was of course quite a while after I had built my house-- and I had a call from a government [man who] asked me, "You're interested in housing?" And I said, "Yes." And in fact I had done a lot of talking about housing because it was in the air at the time, public housing.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Now what year was this?

PAUL THIRY: About 1939, '38.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Uh huh, so you were still with Shay?

PAUL THIRY: Still with Shay, but after I parted with Shay this man had called, you see. And he asked me if I wanted to go into a collaboration or joint venture with John Paul Jones and Fred Olson in designing a housing development. I was delighted to do it at the time, because John Paul Jones had inherited the Bevin-Gould office, and Fred Olson was a friend of mine that I'd gone to school at Fontainebleau with, and he was a Paris prize winner at the time, and had come to Seattle to work for Graham. And then at that time he had left Graham. And so I said yes.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Was this right on the eve of the war? Excuse me, this was wartime housing, essentially?

PAUL THIRY: Well, it was what they called houses for the workers; but before we really got into it, why it was war housing. The first job we had was Holly Park [located in South Seattle--Ed.], and we had really quite a beautiful design for it. That was site planning and I did the designing and building design, and John Paul took care of the business, you know. And business at that time was important because we were talking money, you know, large sums of money.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Before we go on much further I want to ask about the late thirties, just to pick up on a question that remains unanswered at that point. You were working on churches and houses in the late thirties?

PAUL THIRY: Um hmm.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: It's interesting that Pietro Belluschi, down in Portland, was doing much the same sort of thing. Were you aware of what was going on down in Portland? How much contact was there? And did you know Belluschi?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, well, yeah, certainly I knew Belluschi by name but I don't...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: There wasn't a lot of close contact, hmm?

PAUL THIRY: ...the first time I really became acquainted with him was at an AIA [American Institute of Architects--Ed.] convention. I just don't remember the year, but it was early in the game. I admired Belluschi then; I don't know, he just appealed to me as being a diligent architect and not afraid to work, you know. In fact I visited him one time in Portland. It was Saturday. I went into his office and he was all alone in there and he was working! (laughs)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: It doesn't surprise me.

PAUL THIRY: That impressed me, because that was more the way I operated, you know. I worked all the time. I liked to work. And I liked to design and do things. And so I worked nights; I worked Saturdays, Sundays, holidays, whenever I wanted, not all the time naturally. But I'm not afraid to.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well that's very interesting; your two careers were paralleling each other so closely at this time-- both involved in housing and churches, and then too, with the onset of war, in war-related projects. But your contacts with the Portland architects were not close at that time. Is that right?

PAUL THIRY: No, not particularly.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Okay, well do you want to go on with Holly Park then? What you were saying about Holly Park and the housing...?

PAUL THIRY: Yes, well the first job we had, as I stated, was Holly Park. Jones, Olson, and Thiry was the name of the firm. And then we did several other jobs, like we did most of the public housing in Renton, and in one project we were teamed with George Stoddard. But...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Now these were houses of mostly wood?

PAUL THIRY: Yeah.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And with simple pitched roofs?

PAUL THIRY: Yeah, in fact we just had one-way roofs on a lot of them.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Oh, a shed roof, ah hah.

PAUL THIRY: And of course early in the game, we'd started out with the idea of houses for workers, with the idea that these would be more or less permanent. And so we had central heating plants and all that sort of thing. But as we got into it, why it became evident that the government didn't want to plan permanent housing as such, for the simple reason that it wasn't an attractive idea socially, and then on top of that, they didn't want to spend the money. And so before we issued the drawings, well, we found that central heating was out, and we had coal stoves and they had to have a place for coal, and all that so...

[Break in taping]

PAUL THIRY: Well, all of this change in the cost ratio and in the use of the housing cut down on the quality of the product, and so a lot of things were designed as a temporary measure. Also I seemed to be the only one that considered that these projects should be maintained for the long use. And I kept arguing that the sidewalks and the streets should be paved and that they should have curbs and the things that would provide houses for poor people after the war. To a large extent, I was successful, except that we still designed, you know, for a temporary purpose. I think Yesler Terrace [by Aitken, Bain, Jacobsen, Holmes, & Stoddard; Butler Sturtevant, landscape archictect--Meredith Clausen] was really the only project around here that was built and designed as a permanent residence. In fact, even on some of the projects that we did, we built them in masonry and so on, but they were all designed as houses for the workers. (laughs)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: [Still in] masonry. That's very interesting.

PAUL THIRY: And that's too bad, because there were a lot of refinements that could have been added had the thing been basically planned to accomodate the long-run use. And of course they are used as housing, you might say, for, if not the poor, at least the people that are somewhat dependent.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Did this experience in war-time housing have any lasting impact on your approach to architectural design, and particularly your residential work?

PAUL THIRY: Well, it did to the extent that we encountered all kinds of attitudes and ethnic groups and I don't know whatnot, and so you couldn't help but learn a little here and there about attitudes and what really was required for physical comfort and how people treated things, too, which was important. We had to design against rough usage as well as gentle people, you know. (chuckles) They imported a lot of people that actually

had never seen an electric stove except in a store window, you know. So there [were] a lot of things that were interesting.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, now I'm curious. The Architectural Forum, in an article in the Forum of 1945, described a house that you designed outside of Olympia as having a "certain rigid formality"-- the design was 1939-- and they said that its "rigid formality bore little relation to the romantic quality of the natural surroundings." Now, I'm wondering, were you still working in the International Style in your other domestic work at this time? And at what point did that approach begin to soften under the demand for more regionalist approach?

PAUL THIRY: It was a house I did for Sy Nash. He was in the wholesale plumbing business and as I remember, if he wasn't all Russian, at least he was partly Russian, a medium-sized gentleman. He had a five-year plan, and he owned this beach property out on the point there outside of Olympia-- this was prior to the war. George Nakashima worked for me and with me, and he built the central circular stairway out of oak and prefabricated the thing and brought it there and set it in place. And that house was strictly, you might say, International, you know, in appearance. But it was by itself and it was on the beach. It wasn't really in a wooded setting because it was in a beach setting, and if there were any wooded areas at all, it was across the country road that was over beyond it. But the house was all glass, similar to what we have here, and it looked out onto the water.

[Tape 3; side 1]

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Okay, you were describing the house on the beach. My question really was, at what point did your work start moving away from that orthodox International Style, if you will, towards a more gentle regional approach? And was this under pressure from clients? Or was this your own initiative?

PAUL THIRY: Well, no. You see, there had always been this argument about regional architecture, and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: When did that argument...?

PAUL THIRY: Oh this developed, you know, a long time ago.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: What, in the thirties?

PAUL THIRY: Hmm? Oh, yeah. I maintained that there was a regional architecture and that even some of the so-called traditional buildings that Ellsworth Storey designed and some of the others, they had a certain regional characteristic. In other words, even if they were of a Swiss derivation, or a mountain derivation, German and so on, they were peculiar to this part of the country anyway. You know, they had [beams _____], roofs and gables and this sort of thing and they were built of wood. And then too, even the work that I was doing, and of other architects that I worked with had certain local characteristics, and the reason that it hadn't been more recognized is that our work had been copied all over. It's just, you know...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: I want to find out more about this. This was somewhat later, wasn't it? Or was this early, when are we talking of?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, this thing started years ago. (chuckles)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Uh huh, but was it forties?

PAUL THIRY: As long as I can remember.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Oh, still earlier. But in the thirties your work was mostly rigorous international, wasn't it? Or the [white?-- I won't use that term-- modernist. At what point was it that you began to embrace...

PAUL THIRY: Well, I did things in two different ways. Let's put it that way. And of course now, we're talking about houses. Sometimes people would come and they, oh, they had a certain amount of nostalgic attitude about a home, you see. They didn't really want to be educated on a better way to live, but they still were somewhat, oh, impressed with the idea of environment, and view, and a lot of the things where we departed from the past, you know. And at the same time, why, they kind of liked what they had, you know. (laughs) So I've always respected the other person's opinion, especially if he's paying me a fee to please him, and if I didn't want to do that, then I should tell him I didn't want his work. But if they came to me, and in the first place that showed a certain amount of acceptance of ideas, then I thought that I was under obligation also to accept some of their ideas.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, at time, were you doing work that was essentially what we today might call regionalist work in addition to, paralleling, your International or your modernist work?

PAUL THIRY: I couldn't tell you just off-hand without checking back. But on occasion I did. Like cedar siding and cedar shingle roof, and this was all on top of what I would call a flexible plan, and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And that work predated the war? The use of cedar?

PAUL THIRY: Yeah, I did some predating the war. In fact, the work that I did before I went to Japan was practically all, not necessarily as extreme as what I've just said, but it was of that type. I did quite a few houses around Broadmoor [exclusive Seattle housing development--Ed.] and different places that kind of leaned on the more traditional aspects of architecture. I didn't really have the full comprehension of the possibilities of change until after I went to Japan.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, the residential work of the thirties that is most celebrated or most often quoted are the International Style houses.

PAUL THIRY: Yeah, pretty much all of that style. You know there's one thing about ideas, and the other one was function. And of course the idea was that everything should be functional, but then as you do things, why you run into problems. Hmm?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Uh hmm.

PAUL THIRY: And so if you [have--Ed.] a problem then you're not exactly functional. And I've always been kind of gung-ho on the idea of being functional.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: But didn't that sometimes conflict with a certain aesthetic need?

PAUL THIRY: Well, no, I never really designed strictly on aesthetic principle. I always kind of grew from the plan, you know. I always considered the plan the important thing because after all it's the plan that fits the site.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: [Form generated by plan--Meredith Clausen] That's a Beaux Arts approach, isn't it?

PAUL THIRY: Well, it's a functional approach also. And then the vertical interpretation, of course, is anybody's guess. Many plans, not every plan, but most plans, you can project vertically in a number of different ways. And so then it's a matter of whether you do it in so-called International, or whether you do it with a certain flavor of the woods, or whether you do a rockpile, or you know. (laughs) Or you work in ceramics, or in stucco. There's so many ways to do things and if you can only do it one way, why then you're kind of in a rut. And then also there's really no great pleasure in always [solving--Ed.] the problem the same way. So you have to be kind of open for different solutions to a given problem. And so people that have a style and adhere to it, you know, religiously, and really are not open to ideas...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, at that point then, in designing a residential building, one had the opportunity to work in at least three different styles. One would be the historicist, or traditionalist; two would be International Style, or modern movement; and three would be regionalist. Is that right?

PAUL THIRY: Um hmm, that's right.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And was this all very deliberate, self-conscious; you knew that you had essentially those three choices?

PAUL THIRY: Well, let's get back to Nash House, for instance. If you're going to name the style, this was probably as modern as anyone has gone-- I'm speaking visually. That house to me fits the seacoast.

I mean after all, what is indigenous with the water? There's an old sea galley, and there's a modern steamship. There is a house that compares with a boat, you know. Is that compatible? Or is a wood house compatible? And is a concrete building? And here's a rock building. What is compatible? I mean, you might have a rocky beach and so you build a rock house. Well then, you have to ask yourself the question, is this a practical way to build a house-- I mean of rock-- and that sort of thing. The answer of course is, it's not. It's not a practical way, it's a kind of nostalgic way.

So I say that the Nash House fits the setting and it's built outside of Olympia on the bay, and consequently I think it belongs there. Just because people have built houses other ways doesn't mean that that house doesn't belong there. Because it does! But it's endemic, you might say. (chuckles) And so, now you could build a number of different ways and accomplish the purpose of building the house, but I don't think that you could build one that accomodates itself to the program of Nash's way of living and to the beach itself. We employed certain handcrafts in there, like the stairway I told you George Nakashima made the whole thing by hand and fitted it all together. And right after that, why of course they took him off to one of these Japanese camps.

But the changeover really wasn't a changeover. I did houses in the so-called modern vernacular at the same time as I did houses in what you term regional style. If a person came in and they wanted something that reminded them of home, the way they were brought up, but they still were tuned in to the environmental process, why then we designed the house that way. We used wood, or we used brick, and things that are made

locally, and then also we put a roof on, and applied shingles or tile, and so this kind of house you might say was regional. But this didn't divorce me from what I had previously done or was doing at the time.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: It sounds sort of gradual, not so much a shift, but one that...

PAUL THIRY: Well, you see, before I went to Japan I designed, you know, more or less in, oh, there was a little of new forms injected into buildings, but for the most part they were recognizable [i.e., traditional--Meredith Clausen]-- let's hope a little better designed houses, you know. And then...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, at what point did...

PAUL THIRY: ...when I got back into it, why then I reverted to that [new style--Meredith Clausen], along with the ideas that I employed in the new viewpoint, you see. But none of those houses that I did after I came back from Japan had anything to do with a style. They were strictly the way I did it. And without bragging, it was picked up by a lot of architects and it became after a while hard for me to recognize my own work. And of course it's hard for other people that you might say kind of were influenced to admit it, and especially to the client. It could be the architect himself. (laughs)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Ah hah. When you say your "look" or this new approach, this was the flat-roofed and essentially unarticulated white walled architecture?

PAUL THIRY: Yes. Well, at first, yes.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And the free plan?

PAUL THIRY: I did things in, well, some in wood, but for the most part houses were painted white and they were stuccoed.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: These were wood-framed, but stuccoed?

PAUL THIRY: Um hmm.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Rarely concrete. Is that right?

PAUL THIRY: Well you know, just from a cost standpoint. But of course I didn't just do houses. I did a lot of other things besides. And when I was able to employ the true modern construction techniques, why then of course this delved-- just like Raymond's work-- into a realism of a new architecture. Whereas if you dealt in traditional structure, why then you were only [expressing] you might say sort of a faith in the idea of something new.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm. The question that I wanted to ask when you were talking about your early work or those early [International Style--Meredith Clausen] houses was the use of color. They were primarily white, is that right?

PAUL THIRY: Um hmm.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: But they did have spots of color, certain areas of color. How was color used?

PAUL THIRY: Well, sometimes, you know, to highlight a wall or to accentuate a part, why you'd change the color to yellow or red.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: This is on the exterior, hmm?

PAUL THIRY: Well both exterior and interior. Of course a lot of houses that were done then are getting along in years and-- some of [the] houses you're talking about-- new people have moved in.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, let's go back...

PAUL THIRY: For instance the house that I designed for myself, I had the downstairs more or less for myself. Up to that time, I had made up my mind that I would never attach myself to worldly goods, and that anything that I had or any house that I'd built, when the time came for me to depart, why I would have no belongings to remain. In other words, I was willing to leave this earth unencumbered, both practically and mentally. And so I designed this house of mine on a hillside, and I built it on stilts. I had the thing arranged so that my mother kind of had her quarters, and then I had a little, you might say, atelier of my own. You could drive the car underneath, and then I had an entrance down below, so that people didn't walk right into your house. They walked into your house, but not into your living quarters, you see. And so I took it-- in fact it's the only time I ever borrowed money-- I took it to the bank, you know, to get some mortgage money. And they, they just didn't [approve it--Meredith Clausen], this was too new. (laughs) And too goofy.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: They had to approve your designs before granting you the money, is that right?

PAUL THIRY: Well, yeah, I mean after all, they were investing in the house. (laughs) So they said no, that they were willing to go my way to an extent, but not to the extent that was indicated here. So anyway, I was kind of upset about it, but I redesigned and we ended up with what I built. And of course I got the money for that, which was kind of a restraint, you know.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Do you have the original drawings still?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, I don't know what happened to them, but I imagine. And so this way, anyway, I more or less had my quarters below and my mother above. And of course, we joined household[s] in winter and company and that sort of thing, but after we sold it, why [other] people lived in it and they made some changes. And I think now they've turned it into a duplex. And they enter upstairs and downstairs, and so then...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: It's been painted too.

PAUL THIRY: You know, things change over a period of time, and it's rare when any building that you do can withstand that. People have to be constantly sympathetic with things. And of course times change and attitudes are different now. I don't [think] the present attitude towards building is very healthy. It's kind of a disaster, as far as I'm concerned.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Can you elaborate?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I think restoring buildings of no value, for one thing. And then a lot of the younger architects are injecting some of this old bad architecture into new architecture.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: You mean the recycling process?

PAUL THIRY: Yeah, that's right, and so [by--Ed.] the time you get done with it, why you've got a cacophony here that's neither fish nor fowl. It represents an era, but it's not a history-making era as far as I'm concerned. It's deplorable, as old man Gould used to refer to the buildings on First Avenue.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm. Well would you agree that some of these older historical buildings ought to be preserved? And if so, how would you use them?

PAUL THIRY: I think, as I have stated before, that where they're historically important-- not architecturally-- but historically you see, politically, like Pioneer Square, which was the hub of the city. And it was reminiscent of the old colonial towns, when they had a square. It's reminiscent of the European towns where they had a square, and the town was built around the square-- a small town; if it was a big town it had more squares. So this represented the construction attitude of the 1890's until, let's say, the 1910's you see. And so to me, it [Pioneer Square, Seattle--Ed.] should have been restored. Now you have to face it that they were structurally bad, poorly done, and where the masonry on the outside, most of them were wood joists and steel beams on the inside. And most of them were deficient in fire safety, stairways, and ingress and egress. They are deficient in lighting, because the electrical... So the insides, you might say, were completely deficient, and for the most part the outsides were deficient. And historically the, the, they're not reminiscent in whole of anything in the past, but they were kind of a conglomeration of, oh, various styles. They didn't represent an office building; they didn't represent anything, because no two floors have the same kind of windows, and they were not modular. They were not adaptable to new usage. They're not flexible, you see. But, they were built. And they surrounded Pioneer Square. And I thought that historically they represented the old city, the taste of the time. There's more in a building than quality of design; there's also representation of taste, of ways of living.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: They express the time.

PAUL THIRY: And even of locomotion, you see. And so I believe they should have been kept. For the most [part they--Ed.] have either been reduced in height-- one of them was fallen down and then removed, and another one was taken down all together and turned into a parking lot. And so now they're trying to restore them, you see. But I don't think the restoration job's very good, because they're not restored to the way they were, you see. They still have these holes that eliminate the continuity. But in going through this process of trying to keep these buildings in the district, why some of the architects have become charmed with some of the ornament and with some of the ironwork, with some of the materials, and some of the details. Somehow or another, why they want to grasp that and put it into the [new--Meredith Clausen] buildings that have to have an affinity with these old buildings, you see. And they just can't do it.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Yeah, that makes it difficult. The Watermark Towers, for example...

PAUL THIRY: Can't do it, and I've written numerous articles on the subject of mixing new and old. Now, you can

design, as they have in Paris, compatible with old buildings without copying them, you see. This is really what I believe in. But I don't believe in trying to build a building that in your mind lives with what's there. What I'm saying is you shouldn't take away from what's there if you're going to build; my viewpoint is that they never should have allowed what's happened to happen. Consequently, they have these holes in the fabric, and so now they have to replace and fill the holes, and in doing it, why I don't think they're doing it very well.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, I think this question of the design relationships between old and new will come up again when we start talking about the work down in Olympia and also of course in Washington, D.C. But before we get into that, there are a couple other questions that I'd like to ask about regionalism, if that's okay to go back to that. Because I think that regionalism was particularly important in the forties and fifties, and there are a lot of still unanswered but important questions I think to ask about it. Particularly regionalism here in the Pacific Northwest. For example, how influential was Aalto's work at the time?

PAUL THIRY: You mean regionally?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: In regionalism.

PAUL THIRY: Oh, I don't know. Of course, I'm not the great admirer of Aalto as some people are. But I don't think it has anything to do with our regionalism.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: What about Japanese architecture?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I think Japanese architecture did, yes. But I really think that actually the medieval architecture of Germany and Switzerland and Normandy and buildings of that kind really set the pace, you might say, for the residential styles of this part of the world.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Ah hah.

PAUL THIRY: And this was at the time when Storey and this...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: [Kirtland--Ed.] Cutter.

PAUL THIRY: ...Kirtland Cutter, and people of that kind were doing things. And [Joseph--Ed.] Coate... Well, Coate was more classic, but...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: But essentially these were historical styles that were introduced here because of the natural affinity [to the region--Meredith Clausen], is that right?

PAUL THIRY: That's right, but they also were, you might say, somewhat indigenous, because the material problem was the same. I mean they're built of wood; they had a certain amount of stucco. But primarily the style itself kind of predominated and so it was natural to build in that manner, and for a while it wasn't regional in the sense that everything was that way. It set the certain regional pattern, but there are other things that created what I term regionalism in this part of the world. I think Belluschi touched on one thing, and this was the barn. See, these buildings were wood. For the most part they had appendages of smaller buildings.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: This raises a very good question-- whether that affinity that we can now see between, say, the Swiss chalet, which has the simple pitched roof and your overhangs, and the native or indigenous barn-- whether that was an affinity that was recognized after the fact or were the so-called regionalists [deliberately]...?

PAUL THIRY: No, we never had regionalists, as such, and including myself. I think it's like chewing, you know; you don't think about chewing when you chew your food; you're more interested in the food. And you design buildings after sort of a fashion without necessarily saying I'm doing a regional building. See what I mean?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PAUL THIRY: And so a lot of this way of doing things, or this habit, this way of everybody's thinking, why you create something, and you create something unique. And so when you start to rationalize something and you call it regionalism, well then you begin to think of everything that's being done- or has been done. So then you do like Belluschi did; he was going through the fields and here was a beautiful barn, you see, pitched roof, with all these little added buildings, it's weathered, and it's of the earth, it's beautiful, you see. It's indigenous; it was built by a farmer that had a function. He didn't design a building to be beautiful; he just put the damn things up to be practical. But he did it simply, and see this is the essence of my thinking of simplicity. You see those things and so they influence you. And you see a shape and, gee, I like that, and then when you're designing a building or a house or anything you, somehow or another you don't remember that, but it's unconsciously on your pencil.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: What about the indigenous Indian art?

PAUL THIRY: Some people know Indian art and some don't, you see. Most don't. I happen to know it because for many years I've been tremendously interested in the indigenous art of the country and of the Indian, particularly, and the Eskimo. As a matter of fact, I don't know if you've seen the book that we [he and his wife Mary--Ed.] did on Eskimo artifacts. [Eskimo Artifacts, Seattle, 1978--Ed.] I got into structures of longhouses and into the representation of clan by totem designs and decorative arts and all of that sort of thing.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Now, when was your interest in this...?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, this started years ago, part of it because I was born in Nome, and I remembered some of the Eskimo things, and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Was it post-war that you started collecting?

PAUL THIRY: Yeah, actually I became vitally interested when I designed the Museum of History and Industry.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: So, 1950.

PAUL THIRY: I did the first part of the building. And they discharged the director that they had hired-- for reasons of their own-- and there was no one to open the building, you see. And so I volunteered to open the building and to put in the displays. And in so doing, why I went through, with my office crew. We catalogued the whole collection, and then we put on the exhibition and in doing it, why I ran across all of these Eskimo artifacts and Northwest Indian masks...

[Tape 3; side 2]

PAUL THIRY: Well, in going through the various cases and artifacts, why I was kind of taken with a harpoon head. It appeared like the beak of a crane, you know, bird. And of course it was mammoth ivory and beautiful coloring and I thought this is just beautiful, you see. And I brought the piece home and I showed it to my wife and I said, "Just see how beautiful this is." And then about that time I went through a case of points that had been loaned by the Smithsonian, and here was one or two dozen of these pieces of mammoth ivory artifacts. And so not long after that, why we were down at the curiosity shop and Joe James had a whole box full of these pieces and so anyway we started collecting. (chuckles)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Oh, so that's been your interest in Eskimo art, really.

PAUL THIRY: Yeah, well, I had been interested, but I hadn't been interested to the point that I [collected--Ed.]-- Before, I had viewed all of these primitive things as more or less junk, but this was the first time I had come to realize that beyond this point there was great intrinsic value, I mean something that went beyond the primitive. And this was sophistication. And so then we started collecting and being more interested. And then too, we started to take more interest in the way of life and the climatic conditions under which the Northwest Indians lived, and why they had the habits they had and why they did what they did, and their superstitions that were born out of the climate. And so by the time I got into this seriously I became a real follower of the culture. And so I've designed fabrics for the Anton May collection of Northwest Indian, fabrics I did years ago and [were] manufactured, and that really was a success all over the United States. And I've done other things in that way but we've persisted in collecting, and this book, as I mentioned, indicates part of our basic collection of Eskimo [things].

The longhouse itself is structurally interesting, and the way it was used was interesting. And so you take that, with the alpine architecture and with the modern viewpoint, at least my viewpoint, about being consistent with environment, wind, rain and sunshine, and site and location, why you mix the whole thing and you have [what] I would term something that's unique to this part of the world. I wouldn't say that I invented the system because obviously nothing happens in one place, and as you mentioned, Belluschi developed a style of his own along with Yeon and some others. But I think we were all coexistent.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Were you all aware of what each other were doing?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, you're bound to be to some extent, naturally. And of course, Belluschi preceded me and so I wouldn't claim to be the founder of the style, [but] it might be when you go back as far as Ellsworth Storey and some of the cottages he did. And while that little Episcopal church, the Epiphany, is strictly a kind of an English country church, it still has a certain reminiscence of what I'm talking about.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: A number of critics have actually questioned whether there is indeed an identifiable Pacific Northwest regional style. What do you think?

PAUL THIRY: I think if you concentrate on what I'm talking about and look, there is, yes.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm. And how would you identify it? What are its essential characteristics?

PAUL THIRY: Well, principally I would say that what we would call regionalism over a period of years-- you see, not since I returned from Japan, but preceding that-- I would say that there's some feeling of houses for the old world, of the Norman, Germanic cultures. Next, with our local supply of materials and with our contemporary attitude about-- I'm talking about a true contemporary attitude, because a lot of people build the same house no matter where; I'm talking about someone that's tuned to fitting the building to the lot or the situation-- you'll find that the fenestration and the sheltering of the overhanging roofs and all of that is completely unique.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: How? Can you describe the fenestration patterns?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I mean like rows of windows, sliding windows, and rows of doors. I think one person, Roland Terry, certainly has contributed what I call [original] _____; he [is a] very talented architect insofar as that particular class of work is concerned. And he has even gone so far as to use the peeled log for supporting members, and so on. But I would say that if you look for that sort of thing you won't find it anyplace else and that it may go back even so far as the national parks are concerned, where they built these great structures with logs and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Yellowstone Park and people like [Robert C.--Ed.] Reamer.

PAUL THIRY: That's right.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, that raises a new question. How does this compare to the California Bay Area style, for example?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I would say that the Bay style is different in detail, that somehow or another the houses built for California, oh I would say they were more or less influenced by the Victorian attitude, you know.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Can you elaborate on that?

PAUL THIRY: I don't know. There's a certain form of porches and turned wood, and you know. And of course Maybeck and some of those have developed a kind of an architecture which is regional in a sense. Maybe when we speak of regionalism, maybe we're talking about the coast, maybe we're not just talking about the State of Washington or the Northwest, you know. There's a similarity, and still if you're dealing with photographs you probably could pick up the difference or even pick up the designer. But I think you'll find that Greene and Greene and Maybeck and some of those introduced more ornamental wood, carving, you know.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Tends to be simpler up here.

PAUL THIRY: Yes, more direct.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Simpler, and I would have said perhaps more influenced by the Japanese?

PAUL THIRY: That's right. And I think, I think our work is more protected from the weather. Maybeck and the rest of them used to go beyond the roof with outriggers and different things that are subject to rot.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: How influential were those Californians, though-- Greene and Greene for example-- in the developing regional style up here?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, they were in the same category as Storey and Cutter and some of the rest of them. They all lived at the same time and they all came from other places; they were not really native to the country, I mean. But the real, what I call "indigenous" [architecture--Ed.] has more or less come about through their influence, but by more contemporary architects. Do you follow the point?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Sure, indeed I follow the point. Now (and this is an interesting question) there was an editorial in 1953 in the Architectural Record, that said that at that point the Pacific Northwest was exerting a new influence on the development of modern architecture. This was 1953. How true to do you think this is?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I think that's true. More so than anyplace else on the coast. Well, you see, you have to realize that Neutra existed too. And Neutra was doing his thing in California.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: But an entirely different thing, though, wasn't it?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I know, but just the same, he had an influence on the change in thinking. And this so-called regionalism that I'm talking about doesn't represent historic construction by itself, but it represents a new attitude, you see, about environmental design. And so when you get into Neutra's type of new work, why he introduced modernistic or modern theme, and this modern theme was also carried into what we term regional, you see. Except that he did a lot of balconies and flat roofs and things of that kind. There were a lot of things that he did, too, you see, that found their way under a wood roof.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm. Well, but this editorial, in the Architectural Record, spoke specifically of the Pacific Northwest, which would have eliminated that Southern California work.

PAUL THIRY: Well, without trying to put myself up as being the forerunner, why, in a way I broke the ice. And so, in other words...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: With the regionalism or with the International?

PAUL THIRY: Well, with the change. I don't like "regionalism" or "contemporary" or "modern" or anything. All I think of is that life is a progressive thing and some people represent new ideas and change. And I like to think I'm one of those, you know. See. (chuckles)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, you think that's what this editorial, or this editor of the Architectural Record was talking about then?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I think he might have a limited vocabulary.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: He was talking about the influence of the Pacific Northwest on the development of modern architecture.

PAUL THIRY: Yeah, I know but I think he should have said in there: influence and the change in architecture, not modern architecture.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: I see.

PAUL THIRY: I mean, what is modern architecture? You see, what's modern 40 years ago isn't modern right now. You see, really, if you want to speak about something modern let's look at the great building that [Buckminster--Ed.] Fuller did in Montreal.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: The geodesic dome?

PAUL THIRY: This is something; this is creative; it's new. And if you said modern at that time, that is still an understatement for what that man did, you see.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Uh huh.

PAUL THIRY: And so you can't dress buildings with terminology. And right now they're trying to call this Chippendale thing that Philip Johnson is doing in New York, you know, as modern.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Post-modern, isn't it?

PAUL THIRY: Oh come on! Oh God! To even say modern... This, you know, when he could do such a wonderful thing as that house he did for himself, and then turn around and do this Chippendale architecture on a tremendous building [AT&T building, New York--Ed.] which is bound to have a tremendous influence. But this in no way represents what I'm talking about. See, this is style; this isn't change.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And you would say the same about the Graves building in Portland [the Portland Building--Ed.].

PAUL THIRY: Oh, I don't want to talk about that at all.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Okay. Well let me ask one last question on the regional style. The Northwest regional style is said to be on the wane now, usurped-- or so it's been said-- by this new interest or revival in the International Style. Do you think that's true? And if so, that really implies that it is a style rather than...?

PAUL THIRY: No, no, no. You see, what's going on right now is really a strange piece of work. I mean strange architecture. They're using shingles, and clapboards, and siding, and God knows whatnot, along with plastic domes, and, you know, new devices of one kind or another. And then they're throwing the whole thing together into what is called a new idea, new form. And it has no basis for design at all. You can't point to anything that's generally being done as having any particular reason behind it. And so, sure, you reenact, or you continue, you might say, the International Style in certain types of buildings, and this is true. And I think, well, Meier in New York has picked up the International, so-called, and he has [his] own little way of doing things. And to that extent, why they've picked up a style that has become a style through use, just like gothic is a style through use. You could say a man could go back and pick up a gothic and build himself a gothic structure, but that doesn't say that he's doing the right thing. And now, there's more reason to pick up, you might say, the International Style and refine it than there is to depart from it and gookly-gook the whole thing, you see.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, is anybody refining it now?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I don't think anybody's improving on what's been done. And you see the discouraging thing about everything that's happening now is that we're reverting to appearance, and we're reverting to trying to be sensational, to shock, you see. And it's working, but it's working to the detriment of progress.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, haven't architects throughout the centuries always sought to do something different, monumental, eyecatching, and perhaps...

PAUL THIRY: No, I don't think... Oh yeah, there's always been some, but then there are others that have gone through functional and practical uses of materials, construction. You take gothic architecture, for instance, that wasn't styled; that's structural, you know. They wanted to have more light, thinner structure, less material, greater spans, so they end up, you see. And then of course, the embellishment of the frame, that's the style. The functional gothic is the frame, and the visual gothic is what's applied to the necessary.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Couldn't you say that about any building? The Graves building, for example, in Portland is structural and then on top of that you've added, if you will, your...

PAUL THIRY: Yes, but in order to accomplish what he's accomplished, it isn't necessarily a venture in structure, you see. He just built a building, he faced it up the way he wanted to, and then he injected changes of materials and odd shapes, and he ends up with something that's a building. But he hasn't proven anything; he hasn't advanced any[thing].

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: What sort of a lasting impact do you think that building will have on the architectural profession?

PAUL THIRY: I don't give it much. It hasn't made any impression so far, except that it got an honor award. But as I understand-- I didn't go to the convention-- but I understand there was an awful lot of opposition to have him given an award. But they have a claque. There's a group of these young fellows. They have the gift of the gab, and they're well educated, and they're well mannered, and they have a personal appeal, and they pedal a kind of an architectural bushwa that young people just love. And anything that's contrary to what's been done is just great.

What I'm talking [about] is that you have to strain mentally to enjoy yourself: this is delving into the unsolved problems of structure. How to adapt your buildings to practical use, and how to make them flexible for the flexibility of use, and how to make them weatherproof, and how to make them climatically acceptable, see. And at the same time, achieve an art form and a cultural achievement. Well, this isn't within everybody's ability. And it's a rare bird that can produce, and this is what Corbusier attempted to do, an intellectual process, you see, solving problems all the time. It's an advancement. Raymond solved the problems of earthquake structure; and then he takes that solution and makes it beautiful and acceptable, livable.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, I would say on post-modernism, perhaps it's not so much a different set of abilities as a different set of concerns.

PAUL THIRY: It's a different function, different aim, you see. What I'm talking about doesn't interest everyone. You have to realize that in this world that there are leaders, and there are followers, and then there's just a mass of people that just don't give a damn, you see. And it's the same in architecture. If you want to use an example-- this is one thing I like about L'Enfant's plan in Washington-- the Capitol is the important building: this is where laws are made; this is where we're represented; this is where our voice is heard, you see. So it was dictated that that is the important building in Washington; it should superimpose and predominate over everything else. All right? Okay, so everything else then is subject to a minor decision, not necessarily completely minor, but supportive. If you're going to do this important thing, it's gotta be spectacular. See? But if that is good-- and it's wonderful-- that doesn't mean that you have to compete for a supportive structure. Maybe all these supportive buildings have to look at one another and help each other to support this building.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: That sounds to me like a...

PAUL THIRY: Well, it's military, you see.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, or I was going to say a design principle derived from the Beaux Arts method.

PAUL THIRY: Well, that's right, but...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: There they have that hierarchy of less and more [major and minor--Meredith Clausen].

PAUL THIRY: ...but that, that's the basis for everything. You see, even in a democracy you elect a president. He's the important guy. And then you represent and advise the president with a house delegate and the senate,

right? These are important, but the important, as referred to, [is] the top. In an army you have a general, and then you have subordinate officers, and then you finally get down to the soldier that supports the whole system. Hmm? And architecture is exactly the same thing. And being an architect, there's two or three ways to be an architect. There's one whose real pleasure in being an architect is to invent and to create. That's my pleasure. And then also, to preserve what I consider to be good. And hands off: if something has been well planned, then I want to finish that plan. I don't want to be the one to spoil it. If I'm going to participate I'm going to look at that plan and I'm going to help, you know. I'm not going to destroy. See what they're doing now, they're destroying.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, suppose that the function of that plan were obsolete?

PAUL THIRY: It can't be obsolete if it's a good plan.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Suppose the original use had changed.

PAUL THIRY: You don't change, you can't change the usage of a building. Oh, I mean, if it's an office [building], it's an office building.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, no...

PAUL THIRY: Well, now if you want to manufacture steel in that building of course you shouldn't use that building.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, no, I'm thinking of something like these old mansions-- take the Leary House here in Seattle-- these old mansions that no longer have families that are able or have the incomes to support something like that. So you want to put the building to a new use.

PAUL THIRY: Yeah, but the Leary Building isn't a part of a plan.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Oh, okay. So you're using plan in a broad sense, then.

PAUL THIRY: Oh yes. I'm talking about the city plan. I'm talking about the plan of the Capitol, or even some of these industrial parks, or anything, see. But you can't change in the middle of the operation. It's better to complete. You can introduce your own way of doing it, but it has to be a compatible way, you see. This is where we depart right now, and I started out to say, my pleasure in architecture is basically in solving problems. And then I try to do it in a civilized way so that it's not objectionable. Another architect wants to do it because he likes to design and he likes to work with people and he's not too particular, but if they want something some way, why that's okay with him.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm. What about Wright and the Guggenheim, did he handle that, do you think, in a civilized way?

PAUL THIRY: Uh, well, I think Wright did that building on Fifth Avenue and in some respects it was an intrusion, and in other ways it was innovation. I don't really have an opinion about that particular building; I do feel it's an intrusion.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And the Centre Pompidou, in Paris, you'd probably...

PAUL THIRY: Well, that's a different problem. That really isn't a story in architecture. That's a different [thing]; that's a story in movement and it's a people structure. You know the museum was the least of the problem. It's a fun place. It's kind of like going on a ferris wheel. (laughs)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: But you wouldn't want to consider that architecture?

PAUL THIRY: Yeah, it's architecture, but I mean I don't think it's architecture in the sense that the capitol of Utah is, you know. It's a new concept. It's something new, you know, it employs a new technique of escalators and moving sidewalks. And then it separates the museum [as--Ed.] more a storehouse of objects. But it's set in its own setting, and it's surrounded by the old France. Where the buildings around there are being restored and redeveloped, why they've maintained the facades and they've built an entirely new building behind the facade, which makes the whole thing more or less compatible. You see, that museum, Pompidou, is not injected into the facade of the street; it sits by itself and it becomes the central object, just like the Capitol Building. And it's surrounded by the unimportant. But the unimportant has been retained by retaining all the facades and the old France. They don't change one. There's no injection of a change in style in any surrounding at all.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: It's very interesting that you say the Centre Pompidou doesn't necessarily represent a chapter in architecture or, how did you put it, a story in architecture. I wonder in the long run, which will have the greater impact on the development of architecture: the Centre Pompidou or the Graves building in Portland?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, well, Pompidou is an original work, I mean, that's inventive-- not only inventive from the standpoint of handling the people and the pleasure that's entailed in [the] use of the building, but also even in museum design. It's completely flexible; it's just an open space to be filled with exhibits. The building in Portland has nothing to introduce to the world at all. It's just such a strange happening that it attracts attention, and then a lot of students and so on, they gotta imitate, but it's sad to think of any of them approaching that way of going at a problem. No, no, I still think that the way to approach a problem is the way they've approached it from the beginning of time. And that's through invention and through new and improved methods. This probably wouldn't apply to houses as much as it applies to buildings as a general thing, but...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, why don't we stop here and then pick this up tomorrow?

PAUL THIRY: Okay.

[Tape 4; side 1]

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Okay, last time I think we stopped with church design. To return to your work in the thirties and forties, when was it that you first turned to the design of churches?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I started in church design early in my practice. Before I graduated from St. Martin's preparatory school, being in boarding school, why I became rather well acquainted with all of the monks at the college. And it just so happened when I first started, why one of the first jobs I got was a church for the Benedictine monks in Seattle, the Assumption Church, and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And how did you happen to get that commission?

PAUL THIRY: It came through one of the monks, and through one of the priests. I was quite young at the time, especially in the viewpoint of the parishoners, but he persisted. (chuckles) I did a church and then several years after that, well, several months, I might say, why I was commissioned again to design a church down in Shelton. This again was for the Benedictines. And then after that, why I more or less generated a following in church buildings, and so I did quite a number of different ones. I think the one that was most noteworthy from the standpoint of change in church design was Christ the King in Seattle, which was a semicircular design and no person in the congregation in attendance at mass would be more than 50feet from the priest. This was kind of a revolutionary idea, and while it wasn't necessarily original in the total sense, it was original from the standpoint of Americans. And then too, in doing churches, I generated quite an interest, both because of my background, as I said before, of hearing the monks with their chants in the early morning and the night and so on. Then too, I always believed that if you're going to believe in something, why you should believe in the fundamentals. And so I tried to go back into the early Christian church to more or less diagnose its form, and I read a number of books and [writings of--Ed.] one or two clergymen around the country that have persisted through the Liturgical Arts magazine and through its editor. And so the Christ the King really was the outcome of my early findings, which principally meant a restoration of the early church and its form and in the methods of saying the mass and the position of the presbytery, and the basic mass itself and the delegation of the congregation. I became quite interested-- as a matter of fact, Reinholt Publishing Company called me one day and asked me if I would write the Catholic section of a book they termed Churches and Temples, and Richard Bennett was asked to do the Jewish section, and Henry Kamphoefner the Protestant. So we all agreed and each one wrote actually a book in itself and combined the three books into one book, Churches and Temples [published New York, 1953--Ed.]. And I believe that this book had profound influence on not only Catholic clergy but Episcopal and other clergy that maintained the form of the Christian church. And the fault that I found with the modern church is that everything seemed to revert to the local, you might say the vernacular, and not to the old church, in the use of the Latin and the chants and so on. We were beginning to depart not only in the form of the church but also in the rubrics and in the liturgy. So I raised the question in the book and pointed out the early form and the arrangement of the altar where the priest would face the congregation and not have his back to the congregation, and then also the relegation of shrines and all that sort of thing into minor positions and not into major positions in the church, because of the tendency to overglorify side altars and that sort of thing. It was my opinion that these should be subordinated or at least placed in separate chapels; maybe they wouldn't do away with the stations of the cross and all sort of thing, but at least the church would be designed to accomodate that sort of thing. And of course the big obstacle in the modern church is in trying to provide a comfortable setting for parishioners, with carpeted floors and pews and padded pews and this sort of thing. The early church had no pews; consequently there was a flexibility of movement, and the participants of the ceremony could move from one area of the church to the other depending on, for instance, where the sun would come in. Most of those buildings were unheated, so on a cold day if the sun penetrated through the windows, why usually the congregation would move over to the warmer part of building. And so this gave a flexibility and also for pageantry and for processions and so on. People could gather outside and then the procession or the stations and so on could be processed through the church without hindrance, you might say.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: In designing a church, do you tend to think first and foremost of the needs of the individual

or is it the collective body?

PAUL THIRY: No, I think that you have to think of what's happening in the Catholic Church. The mass has a great significance; the reason for people being in the church, other than the fact the church is the house of God, is they're there to participate in a ceremony which supersedes any of their requirements, their...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: So it's the demands of the liturgy as much as anything, that dictates the design of the church.

PAUL THIRY: That's right, yeah. And then too, in the early church why the congregation participated, you might say, in the singing and in a lot of the ceremony itself. And I would say that the greatest change would be to back the altar against the wall and have the priest with his back to the congregation and the installation of pews. Of course, the use of the Latin made the church universal so that a Catholic, for instance, or a Christian, could go to a church anyplace in the world and be familiar with the ceremony. Under the present circumstances, with the vernacular and the use of the language of the country or of the area, why you could go across the border and if you didn't understand Spanish why you would be lost, whereas before, you're entirely familiar with the proceedings right from the very beginning.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well that raises an interesting question about traditional architectural form, or traditional form. A number of the modern churches that were designed in the fifties and sixties sometimes tend to resemble fire stations-- I'm thinking in particular of the one that's right down here on the corner-- which also have tall isolated towers, bell towers. How important would you say it is that the...

PAUL THIRY: Well this is the kind of church that I'm talking about, that is wrong. It's not really a true early church form. The only church in modern society that conforms to the early plan is the Greek Orthodox, because they haven't changed either the ceremony or the design of the church since, oh let's say, the year 700 to 900. And they, in the orthodox church, which really is the Catholic church, had certain standards for design. I mean there were certain proportions: they used a square, and then also the whole liturgy of the Greek Orthodox is the same as it was in the year 700.

So I fostered the idea of the restudy. And then several years after the book came out, we started to get into this ecumenical business, and under Pope John we had a world-wide conference on ecumenical matters. It's been an outgrowth of all of this where they've gone completely the other way, into local ways of doing things and getting into local languages. While some of it followed the precepts of the early church like a process of the mass-- I mean the physical process of the mass reverted back-- but I think the rest of it has all been detrimental.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, how much influence do you think your book had on provoking that or stimulating the interest in church design?

PAUL THIRY: Well, everything that's done in this world is done in a current. It's kind of like a wind and just where you stand in that wind is a little hard to say. But I would say that I was definitely in the wind, you know. And I say that because over all the years, since the ecumenical council, I've spoken [with--Ed.] a great number of different clergymen of different religions and they seem to be familiar with this book despite the fact there are only a few copies printed and it went out of print about two years after it was published. So I can only speak on that course.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Uh huh. I think it was in Churches and Temples that you made the point that you thought church design should be simple, and churches should be designed in a simple straightforward fashion, rather than spectacular. Yet some of our famous and the most memorable churches in the past, Hagia Sophia, St. Peters, Notre Dame de Paris, have been spectacular. Now, do you think that there really is no longer a place for the spectacular in twentieth-century design?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, no, no, no. I think, when I say the thing should be simple, I still mean that, but-- and they can be spectacular from the standpoint of the simple design just by sheer size and design, you know-- the simplicity of art works of murals, of frescoes, of mosaics, and this sort of thing. Santa Sofia is really quite a simple building, a very simple form. It's been embellished over a period of years, historically, but still when you enter that building, it's free of impediments.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, a good measure of it's monumentality then results from its scale, _____?

PAUL THIRY: That's right.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And you would say that monumentality today ought to be generated by the same...?

PAUL THIRY: Yes, the same principles. And of course, the embellishment of any structure depends on its time, its importance in relationship to its, well you might say its management. Santa Sofia has been the seat, you know,

of many hierarchies, and it's been embellished over years, just the same as St. Marco in Venice. Those buildings are enriched, but they're very simple. When you look at St. Marks in Venice, for instance, you're not overcome by the luxurious nature of its art, but you're just kind of emotionally impressed.

And I think that part of it's all right, and of course most of those murals and mosaics in early churches were there for other reasons, too. At that time, the population was relatively illiterate, so things had to be portrayed and also they depended on the spoken word, whereas today, why methods and techniques have changed. That's really, you might say, the excuse for some of this modern art; a lot of it is very bad but they use the technique of impressing people through a different method of portrayal, you know. In other words, it's more soul-searching; you have to see something in the painting or in the sculpture that maybe isn't there at all, except in the eyes of the artist.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well you raised, in Churches and Temples, an interesting question. I think you said, on the design of the church, that the design should not be concerned with styles of architecture or with particular architectural forms. Now doesn't this present a problem in dealing with traditional religious symbols which often take a particular, distinctive architectural form?

PAUL THIRY: Uh-uh. No, you see, for instance, in the church the main thing, of course, is the position of the altar, because the mainstay of the Christian church in the early sense-- Catholic or orthodox, whatever-- depends on two things. It depends on ceremony and it depends on congregation. And this ceremony and this congregation can be set forth in a great variety of ways. So it would depend on the size, or number of people involved, it depends on whether it's a seat of a bishop or a cardinal, and all of these things are relative. And then also with the juxtaposition of shrines and side chapels and this sort of thing, why... I mean side chapels could be even separate buildings, you see, like the early baptisteries were separate. You know the church in Pisa, where the baptistery is itself in a building. So I mean that you can use your imagination within the prescribed formula.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Have you ever run into conflict with a client over the issue of the modern versus the traditional design?

PAUL THIRY: Well, this of course is why I probably have not been doing churches as much in recent years. (chuckles) Because I had some differences with the archibishop on the subject. Unfortunately, I more or less set myself up as somewhat of an authority on liturgy, and I chose the wrong house (laughs) in which to make that impression. But I've changed my ideas about a lot of things since the church itself has changed, for the simple reason that if they can change some of the basic precepts and teachings, why then of course everything is subject to change. If things are subject to change, why then you begin to question, you know. Whereas in the early days, why there was no question-- you either believed or you didn't believe-- but you didn't question. And so if things are true and they're manifest, why you can believe if you want to.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, it seemed to me that the design of the church would present a particular challenge for architects today because of the problem of synthesizing the old and familiar, or traditional, with the new. I'm very curious now. What twentieth-century churches do you admire? Those of Perret, Corbu, Aalto, Wright, Belluschi, Mies...?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I would have to think about that one a little bit before I wanted to express an opinion. The one church that impressed me-- one of the modern churches, of course, was the one that Corbusier did in France.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: The Ronchamp?

PAUL THIRY: Ronchamp, yes. I spent the whole afternoon just standing there and looking at it, because structurally it isn't really all that modern, in a sense, but the whole thing is, I think, quite inspiring. And of course it sits by itself and it's not a part of an adjoining architecture. It just commands its site and the use of play of light and everything I thought was quite wonderful. That doesn't mean that's the only one, but that, to me was creative and inventive and it's philosophical. The whole thing is my idea of a church. That doesn't mean that I want to see a second one.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: It would be hard to duplicate.

PAUL THIRY: But when I say you're not tied to form or anything else, this is a good example of what I was talking about.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: No other twentieth-century church comes immediately to mind, though, an example of one that's really impressed you?

PAUL THIRY: No, because I think most of them are contrived. They're not simple, you know.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: What about Mies' chapel at IIT? The ultimate in simplicity, isn't it?

PAUL THIRY: Well I like his work, and I would like his chapel, but I wouldn't necessarily hold it up as an example. No, I think he's a great architect, but he had one way of doing things and that was his way, and he's known for that way. But I don't think his technique necessarily applies to everything, to every kind of building. Though obviously you can build any kind of building in his way, which is mostly steel and glass.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: You think that approach architecture, the use of steel and glass, the Miesian approach, if I can put it that way, is more successful with some building types than others?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I think in buildings with great scale, I could say that the building that he did in New York, the Seagram Building, along with Phil Johnson, I would say that that is probably the ideal use of his method. And his method allows for unit design, modular design, and flexibility, span, and that sort of thing.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: What about the Farnsworth house? The one in Illinois.

PAUL THIRY: I think it has its place, because he did it, but if you wanted to compare that type of design, I much prefer the one Phil Johnson did for himself in New Canaan. I think that that has a more domestic character to it, I think largely because Johnson features, or did feature art and he had artworks around, and the interior of the house really was more of an art form than an architectural form. And then also he used beautiful materials. I know one time my wife and I visited with him in his house-- this was shortly after he built it-- and I said to him, I said, "You didn't build this for nothing." And he said, "Did I say I did?" (laughs) So...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: You know, you've, on several occasions now, spoken of art in architecture. What should be the relationship of art to architecture?

PAUL THIRY: I don't think anything is livable unless it has some characteristic art form, but that doesn't mean the building itself. It can be an art form, as I say with Ronchamp, that that building is an artform, you see. But you could take the very simply contrived building, which may in your eyes be an artform. But I like independent art. In other words...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, are you distinguishing between artform and architecture? Or is the artform a substitute...

PAUL THIRY: Oh, I don't think architecture necessarily needs to be an artform. But I do think that architecture needs to be an integral part of an artform. In other words, this statue here, for instance, that's the injection of art within architecture. But it's an independent thing, and it could be done by someone other than the architect. I think there's a tendency nowadays not to recognize artists in the works that are being done, except lately there've been, oh, in courtyards and that sort of thing, monumental sculptures, and then some frescoes and so on, but there's a tendency to forget that art has been in existence for thousands of years. And even a modern building can entertain ancient art forms.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, typically...

PAUL THIRY: But it's separate, you see, why then it isn't a part of your mental process when you build a building, because your mental process should deal with the use of the building, it should deal with the structure of the building, and, and it goes, you might say, why beyond trying to particularize _____ of art.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, typically the artist is brought in after the building is designed. Is that the way you think it should be?

PAUL THIRY: Well, let's put it this way-- and I think you had mentioned something about small office, big office, and all this sort of thing-- I believe if you're going to be an architect, that you're going to be an architect. An architect in my sense is a leader. He doesn't necessarily follow, in his personal professional life. And if he does a building, while he may hire draftsmen and everything to help, the predominant idea of the structure and the whole thing should be the work of the architect-- and possibly in collaboration with an engineer, if engineering goes beyond his knowledge. But even in the engineering, he should be able to say to the engineer, "I'd like to explore this way of doing it." You follow me?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PAUL THIRY: And so then, if the architect happens to be an artist in the sense that he can [do] sculpturing and all of that sort of thing himself, why we may go in that direction. But I think the problems of an architect is to be able to recognize good things in other people, and he should be able to incorporate that the minute that he gets an artist to help him design, you see. Why this artist might have a completely different approach to the problem, in fact he wouldn't have an architectural approach, he might be more aesthetic you know. And so my experience has been that you stay as far away from an artist as you can, in designing the structure, and then you call the artist in to embellish the building after you've conceived the idea. And too, artists are not always consistently

good, and then also most of them have a tendency to change their ideas, even in the middle of creation. I remember one time, for instance, I did an electrical engineering building. And I left some great panels for a sculptor to work on with the idea that he would embellish the surface of the building, you see, not design the building, but embellish the surface. And so I had the idea-- this being electricity, and AC current, DC current, and all of this sort of thing-- that the thing was all full of movement and vibration, shock. And then in my own mind, I began to think of Balinese dancers, and the movements of _____, and different things that had to with switching of currents, and so I got ahold of this sculptor and I sat him down and for an hour I tried to electrify him, you see. (chuckles) And oh, he was so excited with joy, he could hardly wait to get to his studio to make some sculptures and some models to cover this vast wall. Well, as he got into it, he kind of wore out, you might say, and then also he began to think of the time it would take, and that he wouldn't be adequately paid and all this sort of thing. And so I didn't hear from him for quite a while. And then one day he came in with some models of student looking out, student looking down, and a hand with nuclear energy in it, and, you know, nothing exciting at all. Good sculpture, but not at all what was intended there. The thing had gone too far and so we just had to accept that sort of thing.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Now which building was this?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I'd just as soon not get into sculptors in detail, but that's an example.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Okay.

PAUL THIRY: But it was a large building. And so I don't know. I think it's better to go and select something that someone has done, and then place it if you like it, if you think it's consistent and compatible. And well, you take here in the house: if we moved everything out of here, you could change the whole character of the house.

[Tape 4; side 2]

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Okay, it's about this time, now, late forties and early fifties, that you first became involved in planning, is that right?

PAUL THIRY: That was approximately the time, yes.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And how was it that you became involved with planning?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I think the proposal to build a viaduct on the Seattle waterfront really warmed me up to the subject.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And when was that?

PAUL THIRY: Well, that was in the early forties, possibly '42, '43. But there was, oh, quite a to-do, and of course, I never felt traffic problems in Seattle were acute then, or were too acute right now. And there were some that did, and so they proposed to build this waterfront viaduct which just cut the city off from the waterfront, and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: That was first proposed during the war, hmm?

PAUL THIRY: '42, or '3. I read an article in the paper anyway, and then I also saw a photograph of a model and I sort of took exception to the design of the structure-- that is, before it was built. I don't remember all the details, but anyway, there was something to the effect that the state highway department was going to design the structure and they made quite a point that there wasn't local talent of that caliber. So I wrote a letter to the editor and I said that I was an architect, I took exception to that attitude, and that I for one felt I was capable of designing. But number one, I thought it was a horrible thing to do to the city, you know. And then we got into a cross-fire, and the newspapers picked it up and so then they began to cross-fire. They gathered other architects that thought the viaduct would give you a splendid view of the waterfront. And I was kind of alone on the subject and I said at the time, "If you want to get the traffic through the city, then you should go through with a tunnel." This would get people who were interested in Seattle to go through and go under the city, maybe start down at Jackson Street and end up at Yale, and from there on it could follow pretty much where the freeway goes now-- but not in the style of the present thing. (laughs) And well, there was a lot of argument about it, and of course I was younger then than I am now, and so...

[Break in taping]

PAUL THIRY: And well, then of the course, the comparative costs of tunnel versus viaduct and everything came up. And the Times, the Seattle paper, usually-- according to my opinion anyway-- seemed to always take the negative view to what I think. (chuckles) But shortly afterwards, why Pomeroy was elected to the position of mayor of the City of Seattle, and one night I was home and he called on the telephone and wanted to know if I would be on the planning commission. And one reason that he did this was because I had been interested in that

[viaduct--Ed.], and then also I had started a program in the American Institute of Architects that dealt with planning and the contradictions of what was going on. In other words, I kind of heated up to the subject, because of the viaduct.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Ah hah. Now when was this?

PAUL THIRY: This was all in this era of '40-45.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And you say there was an AIA committee on planning at this point?

PAUL THIRY: No. We had a program. I was program chairman.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And when was that, or do you remember?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I couldn't tell you the exact dates on it, but it was between '40 and '50 in there. And I went on the planning commission as Pomeroy invited me in 1952, I think it was, you see. But prior to that I'd gotten mixed up in the viaduct and also we'd gotten into very controversial subjects through my program committee in the institute. It gathered great attendance because I showed that the city engineer and the port commission, maybe the parks department, all had different ideas and each one of them was planning their own plan without really knowing what the other was planning. And at the same time, there was no real coordination of planning because they didn't have a strong planning commission, nor did they have a strong director.

And of course it was over a period of time that I became involved in this, as well as well as the practice of architecture. So Pomeroy called me at home and asked me to be on the planning commission. And I told him I didn't want to; it was too controversial, and I didn't think it was worth my time. And my wife overheard me and after I hung up, she said, "What's the matter with you, anyway? Here you've been screaming about the planning process and the things that should be done, and then you have an opportunity to participate and then you don't do it!" And so I thought, "Well, I guess that's right." So I called him and told him I would do it. I served on the Seattle Planning Commission for nine years.

I probably would have continued on it, because I was asked to, but the subject of a freeway through the city came up and I thought that was a disaster. And then there seemed to be no way to stop it; I mean, again the press was behind it and the engineers could do no harm, you know, this sort of thing, and so I had learned that there's no use talking about things, because people would just say, "Well, that's your opinion." So I decided at that time that I would gather my forces, my structural engineer, my mechanical engineer, my electrical engineer, my landscape engineer, and we would make our design. And then also I realized I couldn't change the route of the freeway, but I could improve on it by covering most of the freeway in the downtown area, and then on top, why we would have a beautiful parkway.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Now this was what, early fifties?

PAUL THIRY: No, this was in early sixties.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: A little bit later. Sixties, okay.

PAUL THIRY: See because I had served this nine years. And then also I had gained some prominence by being named architect for the fair [Seattle World's Fair, 1962--Ed.], you know, primary architect. Anyway, for about six months, why practically every night we were either talking at meetings or being on TV, and I don't know whatnot, and I had a great deal of support. And not only that, but we did present an idea and we made drawings and we followed all of those geometrics and all of the things that the highway department demanded, and we made a cost estimate, so it was more than opposing something. Here was an idea that would work, you see, and I spent a lot of time, a lot of money on that thing. It was just ridiculous. In fact, we all did. Peter Hostmark, the engineer, engineered the whole thing. We had a great box girder that went through town, and all the money they spent on slides and everything else would have more than paid for twenty of the parkways that we proposed. Anyway, we had a meeting of the city council, and they were inclined to go along with us... In the meantime I had gotten the support of the First Hill Community Club. But the thing was thrown into reverse when councilmen advised that maybe they'd better turn it back to the city engineer for his advice, and of course, he was supposed to invite us to come in and participate if he didn't agree, but he didn't do that. Instead of that, the following month he reported back to the council-- of course this was a matter of saving face as much as anything else-- why our plan didn't work. And, well, as you know, and they've given lip service to it since, by building a small park of no consequence, whereas the other would have been something of great _____, another Champs Elysee, you know.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm. What do you think of the convention center plans, now?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I think it's a horrible mistake, because that space-- the only benefit of it is that is separates

the city living from business. And then also it provides an opportunity to still carry out a park, a way through the city, you see. But this would be a pedestrian park now, not the kind of park that I talked about. Ours was a boulevard, you see. But if they put the convention center in there, they're going to have more problems than they realize. Then on top of it, it's a mammoth structure, and it's going to just more than fill that space. It's going to do away with the separation of the neighborhood. It's going to create a real nuisance, because a convention center with changing exhibits and trucking and all of that sort of thing is a noisy goings-on, and it happens in the wrong time of the day, in the middle of the night.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Does your criticism have more to do with the site or the model?

PAUL THIRY: No, no. It has to do with putting it over the freeway.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm. So the site.

PAUL THIRY: Oh no, the design, I have no... I mean, the solution as it's been dictated is probably as good as they're going to do. I just don't think that that building should be there, and I don't think there's no solution to that problem, because it shouldn't be there in the first place.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Where would you have liked to have seen it?

PAUL THIRY: Oh I think it should have been in Center [Seattle Center, site of 1962 World's Fair--Ed.].

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Down at the Center.

PAUL THIRY: Oh, there's no question about it. Because the Center is already, well, I mean 90 percent of it is usable for conventions, and it gives a great deal of adaptability and opportunity that no place else in this community has.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: If I can change the direction of the conversation just a little bit: one of the planning projects that you were involved in during this period was Olympia. And I'm interested in the state capitol or the state library that you did. That was what, in '57, was it?

PAUL THIRY: Well, yes, about that time.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: What did you see in designing that building? What did you see there as the biggest challenge?

PAUL THIRY: Well, in the first place, I was selected to do the library and then also I was asked to select the site, you see. And so as I looked at various capitols, even the national capitol. It seemed to me that most of the plans were developed on the legislative, the executive and the judicial, and the servicing buildings for that function. Of course, the state library's principal function is to provide a close and central source of information for government officials and particularly for the legislator. This particular site where I had placed the library was an open site, and I really closed the gap, you might say, in the southerly direction; this was obvious to me that that's where it should go. But for reasons best known to me, why the governor at that time [Albert Rossellini--Ed.]-- Well I was president of the state chapter of the architects, and he had taken a position on architects fees, contrary to the AIA requirements, so despite the fact that he and I at one time were fairly good friends, why we kind of crossed swords. And I was called in to protect the institute, you see. We quarreled violently, and so when I located this site, and he being one of three members of the captitol committee, he objected to the site and said that, number one, I shouldn't be selecting the site, and, number two, that they should have a master plan, and so on.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: So that's what provoked the drawing up of the master plan?

PAUL THIRY: That's right, that's right. Then I became involved in master plan thinking, you see.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Excuse me for interrupting here, but was this your first experience in monumental, or complex [projects--Ed.]?

PAUL THIRY: Well, this was the first complex that I personally was involved in as a professional.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Ah huh. So the college campus planning came later. Is that right?

PAUL THIRY: That's right. After that I did the master plan for the University of Washington, I did some work at Pullman [Washington State University--Ed.], Lewis and Clark College [in Portland, Oregon--Ed.], and different ones, you know. But this was my first. Well, what happened anyway, they hired a planning concern to make a plan. As I mentioned before, I'm a great one to follow the plan if a good plan has been developed; I don't think it's proper to inject your viewpoints into changing an established plan. In the competition for the capitol, of

course, Wilder and White, architects in New York, had won the competition, and they also won the competition on the site plan and the design of the buildings, which were classical. And so the point came when these other planners got into the picture, why they just wild with the campus as it exists and injected new roadways, and this was all geared to automobile traffic, you see, parking.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: I was just trying to establish the chronology of this, the Wilder and White competition, was that 1911?

PAUL THIRY: 1927.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: 1927!

PAUL THIRY: Um hmm. There had been a couple of buildings built on the fringes of the campus by others that were in the so-called modern vernacular, you know. You have your own viewpoint about the design, but they were not either compatible or in classic style. But they were not on campus either.

Well, this plan [state capitol library, Olympia--Ed.] that was generated was really kind of a wild affair. They located the library in the position far from being a monumental location, and so then I was faced with this by the library association; they didn't like the plan either. And so I said, "Well, I don't agree with the plan, yak, yak, yak," you know, that sort of thing, and I still think the library should be where I had located it.

So the long and short of it was that I more or less killed the plan that had been presented, and then we still had to have a plan to satisfy the governor. I was commissioned then kind of, "Well, smarty, you do it!" And so I came up with the idea that the Wilder/White plan was monumental, that it was not of our era, and that to fulfill it only required one or two more buildings, and that they should be, if not exactly in the same idiom, at least they should be in forms that were similar. And then, if you want to build a highway building and you wanted to do this and that-- these were all administrative buildings, not directly connected with any legislative body or the governor or anything else; these were operational things-- then you should have a different campus. And so I suggested that they build an east campus, and that all of the administrative buildings be built with a new campus, a new plan, a new access, and new parking, parking within the buildings, and new refined contemporary buildings, completely, and get off campus. And then this library belonged to the legislature, it belonged to the capitol, and we put it where I suggested. Anyway, this made sense and that plan was accepted then and became a part of the City of Olympia, too. They also accepted that plan, and we built the library in a contemporary way, but using the Wilkinson stone, and in every way that could make it compatible.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: What were those ways? Can you be specific on that? Because that's one of our major problems now, relating old buildings...

PAUL THIRY: Well, classical buildings for the most part have a portico. And the Olympia buildings have porticos, and so we built a portico. And then we built a monumental stairway, you might say, going up on either side, and then we accentuated that portico by DuPen's fountains, you know, with the birds and the big basin, and so on. Of course, the shape of building is traditional in that you had the reading room, and all of that space is one unit, and then the stacks, _____ rooms above that. At that time, of course, that was the accepted way to design the building. The building in Olympia is in a sense an archives, from the standpoint of legislative manuscripts and this sort of thing, despite the fact they built another archives building elsewhere, and really didn't dignify the subject of archives by burying the whole thing across Capitol Way. But it's become overcrowded; it was designed for twelve people and the last time I know, they were approaching a hundred people working in there. In fact before Evans came in, we finished drawings to add on to the building to the south-- to double the size of the stacks and administrative space and that sort of thing, and for some strange reason, he was instrumental in killing the construction. Somehow or another, disagreement in staff, and I don't know whatnot. So it never has been retrieved, and whether it ever will be I don't know. Since then the state library has become a different type of organization. Now they don't only serve the legislature, but they serve the whole state. So obviously they need more people, and while this should still be the legislative library, it doesn't necessarily serve the state.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, most state capitol buildings are traditional in form; that is to say to they're classically inspired, they're buildings that are loaded with symbolism. In your opinion, what should be the role of symbolism in modern government buildings?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I think it comes from the plan, again. You see, in the modern library, why the idea is not to have stacks as such, but the books concentrated in shelving, which in a way are stacks, but people do research, they study in college libraries and everything, you might say within the stacks.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, now I'm thinking not so much of libraries in particular, but of state capitol buildings in general.

PAUL THIRY: Well, the state capitol building, again, is subject to a change in viewpoint, like the capitol of

Nebraska or Louisiana, you know. There they've combined-- the basic ground floor is the same for all the capitols in the United States.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Uh huh, but they still have the symbolism. I'm just thinking of those traditional domes, porticos, and...

PAUL THIRY: Well, I guess practically every capitol building in the United States has a dome, except some of the old capitol buildings that have been not used anymore, like the one in Medford. But the change in form, of course, has come about through Goodhue's building in Lincoln, Nebraska, which is a skyscraper tower. But again, that surmounts, you might say, the city. It's still the symbol, except that the administrative features are within the same building as the legislature and the governor. I think there's a certain amount of symbolism that still creeps into everything you do, providing you understand it and are willing to comply. But that doesn't hinder your ability to originate and to improve. The idea of course is to take an idea and to keep improving it. (chuckles)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm. It presents to the architect one of the major challenges, I would think.

PAUL THIRY: That's right, that's right.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Even with these traditional forms. Well, let's move on to the, Seattle's World Fair. It was 1957, was it not, that you were in Olympia working on the state library down there, and was that not the year before you were elected the primary architect of the Seattle World's Fair?

PAUL THIRY: The World's Fair started in a number of ways. In the first place, oh, the selection of a site was not for a world's fair, but for a civic center. In other words, a cultural amusement center, you see.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Ah hah. And when was that?

PAUL THIRY: And that started in, oh, I would say in the fifties. There were various sites that were selected, and as a matter of fact, the First Hill itself was selected momentarily, you know. Of course there was a big hubbub about the whole thing. And so the mayor got busy and appointed a committee to help select a site, and I happened to be on the committee.

I said that they better take a look at the city plan that was done in 1909, and you'll see that at the foot of Queen Anne hill, the civic center was supposed to be in that area. And that we have the Civic Auditorium there, and we had the ice arena, and the armory had been placed there, and so why go away from there? Why not enlarge, because there are a lot of old buildings that were of no interest that could be torn down. And so strangely enough, that site was selected, and because of that and of my participation in these meetings and everything (chuckles), I was put on what they called a design standards board for the thing.

In the meantime, why this idea of a festival started to develop, and then it kind of grew into a world's fair, which changed the, the whole thing altogether. So we had this design standards boards, and, oh, Halprin, Yamasaki, Johannsen, different ones, there were five or six of us on this thing.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And what happened to the idea of the civic center? Was that eventually lost?

PAUL THIRY: No, no, no. We still have it there at Seattle Center. But the fair idea began to take precedence. It was on this standards board that we developed some plans that were kind of ethereal in a way; also, people worried about financing and I don't know whatnot. And then too, it was characteristic of two or three members of that board that every time we had a meeting they would change-- they were in Bellevue, they were at Interlaken-- [unclear--Ed.] and the thing was just confusing, very near to a point where the whole thing could have blown up altogether. Anyway, it was decided that maybe they better have an architect, a planner, take charge and let's get down to business. We had selected the site, and I was one that took this attitude. They advertised for architects and interviewed people from all over, and much to my surprise why they picked me. (laughs) And so I got busy then and prepared a plan, and others may have shared my idea, but I advocated that what we should do, where we could, was to build buildings that would have permanent use after the fair, and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Permanent use as a civic center?

PAUL THIRY: That's right. And then to fortify my viewpoint, on my own, my wife and I took the kids and went to Europe and traveled all over and visited former fair sites to see what the residue was, you know. And this opportunity was lost in many cases, despite the fact they had some wonderful buildings at one time or another. So I felt all the more strongly about it, and I came back and said we should take this attitude. To make a long story short, anyway, I was given quite a few of the buildings to do, and to prepare a site plan, and then also to take care of the mechanics of electrical and sewage and water; I had my associate engineers. Then I was given the state exhibition building, which is now the Coliseum. The idea of course was to build a building as an exhibit

building that could be used later for a coliseum. And not knowing what the future would hold, we just designed a big tent, four hundred feet square, and then we...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Wasn't that originally planned to be much larger?

PAUL THIRY: Well, it could have been much larger, except they set a budget of $4million for it, and we hit it within a thousand dollars. And then of course...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: That was after bringing down the scale considerably, wasn't it?

PAUL THIRY: Yes, well we could have, with the same structure, gone up to 800 feet square.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PAUL THIRY: When I first started planning the fair, my idea was to cover the entire site with one roof. Then you could just build fragile exhibits underneath it, you see. And this whole space could have been air-conditioned. In other words, the fair would have been a city of its own, and everything would be covered. It was a possibility, but of course people began to worry about the money. Actually, before the thing was over with, why the money had been spent one way or the other. But had they foreseen the success of the fair and been willing to spend the money in the first place, why we could have done quite a few things.

[Tape 5; side 1]

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: When you say you had originally thought of perhaps a tent structure, were you thinking of a geodesic-dome-type structure?

PAUL THIRY: No, no, no. Actually what we have there is a cable structure with an aluminum panel. It's extremely lightweight and very economical for a span of that kind.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: So this was a solid-roof structure that you were talking about.

PAUL THIRY: Yes, also permanent you see.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: I mean your original scheme for the whole center.

PAUL THIRY: Oh yes, we were thinking in terms of an aluminum roof or something of that kind. But we didn't really get down to methods in [that] case. We were thinking of trying a great span, a great coverage of space, you see. And we looked on the cable as being that opportunity, and actually it could be done. Not geodesic dome. Our structure in the coliseum, of course, is really unique: we divide the building into quadrants and then we have 200-foot panels in it. But...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: As primary architect of the World's Fair, you were in charge of coordinating the work of a number of other people, were you not, including strong personalities like Yamasaki?

PAUL THIRY: Yes, when I offered my services, and when I was invited to give my qualifications, I said that if I was to be in charge, why then I meant that I should be in charge. And while I didn't necessarily want to select the architect, I at least wanted to approve, you see. So this was all agreed to. But politics entered into the thing after we got into movement. And then of course the federal building came up, and Yamasaki was selected to do the federal building.

In the meantime, we had devised a plan that kept that particular site rather open, and so we had a design from [my office?] which was 300 feet in all directions. Then we crossed under the water up into this big structure; the science exhibit would be in space, you see. And then too, you could walk on this plaza and look at the city and the sound [Puget Sound--Ed.] and see the mountains and the whole business. We enclosed the site against the neighborhood, because if you can stand inside and look at something that's outside of your compound then you destroy the design of the whole, you understand what I mean?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Sure, and you're talking about the entire complex of buildings?

PAUL THIRY: That's right. We closed everything in within the buildings. Down there we were up high, and we could have gone quite a bit higher than Yamasaki went with his Pacific Science Building. He came in with this idea, and we had quite a bit of argument and disagreement, but he had the federal government and a reputation of his own, and so then it kind of became a matter of opinion between himself and me. Of course his idea I think fundamentally was to enclose his own building, and to hell with the rest of them, you know. He didn't have that much faith in other architects, so he wanted to protect himself, and he did, you see. But it became a compound in itself, instead of the fair being a compound; this being a site high enough and away from everything where you could look out and get the spirit of the Northwest and mountains, why he just wrapped it all up into a water

garden. I had no argument with the building, but it could have been anyplace on the site, preferably someplace else.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: How much control did he have over the choice of sites?

PAUL THIRY: He enjoyed complete control because the federal government participated and he had sufficient backing by the fair commission, you see.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And so he was able to control not only the design of the building, but also the site?

PAUL THIRY: Pretty much. See, the site was designated for the federal building, but it was designated as an aerial building, not a ground building. Well, it's a difference of opinion, and the building I guess is a reasonably good building, especially from the long term. But it wasn't what we had planned.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: I understand there was also some controversy about the coliseum, is that right?

PAUL THIRY: I don't recall any particular controversy. The main controversy about the coliseum I think came after the fair. They had built the coliseum in Portland, and this had a seating capacity of 10,000 people, and so I was told to design the coliseum to accomodate 10,000 people, which we did; it took 10,000 easily. Then afterwards, when the city took it over and they set up a sports council, then they started discussing different things-- hockey, basketball, and things generally-- why then of course the thing took on a little different character. And then there was talk about various sizes. But they ended up with 12,500 for hockey, you see; and with 12,500 for hockey, we could seat 13,000, I think it was, for basketball. So in order to increase the thing we had to go down in the ground and dig out a hole. But we could only go about so deep, because we were going get the roof with the right parabola, with the site lines. And then at the same time, the fixed dimension was the ice floor. And so that settled what we did. And this was acceptable to the sports people at the time, but afterwards of course a lot of things happened. They had crowds, on occasion, that had to be turned away. And I maintained that it's better to fill the place and turn people away than it is to play a half house in a bigger place. But in any event, there was nothing that could be done about it, and that was the main argument.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: I see.

PAUL THIRY: But I think it's turned out that maybe my argument was right, because ice hockey is gone, and this soccer thing is folding, and basketball is moving back to the coliseum. (chuckles) And then, people like the aesthetic quality, the cosiness, you know. Also all of these musical things have gone in there, and they like the acoustics and they like the division possibilities that we had put in there. You can divide that into 40 rooms, and at the same time maintain the big spaces. You can have four conventions going on there at the same time as exhibits and everything. Actually, that building really isn't understood. Nobody really sits down and analyzes the possibilities. I would say that it's one of the great centers in this world right now, but it has to be understood. You can do anything you want to in there, within limits, you see.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well the Space Needle, too, is controversial. There's apparently still some confusion about who actually designed it. As primary architect of the fairgrounds, what's your perspective on the issue?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I don't have an opinion on the space needle.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: You don't know who was primarily responsible for designing it?

PAUL THIRY: Well, there's always sort of, oh, an attitude about people working in an architect's office. And see, I'm an architect. And so I chose talented people to work for me. They came and wanted to work for me, you see, so in the true sense, if we really want to get knuckled down bone tight, why you can't say that you were the one that designed that building if you have anybody else working on it that maybe contributed, you see. But in all fairness, if you can turn out work consistently, regardless of who's working in the office, sooner or later you have to admit that the architect was the architect. Right?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PAUL THIRY: Okay. And so of course, Graham's office [John Graham & Company, Seattle, architects of the Space Needle--Ed.] has been in existence for many years. He had the commission to do the job for two reasons. One of them was that he had the capability. And then the other one was that he...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Capability, you mean engineering capability?

PAUL THIRY: Yes, yes, within his office, you see. And then on top of that, why he's an entrepreneur, and this particular site was the only place they could build that tower. It was the only one in that site that didn't fall within the laws and regulations of the land condemnation and so on; this was separately held, as I remember, by the fire department or something. So they bought or leased that site. Also the base of it could only be so big

because that was the only place they could build it on the grounds as a private thing, you see. It still is private; it's not a part of the city. Or they could have built off the site, which they naturally didn't want to do. And then, as to who was in the office and so on, why that's another question. I mean, somebody worked on it, and maybe somebody made the sketch. But being an architect, I have to say that Graham was the architect.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: I think it was Victor Steinbrueck who believes quite strongly that he came up with the final scheme.

PAUL THIRY: Well yes, but I think he used bad taste, despite the fact it might have set him up, you know. I think he used bad taste in claiming that he was the architect for it, because... He may have been; I'm not saying he wasn't. But of course, even that building wasn't uninspired. I've seen similar structures. In fact there was one proposed five or six years before the fair here, in Florida; it was quite close to the same thing. And then too, in Stuttgart and different places they had space needles there.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: With a revolving restaurant on top?

PAUL THIRY: Yes, that's right. So the idea, I mean, it's unique, and it's original to a point. Again, it's a part of the wind, you see; it's in the wind.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: We've spent some time talking about Seattle, and your ideas, and your work on the planning commission. There's one question, though, that I want to ask, partially because I'm a scholar of shopping centers. How much impact did the development of the large-scale regional shopping centers, like Northgate [major shopping area near northern city limits--Ed.], have on Seattle, particularly on the downtown?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, I'm somewhat familiar with Northgate. This is a whole study and discussion in itself. It would take me at least an hour to tell...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Okay, let me just quickly ask this then. Did you have any premonition, at the time that Northgate opened in 1950, of the tremendous impact it would have on the downtown?

PAUL THIRY: Well, it didn't really impact the city very much. All of the basic stores that exist at Northgate also exist in the city. It kind of crept into the picture, if you know what I mean. Graham and his office were early in the idea of seeing what highway people were going to do. I mean, he was kind of clairvoyant. They worked very closely with the highway people to know where cloverleafs and on and off ramps were going to be-- or could be. And then through their interests, why they selected sites in these locations that were not too far from the city or were between two cities, and so on. So they started to build these shopping centers, as they called them. They're more than that at Northgate-- there's a hospital and theater and everything you know. And so these things started in rather big scale, but small scale as compared to what they are now. And then they became sort of an idea, and the idea spread all over the country and all over the state.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Northgate was actually quite innovative in its size, quite remarkable at the time-- 66 acres.

PAUL THIRY: Yes, that's right. But as compared to what it is now, it was small, and it was an open thing. Matter of fact, I'm not saying I inspired the closing of the arcades and so on, but I think I did. We had it planned for the fair that instead of building buildings in the open space, we covered the streets with a cover. And then we could build your buildings in the blocks, you see, between the streets, but the streets were all an arcade.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Like the Galleria Vittorio Emmanuele [Milan, 1865]?

PAUL THIRY: That's right, and so one of the owners of Northgate happened to be on the fair committee, and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Was that Graham, or Rex Allison?

PAUL THIRY: No, no. But anyway, he thought it was a real [good] idea, and it wasn't long that they started to cover [the mall--Ed.] at Northgate. Then after that, of course, this became more or less standard for all shopping centers; you walk on a covered mall, and the shops are at either side. So in a sense a shopping center, instead of being a whole series of buildings, became one building. And of course having done that, and having provided free parking, and this dispersal of people throughout the areas, why these places have become cities in themselves. Northgate isn't a corporate entity, with a mayor and all that sort of thing, but in a sense it could be.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: It was originally titled or called a shopping city, Northgate Shopping City. Before we turn from Seattle to Washington, D.C., let me ask one last question. What are your hopes for Seattle's future? Why is that so many plans have failed in Seattle, and why does it have no civic center. You say that the Seattle Center is the civic center.

PAUL THIRY: Oh, no. You're not correct in that. We don't have an identifiable civic center, but we do have a civic center. We have a county-city center. For instance, the municipal building, the public safety building, the county

courthouse, the county administration building.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Those are all downtown, though.

PAUL THIRY: That's a civic center.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Uh huh, well I misunderstood you then. I thought you said that it was out at the Seattle Center.

PAUL THIRY: Well it was out there, it was supposed to be out at the foot of Queen Anne, but this was when Westlake Avenue was the prime street of the city that ran from Pioneer Square, all the ways out to Lake Union. And the, oh, what's the name of that plan, you know?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Why did the plans for the civic center in the Seattle Center fail? Why were they not carried out?

PAUL THIRY: Well, for two reasons. One of them is when the plan was made in 1909, this was a big plan. I mean, this envisioned Seattle as a metropolis.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Was that the Bogue plan?

PAUL THIRY: Yes, the Bogue plan. And it envisioned Seattle as the great metropolis in the Pacific coast. In 1909, Pioneer Square was the hub of creation, and so there was really no urgent reason to go out through the hills to go out to a civic center. A pure visionary, as Bogue was, why then you would have done it anyway, but it wasn't convenient, and especially transportation wasn't that good at the time, and people didn't drive cars or have transportation means-- though they did have good transportation to given places. And so they built what was convenient. It's like in Washington, D.C.: there's a place for the municipal center, but the current administration of the city doesn't want to be there; they want to be up in the triangle.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Maybe we ought to turn to Washington, D.C., before we run out of time.

PAUL THIRY: Okay. (chuckles)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Because there are a lot of really very interesting questions to ask about it. By this time, by the early sixties, you were on the AIA committee for the national capitol, in Washington, D.C., is that right?

PAUL THIRY: Yes.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: When exactly was it that you assumed that position? Do you remember?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I was chairman of that committee for four years, so it must have been about 1959 or 1958.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And how did you happen to become chairman?

PAUL THIRY: Well, by this time, I had become quite interested in the subject of planning, not the least of which was the work of L'Enfant. Actually, there are other planned cities in the United States, but this is the one example where a plan was developed before the city was built. The whole thing was planned without construction. This appealed to me; also it seemed to me that the system of planning in Washington was adaptable to the modern system of living and traffic handling and all of that. And so, I mean, intellectually, let's say, I was interested and, of course, I'd made my interest known. I was put on the committee, you see, for two or three years before I was chairman.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And then you became chairman and then it was the following year that President Kennedy...

PAUL THIRY: No, I was chairman two or three years, and then Kennedy... Well, first while I was chairman, the committee became quite important because we were active. And with me were people like Saarinen, and Ed Stone, I.M. Pei, and different ones. And so we made a noise and we rattled our timbers, and so every time we met, why there was newspaper attendance, and the Washington Post, and all the other ones reported out. The whole idea of planning had degenerated in Washington, and it needed some vibrant uplifting and became kind of an idea that writers made the most of, you see. At the same time, why the subject of extension of the national capitol came up, and of course this had been a controversial subject for the last 30 or 40 years. And so our committee became interested in the national capitol. Before we did anything we noticed that there [was] really no planning going on. Every time the Congress wanted to build a building, Congress would say, "Put a building here," you see, without having a plan and saying, "This building goes here according to plan." And so I guess I was the voice that they should have a master plan for the capitol, and this should be coordinated with the National Capitol Planning Commission, which at that time had administrative authority. And the architect of the

capitol should work with the chairman of the planning commission-- which wasn't the case; it was just like they never even knew the other one existed. And so the architect of the capitol, of course, was an honorary member of the institute; the institute had named him that, and still they just said he wasn't an architect and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Was this George Stewart?

PAUL THIRY: Stewart. He was less than intelligent-- according, you know, to the experts. And so anyway, I said one day to the committee, "Well, why don't we just go up there and just see what the score is." And so I called and I talked to [Mario--Ed.] Campioli, who was the right-hand man to Stewart at the time, and he arranged so that we could come up and be more or less indoctrinated into the problems. [The following discussion concerns the restoration of the Capitol Building, especially the West Front--Meredith Clausen] And they did a really good job. The only problem was that there was only one or two of us [who] went up. The rest of them were too busy, you know, they had other things to do, and also they had their own opinions. Anyway, I looked at the model where they had all the cracks and everything indicated. We went downstairs and looked at some remnants of some columns that were all brown and charred...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: This was the model of the building?

PAUL THIRY: The cracks were on a model of a building. The artifacts, you might say, of old columns and that sort of thing were down in the-- what do they call it?-- tomb of down below.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Catacombs?

PAUL THIRY: Catacombs, yeah. I saw they're black and all charred and then also spoiled and then I started asking questions about the thing and I found, from some pieces that had fallen down just before I'd been there, that the things were _____, attached with concrete. They're maybe not structurally in trouble, but from the standpoint of exposing the existing building, there's no question you can't do it. It was in terrible condition.

And so anyway, about a month or so afterwards, I was home here, [and] Stewart called me and wanted to know if I would take Henry Shepley's place, who had died in the meantime. He had a board of consultants that was made up of [John--Ed.] Harbeson at that time and Gilmore Clarke, and Paul Manship, and Shepley. And so I said, "Well, gee, I'm certainly honored, Mr. Stewart, and I would like to accept; but I also have opinions." And I tried to inform him intelligently that, "If after sufficient analysis I come to a conclusion, why then I'm not going to do what I'm told to do. So I want you to know that before I start." And he said, "Well, that's what I like." (chuckles) So I said, "Well, in that case, if you'll get an independent engineering study made, again, over and above what had already been done, that I could participate in the study and so on, why I'll accept."

And so he agreed, and then we did. I spent over six months-- not all the time actually, you know, but I did diligently pursue the thing-- and I came to the conclusion that the 32 coats of paint that were on the old [original] building are what's holding the whole thing together, you see. And actually, the column caps and all of this are really all held together by the paint. The idea that the front portico could fall down is not untrue. It's true. I got onto the idea that if you can't preserve the building, then what's the best way to fix it? And there's no really good way to fix the building, so they had previously said they would extend the building. Then, in the light of the extension, I reviewed all of the requirements for the capitol and the new requirements of joint sessions and meeting rooms, and I concluded that the Congress needed space in the capitol....concluded that the service of the building was all through a manhole in a trap out in the sidewalk, so everything that came in in the way of freight and everything that went out of there had to go through that elevator in the sidewalk. And there was no way really for the taxicabs to come and drop people out of the weather, except under the stairways, which were jammed up most of the time. The public facilities, you know, were horrible; one thing that people don't really understand is that sometimes there's 40,000 people in that building at one time. And so there [are a] lot of dangerous situations. Also the elevators and many things; you go down in the basement in the old building and under that _____ [terrace], why it's just a maze of stuff and it's mostly constructional, so it seemed to me that all of this should be cleaned up and that certainly by adding new, they could get large span areas for various... They had filing cabinets up on the roof; the place was just weighted down with all the archives and what not. And so the whole thing could be reorganized and brought up to the 20th century.

And of course, this pleased, you know, the powers that be. I think legislation was brought about to carry out this idea, this new plan we had developed, with the architects that were working on the capitol. And it would have been accepted, I think, because the commission on the capitol and everybody had approved it. But then we got into a kind of a patriotic move that was carried on by one or two of the senators. And they began to appeal to Americana, you know. This structure of the work of Bulfinch & Latrobe. They lost sight of the fact that Walter had redesigned the capitol at the time they added the new Senate and the new House wings. And that he had envisioned that the whole building would be enlarged in all directions and would all be white marble-- whereas the original building was just limestone, and a tan limestone, at that, and also poor quality limestone. And so after the fire of 1814, they had to paint and to make it conform, but this was [a] temporary measure. But all of

this has been washed under the carpet so the...

[Tape 5; side 2]

PAUL THIRY: Well, not to labor the point, anyway in recent times, this idea of preservation has more or less overcome the Congress and it's had a lot of lobby in favor, and so the ideas that we developed depend on time to prove the point that it can't really be restored. I think there's going to be a lot of concerned people here in the near future.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Didn't the AIA speak up on the issue?

PAUL THIRY: Yes, they've taken the preservation stand, because they also had a preservation committee in the institute, which I had been on at one time. And so, of course, they've kept this up, but as I pointed out, it's because they never have gone into the matter as I had. I think also, they've talked [to] the membership as a whole on the subject and gotten opinions from people that really only think in terms of preservation of the work of Bullfinch, and not in the facts of life, you see.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, the whole issue boiled down, did it not, to one of preserving by restoring versus building anew, with a new architectural form that met current functional requirements. Is that right?

PAUL THIRY: No, no. This is twofold. If you extend the building, you can meet the functional requirements at present, but this is also the best way to preserve the building, you see.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: But that was not the AIA's position, is that right?

PAUL THIRY: No, the AIA position was that this is the last vestige of the old capitol and they want to keep it. But what I'm saying is that they think they can do it, and they've had advice that they can do it, but in my opinion, it can't be done. [spoken emphatically--Ed.] They're going to have to rebuild the old building, and in so doing, it's no longer the old building. It's a simile of, or replica of an old building.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, in extending the West Front, what new architectural form, or what architectural form...?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, no, no, no. It would be exactly visually the same as it is now.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: I see.

PAUL THIRY: But it would be white marble, and it would be extended. And to the lay eye, I don't think anyone would know the difference.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: So the only difference was one of material then?

PAUL THIRY: Well, yes, and then also space.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Additional space?

PAUL THIRY: And then also structural integrity.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm, I see. Well, what was your role in the design of the Madison Memorial Library? Did you have any?

PAUL THIRY: No, the architects who were working on the Capitol had to do with the Madison, but of course that again was changed from Madison Memorial to a library [that was--Ed.] part of the Library of Congress. My role as far as the capitol went was consultant to the architect of the capitol, both Stewart and White, when he first came in as architect.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: I see. The West Front extension and the design of other capitol buildings were pretty controversial weren't they? What do you think of Ada Louise Huxtable and her criticism? She was one of the most vociferous critics, I think, at the time. What do you see as the role or the value of architectural criticism?

PAUL THIRY: What did they criticize? You mean the idea of extending?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Uh huh.

PAUL THIRY: Well, again, I just put that in terms of my opinion, mind you, because all I'm saying is that they weren't really educated on the subject.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: You mean the critics weren't?

PAUL THIRY: That's right. I mean you can criticize without really understanding the problem. I think the criticism is justified as a sort of historical thing. But as an actual possibility, you see-- I'm a realist, I don't deal in imagining or what could be; I believe in what is. And the condition of the building is that you can't restore it; you have to rebuild it, you see.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And that's something that an architectural critic like Huxtable would not or could not understand at the time.

PAUL THIRY: I don't say she couldn't understand. I'm saying that I don't think she went into this problem as I have described it, that's all I'm saying.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, more broadly, what do you think is the value of architectural criticism? Do you see any?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I think if it's knowledgeable, yes, I do. I do very much, but I think there's too much pro what's going on and not enough pointing out the deficiencies. I mean right now I think most of the writers, in New York papers especially, are pro what's going on. They keep pointing out all the wonders of this era, and actually they're really not fundamentally informed.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: What do you think the dangers are, or potentially are?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I think the danger of the thing, of course, is if you give everything your blessing, and then you look at something and you don't like it, you think there's something wrong with you. Because all these people are saying, "Oh, this is just wonderful." It's a system of education but it's not profound. Because some of them like Wolf von Eckhardt are not consistent. He goes overboard one time praising something and then maybe six, ten years later you read where he doesn't think it's all that hot, you know.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Ah hah. Are there any architectural critics today that you think highly of?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I think the only really, what I consider thoughtful one, and the one that worries about what he writes, is Fritz Gutheim.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: In Chicago, hmm?

PAUL THIRY: No, no, in Washington. I think he has a pretty good sense of what goes on. I think he's not as violent as some of them, and maybe he should be a little more so, but at least I think you can read him as a reference with some authority.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: What are your views on the design review process, in general? How can we or a body of experts determine what constitutes good design?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, I think that review boards are for the birds. I've always been against it. As a matter of fact, the post office department had the subject brought to them when I was on the research committee council, and I opposed this, much to the disgust of some of the other architects on the council.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And which council was that?

PAUL THIRY: The Post Office Engineering Research Council. I was on that concurrently with the work in Washington.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: I see. Well, before we turn to other issues, such as the dams, how long did your work in Washington, D.C., continue?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I went back and forth over a period of about 15years. The first national contact I really had was with the President's Council on Pennsylvania Avenue. And as you know, we developed what I consider to be a magnificent plan, a monumental plan, in keeping with the earlier plans, and also in keeping with the L'Enfant plan to the extent that we maintained the ground pattern, but included a large, oh, you might say, plaza as a substitute entrance to the White House, because visually the entrance had been shut off by the Treasury Building. And you know what happened to the Pennsylvania Avenue plan; again, your writers got into the picture and muddied it up with preservation and a lot of chintzy Mickey Mouse stuff that it wasn't human. I have my own viewpoints about humankind, and I think man can be dignified as well as wearing jeans-- that's only by way of comparison. But anyway, that more or less happened to Pennsylvania Avenue, and it isn't at all what we had hoped it would be, which I think is too bad for the nation. After that, I was on the National Capitol Planning Commission and served for twelve years. I was first appointed by President Kennedy and then reappointed by President Nixon. While I served there I was chairman of what they called the Federal Projects Committee, and for a number of years I was really the only architect on the commission. In later years, why Edmund Dreyfus was also appointed; he had the Committee on Transportation and I continued on the Federal Projects. So we as a

committee and I as chairman reviewed all of the federal work that happened in the greater Washington area, you know, the military, air fields, and everything else. Again maintaining the plan was difficult. Like at Dulles Airport that Saarinen had designed: in previous discussions with Saarinen I had, just as a friend, discussed the idea of the automobile and motorbus transportation, and that system of plan, and so in deference to him, I fought against every possible change that was suggested. (chuckles) And I adhered to the Pennsylvania Avenue plan, the mall and all of those different features of the plan that came before the commission at one time or another, which included the extension [of the] National Gallery, the Air Museum, the Hirshhorn Gallery. And, oh, like the freeways: in fact, while I was on the commission, we just about killed the freeway program for Washington; it would have continued along the mall and under the Lincoln Memorial and across the Three Sisters and I don't know what not, but we managed to surpress all of that, and I would say somewhat at my insistence. (laughs)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: So how long was it that you remained...?

PAUL THIRY: Twelve years.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Ah hah, and then what; then you returned to Seattle and devoted your...?

PAUL THIRY: Well, during the time I also was appointed by Mrs. Kennedy, you know, Jackie Onassis, to the Kennedy Memorial Library Advisory Council in Cambridge. And we met at the Ritz-Carleton in Boston, and out at Hyannisport, the Kennedy compound, and spent the better part of a week in company with some of the world's prominent architects. You mentioned different ones, but as I recall it was Louis Kahn, and [Lucio--Ed.] Costa, and Mies VanderRohe, and Tange, of Japan, and so this was quite an educational thing. And I think our discussion had a good deal of influence on not building the building where it was originally proposed, but on a more prestigious site that would give it more prominence.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Did you have any final say on the selection of the Pei design?

PAUL THIRY: No, not in the design itself. Pei was not selected entirely by this group, but he was recommended by the group to be the architect.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, that's interesting. Now in 1972, the quality of federal government buildings became the subject of a large-scale study that was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Did you play a part in that?

PAUL THIRY: Well, indirectly I did, as a member of the planning commission. And actually, I played a part in practically everything that went on there as far as buildings are concerned, for the twelve-year period I was on the commission. Because I was on the commission and seemed to have ideas and so on, why a lot of things were referred to us. Even the Fine Arts Commission often referred things to the planning commission. And so when they set up that program of the humanities, the Endowment for the Arts, why of course a lot of things became injected into the architectural program. I would say that the use of the old Post Office Building and things of this kind, for continued use and not destroy the building and turn it into a commercial venture and mixture of office buildings, this was all promoted by the Endowment for the Arts. I can't think of the lady's name that was chairman of it at the time...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Nancy Hanks?

PAUL THIRY: Yes, Nancy Hanks. And of course I was very much in disagreement on that subject. I think that keeping the old Post Office Building was the kiss of death for the avenue, and then also the idea was stupid because the building isn't on the street level; you have to go up steps to go into it, and then having all this noise created in the center of an office building with little boutiques and restaurants, it's chintzy, and not at all my way of thinking. I think that when we set up the program, it was decided to keep the tower as being representing a period, but to complete the plan as it had been designed, you see. And when [John--Ed.] Warnecke was appointed as architect for the completion of the Plaza, why he had a modern scheme, but he yielded to the idea of keeping to the classic architecture. And then when he was displaced by [Vincent--Ed.] Kling, again Kling agreed to doing that, but then the preservation attitudes and keeping the Apex Building and all of that crept into the picture, and so that was the end of the plan that we had designed.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm. Well, I wonder if we shouldn't turn to the question of dams, unless there's something else you want to add on the whole experience that you had in Washington, D.C...

PAUL THIRY: Well, I could go into Washington indefinitely, so with the limited time let's go someplace else.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Okay, let's turn to the question of dams. We can always come back. In 1964, the Seattle District of the Army Corps of Engineers asked you to design the "architectural aspects," and I'm quoting them here, "of the Libby Dam in Montana." Had you had any experience in dam design prior to this?

PAUL THIRY: Well, let's put it this way. I had designed numerous buildings for the Corps of Engineers over the period of many years, and so I was acquainted at the Corps. And in 1952, I think it was, right in there someplace, why I was asked to review the Chief Joseph Dam powerhouse, and also the architectural features of the Chief Joseph project, you know. And they had decided that they had worked too hard on the powerhouse and that the thing was getting kind of gingerbready, and it really was neither architectural nor was it engineering, from an appearance standpoint, you see. And so would I lend a hand, see what I could do with it? Well, we got into the profiles of the retaining dams and into the penstocks and this sort of thing, and then took on the redesign of the powerhouse, which was a tremendous thing. So I had that experience of contact with dynamos, generators, and I understood what a hydroelectric system amounted to.

Then in 1962, why Sydney Steinborn, who was in charge of design at the Seattle Corps office [chief of the engineering division, Seattle--Ed.], called me up and said that they were going to build a dam at Libby and they wanted to know whether I'd be interested in being consultant for the whole project, not just the fussy-dussy part of it, but oversee the planning of the whole project. And naturally, this (chuckles) suited me, and so I had a chance to exercise my knowledge of planning, of highways, and all of this sort of thing, and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: So you were involved in the whole project right from the very beginning.

PAUL THIRY: Right from the beginning. I went with the Corps on a jeep, and as far as a jeep would go, and then we went by foot way up into the mountains, and up into bear country and looked at sites and this part of it. I was asked to tour the United States and visit all of the dams in the Southeastern part of the United States. This involved Tennessee, all the Corps dams and all of that. And so while I was in Washington, I rented a car, and my wife was with me, and we visited 40 different installations, with the idea of finding what was negative and what was positive about each situation. And I found, you know, certain things that seemed to be characteristics that were negative and certain things that were positive.

And of course the whole idea, at the time, of hiring an architect-- at least hiring me, whom they considered to be an environmentalist, not just an architect, you see-- the idea was to satisfy the public that the money was being well spent, that it wasn't just being spent aimlessly, indiscriminately. Also, they wanted to make these different projects attractive to tourists, so that people would come and see what they [were] buying, you see, and to understand the hydroelectric system and the idea of irrigation and power. Of course, my job was to emphasize that in the design, so that all of this became comprehensible to the layman, you see. And so I looked for all of these things that annoyed me as well as the things that pleased me. I noticed, for instance, that practically always, you'd have to go from one side of the river to the other to get to the dam, which meant sometimes a rerouting of ten miles, and so I was great on the dam being continuous and that you could go from both sides of the river at the dam, you see, either below it or above. Then also, spillways were attractive but you couldn't see the spillways, except from a distance; you didn't participate with the water. Understand?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Sure.

PAUL THIRY: And then also I thought that they could have museums, or they could have guided tours, or they could have lectures. Also, they wanted to increase the recreational features of the lakes that were created behind the dam. So my commission was a total design program. And then also the location of the different facilities, and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, how much say did you actually have in the physical fabric, or in the [design of the--Meredith Clausen] structure?

PAUL THIRY: Well, in the beginning I had... I would say all of _____.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: So you designed the form and then essentially turned it over to the engineers?

PAUL THIRY: We designed about ten different schemes for Libby.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And you say "we;" was that you and...?

PAUL THIRY: My office.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Ah hah.

PAUL THIRY: You see, I speak of my office as we. But I'm the architect.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: But the architects in this case had or were responsible for the primary design of it?

PAUL THIRY: Obviously, I'm not a hydroelectric engineer, nor are we structural engineers in the sense that we could design to retain all that water, you know. So I don't claim that we designed the dam. (chuckles) We profiled and then we did a lot of things in the dam. Now, for instance, you have elevators on the dam, you see.

But usually, they're used for administrative purposes, not for public purposes. So we had one elevator for administrative purposes; and then we took the other elevator, which could be jointly used and we enlarged the thing, and we put an aquarium down at the bottom in the dam. When you're standing on the dam itself, you can see downstream, but you can't see upstream, you see; so we took the elevator and we go up 50 feet above the dam, and then we have an observatory at the top. And then we bridged across the spillways so that people could walk out across the spillway. And then at the bottom of the spillway we bridged from one side to the other so you can walk across, but also we can truck back and forth on the lower bridge.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: As principal designer, what did you see as your primary task? What was your major objective?

PAUL THIRY: That's it, this finding new ways to create interest, you see.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: To accomodate the public.

PAUL THIRY: And then also, we had in mind the physical appearance as well, so that the dam and the appurtenant buildings were all of one style. Most dams, here's a big concrete monolith, and then the powerhouse looks like something else, and then you go to the visitor's center and there may be timbers and shingles, but in Libby everything is concrete. It's all monolithic. And so it's one big concrete, like one big rock in the mountain.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: How difficult did you find working with the engineers?

PAUL THIRY: Let's say the first ten years when Steinborn was in charge, why no one questioned, once they had accepted one of our schemes. We made a number of schemes, so they had a variety-- and then also maybe they'd pick something from one scheme and put it in another; but once that had been done, why then there was no deviation. Te only deviation that occurred-- they had one big slide in the mountain, and where we had designed some bridges to stick from one mound to the other, why the mountain fell down in the water, so they had to fill and create a road along the base of the mountain. It was in a sense a destructive occasion, because these bridges were really wonderful bridges and they spanned from one ridge to the other across the water.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, in working, though, with the engineers, there wasn't any of the kind of animosity that those of us who were raised on Gideon have grown to expect.

PAUL THIRY: No, not with me, you see. Not at first. But as time went on and these things started to materialize and new people came into the thing, and then Steinborne retired, and so on, then people working there began to want to participate. A lot of times we designed something and then they would go through the staff, maybe ten different functions of staff, and each one of them would put in his two-bits worth. Like we have a shelter for picnickers in concrete, and some guy would come up with he'd like to have it in timber or logs and this sort of thing, and it began to get to a point where we were sharing, we were working for the staff. So I told them I didn't like that, and so the thing kind of ran its course, despite the fact that I still have a continuing contract they sign every two years.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PAUL THIRY: So they call me in, but of course the job is done. There've been some changes in the last few years. A lot of things that were expected to work one way have been discontinued because of the change in chief of engineers and different ideas and... Oh, I instigated the idea, for instance, of batch mixing of concrete behind the dam instead of below the dam, so they didn't ruin the landscape, you see. Prior to Libby Dam, why the rule was to just plow the whole thing up (chuckles) and just make a mess, and they never could restore it back to its natural setting. And one of the big ideas at Libby, of course, was to restore it to its natural setting, so if you level a hill, why afterwards you put the hill back and you planted more trees, so that this dam is just part of nature, and not an intrusion.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: You know, that's interesting. Esther McCoy, I think, spoke of you as an ecologist perhaps as much an ecologist as an architect. Did that come about, do you think, because of your living in the Pacific Northwest, that sensitivity to the land and the natural environment?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, I suppose it had something to do with it, yeah. But I've noticed that people move to one place or the other for reasons of maybe the natural setting. They come here because they like the mountains, and then people build tourist resorts out in the hills, in the mountains, because it's so beautiful. And then they set about to destroy it, you see, and put up signs and build old shacks. And this is one thing, as long as I had anything to say at Libby, why even the tourist facilities, everything had to be compatible. Everything came under our review-- boat ramps, all the picnic areas. (chuckles)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: It was hoped that the Libby Dam would serve as a model, was it not, for other dams? And

to what extent has this happened?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I don't think that it's happened for two reasons. One of them is I don't think that the thing is entirely comprehensible to some of the people that have followed since the original group. And then, too, I think they have project engineers that are in charge of a project, you see, and they're kind of little dictators. You put this project engineer's office in the dam powerhouse, let's say, where it should be, because that's where his business is; well, he's down there in the powerhouse and boy he doesn't like that. He looks over on the other side of the river and that's where the traffic is and highway, and so he wants to be there where he can meet the people and, you know, the powerhouse then gets kind of secondary. First thing you know, he's gotten out of there and he's over on the river. And so it's this sort of thing. These people, let's say at Libby, are probably on their fourth or fifth project engineer, and each one of them has a different idea, and so they make changes. And then also the chief of engineers will come barreling in; and [things change--Ed.] depending on the season of the year, whether there are tourists there or not; and then there's some highway things that happened that...

[Tape 6; side 1]

PAUL THIRY: Well, I think we were talking about the change in attitudes and then the problem of bringing everyone up to date. At the beginning of an idea, why of course there's great enthusiasm and everyone's willing to go. And then obviously anything that involves a project of such a great scale as the Libby Dam and the Kootenai [Kootenay in Canada--Ed.] River, there are bound to be little things here and there that maybe don't come up to expectation, and some other things that exceed expectation. If for some reason or another, you get oxygen in the water and the fish are in the middle of the whole program, then you get the fishermen raising hell and they want to do something else. The townspeople are enjoying a great prosperity because of the construction of the dam, and then all of a sudden all the construction workers leave and they have economic difficulties. And there are so many social problems that follow.

I meant to bring up the fact that my latest consultation contract was for a reregulating dam that would be ten miles downstream of the Libby Dam, which in itself was a big dam. It also had a minor powerhouse, but this was established largely to control the fisheries problem and other problems that are generated by the damming of a great river. And so a lot of things that are nonarchitectural enter into what really might have been an architectural problem in which you were involved, you see. (chuckles)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Of all the projects that you've done, throughout your professional career, what projects have you found most challenging?

PAUL THIRY: Well, as some of my architect friends of some note say, the most challenging is the next one. (laughter) As they say, "I've done that."

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Now it's done. But of all the work that you've done-- and your range is getting quite astounding-- houses, churches, college campuses, dams, monumental plans, complexes, coordinating the work of others in let's say the World's Fair-- what did you find to be the most difficult and the most, the most challenging?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I think, if you get into things of any importance, and if you are investigative by nature and you come to conclusions that you think are sound and based on fact, why everything you do runs into force and counterforce. So it's the matter of whether the force can overcome the counterforce, and always opposite opinions.

For instance, if I get into public controversy, my opinion may be developed because of what I feel is right or wrong as a public citizen and as a professional, and where I think an improvement can be made or something shouldn't be done because it's disastrous to do. All of a sudden out of the ground comes a developer, the promoter, the ones that have the selfish interests. And if the plan allows for their activity, why then, even if they object to it, they go along with it, because it's nothing to them. But the minute it interferes, either through codes or zoning or some other way, why then they become what I call the counterforce. Then they appeal to other people for selfish reasons, one way or the other. And of course this is human. I know myself, I don't like to be restrained in the freedom of what I want to do. I try not to want to do anything that's detrimental to someone else, just in principle, because I know that I'm not going to accomplish it, if I do, number one; and then, number two, if I do accomplish it, why I haven't done it with [perks?]. So just common sense will tell you that you have to be sensible. But if you want to be logical, you can't carry those fears into your logic. (laughs) I don't care what you do, you're always going to find some opposition-- practically everything that I've entered into, even the design of the church. Now for instance I designed the Presbyterian Church on Mercer Island, and then I did the St. Demetrius Greek Orthodox Church, and I did the Christ Episcopal Church in Tacoma. And all of these are all different, aren't they?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PAUL THIRY: And in the St. Demetrius we used thin-shelled concrete, whereas in Tacoma we used monolithic concrete.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: So each of these buildings has represented a new challenge to you?

PAUL THIRY: Yeah, that's right. But they also represented a challenge to the congregation, you see. Here at Tacoma, for instance, we have a building that, oh, it's nondescript but it's after what you might call Tudor. So we're going to add a church onto this complex that's already built, an old church [that] was too small and also [in] bad condition; it was wood. And it was very Episcopal, you know, nice, comfortable, homey. (chuckles) We come along with this big concrete structure that takes into account much more than they ever envisioned-- in activity and choir and in the liturgy, and also a lot of little things. Oh, we have a pool along one side; the sun hits it, and the water reflects the sun and it throws shadows into the building. That doesn't happen all the time, just on occasion, you see. And then we have stained-glass windows, but they're not all out there to look at; you have to find them. Every window is stained glass, but they're tucked away in different places and they don't just smack you right in the face; you have to spend some time there to know what's going on. Well, there was certain disappointment that Tudor wasn't there, and then there's great joy among others that they have what they have. In fact, the church has been published all over; I even found publications from India. And even the United States government used it for propaganda purposes.

For the Presbyterian Church on Mercer Island, we used the inverted hyperbolic parabola, and so the water goes down the columns. But inside, you see, it's gothic-- it's not gothic at all, but it has the gothic form. And then it's open and there up at the top of the hill, and so we wanted to go into a pavilion-- really their services are not Roman; they're mostly lecture and music-- and so you can look out at the panaroma of the lake. Other places we planted fir trees so that the windows open into the woods and this sort of thing. It's a different kind of church, but it's a place for people to feel good. But again, here's a whole group that just fought, you know, they didn't want me and they didn't want that, and God knows what. And so you had to write, you had to talk, you had to sell, you see. And of course once this thing is sold and it's built, why you get converts. And then again, others, "This isn't quite what I envisioned." I can say something to you, and you're going to form a mental vision of what I'm saying, which may not be what I had in mind.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PAUL THIRY: This is the wonderful thing about it. But if you create the wrong image-- if say, somebody sees something that they call modern, and they think it's horrible, why then everything that you talk about is horrible, and no matter what it's not acceptable. Or if they think something's wonderful, something that they remember all their life, and then you fall short of that image, you're in trouble.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, what of all the projects that you've done, which of those have you found most rewarding?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, I don't know. I just find the life of an architect is rewarding, without really referencing any single thing. I suppose if it comes right down to it, the scope of things like Libby Dam and even the coliseum, I think they provoke the most strain on your mentality and I enjoy challenge, you know. And so it isn't always trying to be original so much as trying to find the right solution, or at least coming up with a rational solution. That's what I think is important, and if you can be original in the process, so much the better. (chuckles)

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: I have a couple very specific questions about essentially your whole approach to design. In Churches and Temples, the book that you published in 1953, you quote Frank Lloyd Wright as saying, "No one knows anything about architecture. For five hundred years, the thing has been going downhill, until no one knows a good building from a bad one." How do you tell a good building from a bad one?

PAUL THIRY: Well, the way I do, of course, it has to appeal to me as a personal thing.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: You mean, appeal to you visually or how you use it or...?

PAUL THIRY: No, I mean, just appeal to you. You just kind of like it, you feel good about the thing, and so this is fine. Why you feel this way, of course, is an in-built thing that is progressive, as you experience life and as you put different ideas to test... A lot of times, in your early life, you may have ideas, and they may be good ideas, but as you put them to test, maybe they aren't as good as you thought they were. Everything has to really be put to test, I mean, even friendship has to be put to test to prove itself, you know.
As I said about Ronchamp, I just liked it, you know. Structurally it was interesting, and it had these colored windows, it had a barrenness about it, it had a simplicity, it had a loneliness in a sense. On the other hand it was uplifting, you know, to me. Maybe someone else would go in and say, "God, this is a strange thing." But I liked it, and as far as I'm concerned it's good. I can't say that about everything that Corbusier did. But I think his work, whether it stood the test of time or not, is a product of a thoughtful person. And it was the product of someone who wanted to do something that, that would overcome the handicaps and the deficiencies of what was going

on.

Frank Lloyd Wright really had no business making that statement, for the simple reason that he was inspired-- I'm not saying he wasn't original-- don't mistake me-- but all of his forms and structures and everything were inspired from one source or another [when--Ed.] he traveled. Even in Japan and the Imperial Hotel there, they took this lava rock and it was all carved with a kind of a different type of sculpture designed by the architect. But on the other hand, if you went into Indochina and got into the old temples, why you began to see this lava rock all carved and so on. You could go into the Mayan cultures and you'd find some of these houses of Mayans and their instinctive form. And so I wouldn't say that he wasn't uninspired by outside sources; he was. And during the time that he said there were no good buildings, maybe there weren't too many.

One thing you have to remember is that different parts of the world had different types of architecture. For the most part, let's say in Europe, architecture [style--Ed.] was a changing thing but it lasted for many years, like the gothic architecture lasted for a long period of time, and everybody designed in that particular vernacular. But nowadays, you know, we borrow from everything and everybody and every building is different, and still they're all the same. Some of them are good, some of them are bad. Somebody'll have a good idea and they'll build a correct building in one place, and then somebody else copies the same building and puts it into a strange surrounding and it's not meaningful at all. What they're trying to do nowadays is to make an authority and an expert out of people that don't deserve it; they're not creative. They have a right to be architects, but that was the wonderful thing about a style: like in Georgian architecture, you couldn't go wrong if you could do a reasonably good Georgian house. But if you wanted to do a superb one, then you had to have something more than the ability to copy, you know. And so the great architects in the Georgian style had a style that superseded, you might say, the ordinary run of the mill.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And you think that's not true today?

PAUL THIRY: No, it's not, because we design in all kinds of different materials, and different shapes, and different... Well, just like right now we have square buildings, you know, like the SeaFirst [Seattle First National Bank Building--Ed.]. Okay, and it goes up 50 [500--Ed.] feet in the air. Some of these critics think it's terrible. Well, I don't think so! I mean, I don't like the plaza and that part of it; I think that could have been better. But as a building, why it fulfills its purpose. Now whether it works mechanically and all that I don't know. But it's modular, it uses new materials, it's square and, well, so are all the towers of San Gimignano; there's only one of them that has a peak, and when you look at it from the distance, it's varying heights of square-topped buildings.

And Seattle up until lately was that way. Well, now all of a sudden, that's terrible; you can't do that. So you have to have sloping roofs, you have to have this. That's all nonsense! You see that's applied decorative treatment, and it's not functional.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Yeah, but you don't think the people are tired of the module, new materials that _____?

PAUL THIRY: You can't get tired if it's well done. If you're going to get tired of everything every two weeks, why then this is the cause of the confusion. So here, you have some leaders, which are not too numerous, and then you have millions of people that just follow along, and then there's another bunch that could care less.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Who do you see as those leaders now, today?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I'm not too fond of what I call the leaders today. (chuckles) Because I think the leaders that should be the leaders today were the leaders a few years ago. And that they've fallen into the trap of getting tired of what they're doing. Instead of trying to pursue the matter further and improve on what they were doing, why then they start to, you know, gain attention by doing things...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, who are these leaders now?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I wouldn't, I wouldn't really want to get into naming. I think in my discussion I've made one or two remarks.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Okay, well let me ask you this. In reading over your numerous publications in preparation for our interviews, I was struck by your learnedness in history, your appreciation for history. How would you define your own personal relationship as an architect to history?

PAUL THIRY: Well, as I explained to you earlier in the discussion, I believe in history, and in past history there are some remarkable buildings that were built that were in keeping with their time. And when you looked at them, you knew whether you lived in a time of fortification, or whether you lived in the time of open society, you know whether you're living in a mobile society. All of these things are expressed in buildings, they're expressed in old towns, and that's where these things belong. And if they're really of any worth, why then they should be kept, and then I don't think that they should be overcome by new construction and so on. In other words, if you have a

wonderful little fortified town, let's say Mont San Michel, and let's say that that was a city that could be expanded, why I would rather go away and leave that in one place with its wall, and try to use it, and then build my new place. But I don't want to start building skyscrapers right at the foot of the chapel on the hill.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Do you think architects can or should learn from the past?

PAUL THIRY: Oh yes. I mean... I'll give you an idea of what I'm talking about. In the early days in architecture, you could look at a building and you could tell pretty much what it's used for. You take Pioneer Square, the windows are all different on every building, and even the windows on every floor are different. But the interior use is the same. In the old days, if you had a great big arch, this represented a great big room, you see, a great hall. If you had little windows, this was a subordinate room. And in fact, in most of the older houses you can stand outside and you know where the stairway is, you know where the bathroom is, you know where the kitchen is, just by the windows. You see?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PAUL THIRY: Okay, now an office building with this kind of fenestration, you look at it and you don't know what it is! You look at it and you say, "Well, that must be the great hall up there, and this is a meeting hall, and this is where they live, and so on." And that isn't true at all; it's an office building, you see. When I look at SeaFirst, for instance, I know what it is. I mean, it's an office building. And because the units are modular, and they're only, say, four feet wide or something, you know, it's gotta be something that uses a modular design. Now it could be, if you didn't analyze correctly, it could be a hotel. You see?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PAUL THIRY: Okay, but it wouldn't be a hotel because a module in a hotel isn't necessarily four feet. See, the hotel-room module could be four feet if you had a twelve-foot room. But...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, getting back to my question, though, about architectural history, do you think it should be a part of the architectural curriculum, and if so how should it be taught?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, absolutely.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And how should it be taught, do you think?

PAUL THIRY: Well, just as it used to be. Sir Banister Fletcher-- you take it by period, you take it by architectural inclination and style, you take it by Orient, India, and Arabia, you see.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: You studied the major monuments at each one of those successive ages?

PAUL THIRY: Yes.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And analyzed the building and how...

PAUL THIRY: How it was used, and why it was designed the way it was, what the construction techniques were at the time... I mean, now people are beginning to wonder how the pyramids were built in these stones, and how they got them up there, and no one knows. But I read an article-- in fact, my wife called my attention to it, the other day-- that a Frenchman has come up with the idea that these aren't stones at all; these were made stones, or concrete, you know. And so, that simplifies the technique doesn't it? And it justifies the height and the size of the building, because it wasn't as arduous as we might think.

But the reason that everything is so conglomerate right now is that the architecture expresses the abundance of methods. Early in my career, I thought of prefabrication. In fact, I wanted to just take whole walls and build them in factories. It could be done, but the problem that we had when I first started was that you couldn't get them out of the factory. They didn't have Heisters. They had cranes in the factory, but they had nothing mobile that could go on the ground. You could get them on a railroad car, but them you couldn't get them off the railroad car. And so with the war, you see-- you were talking about the importance of the war, why many things were invented through necessity-- tanks, and caterpillars, forklifts, great derricks-- in order to build docks in the Pacific and all of this sort to thing. So we end up with a tremendous amount of equipment. Now these cranes that elevate the buildings nowadays were unknown 50years ago. I mean, it was kind of dealing into futuramics, you know, to even think of such a thing. So where you may enjoy the inventive ideas of prefabricating not only walls, but maybe whole buildings and setting them down on their sites, why it wasn't possible. But today, we've gone beyond that point, now, where it is possible. In fact, I remember I had encouraged an engineer to design a two-story tilt-up for the army down in Auburn. And this was I believe was one of the first attempts to do that.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Ah hah, and when was that?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, that was 19-- oh, I wouldn't venture a guess but it in nineteen-forty-something.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Was it after the war or before the war?

PAUL THIRY: I just don't remember. I think it might have preceded the war. I'm not sure when that Auburn depot was built. But that was for the military at the time; now it's General Services. Iverson was an engineer that used to do a lot of our work, when we did St. George's Church, for instance. I think that was one of the first tilt-ups of factory truss; that was poured on the floor, and then it was tilted into place. When we did Holly Park, during the war, in the community building we had prefabricated laminated trusses that were built in the factory and transported to the site. And these were the beginnings, you might say. I don't claim the basic invention, but I do claim that I was one of the first users of these techniques.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: That's interesting. It sounds as if you throughout your career have drawn upon that engineering background that was your father's.

PAUL THIRY: That was his grandfather, and even his father, you know.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: And perhaps that even more so than the Beaux Arts training that you have?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, I feel the Beaux Arts training was very valuable. As I say it disciplined you, and then also you did research on what had been done. I don't think anything that you can do now isn't based on something that's been done before-- if not in toto, at least in part.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: What else, how else would you describe the legacy of the Beaux Arts in your work?

PAUL THIRY: Well, I think it gave me... Whereas I believe in the simple architecture and a straightforward approach to building, and I believe in a reasonable amount of inventiveness and new ways to do things, I don't think that in itself is the completely satisfying thing, you know. I think it has to [go] beyond that. It has to have garden, it has to have water, and it has to have statuary, it has to have painting and mosaics, and...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: So appreciation for the fine arts aspect.

PAUL THIRY: Yeah, this is built into the Beaux Arts training. The only difference is that once a person had built a building, like in bothic, they invited sculptors like in gothic to crawl all over the place and start chiseling away, you know. And they made it possible through the structure that they used.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: You know, I think it was Esther McCoy, or somebody, remarked upon your accomplished skill in architectural composition. Now, do you see that as something you acquired or learned at the Ecole...?

PAUL THIRY: Well, it was enhanced. Some things come naturally, but even natural traits are enhanced by exposure to other things. When we developed an analytique-- I don't know if you know what that is; you did a composition of Roman urns and columns and this sort of thing-- the real problem wasn't just to gather and assemble a whole bunch of artifacts, but it was to do it in what you call composition, or in somewhat of an artistic manner.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, isn't that where you gained your sense of proportion and...?

PAUL THIRY: So you get your sense of proportion. Even in photography, you know, there's more than taking a picture; there's a record, but you can also record the thing in a way that goes beyond the record itself and it brings in the environment, it brings in the atmosphere, then it brings in the shadows of trees, and sunlight, and... You can take a picture standing here, but it you move over here, maybe four or five feet, you're getting what I'm talking about, whereas over here it's just a bare picture. This element of composition creeps into practically everything you do.

[Tape 6; side 2]

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Do you see any lasting importance of the Beaux Arts and are you aware of the Beaux Arts legacy in your work, in general?

PAUL THIRY: Well, of course, it depends on the interpretation of Beaux Arts, you know, whether you want to take a negative attitude or whether you-- you know, a lot of these people now decribe the Beaux Arts in a negative way of being a movement. Well, I don't look at it that way at all, because for the most part, Beaux Arts education sought greater things than the uplift of humankind and the uplift of architecture. Aside from what you see with your eye, it's what you're trained in your mind, and your position in society.

See, an architect actually creates an environment. You can make or you can destroy. A lot of restaurants, for instance, go broke, a lot of hotels go broke; but that's because they didn't have a good plan. And so you have to

take all of this into consideration and... And then if you get into important work, why then you have to visualize great spaces and so on. Beaux Arts training at least put you in a position where you could think in big terms, whether you ever had the opportunity to carry out your visions or not. The vision is always there in the hope that someday you may be able to do it. Frankly, any great things that I've been able to participate in haven't been of great interior spaces; I mean of greater elegance, you know, where you use all of the wonderful things in marble and bronze and cut glass, and great artists and so on. But I have the capability of doing that if I just had the client. So you do need the patron, and the patron has to participate. In fact, he has to want what you're capable of producing. He has to encourage it; he has to demand it. And then you work, you see.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Uh huh.

PAUL THIRY: Basically it's the patron, and we're lacking in the patron, I think, right now, people that really want that sort of thing. People are more apt to patronize social reform or patronize things of one kind or another, but they're not demanding great architecture, you know. Some of these manufacturers right now-- that Chipendale building, for instance-- they want a symbol, you see, and they got a symbol.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: That's the AT&T Building?

PAUL THIRY: Yeah, they have a symbol, all right. I don't agree with the architectural aspects of it, but they got what they asked for.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm. Well, in a just-published review of an exhibition that was held in Chicago, an exhibition of Edward Bennett's work, the turn-of-the-century Chicago city planner...

PAUL THIRY: Yes, well, he was involved in the Triangle in Washington.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: ...the author in this review said that, "Apologies of the Beaux Arts designs are no longer needed today." He went on to say that, "What is needed instead, as we enter an era in which historical references, human scale, and symbolic imagery become guiding principles in design, is a welcomed recognition of the relevancy of Bennett's Beaux Arts ideals to the solution of today's architectural planning projects." What would you say about this now? What relevancy might the Beaux Arts have to architects today?

PAUL THIRY: Well, as I explained to you earlier, if you have a plan, and it's a good plan, and it's practically developed-- not just a plan; I'm talking about something that's already been set in motion and maybe three-quarters completed-- and this idea here is... Bennett, of course, was mixed up in the planning in Washington and the Triangle, and the removal of all of those old baudy houses and things that were there part of the old federal type of city. Bt this was a recognition of the monumental city, which came about in 1909 and '10, and then the replanning of the mall, and so on. So this was an extension of that.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: But I think the reviewer's question was what sort of relevance might these Beaux Arts ideals have...

PAUL THIRY: Well, what I'm attempting to say is that they tore down all of the buildings except that old post office and a couple of others, you see, which they should have torn down and which they were going to tear down, but they didn't have sufficient funds to complete the Triangle. And those buildings were built for governmental purposes as was popular at the time. In other words, a man of importance would be a commissioner, or even a senator, or someone else, and so his office was a symbol of his position, great paneled offices, great fireplace, you know, this sort of thing, and that's the way those buildings were designed. They were designed after the classic tradition, but they were built on a lower plateau and they were subordinate to the national capitol itself. And then even the White House, which had equal importance, but was a smaller building, was surrounded with enough grounds to establish it as a unit in itself as a part of a grand plan. And so this is really the principle of the L'Enfant plan altogether. And while Bennett's plan there for the Triangle didn't exactly follow L'Enfant's direction, it didn't fight with it either. And so the buildings were designed, but they were not funded.

So what I maintain is that on a part of Pennsylvania Avenue they should have built the buildings to conform with the plan because the buildings were already built; all we're doing is finishing the buildings. Now I did say this: that if you build a great monumental promenade, such as Pennsylvania Avenue may be destined to be if we're not careful, especially when all of the federal buildings are removed, then it's no longer a city place, but it's a great monumental place. It's a place for great gatherings in great times of crises, it's a place for inaugural parades, it's parades in times of war, and great emotional occasions, you see. And it's not commercial; a city street is supposedly commercial, because that's the purpose at least of the [metro?] district. And so they had taken that aspect away. And so in our plan for Pennsylvania Avenue, we pushed for the idea of having shops and retail on the ground floor. Now we maintained that you could still do that with these classical buildings, where they were built on Pennsylvania Avenue, and on the ground and in the courtyards and so on. A great many of these areas that are kind of like Palais Royale in France, which is classic, this could become a Pennsylvania

Avenue Palais Royale, you see. And this is what I pushed for and the rest of us did too. This was in keeping with what we advanced.

But of course, there's a contradiction here. The first contradiction came with the FBI. You see, the head of the FBI at that time wanted no part of it. He wanted to have the FBI building and he only gave in on a few points as far as carrying out the Pennsylvania Avenue plan.

And so, had they carried out this plan that Bennett and the rest of them instituted, why they could have done exactly what we wanted to do, with the exception that outside of that plan, we also had proposed a big courtyard for the assembly of troops. There's no place in Washington for the assembly of troops or great bands, or anything of that kind. There's no great gathering for the common lot, you know, and so we had this and of course that was clobbered, because it represented something that wasn't little people. Well, little people are going to always stay little people if you don't make them grow, you know.

I think that they should have gone on with Bennett, and I don't think that was necessarily Beaux Arts, but it was after the Beaux Arts teaching. I mean, in its form, it wasn't Beaux Arts, but in its principle it was Beaux Arts. But then Beaux Arts went back to the time of the Romans, you know. Romans did monumental cities and the city exhibited the pride of the Roman legionnaires when they strutted down with all their spears and so on. I mean, they weren't strutting around through the slums; they were strutting around through monumental surroundings and great temples and places of government.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, it was Esther McCoy, who in 1964 said that you are noted for your profound love of nature. How do you see that? Have you ever felt a conflict between your sensitivity to the natural environment and your Beaux Arts ideals?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, no, no, no. You see, I've always preached this.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: They've never collided, huh?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, no, no, no. They shouldn't, but they do. You see, if we're going to build a city in a setting, like Washington, or Seattle, say-- Washington was supposed to be a green surrounding, and then it was a white capitol, you see, on the river. Okay, Seattle is surrounded by mountains, and we have the water, so we plunk down the city in the middle. But that background, that surrounding, is what I'm talking about when I talk about the overall environment, but we are destroying it, you see.

I've always said, whenever I lecture (and that's not too often) there's an urban society, and then if you want to talk about suburban (and you can, but I don't believe in suburban society)-- the next thing is rural society, which is different-- and then there's wilderness, which is no society at all, except of natural things, of animals, of birds, of creatures in which man is a creature. But when he goes into wilderness, he should be a creature. He shouldn't go in there and take advantage of the thing. He should [leave] the waters and things undisturbed. He shouldn't disturb the animal life, he shouldn't change the climate, and he shouldn't go into the Arctic Ocean and destroy the whole thing, you know. He should get the hell out of there, and leave it, because it's nothing that he [can] conquer; all he can do is destroy it. Okay, so there's those three elements.

Now, if we're going to talk about the urban society, we're not talking about nature. We're talking about wonderful society, and wonderful places, great squares, great parks, great monuments, great buildings, beautiful houses, and an elevated society, not riffraff, you know. We've elevated everybody to be somebody, like Buckminster Fuller wants, you know. He talks about people and earth people, but he's not talking about the slum-dweller; he wanted to make this earthplace something worthwhile. And that's what I think. So this is urban, and we stick to that.

Then we go out into the country and obviously we have to have fields and we have to have food and we have to [have] great supplies and all this sort of thing, so we respect, we respect the world. So maybe we do cut down the trees in order to grow wheat and so on, but we don't really destroy the waterways and all of that, and we don't build factories in the rural area, you see.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PAUL THIRY: So then the next thing, of course, then you come to wilderness and you can enter wilderness as an animal, or you can just keep out [of] it, you know. What's, what's wrong with keeping out? I mean, there's only a minor part of the population that gets all this big bang out of putting a pack on his back and walking out into the things, and shooting the bears and popping the birds and all of that. If they could stick to that, why we wouldn't have too many problems.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: You've always, throughout your career, worked in a small office. Is that right?

PAUL THIRY: Well, not always, no. For my own choosing, I prefer not to have an office more than twelve people, which I consider small. And which is not really small, because most small offices are just two or three. But with twelve people, I could have several secretaries, and then also, I'm an architect, and my people are working under me, and I watch what they're doing. I don't necessarily do it all; I do some of it, but I don't do it all.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PAUL THIRY: Well, during the war, as I told you, I was asked to join in a joint venture. I fortunately had my hand in the design end of it, but I wasn't the true architect of the project, just one of the architects. And it wasn't my design necessarily; it was [a] joint operation. So on that basis, we have tremendous projects, we have to get them out in 90 days, because of the war. Okay, so you employ a lot of people. So we get 35 people. At one time, taking in all of our joint venture, maybe we were up to a hundred people. And so instead of me working with my own little office, I had my own group producing working drawings and I have 35 people, which I had.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: How well did that work?

PAUL THIRY: Well, it worked fine, you see. It's a way of doing things. All right. During the fair, for instance, I was the architect, and then I was assigned the job of taking care of the master planning of the whole thing. Okay, so the master planning involves sewage, electrical, you know, great transformers, all kinds of different things. While I know about these things and I have ideas, I'm not capable of doing the work.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: But you've never...

PAUL THIRY: So those were my surrounding people. And again, I mean, we have 30or 40people, you see. And so, while I'm in charge, and I designed certain buildings in the place and I did the site plan, I can't say I designed the fair.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: You, have you ever been tempted to join a larger firm?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, I've been invited to a number of times, but well, I've never been one to claim to be an architect unless I was the architect, you see. And then also, I don't like to argue. For instance, during the war people would invite me to speak, and I had my ideas about architecture, and a lot of it was expressed in the work that we did. We did a lot of vast construction, thousands of units, and so on. I would be invited by a community group to talk on architecture, well, I felt-- and I was reminded if I didn't do it-- that I should go and talk to my associates, and so you're restricted; you know, you have to satisfy everybody, not yourself. And the minute you do that, why it isn't much fun, because you pussyfoot around it, or you defer to somebody else, and so I never cared much for that. I found that I could do a lot of work, I could do any size work that I wanted to do, with twelve people, you see.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: What do you think of Gropius' idea of the team approach?

PAUL THIRY: Well, that's a different way of doing it, you see. Gropius preached that, but he didn't practice it. He took credit for everything he did.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, what about TAC [The Architects' Collaborative--Ed.]?

PAUL THIRY: Well, that of course, in the real sense wasn't Gropius. This grew out of Gropius. When I was resident architect in the Academy in Rome, I had a chance to meet with some of the people that worked there, you know. But that's a big combination of things; it's an organization, like SOM [Skidmore, Owings and Merrill--Ed.] or any of the rest of them. But they've no one person can claim anything out of that, and even in those organizations now, they're kind of nameless; at first they had a name. I was thinking about Owings, for instance; he can't claim to have designed anything, you know. And still, he formed and originated a tremendous office, didn't he?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PAUL THIRY: That wasn't a new idea. McKim, Mean, and White, and even back in the days of the British architect that did all that classical work. McKim had a tremendous office. But to be an architect, you have to go it alone. And you have to have people that work in your office that won't argue. They have to like to do what you want to do. So I can point to my buildings, for the most part, and say that I'm the architect. (laughs) And I'm willing to take the blame. And I'm willing to take whatever praise is involved.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Uh huh, the credit.

PAUL THIRY: But I don't have to defer to my draftsman.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, throughout your career, you've gained a reputation of voicing sometimes unpopular opinions, opinions that in the long run have proved to be right.

PAUL THIRY: Yeah.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: What's your position on these controversial issues today? Have you any regrets? Are you glad you took the stands you did, for the most part?

PAUL THIRY: Oh yes. I'm not saying this in a bragging way at all, but I think that most of the important things that I've stood for, if they hadn't been carried out, I think people [would] have reason to regret it that they didn't go. And I think that's true of Pennsylvania Avenue. And then I think it's...

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, in retrospect, might you have handled some of these issues in some other way?

PAUL THIRY: Than what I believed in?

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Um hmm.

PAUL THIRY: Well, the only time that I would handle it in any other way is if I encountered a good reason to change my mind. And anybody that's a sensible adult is willing to change his mind.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: But you didn't encounter any of those good reasons for changing your mind at the time.

PAUL THIRY: Well, not on basic principles, no. Not on any of them. I still think that the basic principles espoused by the early so-called modernist architects are still sound. They needed to be improved upon, and they need to be carried out, but I don't think this calls for a complete
change in thinking. I think the thinking process was sound in the first place.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: You were a fellow of the AIA by 1954. When were you appointed?

PAUL THIRY: I was appointed in 1950. And I was chancellor of the College of Fellows, to make matters worse, for two terms. And so they had a kind of a king-making business there for a little while. Ralph Walker started it up, you know, and so on, and then all of a sudden one day I got a call from a Philadelphia architect [who] asked me if I was interested in being the vice chancellor and so I... He said he thought I could put some energy into it. (laughs) And so I said I would, and I think I did energize the thing. I separated it and made it palatable to the institute, which it wasn't. And then we set up a foundation fund to be able to sponsor scholarships and writings and things of this kind.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: We're just about out of time; I think we have just a couple more minutes. Is there any aspect of your life, of your career, your work that we haven't covered and you'd like to bring up?

PAUL THIRY: Oh, I don't really think so. I think some of the things on the planning commission were kind of interesting. I remember that I was told that we couldn't cover the freeway because the federal government wouldn't do it. And so when I was appointed to the planning commission by Kennedy, the first day that I attended, why I attended the meeting with two others that had been newly appointed, and one of them was the head of the highway department-- his name doesn't just come to me at the moment. But anyway, when I was introduced, he says, "Well, how do you do, Mr. Thiry. I'm certainly glad to meet you." And I said, "Well, that's peculiar because I'm not sure I'm pleased to meet you." And he said, "Well, why is this?" And I said, "Well, you are opposed to our idea of covering the freeway in Seattle, and I think you did the community a great, great harm. You could have really done something wonderful." And he said, "Don't you ever get that idea. I didn't do that at all. In fact, the idea appealed to me, but it had to come to my office before I could approve it, and it never really left city hall in Seattle." (laughs) And so that casts a different light on some of the stories that go around, you know.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, I suspect that there's a lot more to tell about what was happening in Seattle.

PAUL THIRY: Oh, yes. So that one situation I remember, and it did a lot for me, because I began to go into matters a little deeper, and to question the higher authority if it ended before it got to the top. (laughs) Well, I don't just offhand think of anything except I did get mixed up in Metro system in Washington, and I was retained at one time to design a Metro system in relationship to the location of the Capitol and a Metro station that would be adjunct to the Capitol itself. The large Metro system that went beyond the limits of this particular area and went out into the country was given over to others. But there was quite a bit of confusion about that, and I laid out a Metro system for, you might say, the mall and Capitol area with the idea of having the station right in the Capitol. But politically that didn't seem to be acceptable. But they did mount the Metro system in the central area from the plans that I developed.

And also, speaking of large undertakings, I was commissioned to design an addition to the Agriculture Building, which is on Twelfth and Independence. In the area there were a lot of subways and underpasses and just parking, and I designed a building that would span over all of this sort of thing, and bridge spans of 400 feet. It

was turned over to the Voice of America and to that part of world transmission, and in that building we designed broadcasting studios and I don't know whatnot. And speaking of exciting buildings to design, this really was probably the one exciting building that I entered into. It was a big building with 1,350,000 square feet, and it went into multimillion. And I had the thing all by myself without a lot of other architects. It had to go before the planning commission for approval, and so of course I had to excuse myself and leave the room. (laughs) And the staff were worried about the building-- disregarding the fact I didn't impress them with the fact that I had designed it, but not taking into consideration any ulterior motives at all-- why they decided that we were overloading the subway system and the traffic system by such a large building in that particular location. They convinced the commission to vote against the building of that size, you know. And about then, a change in the political outlook entered into the president's office and they decided that they would have outside people build buildings and the government would lease over a period of years, with the idea of purchase, and so the idea of the general services building kind of lost favor, and it was dropped from the program. (chuckles) So that not only was one of my great pleasures, but also one of my greatest disappointments. But it would have been a fantastic building, it really would. I think that it would have been memorable. But nothing happened.

MEREDITH CLAUSEN: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Thiry. It's been a privilege.

PAUL THIRY: Thank you. I enjoyed it.

END OF INTERVIEW

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