



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

**Oral history interview with August Heckscher,  
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# Transcript

## Interview

**PC:** Paul Cummings

**AH:** August Heckscher

**PC:** It's May 25, 1970 -- Paul Cummings talking to August Heckscher in his office in the Arsenal. Well, let's do just a little background material. You went to St. Paul's School and to Yale and Harvard. Was your family involved with the arts and things? Was there an early involvement there?

**AH:** That's a question I didn't expect. One of my earliest memories, as a matter of fact, deals with my grandfather donating a museum and a park to the city of Huntington on Long Island, and although I must say I thought that day didn't influence me I seem now to be much involved in both parks and museums. I remember to this day when my grandfather finished his speech -- which is now engraved on a tablet out there at Huntington -- he said, "To the little birds who migrate and to the little children who fortunately do not, this park is affectionately dedicated." And I really liked that. I thought it was very witty. But unfortunately the paintings he gave to the museum were really horrible things which he had bought -- some were in the Venetian style of the 18th and early 19th century -- and most of those are now put away in the cellar and the museum is a lively place for borrowed exhibitions and for the work of the community. So it really wasn't a family inheritance. And it wasn't an early intellectual or emotional interest.

My own field has been political science and politics almost always. I was interested in journalism and debating from the beginning. Woodrow Wilson was my great hero as a youth. Nobody was less interested in art on the whole than Woodrow Wilson. But when I look back and think of what did lead me to an appreciation of art, the substance of art, and later on a concern with the institutional workings and framework of art, the politics of art, what did influence me was the fact that when I was about eighteen, more or less by chance, I became interested in printing. It's interesting that the other night I was talking with Alexander Liberman, the sculptor. He was in the little printing office I now have in my brownstone. And he told me that it was through printing that he'd first become interested in sculpture. He said that handling the types, the feeling of the solid thing and the spaces between words and letters and so on had trained his eye. Well, I've often said very much the same thing about myself on a much lesser scale: that printing became almost an obsession with me and my eye became very nicely trained to the minor distinctions. I would feel terribly strongly about one face of type as compared with another. I would feel that a certain book or a certain poem could only be printed in one type because handling the type itself was an experience in touching and feeling.

**PC:** When did this start now?

**AH:** Well, roughly from about the years seventeen until I was about twenty-two. I maintained an active press during those years. Then I gave my printing equipment to Jonathan Edwards College at Yale University. That was rather nice because I have two progeny. One in a way is indirectly The Gehenna Press of Leonard Baskin's, probably the best private press in the country today. Leonard learned printing on the types which I had given to Yale. And the other was Frank Altschul's Overbrook Press which has now been given to Yale. The printer who I had, Margaret Even left my press when I closed mine down (I was too busy in the politics and Yale) when she left my press she went over and started the Overbrook Press in Stamford. So speaking of family influences, let me say that about the time I was beginning printing there came into my family one of the great

collectors of books and of fine printing in the country, in the world -- Philip Hofer who has been head of the Houghton Library at Harvard. Of course he encouraged me and showed me the great books and gave me great books occasionally. So although I put printing away when I was about twenty-three or twenty-four and was going to go on and be lawyer and a political philosopher and a politician, nevertheless printing led em strangely to an interest in graphic arts and prints and then to an interest in architecture and to an interest in painting and especially the abstract expressionists which I became very much interested in the early 1950s. So that's about my background in the arts.

**PC:** So in a sense there was no great deal of academic . . .

**AH:** No. Almost none. My whole interest was in English literature insofar as it was -- I had always liked poetry and I had written poetry. But my real interest was in political science. So when a good many years later President Kennedy asked me to come down and work in this field I justified his asking me by thinking that maybe I wasn't such a bad choice because it was really an exercise and a study in political science. It was taking the arts, which had had no constituency, no lobby, no legislation concerning them, no representation in the government; none at all. I mean there was a policy for small farmers, a policy for big farmers, a policy for almost anything you want, but there was no policy for the arts. So I thought of it as being an attempt to bring political science and the arts together, and I felt more sure.

**PC:** But before that you were involved with things like the Museum of Modern Art and the Twentieth Century Fund and various organizations.

**AH:** Yes. Well, I had become involved with . . . One day I remember quite unexpectedly all the top people of the Museum of Modern Art descended on me -- Rene d'Harnoncourt, who was a great figure of course at that time, and I think Alfred Barr was there, and they asked me whether I would do the speech at the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Museum. I was then an editorial writer on the *Herald Tribune*. So I did that. And I may say that speech was a good one. It was reprinted and widely circulated and commented on afterwards. That in a way was a sort of turning point in my relationship with the Museum. Later I became chairman of the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art which is a very important body and has grown more important as the years have gone by. And I love the Museum of Modern Art. It became for me a sort of, well, I won't say intellectual home but certainly a home where I did feel that I moved in a world of the arts and in an environment that was extraordinarily keyed to the problems of modern life as I felt them and sensed them around me. The sad thing, of course, is that today the Museum of Modern Art is sort of old-fashioned and nobody really knows where to go from there. But in those days it wasn't. I mean it really did represent the essence of modernity, the feeling that -- I felt anyway very strongly that in modern art you saw the various intellectual currents of the age coming together, whether it was theology or physics or politics or anything else, or the groping of the young people of that period for some new balance in their lives, necessarily a shifting and moving balance, but nevertheless something which represented them.

**PC:** Yes. When do you think the change came about? That it ceased to be as modern as it was?

**AH:** Well, the fifties were the great period of the Museum of Modern Art I would think. As I say, that can be taken as representative of the changing times. The sixties were the period of the disintegration, you might say, of the very concept of modern art. It's true also that the founders of the Museum of Modern Art were beginning to grow older and to think of retiring, especially both Alfred Barr and Rene d'Hornoncourt. And many of the trustees were growing older. And a period in the life of the Museum was passing; but a period was wasting also in the life of the country and in the life of the intellectual world. and I suppose the coming of Pop art and Op art was the turn.

Abstract expressionism had gone perhaps as far as it could go and there was a return to the figure and to the visible object and so on. But all this not with a sense of composing but in a sense of sort of decomposing and fragmenting modern life.

**PC:** How about Rene d'Harnoncourt? Did you get to know him well? Was he involved with projects and things?

**AH:** Yes, I knew Rene well. I knew him well and yet in a sense I never knew him that well. he was not an easy man to talk to in some ways. In later years he was quite deaf though he liked to conceal the fact. He was always looming so tall in any gathering that you sort of had trouble getting up to him. And certainly in the years when I think of him most clearly it was a kind of continuing monologue that he carried on, very witty and wide ranging but not exactly leading to the kind of intimate acquaintance that one might have with another man. But he was remarkable in his effect on the Museum and his retiring and then his death showed by the turmoil they left, what a force he had been during his time there.

**PC:** That really gets into the fifties and the sixties. To go back a bit, were there things that interested you, other cultural activities when you were at the *Herald Tribune*, for example?

**AH:** Well, yes. If you're thinking, let's say, of my work here where I now am head of Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs, I can look back and see a great deal not in the arts narrowly but in the life of New York broadly, which of course interests me a great deal. I remember that one of our fights -- and a successful fight it was -- was to preserve the Battery, the old fort down at the Battery which Bob Moses at that time wanted to destroy. The Aquarium was being moved out to Coney Island where it now is, and where it's one of my children. and civic issues of that kind, conservation, urbanism, parks, the amenities of city life became very important. I mean that was the style and the glory of the *Herald Tribune* in its great days. Geoffrey Parsons, who was my boss when I first went there, was a man who cared deeply about New York and lived a good deal of its recent history. He used to say that nothing human was alien to the editorial page of the *Herald Tribune*. And we tried to write in that spirit. And then later on I tried to carry it on when I succeeded him, in that spirit. So I was being prepared for this work even if it wasn't a narrow training in the arts. Of course it goes back to that because right after the war I had become editor of a small newspaper in an upstate New York city of 40,000 people -- Auburn, New York. I say small -- it's big enough to be not a village, it's a small city in the best sense of the word with its contradiction and variety and its different complex social structure and its different racial strains and all that. This newspaper had a circulation of 10,000. In editing that I became deeply involved in the community, which is what I loved; and the community involved everything.

**PC:** How did you pick Auburn, New York?

**AH:** Well, that's a story. I had a brother who was very talented. He died in World War II. He had picked Auburn. He wanted to live and work -- he had gone to Oxford as an undergraduate and he had just come home from Oxford and he wanted to live in a small city in New York State, not too far from the Adirondacks where we'd spent our summers always. It was a balance between farming and agriculture. It had a sort of intellectual life that was not dominated by one political party. And he picked Auburn out in that way. It was an amazing small city at that time. There were some great men living there, Samuel Hopkins Adams, the author, the Osborne family, Lithgow Osborne, who at the time I went to Auburn was Ambassador to Norway; and Charles Osborne who was editor of the paper then, one of the really sort of strong characters that I have known in my life. During the war my brother had died and the editor of the paper had died and the Osbornes asked me whether I would go up. And I was looking for a place where I could bring up my kids, put them in public school

and think that if I didn't like the public school I could get on the school board and change it, and so on. And after I had been there not much more than a year they wanted me to run as mayor on an independent ticket, and so on. So in that way I mean the work I'm doing now was in the making and my interest in the urban scene -- in conservation, landmarks (the picture on the wall was over there I see which is the public buildings the landmarks, if you will, of Auburn, New York in 1835. And they would do credit to a city like New York. Auburn was an interesting city because it had been in the 1820s and 1830s one of the largest cities in the state. At one time it had been thought to be the capital. And then the Erie Canal and later on the railroad both bypassed it so they left it. Which was a horrible thing for the boosters and promoters but was pleasant for those of us who came to live there later because it never grew very much. The old buildings were there and it had a stable society and a quite rich cultural life.

**PC:** How do you find the juxtaposition? Was that a study in miniature?

**AH:** Yes. I remember very consciously when I left Auburn and came back to New York, where of course I had always lived, I left there with a great deal of regret and many heartrendings and all that. Helen Reid had come up and looked at me with her gray eyes and said, "Do you think that ten thousand people is all that you ought to be writing for?" It seemed like a lot of people to me but I foolishly or rightly said, "No," and came down and wrote for the three or four hundred thousand of the *Herald Tribune*. But I remember when I came to New York thinking to myself very definitely that if after twenty years -- I was then about thirty-five -- I could feel the same way about New York that at that time I felt about Auburn my life would not have been wholly wasted. And I mean fee about New York in the sense of knowing its different parts and feeling the life in the different sections and so on. And in this work as I travel from borough to borough and section of the city and neighborhood to neighborhood I do often feel again that I am back in Auburn and that I do know it almost as well. you see and feel the differences and you begin to know who the people are that count, not just the people here in Manhattan who I have known for a great many years, but out in the communities. In Auburn there's a story told -- the father of the Osbornes whom I know, Charles and Lithgow, was a very great figure in his time, Thomas Mott Osborne, who was a prison reformer and public figure of some note. He was mayor of Auburn, as both Charles and Lithgow were after him. And the story about Thomas Mott Osborne was that he used to dress up -- we always had lots of amateur theatricals in Auburn; it was a very lively place in that way -- and the story of Thomas Mott Osborne used to dress up in various disguises and go down into all the dives and taverns of the town to hear what they were saying about his administration and to get the real feeling and sense of the people. I said I'll remember that when I'm here in New York and wish I could get the real feeling and sense in the same way.

**PC:** You spent quite a few years at the *Herald Tribune*. Were you involved with other activities besides that and concurrently?

**AH:** Yes. Let's see, though it's hard to sort of place them all in an exact time framework. But that period was obviously one of sort of opening vistas and new undertakings for me. I was involved with a lot of things. I was active in the Museum of Modern Art. I was active in and then President of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation. I became a member of the Century Club and a member of its admissions committee. I was a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and was very active in many ways in that. I was President of the American Council for Nationalities Services. I was active in a number of political movements at the time of the early Eisenhower years. That of course was a sort of liberal Republican group that used to meet regularly and try to promote the liberal candidacies of people like a certain General who was then still in Europe; Hugh Scott was running in Pennsylvania, Jack Javits, and people of that kind. Well, there were other things. I was on many too many boards and institutions. But, you know, I dashed about from one to the other and enjoyed

them all.

**PC:** How did you find that activity of being a board member and a trustee of such a diversified collection of organizations?

**AH:** Of course I was active on many other things. I kept rather close ties with Yale. I was with the Museum of American Crafts. I was on the board of St. Paul's School and the board of Alan Stevens School and so on. I was on the board of the New School and became chairman of that board, and so on. Well, you asked how -- I mean I go back and pick those up because it really was almost too much. My wife used to complain. But in a way each one of these represented some facet of what I was interested in and gave me a chance to reach out and fulfill some other interest than I could find in my immediate work. I mean the American Crafts Museum was really an outgrowth obviously of printing as well as a liking for the crafts in general.

**PC:** You were involved with that for quite a number of years -- the Crafts Museum?

**AH:** Well, fairly -- a good many -- I mean that goes back as far as some. I've always been tempted by the ideal of the life of a good workman and also struck with the beauty of things, the objective beauty of the things a good workman creates. In one sense I feel that I was finding, let's say, an objective embodiment of all these different impulses and interests that I had within me. And it was fun. But after a while it became too much and I did begin to think toward the end before I took this job, for example, that I was spreading myself too thin and I was trying to withdraw into focus somewhat more narrowly. Then when I took this job of course I resigned from all these boards and so on. I thought it was great. The next thing I discovered was that ex-officio I was on the board of almost everything: the board of the Metropolitan Museum, and the Museum of Natural History, and the Museum of the City of New York, the Bronx Zoo, the Aquarium, the Staten Island Institutes, the Public Library, all those things. So I'm right back again where I was. But it's a different role. And I do feel now a very close relationship to action which is the excuse for this particular game.

**PC:** The Twentieth Century Fund came after the *Herald Tribune* - right?

**AH:** Yes. The *Herald Tribune* had been going through very bad days from about 1953 on. The bad days really began with the death of old Odgen Reid who was a man who nobody fully appreciated I think. Supposedly he wasn't doing anything, whereas he really was holding the whole place together. After his death partly I think because of lack of that focus and center, and perhaps even more importantly, partly because of the very heavy estate taxes and so on the *Herald Tribune* began to get into trouble. We didn't know it for a long time. We were rivaling the circulation of the *Times*. There was a very brilliant collection of writers and reporters on the *Tribune* of that day. On the editorial page we had Geoffrey Parsons and Walter Millis and Elinore Herrick, and Aton Ballou, a nature writer; and Kermit Roosevelt had been there just before I arrived. It was a very brilliant and fascinating group. Of course Helen Reid was great. And young Whitelaw Reid -- I say "young" because he was Helen's son -- he had been my classmate at Yale, though I hadn't known him very well. Well all that was wonderful. Well, the high point perhaps in glory was when Eisenhower was elected President because he really had been the protégé of the *Herald Tribune*. We all thought everything would be wonderful after that. But that unfortunately didn't bring in the advertisers or the money and didn't even bring in always the close ties with Washington that we somehow had hoped it would. As things went downhill from a financial point of view, the tensions within the paper grew very great. It was the Joseph McCarthy period and I of course was the faction that was violently anti-McCarthy. By the way, one very strong continuing interest through all those years was the American Civil Liberties Union which I think used to meet every week for hours. It was another interest of mine. I mentioned the fact that Woodrow Wilson had been a hero of my youth and I was

President of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation. So, as I say, all these were like a portfolio of stocks in which I found a different interest mirrored. As I say, the *Herald Tribune* had really become a rather embittered place. Young Odgen Reid, that's Whitelaw Reed's brother, who later has had a very distinguished career as Ambassador to Israel and as Congressman, was instituting a rivalry between himself and his older brother Whitey. (It was Brownie and Whitey.) And the place really was torn apart. Finally the paper was turned over by old Helen Reid to Brownie. And although I had thought I could never work for Brownie he did turn out to be a very considerate boss and switched his own position on civil rights and on many other liberal causes and today is probably the most liberal Republican there is, since we don't call John Lindsay a Republican any more. But in those days he was still a very ambiguous character, to put it mildly. Meanwhile, I had been on the board of The Twentieth Century Fund. And Adolph Berle had spoken to me several times and asked whether I would come over and be the Director of the Twentieth Century Fund. I had always said, "No," that I was in a fight with the *Herald Tribune* and I was going to stand by Whitelaw Reid and so on. So soon after Brownie took over -- and although as I say he had been considerate and had been enlightened in my judgment -- nevertheless I thought it was a good time to go there. When I went to The Twentieth Century Fund I thought of it as not really changing the focus of my intellectual interest. The Twentieth Century Fund was dealing in a broad way with many of the subjects we dealt with in a very small way on the editorial page of the *Herald Tribune*. I remember thinking that the only difference was that instead of having a daily deadline my deadline was the decade. I had to turn now to study ten years from now. And it was a brilliant collection of men who were leading the Fund at that time. Among its members who were members of the board whom I think of are: Adolph Berle, Francis Biddle, Robert Oppenheimer, Wallace Harrison the architect, Arthur Schlesinger, Ken Galbraith, Jim Rowe, and Erwin Cannon; well, they are all men of that kind.

**PC:** Are there particular projects that you were involved with at the Twentieth Century Fund that you feel really were more important than others -- or, say, that evolved into more practical things such as ...

**AH:** Well, I was responsible -- it was a reflection of the times anyway for a change from the purely economic concerns of the Fund which it had held earlier and where it had won its chief distinction into a much broader concern with the problems of urbanism and sociology and aesthetics. I mean I thought those were the issues. In the old days we used to think -- and we may come to think once again -- that economics is the key to our happiness. But in the 1950s and 1960s when I was with the Fund we felt that the economic problem could take care of itself pretty much. We were concerned with certain aspects of the economic problem and we carried on certain of our own studies and our own interest. But our main thing were in these emerging areas and the studies that we did which I was most interested in and which I shaped most personally were things like *Of Time, Work and Leisure* of which Sebastian de Grazia was the author though I worked with him very closely. I mean the thesis of that book was that although we had more time off from work it didn't necessarily mean that we were more free and when we had more leisure, that free time and leisure were not the same thing necessarily for all; it depends on what you did with this. We pointed out I think for the first time that people were more subject to all kinds of self-imposed enslavements than they realize: enslavement to the compulsion to buy, to the compulsion to keep up, and all that. The great study of this eastern seaboard megalopolis of Jean Gottmann's was something which I worked on and thought of as being, you know, in large part my contribution to this vision of the Eastern Seaboard of the United States as being not a series of cities but as being one great continuing city judged in terms of transportation and communication. Later on again I had to live what I had somewhat dimly prophesied because I found myself when I was in Washington commuting back and forth on the shuttle between Washington and New York exactly as if it were a bus, you know, up and down one main street. And then of course the arts I'd become interested in

and we did what was perhaps the key study to the problems we're still facing, and facing very acutely today, and that was on the economics of the performing arts. And at that time I was reaching out into some of these newer things which now are commonplace but at that time were still hidden. I remember when a young man named Michael Murphy came to see me at the Fund. I would see a lot of quacks at the time; nowadays of course I have to find out who he is and what he wants to talk to me about and how many minutes he's going to talk, and so on. But in those days I would see anybody because you never knew when an idea might come up. And it was my business to find those ideas. This fellow Mike Murphy was a very attractive young fellow who immediately gave you a sense of spirit or lift of the spirit and mind when you talked to him. He was the founder of Esalen which at that time was quite unknown and had received no publicity at all. And I had become convinced that the next phase after affluence, after the development of the material world would be the development of the human personality, and that there were all kinds of powers within us which reveal themselves in some state of emergency or crisis and which we ought to be able to call up more regularly. A whole generation now tries to do it in one sense through dope. And I never dreamed or foresaw that. But I remember being influenced by a statement of Churchill's in his *History of the World War*. He said that when he took power in 1940 it was as if everything that he had ever done or been, suddenly came alive inside him and he could call upon any information, upon any experience to instruct him or to advise him or to guide him. And I mean we all carry this immense burden of memory and experience. but for most of us most of the time it's a dead thing. So I became interested in all the ways in which -- well, in which very bright children can be pushed ahead, in everything all the way up to extrasensory perception. We had a series of meetings of the Fund in which we invited representatives of other foundations. And I looked forward to going ahead and exploring this if it was possible to explore in terms of foundation studies and work when I was called to this work and escaped all that. But it went from leisure, you might say, into those kinds of concerns for leisure, art, and the human potential, all the things which . . . And then the great questions of conservation and landmarks and all that have become very important to me.

**PC:** You've mentioned the Century Club. That keeps popping up. I'm curious about your involvement and association with it because . . .

**AH:** Well, it meant a great deal to me especially in those early years. It happens that I went there for lunch today and as I sat there I thought that if I had brought together with great care certain people whom I wanted to see and to discuss the problems of the day I couldn't have done better. I was sitting next to Ernest Angell who has just recently retired as President of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and is one of the great men of the town. There was Arthur Schlesinger across the table, Dick Revere and Harrison Salisbury, among others. I mean there were these four whom I was immediately surrounded by. So it still is that way. I get there very rarely now but in the old days when I was with the *Herald Tribune* it was within walking distance and I used to go there quite frequently. We used to have our editorial conference at eleven o'clock in the morning and we'd break up around noon, then there'd be a few things to take care of. Then I'd go over to the Century Club for lunch. Funnily enough I mentioned to the people there today -- I said I remembered in the old days I'd come here and get baited, all steamed up, and then I'd go back and write my editorial because they'd been discussing today at luncheon earlier what's happening about these subway tunnels that are going through Central Park right under my window here. I said when I came here I was just in the middle of typing out a statement for a hearing on Wednesday and I said I was reminded of the old days when our discussions would help me. And they did help me greatly. I mean these were wise men. Geoffrey Parsons was one of the leading men in the Century Club. He was president indeed I think, at the time I was admitted. I believe I was proposed by Lithgow Osborne who had been my great friend up in Auburn, New York. And I thought of the Century Club as being sort of my faculty club. I mean, with New York as the university and these were the wise men of the



place. And then so many things began there, so many meetings where positions were taken -- sometimes informally and sometimes by arrangement positions were taken on social or political issues. It is a pretty great place. It really does have a lot of interest. Later also -- one thing I forget to mention because it is quite important in terms of some other things I'm interested in, was the Art Commission of the City of New York. Wagner named me to that and I learned both a lot about City procedures there. I mean I wouldn't have known otherwise what the Board of Estimate or the Council or the Budget Bureau and things of that sort were. But it's true that -- what made me think of it is that the Art Commission was very much dominated in those days, and John Lindsay has tried to break it, by the Century Club. In fact, John Lindsay said during his first campaign, "When I get to be mayor I will not appoint members of the Century Club to the Art Commission." And when he did become mayor his name was up for membership and there was a great question as to whether this horrible heresy would be held unforgivably against him. But he did elect him and he has appointed a few members of the Century Club to the Arts Commission.

**PC:** Is the Arts Commission very, very strong in its opinions and effects as far as . . .

**AH:** No, it's very, very weak and that's the reason why it survives and has so much influence because we would let by horrible things -- schools that were parodies of what a good school should be, plans that were repeated, parks. I remember at that time I used to say do I have to approve another comfort station. I never dreamed that I'd have to be building comfort stations. So it let a lot of this go by. And occasionally it would dally interminably over the lettering of a plaque or some simple historical thing. But nevertheless, there were moments, and there are moments now, when the Art Commission plays a role. You may have heard before we started this interview as I was talking with *The New York Times* about the new master plan for the Metropolitan Museum and that master plan has to go before the Art Commission. Well now, if everybody were for it and the Art Commission held it up either the Art Commission would be dissolved or the Mayor would step in and say, "Look, you've got to . . ." But when things are evenly balanced or when there is controversy either on aesthetic or other grounds, the Art Commission then is one of those important voices which you've which you've got to get on your side.

**PC:** When you were on the board there were you able to direct -- it's not an originating group, is it?

**AH:** No.

**PC:** It passes judgment on . . .

**AH:** They've tried recently to make it a little more of an originating group; but not much. The things you rule on are submitted to you by the various departments and I now send down from the Parks Department here regularly plans for a playground or for a building of any kind. We would simply receive these and it was always too late to do anything very much about them. I mean it would be, say, a plan for a school, I mean they'd pick the wrong architect. There would be nothing you could do. You couldn't tell them to go back and pick another architect. Sometimes you could get something changed to improve its looks a little bit. But still I go around the town and see things and think, good God, I passed that when I was on the Art Commission! And I was the layman member so it did give me a chance to play the role of gadfly. And I took my position very often on the side of modernity as opposed to the extraordinarily conventional and orthodox view they had about sculpture and things of that kind. Yet I realized then, and I've had to realize again in this job, that really when you're dealing with the public scene that's not the place to pioneer or to experiment. I mean the private sector, the private museum and so on must do the experimenting. And when you put things in a public place and pay for them with public money they ought to evoke a certain sense of familiarity and affection in the people and not immediately arouse their antagonism. In this job I've

solved it by -- I mean we've been absolute pioneers in putting contemporary sculpture around the city. I've had wonderful help from our Department of Cultural Affairs -- Doris Friedman. I remember Tom Hoving said he would have given his eye teeth to get the show we had in all the boroughs and so on. But the reason I can do it is because they're all temporary and when people write me furious letters I say, well, thank you for writing and come back in a month or so and it won't be there. In that way I think gradually we've been able to let the artists experiment with new concepts of art in the public scene, with new feelings for space. It's amazing, for example, how much trouble sculptors have had in doing pieces of sculpture which are at home in the urban environment because the urban environment is itself so dominant and so sculptural that most of their things look puny and most of their things look like a pale reflection of the very areas they are trying to brighten or illuminate. So we've given the artists a chance to experiment, we've given the people a chance to get used to them, and we've done it as we could not have done it if we were placing permanent works of art around the city. I think then we would have had to be more conservative, and more deferential.

**PC:** Yes. So eventually there's the possibility of permanent things as people become more acclimatized?

**AH:** Yes. There are one or two of the things, maybe three or four of the things which we have exhibited temporarily have been bought afterwards either by an institution or by an individual and placed -- one of the pieces we had here on 59th Street at the entrance to the Park is now up on the Lehman campus; and the very beautiful Rosenthal which stands in front of Cooper Union now remains there permanently. And so on.

**PC:** Slowly, slowly.

**AH:** Yes.

**PC:** But still so that you can see.

**AH:** Then you go out and you try something new. I had a request from the Jewish Museum to hang yellow rectangles in the trees outside the Museum. I thought it sounded like rather a damn fool idea but I made perfectly sure a) that it was a responsible artist -- I forget now what his name is -- and b) that the Museum was serious, and c) (and most important) that the trees wouldn't be injured, and then I gave permission. The outcry from that has really been horrendous and people are deeply shocked by these yellow -- maybe that's the reason for them. I mean in a way you see when you're outraged because something is hanging in a tree you realize more clearly than ever before that a tree is a beautiful thing. Maybe that's the reason for it. So anyway, I have answered all these letters saying, "I don't like them very much either but I thought it was worthwhile to give it a try and it will be away in another week or two." I quote Kipling saying that I really agree with, "for what is art whereto we press in sculpture, paint, and rhyme when Nature in her nakedness defeats us every time." The trees are more beautiful than the art in this case.

**PC:** I would like to get a little bit more into the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art because that was -- what? seven or eight years there.

**AH:** Yes, that was an interesting thing.

**PC:** What kind of things were you involved with?

**AH:** Let's see, first of all, the International Council was an important thing in terms of American art

and its appreciation abroad. It started soon after the war I guess in the late 1940s. It was in the early fifties that I think of its greatest influence as having been. This was at a time when Kline and Motherwell and Rothko, the great abstract expressionists were really not known abroad and hadn't been shown. The paintings were too big for many private galleries to take or for private transportation people to ship. And there was a tremendous revelation -- really revelation is the only way you can think of it -- when these things were shown in Paris and London. Jackson Pollock, for example, was a great show.

**PC:** New American Painting which was six or eight painters . . .

**AH:** Yes. Well, I mean these things were really transforming influence I think in the way people thought of American but much more important in the way the Europeans thought of art. I mean they were coming out of the war years and they suddenly saw whole new vistas that were possible. Many of these people of course had come from Europe originally and were producing over here and then for them to go back . . . And then it was an important moment I suppose in what you might call the changing image of America in the political field. I mean it's hard to believe it but people were all saying that America is a materialistic nation and doesn't produce any art or culture. Of interest to me was that Eisenhower for all his limited perceptions in the field of art nevertheless did back this exchange very strongly. I always remember his taking a stand during the very controversial exhibit which we had put on at the World's Fair in Moscow. There was one painting in particular that had a very ironical comment on a general by Grosz, if I recollect. And Eisenhower said, "Well, I don't like it but if the Museum of Modern Art chose it, it must be all right," or something of that sort. And I remember we all sent him a telegram saying, "Congratulations on having established an important precedent in the development of artistic standards." I'm sure he never dreamed he was doing that. And that was what really saved Eisenhower was the capacity to say perfectly simple, common sense things without fully realizing their consequences, but nevertheless often establishing a moral precedent or level of excellence or freedom which was very important. So that was going on. And then I mean something so simple (all these things seem a little old fashioned and worn out now) as putting good American paintings in American embassies abroad. We build these large buildings in many cases and they were totally devoid of art. And every other country lent out its national museums works of art. And working very closely with the Ambassador himself to find things which might be congenial to his taste we sent over some very great paintings on loan for a year or two or three years, which often was as long as the Ambassador was in residence. And then it was very important -- the State Department at that time was trying to develop a cultural policy but running up against all kinds of roadblocks. For example, we were the only country which didn't own a pavilion or gallery at the Venice Biennial. It was owned by the Museum of Modern Art and the exhibitions were put on by the International Council of the Museum. So it was really an arm of the State Department in that sense. And it was very important to the Museum. And today it's very important because what we did was to bring in people for membership in the Council from all over the country. Today we have them from -- I don't know -- from forty states and ten or fifteen foreign countries. People have to pay a thousand dollars a year to belong. They didn't get very much for it except a certain prestige and a few good meetings and parties. But the great problem at that time was: how can we join the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art? Our loyalty is to the Chicago Institute or the gallery in Tucson or somewhere else. And we sort of broke down that feeling. I mean we made them realize that they could support their own museum and also be involved and then ultimately support the Museum of Modern Art here. The feeling was that the Museum of Modern Art did sort of play back and feed their museum and establish a sort of rich texture of cultural life without which a museum in Tucson or Phoenix would be absolutely lost. So I think that was a very important thing we did. And the Museum of Modern Art today looks upon this International Council (of which I'm a residual member only now) as a very important part of their

total operation and I'm afraid that they expect a large part of the money which they now want to raise for the new building and so on to come through people who have been attached to the Museum. But I don't think that's good. I mean we really -- I always was in good faith when we said we don't want your money; we want you and your participation in these things. But it still is pretty great. The last meeting I attended was in Washington two weeks ago. We dined at the National Gallery. The dinner was given by Mr. Mellon. We dined at the State Department; the dinner was given by Douglas Dillon. We met at Dumbarton Oaks with the Director, Bill Tyler, coming out and addressing us and telling us how important the International Council had been to Mrs. Bliss, and so on, and so on. Last year we had our annual meeting in London and we were entertained and dined at the Tate. The contents of the National Museum were disgorged for us.

[BREAK IN TAPING]

**PC:** It's December 29 -- Part 2 -- Paul Cummings talking to August Heckscher. Well, could we just sort of jump into the whole thing and start with the special commission on the arts?

**AH:** Now let's see . . .

**PC:** Or exactly what the Kennedy . . . ?

**AH:** Well, there was no special commission ever established. My role was as Special Consultant on the Arts. I was appointed singly, individually to be the President's advisor on the arts programs. The background of that is briefly this: The President had received after his inaugural an enormous number of letters commenting on the fact that he had invited artists of various types -- painters, musicians, and everything else to the inaugural. I mean it was the first time that at the inaugural of a president the artists were brought right into the center, the focus of national life. The idea originally had been Kay Hally's, Kay Hally lives in Washington and is a distinguished person who has been interested in many public causes. She was the one who had originally suggested to Kennedy before he was president that it would be fine to invite the artistic community to the inauguration. She had taken care of the lists and she took care of some of the entertainment I suppose, of the people who came down. I was not involved at that time. After the inaugural she then wrote I believe to each one of these people and said: wouldn't you like to give us your ideas as to what the new administration could do that would help elevate and express the artistic community of the nation. So that brought in this very large number of letter I mean from absolutely top people in the arts world, very intelligently expressed, full of ideas, as to what the government might do. And I think that spurred the President more than anything to feel that he ought to have somebody who could among other things read these letters, sort them out, and work on the ideas which were suggested there. There were many ideas, such as, for example, a national award or medal which would be given to people of distinction in the arts comparable to knighthood or whatever is done in England, and so on. Arthur Schlesinger, of course, was Kennedy's relation and contact with the academic community and with the intellectual community in many ways. So I think it was Arthur Schlesinger who said why don't we get Heckscher down here. I recently had written myself -- but I guess I'd been chairman of a small committee doing National Goals in the cultural field for President Eisenhower. And so my credentials were good. And of course at that time I was director or president of The Twentieth Century Fund which dealt in all kinds of matters of public policy. I had been on a number of boards. I was chairman of the International Council on the Museum of Modern Art. I was on the editorial board of the *American Scholar*. So I mean although it was totally unexpected to me, I suppose it was not a wholly insane suggestion for Arthur Schlesinger to have made. So Arthur called me up and asked if this thing came up would I be at all receptive. I said yes, I'd have to talk it over with the trustees of The Twenties Century Fund (of which he, by the way, was one). So then I think he called me up again and said I would be receiving a letter from the

President and naturally he hoped I would await it with impatience and read it with care. Which I did. The letter said that he felt the time had come when the arts ought to receive greater attention from the national government; that although aid of government to the arts must always be "marginal" -- I always remember that word in the letter -- nevertheless it could have an important role to play. I mean when he said "marginal," he meant the private economic community first but also the creative genius of the men themselves were the main things that were responsible; but government has an important, if limited, role to play. He said, "If you agree with me on this, would you come down to Washington and talk it over with me?" So I went down to Washington and met with the President. He had in mind a consultant who would be part time, who would have an office in the White House in the executive branch there, who would have a small staff of two or three people (there was no money; there never was any money for anything). It was an attractive thing to me. I accepted. And it got a great deal of publicity, simply because it was the first time that the national administration had ever taken an interest in the arts on a broad, across the board front like that. I mean many presidents' wives -- including of course, Mrs. Kennedy -- had been interested in actual aspects of the arts; Mrs. Woodrow Wilson had, to back a bit in history; and I guess Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, and others. But here was something that went more or less across the board. And I conceived my role as not decorating the White House, and not working particularly closely with Mrs. Kennedy (though of course I came to know her and admire her and work with her on certain things). But I was interested in national policy in regard to the arts; what should we do about artists to help them? Were the tax laws unjust? For example, the disposal of surplus property allowed a building to be given to an educational institution or, I believe, to a hospital but didn't allow it to be given to a cultural institution, and that seemed to me to be discrimination in that. My recollection is that although a workman can get a tax concession on his tools, a musician could not get one on his violin or instrument. And there were all sorts of things that seemed discriminatory in that way against the cultural life. To give another example, the copyright laws seemed unfair and less favorable than they should be. The need to give some attention to the early development of an interest in the arts in children was something which had . . . There were many programs which potentially were of value to the arts which simply hadn't been developed as fully or coordinated as they might be. There were ones of course in Health, Education, and Welfare which were of great interest to anybody who concerned himself with the progress of the arts but they . . .

**PC:** Did you and your ideas in developing them function then through different government agencies? Or were you . . .

**AH:** Yes. That I think is what did happen. I mean I would be able to call up and say "the White House is calling," and talk to anybody in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare or with Arthur Goldberg. Oh, by the way, another thing which had been very important in these early stages and in Kennedy's growing interest in the national role of the arts was that Arthur Goldberg had settled in Metropolitan Opera strike. And when he did it he issued a statement in which he called for government support of the arts. He said that institutions like the Metropolitan Opera could never survive unless there should be federal support. Arthur later told me that he had never received so much mail or so much public interest on anything he did or ever had done as he did on that settlement of the strike and that proposal for government support. I remember saying to Arthur Schlesinger, "It seems to me that with Arthur Goldberg having been so effective in this field there isn't need for my coming down." And Arthur said, "Quite the contrary. There is more need than ever because now very large interest has been generated, it's focusing around the White House and we've nobody here who can deal with it." So it seemed to me a real job and not a made job in any way. There were so many things came out. Post Offices were going to be torn down. It was a landmark, a historic building. And I could take that up with the Post Office Department. A road was going to go through some old part of a city or some other cultural asset. I could take that up.

**PC:** So you really got down to very practical issues?

**AH:** That's the point. It was to be practical as I conceived it. It was to affect the actual conduct of government in many areas. The interest of the arts or the culture might be considered a marginal interest in the total picture but nevertheless it was important enough to have a voice and to have a spokesman. And I said perhaps the interest of art ought not to prevail in every case but at least they ought to be heard and weighed in all these cases. Another thing that came to mind, because I see it everyday now, is that the Federal Government had set up, was building this federal office building here in New York City . . .

**PC:** The one uptown?

**AH:** Downtown. It's built now. This hideous building just north of the City Hall. The way the case was presented to me was that the government was building an office building; it was not coordinated with the City's own plans for the development of its civic center; besides which it was a hideous building. So I got into that and I may say that I was not very effective partly because, as is always the case, people on whom you rely for support had really not done their work. In other words, the City government at the time had not really planned a civic center. So that the Federal Government was really at a loss as to where to put this building. In good faith they had put in one place and now were told that it ought to be somewhere else. And the plans had gone through so far that it was going to cost, I forget how many millions of dollars to go back to Congress and get new plans for a new building, and so on, and so on. But that was the kind of thing which came up and which I was engaged in. I stress all that because when Kennedy asked me to come down I think, as he saw it, one of my major functions was to investigate the state of government support of the arts and to make a report. But I couldn't conceive it in that way alone. I didn't think I just ought to spend the time studying and then make a report. I thought I ought to spend the time acting and then report on the activities. I mean was there a function for a role like this? Was it a real role? Should it be perpetuated? What were the points at which government touched the cultural life of the country? And how could the interest of the arts be better represented: as I say, our tax laws, disposal of surplus property, our road policy, and so on. So that kept me very busy for as long as I was down there. And I did write a report at the end which recommended a National foundation of the Arts which was subsequently financed and established under President Johnson. Another thing that took a lot of my time was something which proved abortive. There had been plans, proposals in congress for a thing called the National Advisory council on the Arts.

**PC:** Oh, yes, right.

**AH:** And that was to be the sort of committee which you spoke of. I drew up the bylaws of that and worked on the membership of it very closely with the President. We went over the lists and picked out exactly who was to be on it and who was to be off. I was to be the chairman of it. I mean it was written into the bylaws that the President's Consultant on the Arts would be the chairman of this National Advisory Council. The President wanted that. I remember I had phrased it somewhat differently saying that "the Council would elect its own chairman," hoping, thinking than the person they elected would be the President's advisor; but Kennedy said, "No. Let's write it right into the bylaws: 'the President's Consultant on the Arts shall be the chairman of the National Advisory Council.'" He said that will give it weight and substance and a close relationship to me and so on. Well, the long and short of it, the tragedy of it was that we were prepared to announce the names of that National Advisory Council and the President was to issue a statement on the day that he was to have gotten back from Texas. The names were never known to the public. But President Johnson did establish not only the National Advisory Council but he went to the step beyond which I had foreseen as taking place I hoped before the end of the Kennedy administration but not initially.

That was having a foundation which was funded. So it wasn't just advising on the arts policy. It was really performing certain functions of extending support to these various institutions.

**PC:** What kind of reception did you get from governmental offices when you would call up about something?

**AH:** Very, very good. Very, very good. Because this was an area that interested everybody. I remember one day in the White House mess when everything seemed to be going badly and the President was getting flak from a number of different directions, I think it was Mac Bundy who said to me, "How in the hell, Augie, do you get such good publicity for the Administration? You don't have any money at all and you're the only person who seems to be getting good stories." I think there'd been a profile in *Life* magazine at that time. And then there were a lot of people there. To mention one, Arthur Goldberg. Jeb Nabeeb Halaby to mention another. Jeb at that time was head of the Federal Aviation Administration. And it might be thought that that didn't touch cultural affairs at all. But it did, in the design of the . . .

**PC:** Oh, sure, airports.

**AH:** Well, I don't believe they design airports -- that's an interesting thing-- but they do design the navigation towers at the airports. And they got I.M. Pei, the great architect, to design them. For example, you'll still see one out at La Guardia, a wonderful sort of cone-shaped thing looking like a very elegant silo. And they appeared in other parts of the country. He was very interested in federal architecture so far as he had any influence over it. So I used to see him. So from all sort of unexpected places you got support. Of course Stewart Udall, of the Department of the Interior, is another man who is very interested in this whole field. He had brought Robert Frost into the inaugural in the first place and then into a fairly close association with Kennedy. Pat Moynihan was at that time in Arthur Goldberg's office and he undertook setting up the procedures which have since become the -- I think they call it The Freedom Medal -- which was to go to largely to cultural leaders. We decided it was better not to create some new order or some new medal but we found this one existing which had been used rarely and given only to retiring general and people of that kind. And we thought that we could take that vessel and pour new life into it. And President Kennedy did give the first awards of the Freedom Medal -- I remember the occasion -- one went to Samuel Eliot Morison -- I think he made an address. And I believe one of the first ones went to Walter Lippmann -- I'm not absolutely sure -- he got one later anyway. So that was another thing we accomplished and which has been carried on since then with a good deal of prestige still attached to the concept. That was a suggestion which, as I say, from the beginning had come from so many quarters to find some way of giving distinction comparable to the legion of Honor or something like that to people who served their country in the cultural field. Well, that's about all I remember of that.

**PC:** It's interesting that all of this has really been a development of the last great cultural activity postwar maybe since 1950 or something.

**AH:** Well, except that we must always remember our previous generations. And I remember being struck when it was a front page story all over the world that Casals had played in the White House and Mrs. Kennedy had been there and the occasion had been brilliant in every sense. And Casals remarked very quietly at the end of the story -- he said, "This is the first time I've played at the White House since I played here under Theodore Roosevelt." Which showed how memorable Casals was. It also showed that although we were pioneering and doing new things that we also were building on a tradition which had previously existed, and if Kennedy had Robert Frost as the poet of the White House, Theodore Roosevelt of course had brought national attention to Edward

Arlington Robinson and given him the patronage of a job in the Customs House which allowed him to write his poetry and still live. So things had been done. Of course you go back to the early days of the Republic and Jefferson is the outstanding example. And Adams was equally insistent though Adams used to say that his generation had to build the continent and do the work with their hand but a generation would come along which would devote itself fully to the arts and literature. And in the twentieth century that time has certainly come.

**PC:** It's coming true, yes. What about the New York State Council? Were you involved in that early on?

**AH:** Well now, let's see. Yes. The New York State Council had already been established when I was in Washington. And it must be said that it was a model. We had always planned that a certain amount of federal money would go to the State Arts Council. It was to be \$50,000 a year. It seems small but nevertheless most of the states didn't have a penny. And this at least allowed them to make studies. I can't remember whether we wrote that into the bylaws -- I just don't remember -- but undoubtedly it exists in the records elsewhere. but from the very beginning the plan was that the federal government would give support to the State Arts Councils' and that was a in large part because the New York State Arts Council was setting a model and as a result of this Carat applied by the national government today there is an Art council in every state including Hawaii and Alaska and everywhere else even the most remote. So after I left the federal government perhaps again it wasn't too illogical that Governor Rockefeller should ask me to join the State Arts Council. AS I said, I supported them and believe they are absolutely vital. Let me just say for the record two things that are sort of amusing. One is that my first contact really with John Lindsay, whom I now serve as his Commissioner of Parks and administrator, was in these days in Washington when the President and I were discussing whether the National Advisory Council on the Arts should done by executive order or whether it would have to pass through the Congress. Every time it went through the Congress it was voted down by a group of Philistines -- or bottled up rather in one of the ocmmittees by a group of Philistines who said, "How can you distinguish poker playing from playing the piano?" and so on. So I said, "I think you ought to do it by executive order." And the President said, "Well, I don't want to be accused of bypassing the Congress." So he thought for a while and finally he said, "Well, all right, if you can clear it with John Lindsay that's all right." Because John at that time having been cut out from other committee assignments which he might desire by the Republicans who weren't in great sympathy wit him any more than they are now, was specializing in arts legislation. So I saw John at that time, had several luncheons with him, and so on. Finally he checked with the people and we got clearance to do it through executive order. I was going to say something about the state arts councils -- probably it will come back to me. So anyway I was invited to be on the State Arts Council. And that was a wonderful and extraordinary institution in those days and I think it still is. When I first joined it I believe it had \$500,000 or \$600,000 a year. It now has \$18,000,000 which shows how it has grown.

**PC:** A long way, yes.

**AH:** Whether that \$18,000,000 will continue we don't know. The Arts Council was headed by John Hightower -- no, it wasn't -- when I first joined it was headed by John MacFadyen . . .

**PC:** Right -- the architect.

**AH:** Who ran it with quietness, with great authority. When he decided to go back to architecture we all felt that he would be an extraordinarily difficult man to replace. And there was this young man, John Hightower, who had been an assistant or second -- I forget exactly his role -- but he was made head of it. He couldn't have been more than -- well, if he was thirty at that time it would be



surprising. And now, as you know, he'd Director of the Museum of Modern Art and one of the major cultural leaders of the City. And John Hightower took it over and he with extraordinary sort of wit and simplicity of manner managed to keep this board together and to do unusually interesting things. I mean we did all sorts of things which you wouldn't believe you could do with public money. For example, we had one project which always delighted me because I'm an upstater at heart. We gave a man in Syracuse I believe, we commissioned this artist to paint barn doors up and down the state of New York. Of course he had to get the consent of the farmer to do it and usually the farmer would consent. And it not only meant that across the landscape one began to see these wonderful abstract designs painted on the large surface of the barns, but also the farmers began to take an interest in their barns, and many of them of course from the point of view of architecture are immensely interesting. And I think indirectly it may have been a matter of saving this great architectural form. So we did that. I remember a discussion at the Arts Council about making grants to colleges and universities in the state of New York for poetry readings by contemporary (obviously contemporary) by the most advanced poets. And one of them for example was Leroi Jones who at that time was behaving in a very radical way and a poetry reading by Leroi Jones was very often a circus and all that. So I thought it was my duty to bring up before the Arts Council certain things that I personally was in favor of making but I felt that we all ought to know exactly what we were doing. The wonderful part was that having heard all the facts we voted to go ahead and make the grant.

**PC:** Did the board vote on all of the grants?

**AH:** No. I'm sorry, as I was saying that that I may have misstated the thing somewhat. Leroi Jones was on a list of poets that we were going to recommend to the colleges. I believe that was it. And we didn't pick these poets. They had been picked by a jury of their peers, so to speak.

**PC:** Oh, I see. Right.

**AH:** So there was a kind of indirect -- I mean we were indirectly related to it. As you say, we wouldn't have voted on each poet. That would have been absurd. But nevertheless we would have gotten the flak if Leroi Jones went up and did an obscene or violent thing people would say that either we had done it or Governor Rockefeller had done it, and so on.

**PC:** Right. It gets back to the top quickly, doesn't it?

**AH:** Yes. But the wonderful part of it was that they had the courage to stand by this jury of poets and do the thing that was dangerous. And for a government organization to that I thought was pretty great. Seymour Knox has been the chairman from the beginning and is just a remarkable man.

**PC:** Yes. they have members on the board from all over the State, don't they?

**AH:** Yes. Upstate is very well represented.

**PC:** Is there a great deal of battling between them, say, for Mr. Knox to get people to come to Buffalo for a project, or to Albany, or Schenectady, or to New York, or the various areas of the board members? Or do they really look at the state pretty much as a whole and try . . .?

**AH:** Well, when I was on the Arts Council I don't remember any problems of that kind because I was interested in upstate. Now from my point of view here I am very interested to be sure that New York City gets its full share. And that has been a concern of ours. I know the Mayor said once rather

harshly to John Hightower that he thought the city was being shortchanged. But I must say in all honesty that I think that John Hightower handled it, I think, since he went over to the Museum of Modern Art Eric Larrabee is handling it so the City is really getting its full share. I don't think I have any complaints on that. And I don't believe that upstate New York has any complaints either. The problem originally was that if you supported a touring group which was to go upstate areas you tended to take a New York institution. I mean I remember the *Hamlet* as done by the Phoenix Theatre was sent up to play in all the different communities of the State, many of which had never seen live theatre and certainly had never seen Shakespeare. Well now, the question is: were you helping the Phoenix Theatre which put on *Hamlet*, which in effect you were doing, or were you helping the communities who received it? And let me say something here: it is very important -- and this is for the Archives -- that the growth of these Arts Councils and of the Federal Arts Council is in a very definite direction. And I've stated this, I've stated it among other things in the preface to one of the State Arts Councils annual reports; they begin by trying to popularize the arts and to distribute them more widely. Governor Rockefeller, said, for example, "I'm not interested in the arts; I'm interested in people." Well, I mean Governor Rockefeller is interested in the arts we all know. But what he really meant was that he wasn't interested in supporting the institutions themselves; he's interested in expanding their access to the public. Well, as time goes on, an art foundation or state arts council discovers that you can't just diffuse the arts. You really have to tend the institution itself which nourishes the arts and creates it. And today, of course, with its \$18,000,000 the State Arts council isn't just taking things and sending them to a wider audience; it's making sure that the institution -- whether it's the New York Public Library or the Metropolitan Museum or the Metropolitan Opera, or any of these great institutions -- to be sure that they survive. Because if they don't survive there's nothing to spread. That was one of the first things I learned when I went to Washington. We had a reasonably good program of sending art abroad through the State Department and diffusing, if you will, American culture. But the government wasn't supporting American culture here at home at all. So that one of the first problems that came to my desk when I got to Washington, I didn't even have a desk. I think *Life* pictured me with some of my papers on old whiskey cases or something like that. Everything was so hectic in those days; anyway, one of the first things was the American Ballet Company -- which, by the way, has just won its new fame with Makarova who defected from the Soviets. She's gone with the American Ballet Company to be their great star -- but at that time the American Ballet Company was in Salt Lake City. and it didn't have a penny to go anywhere else. It was stuck there and broke. And here was an institution that the State Department had sent abroad to the Soviet Union where it received immense critical acclaim and which had played all through Latin America to immense critical acclaim, but when it got back to our own country nobody would support it or give it a penny of any kind. So what we were sending abroad was a kind of false show; we said this is American culture but it really wasn't the sellout which we weren't ready to back up here at home. So that's the reason I say you've got to support the institutions which produce art and not just see that the art is traveled more or reaches a wider audience; though indirectly that may help an institution but you really need more direct help than that. We did help the American Ballet, I mean, through negotiations. We gave it a home in Washington for the follow year so that at least it didn't have to wear itself out traveling all about the country looking for funds as it went. We couldn't give it direct money but we did help it. And I've always been very proud of that. So the State Arts council, as I say, has gone from . . . By the way, this is the history of the Arts council in Great Britain, too. that began as an institution which was to diffuse the arts over a wider area and it developed into an institution which supports the cultural institutions.

**PC:** It's interesting that whole idea because so many cultural projects tend immediately to run out into the streets and want to gather in more and more people. Now museums seem to be going through that same kind of idea with satellite museums and traveling . . .

**AH:** I know. And that's always been the trouble with foundations whether private foundations or government foundations. They always want to support something new. And yet it's the heart of the institution itself is something old, it may be very old, it may need support. and you really don't help the arts if you -- well, that isn't quite fair to say. Let me put it this way: of course you help the arts by giving them a greater diffusion and by winning for them a wider public, but by the time that help begins to really manifest itself in new money that is coming in and new audiences that are ready to pay, the institution itself may have died. I mean with the American Ballet today people are dying to see the dance although no dance company ever runs without a deficit it is a reasonably viable institution. But the first thing to do is to keep it alive so the audience can find the American Ballet.

**PC:** Well, you were I guess at a later date involved with Municipal Arts.

**AH:** Yes. Let me just say one other thing, I know now what I was going to say earlier. I had my first contact with John Lindsay in Washington. But another curious anticipation of things to come was that just as we were setting up in Washington this National Advisory Council on the Arts, so when I came to this job in New York one of the first things that John Lindsay asked me to do was to set up the Mayor's Advisory council on the Arts. And I actually took some of the bylaws that I had worked on in Washington and was able to apply them to our City Advisory Council which is now headed by Bethuel Webster. But I may say also that no advisory council is every wholly effective. I mean if the City had its own arts foundation with money that it -- but it does in effect have that because in this department of mine we have a very small sum of a little over a million dollars. I'd say that half of that -- or even less than half -- a small part of that goes to support the things that an arts council would ordinarily do, namely traveling companies, theatre in the streets, dancing in the streets. The rest of that million goes to some big tuition's. \$300,000 goes to City Center, which is fine; \$350,000 or \$400,000 goes to Joe Pap. But those are almost more like . . . Of course in addition through this Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs we are spending almost \$70,000,000 a year in support of cultural institutions, which people don't realize. I used to say to Roger Stevens, "You may have your ten million," which we had in that day, "But I've got my seventy million." Of course a large part of that is support to the libraries, it's support to the museums two million dollars to the Metropolitan Museum, two million dollars to the Brooklyn Museum, and so on. It is support to a few institutions like City Center and to Joe Pap. And then it is a small amount in the end for traveling and things that make our summers cheerful and noisy.

**PC:** Well, did you found the Municipal Art Society?

**AH:** Oh, yes, now we come to that.

**PC:** What is that really all about?

**AH:** The Municipal Art Society, let's see, again we have to distinguish. There is a purely voluntary organization called the Municipal Art Society of which I was a member, I think, vice-chariman or vice-president; but that's purely voluntary -- an old local institution here in New York City which has never been exactly sure what its function is. It is now headed by Brendan Gill of the *New Yorker* who has a great interest in landmarks and the architecture of New York City. But that's a purely private thing. That is voluntary with a pitifully small budget and a lot of very good people. But what I think you're referring to is the Art Commission of New York City.

**PC:** Oh, right. Yes.

**AH:** These names are confusing. The Art Commission is a body that was created by the New York City Charter and the appointments to it are made by the Mayor. Its membership is composed of

various people designated by law; the offices are designated by law. There has to be somebody from the board of the New York Public Library, somebody from the metropolitan museum, and so on. And there is always one layman member. Oh, there is somebody from the landscape profession, and there's an architect member, and a sculpture member, and so on. But I was the layman. And I always thought that was the ideal position to be in because I could badger everybody else at least pretend I didn't know anything about any of these other fields. Very often I didn't. But at least I could say, "I don't know anything about sculpture but why do you always turn down contemporary sculpture?" and so on. Every public building, that is every building built with public funds goes before the Art Commission for approval. That's one great exception, one horrible exception; that is that public housing does not go before the Art Commission because of the federal money that is in it.

**PC:** There is no comparable federal . . . ?

**AH:** No, not that would affect New York City. So we have no control; the Art Commission will not review -- it may spend hours reviewing a piece of sculpture that's going to be placed in a park or something of that kind. But meanwhile some huge blot will be placed upon the landscape that it can't do anything about. All schools that are being built go before the Art Commission. But there it is very difficult for the Art Commission to exert the sort of influence which it should. Because the Board of Education is a great powerful bureaucracy and it's moneyed and they go ahead with these designs and they sort of roll them off and it's very difficult to turn down a big building when it's even in the preliminary phase of its design. And, as I say, too often the Art Commission would take a very stern position on something very small like a plaque or a piece of sculpture and a very lenient position on something very big like a school. And then of course it has no control whatsoever over the private building of a skyscraper and things of that kind. Which was too bad because, after all . . .

**PC:** At what stage would you look at the plans for a new school building?

**AH:** You'd look at it in what they call the preliminary when the architect does his perspective drawing and rough plans. And then we'd look at it again in final plans. But if you approve the preliminary you almost always approve the final plans automatically. I think you're only interested really to see that he hasn't departed in some significant way. But the question is: why the Art Commission isn't more effective in controlling the environment than it is. As I say, it's partly because what say it has is only over a small part of the environment with certain exclusions which I've already mentioned which represent the major portion of buildings in the City. When I was on it its membership was on the whole very conservative and it wasn't at all hospitable to sculpture by outstanding sculptors or murals by outstanding painters. In fact, they tended to turn anything down that wasn't of the Beaux-Arts School. When Mayor Lindsay came in he tried to rejuvenate the Art Commission by putting on people who are much more modern-minded. And yet in practice somehow I don't feel that it's worked out nearly as well as some of us who helped pick the names and so on had hoped. Sometimes these meant -- I can think of one who is a perfectionist you might say on the other side. He always turns things down not because they're bad but because they don't conform to some ideal of perfection which he as an architect or landscape architect would attain if he were doing it himself. I mean, he votes against almost everything and therefore this particular person makes the position of the Art Commission rather -- I won't say unfruitful -- but unrewarding. You know you're not going to get -- they don't examine . . . Let me just say that I'm on the other side of the fence now because I have to submit so many things to the Parks Department. We have a huge building program -- I mean many, many projects -- we have to submit many things to the Art Commission and very often they turn down things on abstract grounds without taking into account the kind of problems which I deal with. I mean I have to deal with architects who work for the fee which the City will provide and I can't go out and pick -- I mean the ideal architect won't do a compensation, no architect will do a compensation he wants to do them all alike. So I mean,

there are many practical problems and I feel as if the Art Commission doesn't always look at those. Maybe that's just a bias that I now have being on the other side of the fence. But when I was on the Art Commission I felt that these problems were a little bit different. It was not that we were pressing people too hard to attain an ideal of perfection. Rather we were being too lenient in letting things that were second rate go by. Anyway, the Art Commission has a power, and a tenuous power. It is appointed by the Mayor. The Mayor can exercise very considerable control over the Art Commission for better or for worse. In the present administration it has probably been for better; in others it may have been for worse. Bob Moses could always muster great political support for any project no matter how horrendous, and get it through the Art Commission. Because the Art Commission, as I say, is a political body and like all power if the Art Commission tries to use its power too openly or too frequently it loses the power. I mean the Art Commission survives because it doesn't make things too difficult for people like myself who are now an administrative body of the City, or the school board or anybody else. So I would say it's a sort of gentle influence on public buildings but not really a crucial factor. One of the outrages -- it was an outrage that was narrowly averted -- but still I think it was pretty bad -- the Art Commission (I was not on it at the time) -- I was not in this position at the time -- I was in between the Art Commission came within one vote of turning down the Henry Moore sculpture in Lincoln Center.

**PC:** Oh, really!

**AH:** In fact, there was a tie vote and the tie was broken by Arnold Whitridge a very distinguished New Yorker. And he wrote me that he sort of -- he was afraid that he did it only by holding his nose he thought it was a monstrous thing and he would have liked to vote against it but he didn't dare vote against it or something like that. Well, I mean that any art commission should have come within, I mean within a hundred miles of voting down the Henry Moore statue in the Lincoln Center seems to me outrageous while they were approving all these commonplace sculptures of a representational character in schools and other public buildings. So when I was on the Art Commission it was a very conservative body. And, as I say, now it is not conservative, but it is still doctrinaire. I think that's the trouble now. I mean one modern sculptor doesn't like the work of another modern sculptor. And that's just as bad as one old fashioned sculptor not liking the work of a modern sculptor.

**PC:** Yes. Right. Well, let's see, you were on the board of the Crafts Museum for a long time -- Mrs. Webb mentioned it.

**AH:** Yes. Well, I still am on that board thought I have a sort of leave of absence; I'm not a very good member. Let me think about that and let me think of a minute as to whether there's anything else that I should say -- I mean, of course, my whole work in this agency is really extraordinarily interesting in relation to the arts of the City.

**PC:** Well, that's the next thing I'd like to get into.

**AH:** Well, the American Craftsmen's Council -- I was sympathetic to it for a number of reasons but partly because I do believe that the relationship between art and crafts is crucial to a civilization. If there is too big a gap between the work of the craftsmen and the work of the artist civilization is unhealthy. You might even say it's sick. And I believe that that breach did develop in our culture and I believe also that it is being bridged over now. In the first place, the craftsmen themselves are becoming much more artists, they are not simply people making belts or something of that kind. I mean you look at the exhibitions in the Museum of American Crafts and you don't know really whether they ought to be there or whether they ought to be in the Museum of Modern Art.

**PC:** Right.

**AH:** I mean people criticize both museums for that reason.

**PC:** No, but I think that's a very good point.

**AH:** Yes. My feeling is there ought to be -- a work of art should always involve a certain degree of craftsmanship. In the great days, of course, it did. And the work of craft should involve a high sensitivity to art. I compare it to an airplane which is taking off the ground; at one moment it's a thing of earth; at the next moment it's a thing of air, and one can hardly tell when that transformation takes place as it goes down the runway. In the same way a thing at one moment is a work of the hand and the next moment it's a work of the spirit and we don't know exactly when that transition occurs. But that analysis leaves out a great many things about contemporary art which I don't want to go into because that would be a long discussion in itself. But the point about contemporary art is that a great deal of contemporary art -- and I think legitimate contemporary art -- does do away with craftsmanship entirely. I mean the idea of disposable art is of course art that is very different from the old feeling that you made something and it's yours.

**PC:** Yes, but yet in the making of some of the disposable art there's a great deal of craftsmanship.

**AH:** Craftsmanship, yes, I agree. Take a kite, for example. And that's disposable, I suppose. Yes. But anyway, let me just say that without going into all the analyses that the relationship between art and craft is, I think, very important and that's one of the things that fascinated me about Mrs. Webb's enterprise. Mrs. Webb herself is fascinating, also. I mean she's one of the great women of the world without any question. Another thing is that I am a craftsman myself because I am a printer in my avocation, a fine printer, and have set type and have handmade paper, and so on. And I mean I know in that field exactly how a book that at one moment is a perfectly ordinary routine printing at another moment under the hands of a master becomes an enduring work of art. I believe that printing and the other crafts are absolutely vital to preserve and to recognize.

**PC:** Right. Now we can get into this present job.

**AH:** Yes. Well, in a way this is -- I hadn't thought of it -- but as we've talked about these other things I realize that this job sort of draws together many of the threads that were woven in these other positions. I may say that when I took this job I was woefully ignorant of city government and almost everything I know about city government I've learned on the Art Commission. Of course you dealt with the Bureau of the Budget, you dealt with the Board of Education, you dealt with the Mayor's office, and everything else. So that has been a good laboratory for me. I mentioned earlier how I first met John Lindsay. I had known him slightly before. We both were at Yale and at St. Paul's School. But I hadn't known him in a professional way until Washington. I mentioned earlier how some of the work I did here, namely the setting up of the Advisory Council was directly related to setting up the Advisory Council for President Kennedy. But in other ways this work was a much fuller development than anything I had ever done before. The others were advisory.

**PC:** Well, you have a lot more people, buildings and . . .

**AH:** Yes. Let me just say that we do have because I think that's interesting. When I took this job in March of 1967 we were still the Department of Parks and the Department of Parks had had under I believe first under Tom Hoving a cultural branch, a cultural division but it was still under the Department of Parks. And it is true also that way back long before Tom Hoving that the budgets of the cultural institutions were supposed to pass through the Parks Department.

**PC:** Oh, really?

**AH:** They were actually not evaluated here. The Parks Department really was almost a messenger boy in transmitting them to the Bureau of the Budget and the Bureau of the Budget made virtually all decisions in regard to the planning of institutions and in regard to their development, their future, their financing, and everything else. So I took over when the old Parks Department was becoming under Mayor Lindsay the new administration with Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs. And that really meant in other parts of the city government it meant that these new administrations took existing departments and drew them together under one administrator. In my case it meant that I created new departments under the administrator because there had never been a department of cultural affairs and there had never been a department of recreation. There had, of course, been a Department of Parks. So my problem -- which is a little separate from our immediate discussion -- has been to try to create this structure in which the Parks Department, which used to manage everything, can find its place and to try to create a cultural . . .

**PC:** It's tripartite.

**AH:** Yes, it is tripartite, I mean there are really three horses or three commissioners and theoretically I'm on top of them. Well now, what that meant was that the new administration of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs (PRCA hereafter), the new administration was much more interested in the cultural affairs than it ever had been before; in two ways: in the first place following where Tom Hoving had pioneered and done brilliant work we were committed under the Mayor to doing all sorts of things to provide entertainment's and public events -- I call it "public happiness" to create public happiness not only in our parks but in the streets and the squares of the City and on indoor stages. In other words, we had a program of nurturing and as far as possible supporting and scheduling and then putting on these entertainment's throughout the City. That's one part. The other thing was that we had a much larger responsibility than we ever had to make sure that the judgments that the City made in regards to the cultural institutions should be made with an interest in culture and not merely with the interest of the Budget Bureau in mind. Now the question is how these two aspects of the cultural work have panned out in practice. Let me say first on the organizational level that partly because of my own work in the field and my own interest in this area we didn't have a commissioner of cultural affairs at the beginning; and we didn't really have a full department of cultural affairs; I mean that had to grow, it had to develop. And we had as executive director of the Department of Cultural Affairs Doris Friedman who for more than two years did an absolutely brilliant creative job in the field of what I would call the public happiness; that is, the street fairs, the workshops, the park events of various kinds. And of course I have backed her up, worked with her very closely and so on. Then we had part of the cultural affairs under Arthur Rashap who is now working for the State Arts Council and had been working with the Brooklyn Institute, so he's been in close association. Arthur Rashap was the person here who under me was reviewing the budgets and working with the cultural institutions that received City money. As I say, the ones that received City money are most of the great ones; I mean: the Metropolitan Museum, the American Museum of Natural History; of course, the Bronx Botanical Garden, the New York Zoological Society, the Brooklyn Museum, the Brooklyn Children's Museum, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Staten Island Institute, and so on. The ones that don't receive city money are also fairly plain, I mean they Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum are two examples that have not been in my jurisdiction in any way except very, very, very generally. So the idea was that the policies and the plans and the financing of these cultural institutions would be reviewed within this Department of Cultural Affairs. And we are doing it. But we still have a long way to go. In the first place the institutions themselves are very powerful and have their own board of trustees and don't lend themselves easily to being curbed or checked or diverted. Secondly, the Bureau of the Budget

is very powerful and has set up traditional relations with these institutions. We have to make our way in between them. And between the Bureau of the Budget and the institutions we sometimes got a little crushed. But anyway we're working on that and I think in the long run it is very important that there be an informed, knowledgeable influence standing between the Bureau of the Budget and the institutions themselves. We're working on it and I think we have made some real progress. But I wouldn't say that I'm entirely satisfied. The other aspect of this idea of public entertainment: we are limited very harshly by the budgetary inadequacies. I mean for all we have done -- and the last years have been outstanding in the number of events and their quality in all parts of the City, by the way, sometimes we're accused of doing things only in Manhattan, which is a great injustice, but for all we've done everywhere we still have, I think, hardly any more money than was being spent under the Wagner administration. And we have pulled off a miracle in large part by the support of the private sector which has been great. On the other hand, the private sector itself is hit very hard now and in any case there's a limit to what you can properly get. And then problems come up: if the private sector is going to support something it's usually because they're going to get some free advertising out of it and we have to be very careful in seeing that they don't exploit the parks by having, you know, the names of private concessinai . . . pasted all over the trees and everything else. And that creates tensions between us and the private sector and that means we don't get . . .

**PC:** But there have been a number of corporations that have sponsored concerts and things.

**AH:** Oh, yes, we've had wonderfully enlightened support but I was thinking of some of the smaller things. Of course we've had Schaeffer and Schlitz the beer companies, that have been great. We've had Pepsi-Cola which supported the Metropolitan Opera concerts in the Park. Canada Dry did our New Year's Festival last year a small one show affair.

**PC:** It's interesting they're all beverage oriented.

**AH:** Well, you see, these things are sold in the park and they think naturally it's the way to do it. and we had a wonderful ethnic festival in Central Park this year that was supported largely by money that Commissioner Schary raised from the private sector. By the way, I was going to say -- I think I lost my train of thought there -- Doris Friedman was doing this brilliant work for the first two years, and then as the Department matured it was evident that we should have a Commissioner of Cultural Affairs. And Dore Schary who is now Commissioner of Cultural Affairs was the first man to fill that post. So we now have a Commissioner of Cultural Affairs and a Commissioner of Recreation.

**PC:** Was he brought in through you? Or the Mayor's Office?

**AH:** Well, naturally the Mayor discussed it with me; but naturally also he was a suggestion of the Mayor's; and I had known Dore actually, had known his work and so on. He had worked closely with the Mayor during the last campaign in relation to the visit of Golda Meir, and certain other festivals involving cultural events involving the Jews where he's been very influential. But I welcomed him. And although there have been some difficulties in working out my relationship with him and his relationship with me, I mean inevitable difficulties, I think we've dealt with them as men of good will should. But it is a problem because if you've got somebody at the head of the administration who's been involved in the field as long as I have it's hard to surrender power altogether. And so many of the decisions that have to be made in the field of cultural affairs also involve other parts of the PRCA, what part of the budget goes to cultural affairs as opposed to the Parks Department or Recreation, all kind of . . . I have to decide basically whether the resources of the Parks Department -- that is men who clean up after a concert -- are going to be used, whether I'm going to divert hundreds of men from my Parks Department forces to clean up after a big concert in the Park, and



so on. so you have to see there is a relationship between all these things and I really do have to have the final say in many of them.

**PC:** Right. Well, how do the projects work in other boroughs like Bronx, or Queens, or Staten Island?

**AH:** Well, let me say that interestingly enough, another analogy that has developed in this work that is based on the experience in Washington and elsewhere, we not only set up the Advisory Council for the City as a whole but we also have been setting up -- I won't say 'setting up' -- but helping develop borough arts councils which are comparable to the State Arts Council. It is really very interesting how all these things have a reflection in their development.

**PC:** And they become one more local.

**AH:** Yes, one more local. So today every borough has its own arts council just as every state has its own arts council. And then I hesitated a minute ago and said 'I don't want to say we set them up' that's because these people in the boroughs are so proud and they believe so much in local rule and their own sovereignty almost that if I should say in public at 'I set them up' I would have the Bronx, Queens, Staten Island and Brooklyn all on my head immediately and they would say they set themselves up. And now the great problem is to find -- and it's rather interesting -- just as we earlier said we would give \$50,000 to each state, so now we're giving \$7,500 to each borough arts council. And pitiful as that sum is, it nevertheless is enough for them to have a secretary of some kind of executive assistant who does coordinate the arts in the boroughs. So theoretically -- I say 'theoretically' because these things are very hard to work out in the crises and pressures of this life in a great city -- theoretically the scheduling of these various events in the boroughs is greatly influenced by decisions of the borough arts council. I mean they want certain things and they don't want others and their decisions always weigh very heavily with us. In practice, as I say, we have to decide really where the metropolitan Opera is going to play and how often because it's a valuable resource and we can only give so much to each borough. It plays twice in Staten Island and four times in Brooklyn. I mean it's just going to be that way because it's been decided.

**PC:** Sure. Different population.

**AH:** Yes. No matter what the borough arts council might think we have to decide to have more or less a say in that over all decision. But they on the other hand should decide whether it's going to play in one park or another, whether in the Bronx it's going to play in the Bronx Botanical Garden, where it has played, or whether it's going to play in Pelham Bay Park where I think we're going to experiment next summer, and so on. And then of course also these borough arts councils are doing some interesting work in helping to coordinate and stimulate largely amateur groups. They hope to get money from foundations so that they themselves will be grant-making organizations for local groups. They have indeed gotten money from the State Arts Council this year. Each one of them has gotten \$17,000 from the State Arts Council, enough to enable them to hire officers and a secretary and to make small grants. So I mean I've seen this diffusion from the federal government into the state, from the states to the cities, from the cities, from the cities to the boroughs. And in one sense I've been part of all of that and it's a rather interesting development; and all rather new.

**PC:** It's interesting how it's worked down from the top.

**AH:** Yes. As I say, I've seen them all. I hadn't realized it. I've really been part of it all.

**PC:** Yes.

**AH:** So let's see what else is interesting about this job. At the moment, of course, we are now in December 1970 and we are facing what we faced once before in the spring of 1968, the terrible business of the subjecting the City-supported cultural institutions to budgetary cuts. Everybody else in the City is being cut and these institutions obviously feel that any cut which falls upon them is very heavy, close to the mark, and quite cruel. And they have much less flexibility than a great department. And I have taken cruel cuts here in this whole department. But I have more flexibility I must admit than a small museum. There's seasonal labor that I don't hire or postpone hiring for a week and I'm able to make cuts which people don't notice right away anyway. But anyway, how we're going to get through this -- and there is great disaffection and great unhappiness among these institutions right now. I feel it to the full. They're saying what is always said: that when cuts have to be made culture bears a disproportionately heavy part. They're saying that they can't carry on if they have to rely on public funds which are subject to budgetary cuts which they consider to be arbitrary and unreasonable. And they are saying that New York is an impossible city and they ought to move somewhere else, and so on. It happens everywhere but it's happening right here. And I don't know where we'll end up on this on -- unless you want to come back in a month and I may have a solution to it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]